

## **The Impact of Technological Mechanisms on Literary Imagination: The Novel *Tashari* as a Model**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes1047>

Aysar M. Al-Dbow and Jasim M. Abbas  
*University of Anbar, Iraq*

Received: 23.2.2025

Accepted: 9.12.2025

Published: 2.1.2026

**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate how contemporary novels employ how technological mechanisms. In the 2013 novel *Tashari (The Dispersal)*, Inaam Kachachi utilizes these mechanisms to escape from reality into a world of fantasy. To achieve its objective, this study takes a descriptive analytical approach to the characters and events and addresses some technical aspects related to textual analysis. The study finds that the characters generally suffer from marginalization, threats, and loss of security following events after 2003. These events destabilize the community due to external and internal factors: the American occupation of Iraq, the ensuing security chaos, and the control of outlaw groups. This reality prompts many people to emigrate, hoping for a decent life, only to face the cruelty of exile and the loss of their children inside Iraq. The “electronic cemetery” appears as a utopian city in which these displaced people dream of recovering their life. This cemetery becomes an alternative to their homeland after they lose hope of returning. The virtual community represents a world to which the novelist escapes from the distress and tragedies of the present to a new world far away from hers, which is full of disasters and wars.

**Keywords:** digital, imagination, Kachachi, technological, *The Dispersal*

### **1. Introduction**

Digital literature maintains an important status that cannot be ignored, having been clearly manifested in the modern age since its origins in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has been widely and effectively developed and, in many respects, has disregarded the classical novel form, utilizing numerous technological techniques to create an active digital literature that overcomes spatiotemporal boundaries. The digital transformation opened wide the gates in all areas of life, in addition to its effects on literary practices (Ramesh and Venkatesh 2023: 102).

The novel is one of the most prominent literary arts to employ the techniques of interactive technological literature. The peculiar nature of the novel enables it to interact with and integrate new media, technologies, weblinks, electronic pathways, and audio-visual effects, and in the process of reading, absorbing information, and producing new writing, the reader actively engages with the text, transforming received knowledge into creative expression. These innovations require the conscious presence of the recipient, who interacts throughout the unfolding of the events of the novel and participates in the construction of meaning. Thus, the recipient represents an influential factor in the narrative structure, having the ability to change the paths of the narrative and the writing of its events. In addition, there are other aspects to this art, including the fact that novelists employ technology within the novel and the multiple opportunities that Internet technologies have

provided us with. *Tashari (The Dispersal)* by Inaam Kachachi is one novel that employs computer and Internet technologies within its narrative fabric to create a state of alienation in the individual's life, which renders a different human being (Elhafeez 2024: 184). The "electronic cemetery" and the details it includes represent one of these means of employing Internet technologies, building a virtual world on a small screen. It becomes the dream of all the immigrants in the novel to join the electronic cemetery, even though it does not exist except in the imagination of Wardiyah and Iskandar, who formulated the idea.

Hence, it can be said that the contemporary novel has professionally employed what it has borrowed from all the arts, including technological means. Via these techniques, the novel communicates with the recipient and prompts the recipient's involvement in the communicative process of narrative discourse. It is well known that the dynamic of narrative creativity is characterized by transformation and development, as is the case with all literary arts. This is not restricted to forms, content, and techniques but includes all the knowledge and sciences that are employed alongside the narrative structures and artistic techniques. The techniques of the virtual world are well within reach of the novelists, who employ experimental techniques that go beyond the traditional novel and the classical model of narrative to lead us into a world of imagination that used to be alien to fictional literature. Hence, these techniques have shifted narrative art from inhabiting traditional forms to possessing serious sensitivity to the technological world. The novelist's imagination can take flight to add elements of suspense to the novel that push the recipient toward new worlds via a longing for new things and the activation of a wide mental activity, as was accomplished by literary theory in the 1980s and 1990s (Erlin 2016). This study is based on the Arabic version of the novel, *Al-Tashattut* (التشتت), translated by Inaam Jaber into English as *The Dispersal* and published in 2013. Since the original text was written in Arabic, the researchers have referenced their own translations of the Arabic version throughout the analysis because this version is easily accessible and acknowledged within the Arabian academic context. All textual references and citations are taken directly from the Arabic version unless otherwise specified. The researchers acknowledge the interpretive dimension that translation may introduce but consider this translated version sufficiently faithful for the purposes of narrative and thematic analysis.

The following sections provide a detailed examination of these narrative mechanisms as they are employed in the novel under study.

## **2. Spatiotemporality and the unrealistic structure of events**

Narrative work emphasizes the significance of time and place as two very important elements of narration. A narrative structure cannot exist without these elements, which are interconnected and inseparable. Through them, the depiction of facts and events is revealed as a means of expressing the tragedy of reality. The spatiotemporal is transformed into a narrative element that embodies the characters' conflicts and the woes they have experienced and continue to experience. Thus, the writer weaves reality with imagination, using narrative strategies that blur the

boundary between the two to construct a unified textual world. This fusion shapes the progression of events and provides the novel with a layered experiential depth. Within this structure, spatiotemporality becomes central, operating through the interplay of time and space as artistic categories embedded in the fabric of the narrative. As Bakhtin (1981: 85) describes:

... the internal connection between temporal and spatial relationships artistically expressed in literature... In literary spatiotemporality, the indicators of time and place merge into a coherent and carefully studied unit. Time becomes, as it were, dense, acquires a body, and is artistically seen. In the same token, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history.

The virtual world, with its technologies, makes spatiotemporality effective in depicting the event and giving it dimensions that make it tangible. This is intentionally done to create “the external narrative frame and arrange its content. The world constructed in the novel reshapes reality and history by deliberately reversing the linearity of the narrative structure and replacing it with overlapping and synchronous worlds” (Hassanein and Akkawi 2025).

The novel *The Dispersal* is distinguished by the unrealistic utilization of time and place. To achieve this, Kachachi employs imagination in the sequence of events and creates an abstract space characterized by the grotesque and the wondrous, in order to simulate a cached reality that is full of groans and sorrows. The novel is interspersed with transitions in time and space to another world different from ours. It is a virtual, eternal world, in which time does not end or begin, which means that moments of meeting continue ceaselessly. This represents the first symbolic indication of the violence and cruelty of time in the dispersal and loss of the Iraqi Christian identity belonging to the people of this class. Transition from one time to another provokes surprise and amazement, for time is fragmented in the novel between the present and the past, and the novelist consistently adopts striking techniques to convey this. Kachachi achieves this temporal transition by symbolically employing screens and phones:

A splendid land, with its great civilization and its miserable present, stretches across the screens... I wonder how my aunt survived it... It is the most beautiful of all countries, the homeland of first love—I experienced love through messages, through the smoke of shelling, through poverty, through the anguish of loss, and the flags of black mourning. I heard the death rattles over the phone (Kachachi 2013: 243).

The reality Wardiyah lives in obliges her to seek solace in the virtual world and imaginative realities to relieve the pain of alienation, lessen her loneliness, and cope with a fragmented identity and separation from family and homeland. Yet, despite all this, certain memories remain etched in her soul, unchangeable and unforgettable, notwithstanding their inseparability from bitterness and sorrow.

Technologies like TV screens have given the world the opportunity to see all the destruction the war brought upon Iraq, a country with a great historical legacy. After Wardiyah emigrates from Iraq, she begins receiving news via phone calls to those who have remained behind. Thus, she experiences the violence of time and the fragmentation of identity, torn between her sense of belonging to her homeland and the reality she now lives in, in France.

Kachachi emphasizes that acquaintance between cousins can only take place through the virtual world created by unreal time:

The boy does not understand how to carry a name that is shared by half the men in the family, those among them who died and who will be born. When he turns on the computer and navigates Facebook, he finds the cousins lined up in rows with their pictures and their latest news chasing him and overwhelming him with their warm emotions. One is in Seattle, two in Oakland, and one in Jaramana... Facebook is no longer sufficient for him to belong to them and communicate with them as his mother wishes and insists (Kachachi 2013: 85).

It is well known that place in a narrative is an imaginary place created by the writer. It either does not resemble the real world in which we live, or it may resemble it according to the writer's vision and sometimes the impositions of the events of the narrative. *Tashari* is the result of the overlapping of events and the search for an alternative place to the characters' reality. The writer utilizes various technological means to embody an imaginary place that brings together the fragments of the displaced. Iskandar, who was born in France, tries to communicate with his relatives and cousins, yet his mother, who is keen to support him in this, finds no means but the virtual world in order to facilitate his acquaintance with them.

The real place is characterized by fragmentation and dispersion after the family's separation due to events in Iraq, and the death threat to the Christians there. As a result, most of them have emigrated. Hence, their reunion begins here through a virtual world via Iskander's idea of bringing together the fragments of those who died in different countries in rooms in the electronic cemetery. It is the kind of beginning that a person resorts to after having lost all the implications of life in their realistic place. It represents defeat and alienation in the homeland of childhood, and this is a sufficient reason for such a person to leave their homeland physically and psychologically. This is true because feelings of defeat and alienation lead to destruction of life and identity (Alheeh 2022: 591). The homeland of exile is a safe place for the dream that has become difficult in the country in which one used to live. For this reason, a time that combines reality and imagination allows the distance between the two to be reduced and narrowed to the point that the distinction between reality and imagination disappears. This happens when life becomes a real tragedy due to the ugliness of time in all its details. Searching for an alternative homeland becomes an inevitable feeling for those who have experienced exile. Estrangement causes acute psychological distress, as evident in the exiles'

emotional state while anxiously following news from their homeland. Although they physically reside in another country, they live emotionally in their own homeland, deeply affected by everything that happens to it. In this context, time dissolves into a psychological dimension—one that influences and is influenced—reshaping the dreamlike image of the homeland. This imagined homeland remains a symbol of hope for these migrants; despite the tragedies they have endured and that persist. In such a state, time becomes undivided in their consciousness. Hence, Kachachi perceives the virtual world as providing a space in which to achieve the impossible:

Souhaila Younan was the first to contact me, asking for a grave for her son Raad next to his father's, who was martyred in the Kuwait war. His body had remained exposed in the desert, food for the vultures, until symbolic remains were brought to her, which she buried in a symbolic grave (2013: 159).

Despite knowing that this cemetery is merely a dream within a virtual world, she convinces herself that it has been built in reality. She requests a grave for her son beside his father's. Here, we see how the cruelty of reality and the fragmentation of hope lead to seeking refuge in imagination. Hence, imagination and reality merge together and become an alternative reality replacing the dream homeland.

The novel employs various means of communication that allow the imagination to play an important role in convincing the recipient to become involved in the interaction between the text on the one hand and, on the other hand, the reader who is preoccupied with technologies and with the means of digital imagination (Shukur, Ameen, and Awad 2024). Kachachi continues this virtual use of the cemetery in the words of the omniscient narrator:

She swallowed the pill and put another pill under her tongue. She calmed down from her excitement, watching the electronic cemetery, and in amazement, she placed her hand on the mouse, learning to control the indicator, and wandering among the signs distributed in a paradise of flowers, birds and moonflowers from which clusters hung... The electronic cemetery threw Iskandar into the family and almost distracted him even from Kulthum. He previously did not know his family (2013: 111).

The recipient feels the interaction with Wardiyah's words particularly when she says, "This is so amazing! Though it really needs some palm trees." She enters this world full of hope that she will spend her remaining days in it, meeting those she loves. Such longing convinces Wardiyah that the dream and the fantasy created by the digital technology are true and real, due to psychological factors and the search for emotional and physical stability. She is convinced of the reality of this cemetery, even though it is virtual and does not exist. The virtual world "gives texts a relational dimension and creates harmony among them and the ability to interact.

Thus, each text becomes capable of containing other texts that can be quickly moved to and dealt with independently” (Qalem 2011: 92).

Therefore, the virtual world, which has contributed to building literary imagination, becomes a utopian place and a safe zone, the dream that humans search for, versus the dystopia of a reality characterized by sorrow and deprivation. Escaping into this world has become an objective equivalent to all the contradictions of life, so that we perceive the spatiotemporal element in this imagination as a true reality. It carries the geometric shape that Kachachi dreams of in response to what she encounters in reality, in addition to possessing the sincerity of feeling and belonging to the place in which the events take place. The thing that embodies all of this is the creation of the imaginary place in a virtual world, which she calls “the electronic cemetery”—when Iskandar says, “Look aunt, it is an electronic cemetery in which you can sleep next to those you love” (Kachachi 2013: 109). The spatiotemporal element, which refers to the fusion of space and time as a unified dimension within a narrative structure, plays a significant role in shaping this virtual reality. In literary studies, the term “spatiotemporal” denotes how time and space interact in the fictional world, influencing how characters move, remember, and experience events (Bakhtin 1981: 84). In the context of the virtual setting, this fusion becomes fluid and symbolic, allowing imagined places to acquire emotional and symbolic depth beyond the physical.

It is the beginning of man as he “transforms from his first being as a real human being in a realistic society with defined parameters to his new being as a virtual human being living in a virtual reality” (Al-Breiki 2006: 124). This is what we see in *Tashari*, whereby the true reality is transformed into an imaginary, virtual reality. The geographical location of the cemetery in reality is irrelevant, but the place in the novel is the location where the writer embodies all the events, incidents, and ideas through the interactive aspect that draws in all of these elements. This action and the imaginative perceptions it contains enable Kachachi to knit together the details of time and place, using them to render the human dream realistically without it entering into the mind of the recipient that these are illusions or a miraculous act; rather, it is a reality that prompts the recipient to accept it willingly and with full conviction.

This is what lies behind the text, or “the excavations of knowledge,” as Michel Foucault calls it. The interaction of all these people with the cemetery, their belief in it, and its translation into an objective reality is what the writer has been working for. Once that has been achieved, the novel no longer expresses reality as much as it expresses itself internally, because the novel is no longer a representation of reality. This matter has become a stumbling block in the novel’s transition from a realistic world to another world in which the novel is the best representative of itself. This is a narrative technique that the Europeans have come a long way in employing, including Proust (1995) in his novel *In Search of Lost Time*, which did not simulate the nature of French society but rather expressed the writer’s unreal suffering in living a reality to which he did not belong.

The writer resorts to the technique of explicit indefinite deletion, which is “deletion in which the narrator does not explicitly announce the size of the deleted

time period” (Genette 1997: 119). When time is unreal and events interact and conflict, everything seems strange. So when Kachachi writes, “Iskandar grew up faster than I expected... because of his friendship with death” (2013: 193), she makes a reference to the world of fantasy, which carries miraculous implications. Iskandar’s “friendship with death” shocks the reader, in addition to infringing the logical sequence of the events. The cemetery, with all its details, belongs to an unreal world woven by Iskandar’s genius imagination. The sequence of its events is necessarily illogical, as everything in the cemetery is the product of a past era with all its components such as corpses, debris, and songs: “The boy she once viewed with the innocent eyes of childhood has now become capable of transforming her dead into an electronic paradise she can visit whenever she wishes” (Kachachi). This passage leaves the reader immersed in the strangeness of the situation, while clearly illustrating the employment of digital technology to manipulate time. The past (childhood) merges with unbounded time through the transformation of the dead into digitally rendered dimensions that can be visited at will. This reflects a chronotopic structure, space being represented by the “electronic paradise” and time by the assertion that “she can visit [it] whenever she wishes.”

This narrative resonates with stories like *Black Mirror: San Junipero*, where the minds of the deceased are uploaded into a virtual simulation that the living can visit and interact with during their chosen youthful era in New Jersey (Gibson and Carden 2021, 144–146). Both works reflect a futuristic vision of the human mind transitioning into an electronic existence that can be “visited and modified” at the will of the visitor (Brewer and Cuddy 2025: 2).

Even the title of the novel, *Tashari*, clearly reflects this meaning. It refers to a lapse of time, as the novel’s fragmented temporal structure builds upon the illusions of a dream embodied by Iskandar. As Wardiyah observes, “This cemetery will be nothing but a new illusion that we add to all those sites to which Iraqis rush to build a country on the Internet” (Kachachi 2013: 159). Everything in a cemetery refers to despair in the real, material world, but Iskandar’s cemetery represents an alternative to that sadness. It makes these people happy because they are seeking a beautiful dream from which they do not want to wake up. This represents the depth of the tragedy and the existential dimension for them in light of the great contradictions they have experienced due to governments failing to preserve the dignity of Iraqis. Hence, they have been forced to emigrate and fragment in other countries in search of an ideal world that preserves human dignity.

The construction of the cemetery, the search for the remains of the dead among thousands of destroyed corpses, and their transfer illustrate the existential paradox between life and death, and between existence and non-existence. As Wardiyah observes,

I turned to Iskandar and I was distressed by what I saw. My emotions were disturbed and my imagination wandered to poems that I had not written and I dare not write down. Which words should I put on these white innocent marble tombstones that have not been stained by blood and tragedy? “The

hole is large and our needles are small". This cemetery will be nothing but a new illusion to add to all those sites to which Iraqis rush to build a country on the Internet. They wake up in the mornings of exile and rush to the screen before putting the tea pots on the fire. They read the news and store articles, poems, old photos, and stances that reflect a bygone honor, a past time, and a chivalry whose time has gone away (Kachachi 2013: 240).

The dialogue is based on the monologue technique. We see that the voice of the ego is present; even though the dialogue is based on the form of the ego, this ego embodies all the symbols and signs included in the narrative discourse. It is as if the dialogue begins when Wardiyah says, "I turned to Iskandar and I was distressed by what I saw." Her interior monologue, which seems to begin at this point, is then interspersed with imaginary outbursts, as she calls them. So, the narrator's imagination soars, starting from various manifestations to arrive in front of numerous signs of the imaginary graves that Iskandar has built on his website.

The voice of the character Wardiyah holds the reins of the dialogue as she flies into the world of the electronic cemetery and raises her questions about its feasibility, quoting a popular Iraqi proverb—"the hole is big and the needle is small"—referring to those who are unable to put things right. Through this dialogue, which is essentially linked to the electronic cemetery, a new illusion is added to the existing illusions of the Iraqis, whose people have been unable to live in peace in the country of peace after everything in it became governed by a past that will never return.

A close examination of the text reveals the extent to which imagination can endow the dialogue with an expressive space through which the narrator can present to the recipient an idea of the effectiveness of imagination. It allows the reader to clearly see the reality in light of the various contradictions Iraq has witnessed. This gives dialogue the ability to activate the dramatic dimension, and it gives the narrative its vitality and effectiveness, especially when imagination adds an artistic dimension represented by the involvement of electronic technologies in presenting the event. In the words of Al-Dbow and Abbaes, "The event is shaped dynamically, as it is an effective path in the structure of the narrative text, granting the rest of the narrative elements an effectiveness that is rarely matched" (2023: 39).

Imagination in the novel maintains a major role in representing the values of employing technology in all its manifestations by building the novel's text on different narrative techniques.

### **3. Effectively employing technology between the digital and real worlds**

By employing the virtual world in novels, writers can transport the recipient from their familiar reality to a distant world of the past—a world they have never truly known. This journey allows the reader to experience a different set of norms and values, highlighting the contrasts between their own world and the imagined one, while deepening the narrative engagement. However, this approach has also proven its effectiveness and distinguished its presence in various fields of narration. The

contemporary novel has professionally employed borrowings from all the arts, and technological means are not the least of these. Using technological techniques has become one of the means by which it communicates with and influences the recipient, calling for the recipient's involvement in the communicative process of narrative discourse. Virtuality, in the contemporary novel, does not contradict reality; rather, it reshapes the conditions of its reflection and reconstruction. The reader is no longer content with merely decoding realism but actively participates in the act of re-virtualization.

Digital interactions have touched upon life in all its details, involved everyone, and presented viewpoints varying between rejection and acceptance. Iskandar's invention of the virtual cemetery is established on a new ground, as its textual construction comes with a technique based on virtual reality. Building the cemetery brings psychological comfort to many, and they find in it an alternative to their reality. Through this virtual and infinite reality of imagination that is shaped by the influence of technology and virtuality, Iskandar is able to achieve interaction with all sincerity and spontaneity. Thus, these realistic characters leave their real world for a digital one in which imagination dominates, bringing the bodies of their children, who have been dead for decades, finding their remains and burying them again in that imaginary cemetery.

This relates fundamentally to supernaturalism—often referred to as magical realism—which breaks the norm and works in the impossible. Since narrative is one of the best literary genres to express society, novelists have been able to exploit the use of virtual reality in explaining the nature of every society and its culture. The concept of supernaturalism naturally challenges traditional structures and operates beyond the boundaries of the possible. Narrative fiction is regarded as one of the most powerful literary genres in expressing the identity and complexities of societies. In global literature, authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, particularly in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and Haruki Murakami in *Kafka on the Shore*, have incorporated elements of magical realism and surrealism to explore themes that transcend the logic of everyday life. On another front, writers like William Gibson have employed virtual reality as a narrative device to examine cultural and social dimensions within futuristic or digital contexts. In the realm of Arabic literature, a number of authors have also engaged with digital aesthetics and virtual environments in their narrative works. Among the pioneers in this area is the Jordanian novelist Mohammad Sanajleh, who is considered one of the leading figures in Arabic digital fiction; he has sought to integrate elements of virtual reality within narrative structures in a distinctive way. Other Arab novelists have turned to magical realism as a literary approach to depict complex social realities. Among the most prominent are Elias Khoury in *Bab al-Shams*; Ibrahim al-Koni, known for his ability to blend myth with imagination; and the Iraqi novelist Hisham Tawfiq al-Rikabi in his novel *Al-Aslaf (The Ancestors)*, all of whom have adopted magical realism to portray multifaceted societal experiences.

These narrative techniques contribute significantly to the enrichment of the novelistic form and offer new perspectives for understanding the cultural and social structures of various communities, depicting aspects of social life in all its forms

and shapes. The cemetery results from the oppression and the intellectual and personal alienation that the Iraqi citizen experiences living in a world that, to say the least, is chaotic. Here, the self seems to endure psychological alienation; this is a form of oppression under which the citizen lives, in addition to an alienation from many concepts that are no longer useful. All the characters who interact with the cemetery are the product of a reality that is a crisis of oppression, deprivation, and dispersal. Many of them have been forced to leave their country and disperse widely throughout the world. This is what the cemetery is responding to for these people.

For instance, Wardiyah, one of the main characters in the novel, travels to Canada, the United States, and France to join her children, driven by a dream that haunts every mother longing to embrace her children. Motivated by nostalgia and longing, she seeks to reconnect with them. Her encounter with Iskandar, her nephew, assists her in attempting to overcome her emotional wounds and integrate into the new society, yet ultimately, she is unable to achieve this. So, she continues to yearn for the past, after feeling excluded and marginalized in the new society. This leads her to experience an identity crisis, which she confirms by saying,

Travelling was not my destiny. I walked to it as if hypnotized. I no longer had anything in that country to keep me there or anyone to hold me. I buried my husband and closed the clinic. I saw the riffraff occupying the streets, and my remaining days became as if they had never existed (Kachachi 2013: 23).

She has been forced to leave her homeland, which is no longer safe. Then she begs Iskandar to build an electronic cemetery for her, so that she can visit her husband whenever she misses him. In response to her begging,

[Iskandar] thought and invented a cemetery that one can travel to on an on-demand basis. She can visit it whenever she wants, a precious gift equivalent to a medical certificate, a wedding seal, or the ownership of the big house she built in Baghdad... He plays on the screen in order to turn death into a delicious meal (Kachachi 2013: 111).

The writer's imagination is undoubtedly an effective one. She knows how to employ the narrative structure based on a logical arrangement. Wardiyah tries to bring Iskandar closer to his Iraqi culture and origin, since he was born in France and no longer knows anything about Iraq. His aunt is trying, through the idea of the cemetery, to connect him to his Iraqi origin. This is apparently a message that Kachachi is sending to those who were exiled to strange civilizations that are religiously, culturally, and socially different about the necessity of teaching their children Arabic, the origins of their religion, and the civilization of their country. She is writing about Iraq and asking people to put tombstones in the cemetery that belong to Iraq's culture and its history. Wardiyah asks Iskandar to make graves for his uncles, with the intention of introducing him to them and connecting them spiritually, even if only virtually through his computer screen. For Iskandar, the

virtual cemetery is more than a digital memorial: it is a gateway into family history. Before becoming busy designing, it,

... he knew no one of his family except his mother and father, then he became quite familiar with the departed uncles and grandfathers. He discovered amusing details about them as he carved their graves and wrote appropriate phrases on their tombstones (Kachachi 2013: 111–112).

The cemetery does not constitute only one goal that Wardiyah was keen to achieve. Rather, it has become a homeland for these expatriates, as they have been reunited on a small screen. They have been deprived of their cultural identity due to several factors including differences in culture, customs, and traditions. Here, reality emerges in all its manifestations, rejecting the integration of these families into their new society. Hence, returning to the near past becomes an attempt to build bridges of affinity among the expatriates. The events of the novel speak of the fragmentation that has engulfed the Iraqis, so the idea of the virtual cemetery becomes an attempt to reunite them and build a detailed alternative society. The cemetery represents an objective equivalent to the dream homeland, as everything in it represents an equivalent and alternative to the dream homeland. This is closely linked to the issue of identity that associates a person with their country, forgetting all the wounds and pains of the past.

Therefore, alienation represents a refuge from the motherland, resulting in an identity fragmented as a result of the conflict of concepts, ideologies, and cultures of the two countries. Accordingly, the immigrants seek to cling to everything that brings hope of a decent life, but the price for this is their homeland, thus depriving them of pride, dignity, and a reassuring life. Therefore, the countries of the West become an alternative homeland. Kachachi's novel embodies the spiritual and intellectual fragmentation that followed the events of 2003 due to the great challenge to which the national identity was exposed, especially for Iraqi Christians, in terms of injustice and abuse. This is why the search for an alternative identity and an alternative homeland emerge and are embodied between a true, painful reality and a beautiful, virtual one created by digital technology and the vast digital imagination. Therefore, *Tashari* is the loss that transcends the imagination in gathering its scattered parts, and this is what the novel works to achieve.

He was looking for a paper stapler when he found a thick, eye-catching purple notebook in his mother's drawer. There was a word in Arabic on the cover of that notebook he did not understand. When he asked her, she replied that it was her poetry collection ready to be published.

"What is the title?" he asked.

"Tashari."

"What does it mean?"

"In plain Arabic, it means they dispersed in all directions."

"What does this mean?"

“They dispersed like a rifle bullet that spreads in all directions” (Kachachi 2013: 90).

The title of the poetry collection reflects what we previously discussed about the novel’s content, particularly the use of technological imagination in constructing events and the narrative development of its characters. This creates an overlap between narrative techniques and both autobiographical and biographical elements. As a result, the characters experience suffering caused by a reality marked by impotence and cruelty, with women facing heightened alienation and deprivation. Perhaps the harshest and most dangerous form of alienation is that linked to thought and culture, involving the alteration, transformation, and erasure of identity, alongside the alienation of being itself. Authoritarian ideologies often perceive intellectuals as a threat due to their role in raising awareness (Mutlaq and Al-Dbow 2023: 39). This is why the characters in the novel seem to suffer from all kinds of intellectual and cultural alienation.

Kachachi unveils the nature of this alienation and its manifestations. She does not forget to make comparisons between those who emigrated and those who remained at home. Those who stayed have come to experience a living reality among their families and friends. Whatever this reality is, it is different from the reality of those who emigrated and suffered considerably because of the difficulty of adapting to a new environment. Those who left want to live in the diaspora because it gives them safety and peace, yet they also do not imagine remaining there for the rest of their lives. It is a mere rest stop, not an eternal home. Hence, the duality of longing/reassurance is formed between what the soul yearns for in returning home and the material stability and maintenance of human dignity that one experiences in the Western world.

In her novel, Kachachi resorts to a world that fulfills the first requirement (longing and nostalgia) for the characters. For instance, Wardiyah meets her loved ones in the virtual cemetery. The idea of the cemetery responds to the search for a temporary alternative homeland for those in exile:

He does not understand why Aunt Wardiyah is worried, although she came out safely from a country in which people are dying like flies.

“Aunt, don’t you like Paris?”

“I love it, but I don’t want to die here and be buried in France.”

“What is the problem?”

They all love France but they do not want to be buried there (Kachachi 2013: 86).

Thus, Iskandar’s solution, building the cemetery, is an alternative to a homeland to which returning has become like a dream. All those who emigrated want to return, but the circumstances in Iraq prevent this. At that time, overcoming reality was very difficult under the circumstances Iraq was passing through because of the war and sectarian fighting. In the quotation above, we see Wardiyah willing to live in Paris but only for a short period of time; she does not want to be buried

there, but rather to be a temporary guest and then return to her country. She feels oppressed at the mere thought of being buried there. Iskandar's imagination gives Wardiyah a refreshing dose of hope, and an imaginary place as an alternative to a frightening reality and unknown fate in her home country. She arrived burdened with a phobia of the violence she had experienced in Iraq, where she witnessed death snatching her co-workers one by one. Iskandar's idea of building an imaginary reality and an alternative country strikes her as an excellent one. This evidences the crisis that all these immigrants have experienced. Therefore, the process of linking the lived reality with an imaginary reality is, in fact, an evocation of the concept of identity, especially since the Christians represent an ancient sect with their own heritage and culture, and they were the original inhabitants of the country. Thus, they all gather around the idea of the cemetery in order to conjure an alternative country and identity that awakens their sense of belonging. Normally, identity in literature implies an essential issue that touches upon the self (Mhene 2022: 20). Hence, they become excited about their arrival in Paris, the country of freedom and human rights, but this reality quickly fades away:

Cigarettes are the cheapest, the best dye for hair is the white color, the conditions for obtaining French citizenship, can they become French nationals and hold a wine-colored European passport? What a beautiful wine color in a small passport... They were tired waving the green passport in front of the consulates in vain... They imagined that they were spoiled among the black, yellow, and brown citizens, and they will receive better treatment, but the lice are ignorant, cannot read or write, and do not differentiate between a Vietnamese, Somali, Chechen, or Iraqi head (Kachachi 2013: 96).

Moreover, the author has turned these two characters into symbolic figures of imagination. Such characters, who advocate for an ideal world, though rooted in the realities of life, use these realities as a launching point toward a utopian realm free from the disturbances of the real world—much like the utopian vision depicted by Thomas More. All of this is achieved through the employment of technology and the construction of a virtual world that mirrors our own, as if the author is living in a narrated reality enabled by technology and presenting this virtual world as though it were real. The author's intention is not hidden from the reader: although real life has separated these people, death in exile has united them. This forms the main theme of the novel—one that Inaam Kachachi has succeeded in conveying. Nevertheless, the text contains much that remains unspoken, left for the reader to uncover. To fully engage with the virtual world, the reader must possess a certain familiarity with digital technology in order to grasp its active and vital role in the creative process, as it becomes a contributing element in the production of meaning (Al-Abbadi 2014: 490).

“They were tired waving the green passport in front of the consulates in vain... They imagined that they were spoiled among the black, yellow, and brown citizens, and they will receive better treatment” (Kachachi 2013: 96). Here is a

major shock to these immigrants who are dreaming of a golden future. The cruelty of reality has made them realize that they are immigrants, as is the case with all other nations. The moment a person realizes their own helplessness is the moment of weakness or the turning point towards dreams that do not stop that person from seeking a mirage. Hence, digital technology serves as an aid in constructing this dream that releases the internal demands of those we miss and with whose love we live. The virtual cemetery is an objective equivalent to what Wardiyah is passing through: a realistic homeland for an imaginary life in a digital world.

There is an irony to the important question raised by Kachachi—Is it possible for them to become French and carry a wine-colored European passport?—since the fulfillment of the dream of owning a passport is denied by the difficulty of obtaining one, making it just as much of a dream as the one to which Wardiyah flees to achieve her ambitions of reunion thanks to digital technology. For Iraqi citizens, obtaining a European passport can only be achieved in a dream—a moment of joy and reassurance that a person experiences before waking up and returning to the bitter reality. Hence, reality—with all its fragmentation, loss, and cruelty, and perhaps the request by some characters that Iskandar search for the remains of their families—carries connotations that they want to be acquainted with their dead, visit them from time to time, and spread roses and water on their graves. These things represent an alternative to a real homeland, a dream that contributes to presenting events effectively, and thus paths for the recipient are shaped in order to build an indirect text (Abid and Abid 2020: 14). Wardiyah's character has special connotations in the novel because she is a doctor first, which means that she has a humanitarian dimension and possesses a noble and honest heart. Added to this is her desire to build an alternative homeland, an invention that enables the gathering of the dead in one place. The idea is Iskandar's, and Wardiyah assists him and creates the rosy dream of building an alternative homeland that carries a humanitarian meaning.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Digital literature represents a distinctive phenomenon in contemporary narrative, asserting its presence through the use of virtual-world technologies and the tools of digital writing. Modern fiction has thus distinguished itself by transcending reality and activating the possibilities of the digital sphere. Within this environment, technology and digitalization have granted the reader an active role in reshaping the narrative trajectory and its internal structure through interaction and participation in virtual literary texts. In this sense, imagination has gained a new and influential function unfamiliar to earlier narrative traditions, enabling writers to introduce elements of suspense that open new creative horizons for the reader.

This analysis demonstrates that the novel *Tashari* reflects the experiences of contemporary Iraqis, particularly after 2003. The virtual community and social media offer a new realm in which the writer can escape the pressures and tragedies of the present, as well as the nation's calamities and wars. Time in the novel merges reality with imagination, diminishing the distance between them until their

boundaries dissolve, making the characters appear awake rather than dreaming, as they devote themselves to what is beautiful.

In a dystopian world where individuals are deprived of agency and overwhelmed by misery, Kachachi employs technology to construct a hopeful utopia that provides reassurance and stability. The cemetery emerges as an unusual utopian solution, reflecting the author's ingenuity and her effective use of technology within the narrative.

Aysar Mohammed Fadhil Al-Dbow – Corresponding Author  
Department of Arabic, College of Arts, University of Anbar, Anbar, Iraq  
ORCID Number: 0000-0001-7537-9404  
Email: art.aldbow@uoanbar.edu.iq  
Mobile Number: 009647901786561

Jasim M. Abbas  
Department of Arabic, College of Arts, University of Anbar, Anbar, Iraq  
ORCID Number: 0000-0001-8294-9487  
Email: Jasim88@uoanbar.edu.iq  
Mobile Number: 00964 781 021 2211

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