

## **The Poetics of Textual Openings and the Historical Pact in the Novel The Book of the Prince by Waciny Laredj**

**Mohammed Salmi**

Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of Arabic Literature and Language, University of Biskra, Algeria. E-mail: [salmimoh1986@gmail.com](mailto:salmimoh1986@gmail.com)

**Received: 23/01/2026 ; Accepted: 28/06/2026 ; Published: 06/07/2026**

### **Abstract**

This article sheds light on the textual openings in the novel *The Book of the Prince* as an essential component of the artistic construction of the narrative discourse. In this work, Waciny Laredj succeeds in combining the artistic and historical dimensions, thereby endowing the novelistic text with both artistic and historical credibility. Accordingly, this study seeks to explore the various manifestations of textual openings in *The Book of the Prince* and to demonstrate their particularity in terms of their impact on the artistic and referential levels of the novelistic narrative.

**Keywords:** textual openings, fiction, history, title, epigraph, *The Book of the Prince*.

### **Introduction**

We have chosen to address the topic of "textual openings" because of its significance as an element distinguished by its particularity within the artistic structure of the novel. Indeed, "modern narratology has increasingly turned toward the study of textual thresholds, considering them strategic sites for investigation and problematic areas for analysis. Among these thresholds is what specialists in the field of narrative studies have termed the textual opening" <sup>1</sup>

. Dictionaries as well as classical linguistic, rhetorical, and critical works describe it as "the excellence of beginnings" or "the art of the opening." Both classical and modern studies have emphasized its importance, since it stands at the threshold of the entire narrative and carries a metatextual dimension through which narrative practice and its transformations are manifested. Consequently, this study seeks to examine and identify the manifestations of textual openings, or novelistic incipits, in *The Book of the Prince*, and to investigate their specificity in terms of their artistic and referential implications for the novelistic narrative.

### **1. What Is a Textual Opening (the Novelistic Incipit)?**

The textual opening appears to be of great importance, as it carries a significant artistic meaning due to the tightly woven threads embedded within its texture, threads that flow into and merge with the structure of the novelistic text as a whole. The textual opening is considered one of the most important thresholds of the paratext. Ever since Roland Barthes posed his foundational question, "Where do we begin?", critics and scholars have regarded it as the key question in the study of textual thresholds, since it constitutes the first sign that will be filled by the presence of the text<sup>2</sup>.

In this regard, the critic André Dal Lungue defines the textual opening, drawing on previous studies, as: "a textual point that begins at the threshold leading into fiction and ends with the occurrence of the first significant rupture at the level of the text; it is therefore a strategic element within the text"<sup>3</sup>.

This definition makes it clear that the textual opening occupies a strategic position that reflects an initial stance adopted by the novelist in order to attract, intrigue, and captivate the reader. The

beginning plays a fundamental and decisive role; it is a sensitive point, responsible for conferring legitimacy upon the narrative discourse, directing it, and providing generic, stylistic, narrative, and artistic markers. This is achieved through the construction of a fictional universe), the presentation of information about the narrative, and its incorporation into the textual opening. Moreover, it is considered an open space in which the reader participates by directing its semantic and interpretive possibilities<sup>4</sup>.

Accordingly, every novelistic text has a beginning or introduction, and it is impossible to conceive of a text without one. As previously mentioned, narratologists designate this beginning as the textual opening. It is not merely a word appearing at the beginning of the novel, as Goldenstein suggests; rather, it is broader than that. It may consist of a sentence, a paragraph, or even an entire chapter of the novel<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, we shall examine how it is identified and constituted in *The Book of the Prince*, with the aim of understanding the strategy governing its operation within a particular narrative discourse that combines fiction and history.

## **2. Identifying the Textual Opening in *The Book of the Prince***

The possibilities inherent in the textual opening are virtually limitless, particularly in terms of its construction and impact. The opening of the novelistic text tends toward breadth and expansiveness; consequently, most novelists devote considerable attention to it and regard it as the most important threshold among the paratextual thresholds. Through it, narrative practice can be understood as an integrated whole, and through it the reader may gain access to the inner depths of the narrative discourse, making it an effective strategy characterized by creative attractiveness. Thus, it "possesses an internal balance; if the novelist loses it or fails to construct it properly, the work becomes unstable. It has the capacity for concentration, suggestion, and interpretation. The opening neither places the reader immediately at the heart of the work nor merely circles around it; rather, it paves the way toward the work's inner secrets. It is akin to the key to the door of a large house"<sup>6</sup>. This is what grants the textual opening its novelistic quality, characterized by multiplicity of voices, complexity of artistic structure, expansion of textual meanings, density of suggestion, and openness to interpretation.

In this context, Waciny Laredj's novel *The Book of the Prince* presents a textual opening that constitutes the cornerstone through which the novelist succeeds in combining the historical, biographical, and fictional dimensions. It may be described as a generic incipit. Accordingly, the novelistic opening of *The Book of the Prince* can be located in the first "Amiralia" section (pp. 9–20), where we observe stylistic shifts from the informative to the descriptive, then to the narrative and dialogic modes. We also notice changes in narrative temporality through a number of flashbacks and anticipations. Through these features, the opening fulfills "the framing function of the incipit as a site in which discourse about the text and its code is centered"<sup>7</sup>. Hence, the Amiralia opening may be better understood through an examination of some of its active functions within the novelistic narrative.

## **3. Functions of the Textual Opening in Waciny Laredj's *The Book of the Prince***

### **3.1. The Seductive Function**

This is among the primary functions of the textual opening and carries a particular significance in presenting the narrative discourse in a specific manner. It contributes to "arousing the reader's interest and capturing his attention by generating the desire to read"<sup>8</sup>. The textual opening adopted in *The Book of the Prince* serves as a fundamental gateway into the worlds of the narrative discourse. It seeks to attract the reader's attention through a communicative and seductive strategy that stimulates

the willingness to read. It touches the reader's imagination and grants the pleasure of a narrative discourse capable of captivating the eye and mind.

As a decisive moment for establishing communication between the narrative and the reader, it constitutes "a privileged site for assembling a sequence of signs and indicators directed toward the recipient of the narrative text"<sup>9</sup>. The narrator captures the reader's attention by recounting the story of John Moby, particularly his fulfillment of the last wish of his master, Father Monsignor Dupuch. In narrating this story, he refers to the relationship between Emir Abdelkader al-Jazairi and Dupuch, as well as the latter's letter concerning the Emir's character, entitled Abdelkader at the Château d'Amboise, Dedicated to Monsieur Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, President of the French Republic, written by Monsignor Antoine-Adolphe Dupuch, former Bishop of Algiers. At the bottom of the page appears the word "Bordeaux" in bold print, followed by: Printing and Lithography by H. Faye, Rue Sainte-Catherine 139, April 1849<sup>10</sup>.

All these elements generate a series of questions in the reader's mind concerning the narration ("Who is speaking?") and the narrative itself ("What happened before and after?"). Such questions stimulate curiosity and renew the reading pact for the recipient, prompting the discovery of the unknown dimensions to which the narrative discourse refers.

### **3.2. The Typifying Function**

The textual opening in *The Book of the Prince* performs a distinctive functional role in inaugurating the novelistic text through "the initiation of the text and the determination of its point of departure, thereby effecting a transition into a new linguistic space that requires confronting the arbitrariness associated with the origin of discourse and the act of beginning. At its outset, the text is compelled to legitimize itself"<sup>11</sup>. This textual incipit constitutes a concise introduction to the worlds of the narrative discourse, "as a particular act of enunciation established between the writer and the reader, which determines the manner in which it will be received and dealt with at the levels of reading and interpretation. For this reason, a set of textual data usually converges in order to clarify and shape the conventions of discourse"<sup>12</sup>.

In this respect, the novelist relies fundamentally on the reader's interpretive competence. Yuri Lotman (Lotman, I.) argues that the textual opening, or textual incipit, must respond to certain expectations and questions that arise in the recipient's mind at the beginning of the narrative. The reader seeks to acquire the most comprehensive possible idea about the genre, style, narrative intentions, and other elements, as well as the exemplary artistic codes and signs that must be activated in order to grasp the text as a whole. Such information is derived primarily from the textual opening. It generally performs the function of placing the text in relation to the reader's horizon of expectations or creating a new horizon altogether according to the perspective of Hans Robert Jauss<sup>13</sup>.

Accordingly, the textual opening establishes a typifying function by beginning to construct its own codes and signs while simultaneously directing the recipient. It is therefore compelled to provide information and indicators about itself its genre, style, and other characteristics as well as about the novel as a comprehensive discourse. This is done in order to arouse the reader's interest, capture the horizon of expectation, and produce a reading pact<sup>14</sup>. As previously noted, a number of textual elements interact and intertwine with the textual opening in order to clarify and articulate the conventions of discourse. "Since every discourse constitutes a specific communicative and pragmatic mode, it requires a particular form of analysis; thus, these elements become an explanatory discourse that elucidates its conventions"<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, the textual opening in *The Book of the Prince* grants the text its literary pact through the writer's reliance on fictional, informative, descriptive, and narrative structures that determine the genre of the text within the framework of literary categories, identified here by the indicator of the novel. By adopting a strategy of narrative communication in the framing story represented by the textual opening, and in light of the communicative model and the functions of language, the poetics of the novelistic opening emerges as a message issued by a sender, represented by the omniscient narrator (John Moby), directed toward the receiver, represented by the reader, through a system of indicators and signs governed by a historical frame of reference. These elements confer upon the textual opening a synthesis of the literary and historical dimensions.

### **3.3. The Informative Function**

The textual opening of *The Book of the Prince* contains a body of knowledge and informative energy that define the semantic horizon of the text, making the reader aware from the outset that he is confronted with a historical novel. Indeed, "textual signification assumes the form of a linguistic construction of a narrated world whose origins extend to knowledge of a reality external to both language and text, transcending them both. This is because informing about the narrated world through language can only proceed from prior knowledge of that world"<sup>16</sup>, knowledge which the narrator conveys to his recipient.

Waciny Laredj borrows from this visionary historical reality a set of aesthetic signs, selecting them as material for creative fictional practice within the narrative discourse. The features of the informative function become evident through its division by André Dal Lungue into three subsidiary functions<sup>17</sup>:

#### **a. The Thematic (Semantic) Function**

This is the function whose "subject is that about which the opening narrative speaks"<sup>18</sup>. It provides the recipient with an introduction to the principal subject of the opening narrative and refers him to knowledge external to the text. It relies on historical knowledge that documents the real past relating to the life of Monsignor Dupuch, Emir Abdelkader, and the relationship between them. This historical knowledge appears in the temporal documentation provided by the narrator: "28 July 1864, at dawn"<sup>19</sup>, a date that clearly situates the narrative within its historical context.

#### **b. The Foundational Function (Construction of the Fictional Universe)**

This function "refers to the elements of fiction as they are employed in the literary work"<sup>20</sup>. Within this framework, the historical reality of the past is reconstructed in the opening of *The Book of the Prince*. The fictional narrative revives and reanimates the historical context whenever the act of reading establishes a particular relationship between the world of the text and the world of the reader<sup>21</sup>. Historical data thus generate a new modern vision, thanks to the effectiveness of fictional rhetoric within the opening narrative.

The narrator presents descriptive, discursive, and imaginative passages embedded in the narration, such as the following:

"The heavy humidity and the heat that begins early; the clock approaches five. Nothing but silence, darkness, and the smell of coffee drifting from the other side of the harbor, mingled with the gusts of the last wave that broke against the edge of the *Amiralia* [...] nothing but silence and the gentle undulations of a sea burdened with ships and events. Faint lights, barely visible beyond the high mountain, still resist a dense darkness through which some golden halos had begun to penetrate, only to be swallowed again by a gloom that scarcely allowed them to appear..."<sup>22</sup>

**c. The Metanarrative or Explanatory Narrative Function (Organization of Narrative)**

This function "refers to the ways in which the novel organizes and coordinates the narrative process"<sup>23</sup>. Through it, the novel is structured according to its narrative operation, beginning from the textual opening, which adopts the Amiralia as "a point of anchorage and a focal space to which the narrator John Moby returns after historical and fictional events have followed multiple and intertwined narrative trajectories of development and growth in a movement that, while advancing forward, simultaneously returns backward"<sup>24</sup>.

The Amiralia thus functions as a point of narrative anchorage and organization. Waciny Laredj relies directly on the concept of circular time, whereby "the entirety of events is bound by ropes to a spatio-temporal anchoring point represented by the Amiralia, from which the narration begins and at which it comes to rest as both the beginning and the end of the framing story. This framing story may be described as possessing a circular structure that contributes to the realization of a circular continuity centered on the present time, namely the time of narration"<sup>25</sup>.

**3.4. The Dramatic Function**

The dramatic function in the textual opening of *The Book of the Prince* is manifested through the metanarrative dimension and the entry into the description of events; that is, it represents "the zero point from which the story begins and in relation to which the narrated events are determined"<sup>26</sup>. A novelistic text may choose to begin by narrating an ongoing story (a direct incipit), or it may enter the narrative gradually by providing information or delaying the initiation of the event through an alternative procedure. In the latter case, the novel must disseminate dramatic indicators, such as alluding, within a descriptive passage, to existing relationships between two or more characters. For the reader, this constitutes a possible point of departure for a possible story.

This is precisely what we find in the opening of *The Book of the Prince*, where the relationship between the two characters, the Emir and Monsignor Dupuch, is established through the stimulation of the narrator John Moby's memories. This human relationship unfolds across several temporal dimensions within a solemn and melancholic atmosphere (the funeral of Monsignor Dupuch), "where the flow of time is suspended through the return of the same intimate images. Yet this circular period opens onto historical, mythical, and biographical times, encompassing countless memories and internal dialogues of either a public or intimate character"<sup>27</sup>.

This dramatic narrative movement is a complex issue, and the challenge of such movement is determined by the dramatic function. Accordingly, the dramatic quality of the novelistic opening may be appreciated through its artistic nature and narrative displacements (temporal, spatial, focal, personal, and descriptive), particularly through the use of flashback and foreshadowing techniques incorporated into the textual opening of *The Book of the Prince*.

**4. The Strategy of Parallel and Adjacent Textual Openings**

The novelistic title has occupied a prominent position among scholars and critics, who have devoted considerable attention to it at both the creative and analytical levels. It has become a major field within contemporary literary criticism in Western Europe particularly French criticism because of the theoretical and aesthetic issues it raises concerning its nature, function, and relationship to the other components of the literary text. Consequently, it has developed into a distinct discipline known as *Titrology*<sup>28</sup>, with specialized critics and researchers such as Gérard Genette, Claude Duchet, Leo Hoek, and others.

#### **4.1. The Concept of the Title**

Classical Arabic critical studies, particularly rhetorical ones, contributed to establishing new conceptions of the title by considering it "an aesthetic textual structure endowed with an informative function, activated by the informative energy of the title"<sup>29</sup>. In this regard, Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥāq al-Naḥwī, in his work *Taḥrīr al-Taḥbīr*, devotes an entire chapter to the title (*Bāb al-‘Unwān*), classifying it as one of the rhetorical embellishments. He defines it as:

"The speaker embarks upon a description, praise, boasting, satire, reproach, or the like, and then completes it with expressions that serve as a title to preceding reports and past stories"<sup>30</sup>.

The title may therefore take the form of a word, a sentence, or an entire text, and it performs a complementary function centered on informing the reader about the content. Al-Suyūṭī states: "...because the title of a book gathers its objectives in a concise expression placed at its beginning"<sup>31</sup>.

In line with this attention accorded to the title in classical studies, contemporary European criticism especially in France has made title analysis a fundamental component of literary analysis because of the aesthetic, semantic, interpretive, and even commercial functions it performs. Leo Hoek, one of the founders of modern title studies, defines the title as:

"A set of linguistic signs consisting of words, sentences, or even texts that appear at the head of a text in order to identify it, designate it, indicate its overall content, and attract its intended audience"<sup>32</sup>.

The title thus entices readers to engage with the text and serves as a guide to the book, being one of its integral components.

For his part, Gérard Genette regards the title as a paratext. He acknowledges the difficulty of defining it due to its complex structure at both the theoretical and practical levels. He writes:

"Perhaps the definition of the title itself raises, more than any other paratextual element, a number of issues and requires considerable analytical effort, since the titular apparatus, as we have known it since the Renaissance [...], is generally a semi-composite set rather than a genuine single element, and its complexity is not determined merely by its length"<sup>33</sup> or by its brevity.

Thus, the title is "a condensed, compressed, and abbreviated text; it is a symbolic semantic system possessing both a surface semantic structure and a deep semantic structure"<sup>34</sup>. Through it, the general objectives of the work and the motives behind its composition become apparent. Its intentionality may be direct and refer to a character, a place, a time, events, or intellectual, political, and social orientations. Alternatively, this intentionality may be indirect, whereby the title appears in a symbolic, metaphorical, or allegorical form, inviting the reader to engage in interpretation. As Umberto Eco observed, the title becomes, from the moment it is assigned, an interpretive key<sup>35</sup> that generates multiple readings and interpretations. This grants the title an interpretive effectiveness that establishes the text's literary, cultural, ideological, civilizational, and generic affiliations.

#### **4.2. A Study of the Title of The Book of the Prince**

The significance of the title lies in its role as a magical key that grants access to the worlds of the text. It has long been said that a book is read through its title. The title is a productive, generative, and pragmatic structure that generates most of the text's meanings; indeed, it is the actual producer of textual significance, around which the textual fabric is woven with all its intellectual and ideological dimensions<sup>36</sup>.

The title therefore exercises authority not only over the text but also over the recipient, upon whom it exerts a form of "literary coercion"<sup>37</sup>. Since the title functions as a gateway that summarizes the meanings of the text and encapsulates the significant implications of the novelistic world, we may

ask: Does the title *The Book of the Prince* fulfill this function? Does it open up multiple meanings and interpretations? Does it truly remain an open horizon of endless expectations and possibilities?

The first element that attracts the reader's attention when contemplating the title *The Book of the Prince* is the word "Book" (*Kitāb*). Ibn Manẓūr explains:

"Al-kitāb is well known; its plural forms are *kutub* and *kutb*. One says: *kataba al-shay'*, meaning 'he wrote the thing'; *kitāban* and *kitābatan* mean writing; *kattabahu* means 'he inscribed it' [...] and *al-kitāb* is that in which writing has been inscribed"<sup>38</sup>.

Al-Tahānawī states:

"*Kitāb* is a name for that which is written. The difference between it and a *risālah* (epistle) lies in completeness, which is lacking in the epistle. In Islamic usage, the term came to denote the Qur'an, just as it became established in Arabic usage"<sup>39</sup>.

He then explains its technical meaning:

"Among authors, the term denotes a collection of expressions indicating specific issues belonging generally to one category, under which are arranged chapters and sections. Sometimes chapters and sections may replace one another. In Sufi terminology, it refers to absolute existence devoid of nonexistence, as previously discussed under the term *Umm al-Kitāb*"<sup>40</sup>.

In this sense, the word *book* suggests collection, inscription, documentation, existential completeness, and the treatment of issues belonging to a common category organized into chapters and sections.

When used in a more specific sense, however, the term has become predominantly associated with the Holy Qur'an, "for just as it refers in Islamic law to the entirety of the Qur'an, it may also refer to any part thereof"<sup>41</sup>. The word *kitāb* appears numerous times in the Qur'an, where it is associated with perfection, certainty, and guidance. Waciny Laredj's use of the word *Book* in the title of his novel suggests truth and certainty. The word carries connotations of clarity, reliability, and permanence in the minds of readers, as though the novelist sought to revive reality, document it, and connect it with truth in terms of clarity and affirmation.

As for the word "Prince" (*Amīr*), Lisān al-ʿArab defines it as:

"The *amīr* is the king because of the effectiveness of his command. Its plural is *umarā'*. One says *amara ʿalaynā* when he was appointed over us [...] and a man becomes an *amīr* when he acquires authority over others"<sup>42</sup>.

The designation *Prince* thus offers the reader opportunities for anticipation and interpretation, suggesting that the narrative will concern a great figure possessing authority, leadership, and sovereignty<sup>43</sup>.

Returning to the main title and combining the words *Book* and *Prince*, we obtain a nominal construction consisting of a genitive structure (*Kitāb al-Amīr*). Grammatically, the title is composed of a possessed noun (*kitāb*) followed by the possessed complement (*al-amīr*), while the implied predicate belongs to an omitted subject, understood as "This is the Book of the Prince"<sup>44</sup>.

The subtitle, "The Paths of the Iron Gates", further captures the recipient's attention and draws him into the depths of the narrative text, confronting him with numerous questions that encourage him to continue reading and enter the worlds of the narrative discourse.

According to Lisān al-ʿArab, the term *Masālik* (Paths) is the plural of *Maslak*, derived from the root *salaka*, meaning:

"To follow a path; to traverse a place; and *al-maslak* means the road or pathway"<sup>45</sup>.

The word Abwāb (Gates) means:

"Al-bāb is well known; its plural forms are abwāb and bībān"<sup>46</sup>.

A gate is an entrance<sup>47</sup> or a passage through which one moves from one side to another, whether entering or exiting.

The word Ḥadīd (Iron) signifies:

"This well-known metal because of its strength and resistance; a single piece is called ḥadīdah, and its plurals are ḥadā'id and ḥadīdāt"<sup>48</sup>.

Iron is characterized by great hardness and solidity. When these terms are combined into the phrase The Paths of the Iron Gates, they form a nominal construction that immediately suggests that the Prince will confront numerous hardships, iron barriers, and difficult, rugged paths.

Moving from grammatical structure to interpretive understanding, the main title The Book of the Prince foregrounds the predicate Book while omitting the subject. Likewise, the subtitle The Paths of the Iron Gates foregrounds the predicate Paths while omitting an implied subject, understood as "He." Waciny Laredj thus omits the subject twice and foregrounds the predicate twice, rendering the predicate denser, more suggestive, and symbolically charged. This constitutes the foundation upon which the narrative discourse is built: informing the reader about the Book of the Prince and the paths that Emir Abdelkader will encounter throughout his life.

Consequently, both the main title and the subtitle contribute to completing the overall signification that guides the reader toward an understanding of the novel. The title cannot refer to anything other than the novel itself, for which it serves as an operational key that unlocks the closed gates of textual meaning. "Since the title generally consists of multiple and diverse elements, it may take the form of a sentence composed of proper names, living beings, places, numbers, or dates connected through linking devices; this diversity reflects the modernity of the novelistic title"<sup>49</sup>, a diversity clearly echoed in our title, The Book of the Prince.

The title The Book of the Prince: The Paths of the Iron Gates refers directly to the narrative text through "its interaction with the inner world of the producing self, while simultaneously emerging through overlap and interpenetration with what is produced and perceived in a specific manner. Thus, the referential world of the title becomes composite"<sup>50</sup>. It consists of a main title that combines the documentation of historical reality with the artistry of fictional imagination, and a subtitle inclined toward suggestion and symbolism<sup>51</sup>. It evokes the fluctuations experienced by the protagonist between victory and defeat, and perhaps constitutes an invitation to meanings that transcend these historical contexts, shedding light on the present condition of the Arab world and reflecting upon the pathways of the contemporary Islamic world<sup>52</sup>.

#### **4.3. The Poetics of the Epigraph**

The epigraphic threshold constitutes a guiding key for the reader, serving as a preliminary passage into the world of the novelistic text. Gérard Genette considers it "one of the textual thresholds surrounding the text and contributing to its understanding and analysis. It comprises a set of themes that reveal the author's intentions, objectives, and ideological purposes, functioning as essential signals and guides that direct the reader, assist in achieving a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the text, and enable the reader to grasp the fundamental threads of the work"<sup>53</sup>.

Waciny Laredj constructs this threshold through two quotations enclosed within quotation marks, each framing a distinct discourse. The first is formulated in Arabic and attributed to Father Monsignor Dupuch:

"While awaiting the accomplishment of something more important, I believe that it has now become my human duty to strive relentlessly in support of justice toward this man and to clear him of the grave accusations falsely attached to him, and perhaps to hasten the removal of ambiguity and the dispersal of the darkness that concealed the face of truth for so long"<sup>54</sup>.

The second quotation is written in French and attributed to Emir Abdelkader al-Jazairi:

« Si tous les trésors du monde étaient déposés à mes pieds et s'il m'était donné de choisir entre eux et ma liberté, je choiserais la liberté. »<sup>55</sup>

("If all the treasures of the world were laid at my feet, and I were given the choice between them and my freedom, I would choose freedom.")

Laredj's presentation of these two quotations constitutes a central point of gravity in the novel. Through them, he seeks to formulate a position consistent with the interpretations and open meanings that he wishes the reader to adopt. This epigraph helps delimit and direct the reader's perspective through the encounter between the acts of writing and reading. It establishes a form of rationalized and humanized dialogue that creates complete harmony among the author, the reader, and the horizon of the text.

The epigraph thus functions as a preliminary declaration of the possibility of reconciliation between past and present, or between contemporary reality and history. It also promotes the necessity of transcending discourses of hatred and fostering a form of civilizational communication and religious and cultural dialogue founded upon tolerance, reconciliation, and the rejection of violence in all its forms<sup>56</sup>.

In the language of the epigraph, Laredj resorts to a combination of Arabic and French. In doing so, he transcends "one of the most racially and ideologically charged components of identity language which constitutes a fundamental ideological and cultural factor in the relationship between self and other, or between subjectivity and alterity"<sup>57</sup>. Remarkably, Laredj makes Dupuch speak in Arabic while Emir Abdelkader speaks in French, thereby allowing each character to speak in the language of the other.

Language here becomes detached from the conventional identity and specificity of the speaker. According to Mohamed al-Qadi, this represents "an indirect expression of generosity, openness of spirit, and receptivity toward others. Consequently, texts and languages coexist within the novel, and the barriers separating them collapse"<sup>58</sup>. By adopting this choice, Laredj appears intent on "crossing all borders and thresholds, and from the very beginning of the fictional act declaring a dialogic tendency of a reconciliatory nature in which identities and languages are reincarnated within a shared textual space, thereby achieving a form of peaceful coexistence"<sup>59</sup>.

This epigraph, conceived and embraced by Laredj, falls within "the realm of fascination and the passion of linguists, the desire to move toward the Other at least on the level of the aesthetic game that seeks to accommodate both selfhood and alterity within the framework of open cultures and societies"<sup>60</sup>. It thus represents an attempt to dismantle barriers and transcend all boundaries those of language, religion, belief, nationality, culture, and others in pursuit of the values of coexistence, tolerance, and reconciliation.

#### **4.4. Chapter Openings and Narrative Pauses between the Historical Pact and the Literary Pact**

The Book of the Prince is distinguished by its carefully crafted narrative architecture, precise structural organization, and informative effectiveness achieved through the rhetoric of fictional

discourse. Indeed, "the architecture of the novel appears to have been designed with rigorous precision"<sup>61</sup>.

The novel is divided into three major sections, "books" or "chapters". Within each section appears an Amiralia entry, accompanied by a number of pauses. In total, the novel contains twelve pauses: five in the first section, four in the second, and three in the third. As for the Amiralia sections, there are four in all one at the beginning of each major section and a final one that concludes the novel.

Each of these sections, Amiralia entries, and pauses is preceded by introductory passages and textual openings. These openings constitute a direct embodiment of a narrative condition imbued with human dimensions. They express the vision of the narrating self by situating it within diverse historical contexts, thereby enabling it to "redraw the map of existence and create new imagined situations or situations charged with historicist referential meanings"<sup>62</sup>.

The first dimension belongs to the sphere of novelistic fiction, whereas the second belongs to the sphere of history and the reverberations of memory. This duality enhances the novel's credibility, as it functions as "a model in which narrative derives its identity as a discourse that transcends the limits of the cultural self. Narrative here becomes movement through space and memory, as well as a continuous openness to diversity, plurality, and difference"<sup>63</sup>.

#### **a. The Historical Pact**

Through an inductive examination of the textual openings and incipits, the openings carrying historical referentiality may be represented as follows:

The First Amiralia: "28 July 1864, at dawn. The humidity was heavy, and the heat had begun early. The clock was approaching five o'clock"<sup>64</sup>.

The First Pause: "17 January 1848. Monsignor Dupuch removed the page from the calendar with a certain emotion"<sup>65</sup>.

The Second Pause: "November 1848. This was precisely the season of storms that sweep through the quarters of ancient cities and cover the waters of rivers with a transparent layer of yellow leaves"<sup>66</sup>.

The Fourth Pause: "The carriage crossed the Loire River over the small bridge leading to the Château d'Amboise before finally stopping beside the Church of Saint-Hubert. As was his habit whenever he visited the Château d'Amboise, Monsignor Dupuch would first go to the Church of Saint-Hubert to stand for a while before the tomb of Leonardo da Vinci"<sup>67</sup>.

The Ninth Pause: "Monsignor Dupuch had not forgotten the Emir's words, which now seemed distant after all these years: 'Where blood is shed unjustly, legitimacy collapses.' As he crossed the Château d'Amboise, he felt captivated by the wisdom of this statement"<sup>68</sup>.

The Tenth Pause: "The clock indicated nine o'clock in the morning when Monsignor entered the salon through the lofty arches of the palace"<sup>69</sup>.

The Eleventh Pause: "The news of the previous nights had not been encouraging"<sup>70</sup>.

The historical interaction times, dates, places, and characters is explicit and evident in these introductory passages. For this reason, Waciny Laredj was careful to narrate a past history extending over bygone years. On the one hand, this serves as a prelude to subsequent historical events; on the other, it grants the novel artistic credibility and a historical character at the beginning of each chapter of the work<sup>71</sup>. In this way, the reader is continually reminded that he is reading a historical novel.

In these examples, the narrative assumes a documentary and archival dimension through the presentation of historical information that functions as a guide for the reader, highlighting the significance of the historical experiences of the two principal figures the Emir and Dupuch. Through

these openings, the historical dimension becomes manifest at the beginning of each pause and Amiralia section. Reliance on the historical dimension thus provides an artistic foundation upon which the novel operates and which it develops narratively in order to construct meaningful fictional worlds.

### **b. The Literary Pact**

This pact may be illustrated through several of the incipits found in the novel:

The Third Pause: "Monsignor Dupuch remained deeply absorbed in contemplating the notes, newspaper pages, and manuscripts before finally raising his head from the table"<sup>72</sup>.

The Fifth Pause: "Monsignor Dupuch asked me to bring him an herbal infusion this time, for the pains in his stomach, neck, and head had intensified"<sup>73</sup>.

The Second Amiralia: "John Moby closed his eyes for a long while, as though storing within himself the sea's infinite shades of color; then he sighed deeply like someone who had lost a homeland or a loved one"<sup>74</sup>.

The Sixth Pause: "My dear John Moby, forgive me; I have burdened you greatly. I am placing upon you more than you can bear"<sup>75</sup>.

The Seventh Pause: "Ah, my dear John, if only you knew! Whenever I intend to visit the Emir, my body grows heavier with responsibility, and my heart breaks because I have nothing to offer him except a few kind words"<sup>76</sup>.

The Eighth Pause: "Monsignor Dupuch did not realize that time was passing as swiftly as a fatal disease"<sup>77</sup>.

The Twelfth Pause: A blank page (empty).

The Fourth Amiralia: "People lined up along the edge in an endless chain"<sup>78</sup>.

In these openings and incipits, historical precision is absent. Instead, a fictional impulse is declared from the outset, endowing the text with artistic authority and placing the reader under the spell of imagination. This constitutes a response to the demands of creative expression.

Through this interweaving and diversity of openings and incipits between the historical pact and the literary pact, the novel acquires greater credibility both artistic and historical. These openings transcend the merely documentary function of history and serve as guides for the reader by organizing the internal significations of the novelistic text. The reinvestment of historical contexts according to narrative requirements enables the novelist "to construct, through the interaction of history and imagination, a novelistic text that, while granting special importance to its referent, opens itself to the spaces of fiction, blending historical truth with imagination and engaging the past through the propositions and constraints of the present"<sup>79</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this article has sought to explore the various manifestations of textual openings in Waciny Laredj's novel *The Book of the Prince* and to identify the principal mechanisms underlying their employment. The objective has been to understand the strategy governing their construction and operation within a distinctive narrative discourse that combines the artistic and the historical dimensions.

The study has arrived at the following conclusions:

Textual openings are of great significance, occupying a strategic position that directly expresses an initial stance. Through them, the text seeks to attract the reader, capture his attention, and stimulate the desire to read.

Textual openings possess unlimited possibilities and distinctive artistic properties that set them apart from other components of the literary text. Their scope may extend to encompass an entire first chapter or even several chapters.

Waciny Laredj's *The Book of the Prince* is characterized by multiple textual openings that perform a variety of aesthetic and artistic functions. These openings possess a particular specificity in that they establish a strong relationship with historical discourse, thereby producing a narrated world marked by realism and generating an effect of reality upon the reader.

The functions of the textual opening in *The Book of the Prince* are diverse and are primarily embodied in the first Amiralia. These functions may be summarized as follows:

**First: The Seductive Function**

This function carries a particular significance in that it stimulates and captivates the recipient, generating the desire to read by arousing the reader's curiosity.

**Second: The Typifying Function**

This function consists in establishing specific codes and signs directed toward the recipient, providing information and general indicators concerning the genre, style, language, nature, and other characteristics that distinguish the narrative discourse from others.

**Third: The Informative Function**

The textual opening possesses a cognitive dimension and informative potential that determine its semantic, interpretive, and artistic horizon. This function comprises three subsidiary functions:

**a. The Thematic Function**

Providing historical information and directing the recipient beyond the text toward historical knowledge, which contributes to documenting the narrative discourse on an informative level.

**b. The Foundational Function**

Through this function, historical units are expanded beyond their original logic and contexts and incorporated into the sphere of fictional activity, which grants them vitality and semantic openness.

**c. The Metanarrative Function**

Here, the textual opening organizes the overall narrative structure of the novel by establishing the Amiralia as a point of anchorage, organization, and focalization to which the narrator returns at the beginning of each chapter or major section.

**Fourth: The Dramatic Function**

This function is manifested through the preparation and initiation of entry into the narrative events.

The title occupies a prominent position and possesses profound significance. The title *The Book of the Prince: The Paths of the Iron Gates* establishes textual meanings in which the artistic and historical dimensions are closely intertwined.

The epigraphic threshold serves as a key to introducing the narrative worlds through the two quotations one attributed to the Emir and the other to Monsignor Dupuch. These quotations function as a guiding path for the recipient, directing him toward the adoption of a particular perspective and an unconventional vision. They also encourage the expectation of a dialogue between past and present, as well as between self and other.

The interweaving and diversity of textual openings and incipits between the historical pact and the literary pact grant the novel considerable credibility, both artistic and historical. These openings function as guides for the reader through the reinvestment of historical contexts and their organization by means of the rhetoric of fictional narration.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *The Vigor of Writing and the Interpreter of Reading: Thresholds in the Arabic Novelistic Achievement*, Arab Diffusion Foundation, Beirut, 1st ed., 2013, p. 237.
- <sup>2</sup> See: Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *ibid.*, p. 238.
- <sup>3</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *ibid.*, p. 239.
- <sup>4</sup> See: Andrea Del Lungo, "Towards a Poetics of the Incipit," trans. Abd al-Ali Boutayeb, *Dafaf Magazine*, Morocco, no. 3, October 2002, p. 55.
- <sup>5</sup> See: Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *The Vigor of Writing and the Interpreter of Reading*, p. 239.
- <sup>6</sup> Yasin al-Nassir, "The Novelistic Incipit: The Dynamics of Beginnings in the Novelistic Text," *Al-Aqlam al-Iraqiyya*, Iraq, nos. 11–12, November 1986, p. 39.
- <sup>7</sup> Andrea Del Lungo, "Towards a Poetics of the Incipit," pp. 56–57.
- <sup>8</sup> Andrea Del Lungo, *ibid.*, p. 65.
- <sup>9</sup> Andrea Del Lungo, *ibid.*, p. 66.
- <sup>10</sup> Waciny Laredj, *The Book of the Prince (Novel)*, Free Space Publications, Algeria, 1st ed., 2004, pp. 18–19.
- <sup>11</sup> Andrea Del Lungo, "Towards a Poetics of the Incipit," p. 64.
- <sup>12</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *The Vigor of Writing and the Interpreter of Reading*, p. 259.
- <sup>13</sup> See: Andrea Del Lungo, "Towards a Poetics of the Incipit," p. 64.
- <sup>14</sup> See: Andrea Del Lungo, *ibid.*, p. 64.
- <sup>15</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *The Vigor of Writing and the Interpreter of Reading*, p. 259.
- <sup>16</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *ibid.*, p. 139.
- <sup>17</sup> See: Andrea Del Lungo, "Towards a Poetics of the Incipit," p. 68.
- <sup>18</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *The Vigor of Writing and the Interpreter of Reading*, p. 140.
- <sup>19</sup> Waciny Laredj, *The Book of the Prince*, p. 9.
- <sup>20</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *The Vigor of Writing and the Interpreter of Reading*, p. 140.
- <sup>21</sup> See: Al-Taher Rouainia, "The Novelistic and the Historical in The Book of the Prince," *Symposium on Representations of the Other in the Arabic Novel*, Al-Baha Literary Club, Saudi Arabia, 1431 AH/2010 CE, Arab Diffusion Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 2011, p. 17.
- <sup>22</sup> Waciny Laredj, *The Book of the Prince*, p. 9.
- <sup>23</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *The Vigor of Writing and the Interpreter of Reading*, p. 140.
- <sup>24</sup> Al-Taher Rouainia, "The Novelistic and the Historical in The Prince," pp. 21–22.
- <sup>25</sup> Al-Taher Rouainia, *ibid.*, p. 22.
- <sup>26</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *The Vigor of Writing and the Interpreter of Reading*, p. 261.
- <sup>27</sup> Al-Taher Rouainia, "The Novelistic and the Historical in The Prince," p. 22.
- <sup>28</sup> Bouchoucha Ben Jomaa, "The Poetics of Thresholds in Black Suits You by Ahlam Mosteghanemi," *Cultural Life*, Tunisia, no. 249, March 2014, p. 23.
- <sup>29</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *The Vigor of Writing and the Interpreter of Reading*, p. 52.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibn Abi al-Isba' al-Misri, *Tahrir al-Tahbir*, ed. Hanafi Muhammad Sharaf, Oriental Advertising Presses, Cairo, Egypt, 1st ed., 1963, p. 553.
- <sup>31</sup> Abd al-Haqq Belabed, *The Vigor of Writing and the Interpreter of Reading*, p. 53.
- <sup>32</sup> Bouchoucha Ben Jomaa, "The Poetics of Thresholds in Black Suits You," p. 23.
- <sup>33</sup> Jamil Hamdawi, "Semiotics and Titology," *Alam al-Fikr*, Kuwait, vol. 25, no. 3, 1997, p. 106.
- <sup>34</sup> Al-Tayyib Bouderbala, "A Reading of The Semiotics of the Title by Bassam Qatousi," *Second Symposium on Semiotics and the Literary Text*, Mohamed Khider University, Biskra, 15–16 April 2002, University Publications, p. 25.
- <sup>35</sup> See: Mohamed Hadi al-Matwi, "The Poetics of the Title of Leg over Leg," *Alam al-Fikr*, Kuwait, vol. 28, no. 1, July–September 1999, p. 458.
- <sup>36</sup> See: Jamil Hamdawi, "Semiotics and Titology," p. 106.

- <sup>37</sup> Chouaib Halifi, "The Paratext of the Novel (The Strategy of the Title)," *Al-Karmel Magazine*, Palestine, no. 46, October 1992, p. 83.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, vol. 5, eds. Abdullah Ali al-Kabir, Muhammad Ahmad Hasb Allah, and Hisham Muhammad al-Shadhili, Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, n.d., vol. 4, p. 3816.
- <sup>39</sup> Muhammad ibn Ali al-Tahanawi, *Encyclopedia of Technical Terms in Arts and Sciences*, eds. Rafiq al-Ajam and Ali Dahrouj, Librairie du Liban, Beirut, 1st ed., 1996, vol. 2, p. 1359.
- <sup>40</sup> Muhammad ibn Ali al-Tahanawi, *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 1359.
- <sup>41</sup> Muhammad ibn Ali al-Tahanawi, *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 1359.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, vol. 1, p. 128.
- <sup>43</sup> See: Nassira Zouzou, "The Textual Space in The Book of the Prince," *Al-Mukhbir Journal*, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Mohamed Khider University, Biskra, no. 6, 2010, p. 79.
- <sup>44</sup> See: Nassira Zouzou, *ibid.*, p. 78.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, vol. 3, p. 2073.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibn Manzur, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 382.
- <sup>47</sup> See: Louis Maalouf, *Al-Munjid fi al-Lugha*, Catholic Press, Beirut, Lebanon, 19th ed., n.d., p. 52.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, vol. 2, p. 800.
- <sup>49</sup> Chouaib Halifi, "The Paratext of the Novel (The Strategy of the Title)," p. 90.
- <sup>50</sup> Abdellatif Mahfoud, "Meaning and the Hypotheses of Signification," in *Maghrebi Literature Today (Moroccan Readings)*, Union of Moroccan Writers Publications, Casablanca, Morocco, 1st ed., 2006, p. 144.
- <sup>51</sup> See: Ahmed Joua, "The Interaction of the Novelistic and the Historical in The Book of the Prince," *Qira'at Journal*, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Mohamed Khider University, Biskra, no. 2, 2010, p. 287.
- <sup>52</sup> See: Nassira Zouzou, "The Textual Space in The Book of the Prince," pp. 82–83.
- <sup>53</sup> Khalil Shukri Habbas, "The Effectiveness of Textual Thresholds," *Al-Masar Journal*, Tunisian Writers' Union, Tunisia, no. 6, November–December 2002, p. 24.
- <sup>54</sup> Waciny Laredj, *The Book of the Prince*, p. 6.
- <sup>55</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 6.
- <sup>56</sup> See: Al-Taher Rouainia, "The Novelistic and the Historical in The Book of the Prince," pp. 14–15.
- <sup>57</sup> Al-Taher Rouainia, *ibid.*, p. 15.
- <sup>58</sup> Mohamed al-Qadi, *The Novel and History: Studies in Referential Imagination*, Dar al-Ma'rifa Publishing, Tunisia, 1st ed., 2008, p. 155.
- <sup>59</sup> Al-Taher Rouainia, "The Novelistic and the Historical in The Book of the Prince," pp. 15–16.
- <sup>60</sup> Al-Taher Rouainia, *ibid.*, p. 16.
- <sup>61</sup> Mohamed al-Qadi, *The Novel and History*, p. 151.
- <sup>62</sup> Al-Taher Rouainia, "The Novelistic and the Historical in The Book of the Prince," p. 11.
- <sup>63</sup> Idris El Khadrawi, *The Arabic Novel*, Ru'ya Publishing House, Cairo, Egypt, 1st ed., 2012, p. 108.
- <sup>64</sup> Waciny Laredj, *The Book of the Prince*, p. 9.
- <sup>65</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 22.
- <sup>66</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 40.
- <sup>67</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 124.
- <sup>68</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 362.
- <sup>69</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 439.
- <sup>70</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 479.
- <sup>71</sup> See: Nidal al-Shamali, *The Novel and History*, p. 215.
- <sup>72</sup> Waciny Laredj, *The Book of the Prince*, p. 88.
- <sup>73</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 174.
- <sup>74</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 201.
- <sup>75</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>76</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>77</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>78</sup> Waciny Laredj, *ibid.*, p. 546.

<sup>79</sup> Al-Taher Rouainia, “The Novelistic and the Historical in The Book of the Prince,” p. 12.