



# The Rhetoric of Influence: Between Discursive Guidance and Imagination in Contemporary Texts

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## Abstract:

The rhetoric of influence raises a critical issue that transcends the traditional classification of discourses, probing instead the ways in which contemporary texts generate symbolic authority and shape consciousness while reorienting perception. From this perspective, the present study explores the dialectical relationship between guidance and imagination as two interacting structures in the formation of rhetorical effectiveness. It seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which these dimensions operate within contemporary texts as spaces for meaning production and the exercise of influence. The study is based on the premise that influence is achieved neither through direct persuasion alone nor through purely imaginative openness, but rather through a complex network of pragmatic and aesthetic strategies that position the recipient as an active participant in the construction of meaning. In this context, guidance is viewed as a discursive practice that employs argumentation, persuasion, and the cultivation of acceptance, whereas imagination constitutes an aesthetic horizon that liberates meaning from referential closure and opens it to multiple interpretive possibilities. The study further demonstrates that contemporary texts no longer rely primarily on the transmission of information; instead, they seek to generate effects, transforming language into a means of shaping visions, constructing representations, and redefining the relationship between the self and the world. It concludes that the rhetoric of influence manifests itself through its capacity to combine the authority of guidance with the allure of imagination, thereby making discourse a space of symbolic negotiation and a field for the reproduction of meaning according to the dynamics of reception and diverse interpretive contexts. This interaction grants contemporary texts both their aesthetic distinctiveness and their cultural efficacy.

Adopting a modern critical perspective, the study also moves beyond approaches that separate the persuasive function from the aesthetic function by highlighting their profound interdependence within contemporary discourse. It argues that textual effectiveness is measured not only by the clarity of its message but also by its ability to exploit the symbolic potential of language and generate implicit meanings embedded within its expressive fabric. Consequently, the rhetoric of influence emerges as a fertile field where rhetoric, pragmatics, and cultural criticism intersect, enabling texts to be read as discursive practices that contribute to the production of values and the formation of collective representations. The study emphasizes that guidance and imagination are not opposing elements but complementary components whose interaction constitutes the dynamism and persuasive power of discourse. Accordingly, it underscores the importance of reconsidering traditional rhetorical concepts in light of the



transformations experienced by contemporary texts and their modes of reception. This approach further opens new avenues for understanding the relationship between language, power, and influence within evolving cultural and epistemological contexts.

**Keywords:** Language; Influence; Guidance; Imagination; Contemporary Text.

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## **Introduction:**

This study seeks to explore a particular category of literary texts distinguished by their unique vision and distinctive mode of expression, through an examination of two human experiences centered on the dual themes of forgetting and sorrow, as reflected in Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Nesyan.com*<sup>1</sup> and Aidh Al-Qarni's *La Tahzan (Don't Be Sad)*.<sup>2</sup>

Although both works are referred to as "books," they differ markedly in their perspectives, underlying assumptions, modes of presentation, linguistic choices, and strategies of textual construction. More significantly, these differences extend beyond stylistic features to encompass the intellectual, cultural, and ideological frameworks upon which each work is founded. Neither text conforms to conventional narrative genres such as the novel or the short story; rather, both consist of collections of reflections and textual meditations revolving around the concept of forgetting, articulated through a literary discourse enriched with aesthetic and emotional dimensions.

At a deeper level, the two works represent attempts at self-expression and emotional release, as well as endeavors to recover a sense of security, comfort, and inner peace through the rhythm of language and its expressive potential to contain and articulate human experience. The discourse of *Nesyan.com* emerges as an emotional expression of the moments of pain and sorrow that have shaped Ahlam Mosteghanemi's experience, whereas *La Tahzan* may be viewed as an intellectual and exhortative project aimed at confronting sadness, overcoming its causes, and restoring psychological and spiritual balance.

Through the act of writing, each author endeavors to reconstruct a personal vision of the world and to reshape lived experience, transforming language into a space for the production of meaning and the reconfiguration of the relationship between the self, the other, and existence itself. Consequently, the comparison between the two works derives its significance from its ability to reveal the differing rhetorical and aesthetic strategies through which sorrow and forgetting are represented, as well as the ways in which writing becomes a means of understanding, confronting, and transcending human suffering.

Following your agreed translation rules (preserving structure, keeping reference numbers exactly where they appear, and rendering proper nouns in **bold**):

### **A-. Forgetting and Its Literary Philosophy from the Perspective of Ahlam Mosteghanemi (The Seduction of Femininity and the Discursive Devices in *Nesyan.com*) \***

Ahlam Mosteghanemi presents her book in a distinctly feminine tone, closely associated with a specifically female sphere of experience, which makes the book resemble an invitation addressed to every woman seeking forgetfulness, although it resides within herself. It constitutes a creative fabric that may be situated within what Said Yaqtin terms the "grand narrative vision".<sup>3</sup>

*Nesyan.com* represents a different mode of writing in Ahlam Mosteghanemi's literary production. The reader is not confronted with a novel enchanted by mystery and adorned with stylistic elegance, nor with a narrative laden with themes of love, patriotism, and rebellion. Rather, we are faced with a book in which the author addresses the reader directly, without mediation, narrative plotting, or specific fictional characters.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi attempted to justify this position by stating: "My new book is a treatment for women through laughter," that is, a therapeutic work through laughter for women who suffer from emotional shocks and disappointments.<sup>4</sup>

In this sense, the book may be epistemologically condensed into a set of emotional passions, as conceptualized by Greimas.<sup>5</sup> For Ahlam Mosteghanemi, these passions are embodied in a vast collection of titles rhetorically directed toward the woman/man binary, whether through reproach, irony, advice, insult, confession, outcry, severe blame, remembrance, reminder, warning, clarification, or command. These texts contain an invitation for women either to surpass men in love or to remain steadfast before them. Alternatively, they may be viewed as a feminine inventory directed against masculinity in Ahlam's own style (*Nesyan.com*, p. 11). Through the "telephone of forgetting," she addresses her female friends and opens the gates of love in order to declare her entanglement with women. These passions, among others, translate the semiological dimension upon which the pages of *Nesyan.com* are grounded, functioning as signs indicative of forms of feminine jealousy that surge through Ahlam Mosteghanemi's spirit and refuse restraint or suppression. *Nesyan.com* thus emerges as a discourse saturated with such jealousy and animated by a consciousness crowded with ideas opposed to men, expressed through a mode of feminine resistance that only a woman, by virtue of her enchanting nature, can embody.

In this regard, she stated in an interview with Agence France-Presse that "the idea of the book originated from a friend who was experiencing a painful separation. The man she loved used to call her every day at nine o'clock in the morning, and even after their separation she continued to wake up every day at the same time (at nine o'clock in the morning)." The author adds: "To help her forget her waiting, I began calling her at that same hour and telling her a story every day, just as Scheherazade did with the king. The difference is that Scheherazade narrated her stories at night, whereas I told mine to my friend during the day so that she would stop loving that man, hoping to remove Shahryar from her mind. Thus, the story of the book began."<sup>6</sup>

Here, Ahlam Mosteghanemi sketches for her friend a philosophy of profound love and a philosophy of forgetting, according to her own perspective, in the following poetic manner:<sup>7</sup>

"Love him as no woman has ever loved,  
and forget him as men forget."

She cried out: "My God, write that down!"<sup>8</sup>(author's translation)

These words emerge through a series of morning telephone conversations that Ahlam calls the "Telephone of Forgetting," a complete chapter in the book, followed by another chapter entitled *Advice with a Caravan of Camels*, prefaced by a saying attributed to Imam Ali: "He who warns you is like one who brings you glad tidings" (*Nesyan.com*, p. 81).

This book is constructed in a manner entirely different from Ahlam Mosteghanemi's previous writings. For the first time, she writes specifically for women, as the book explicitly declares from the very beginning, starting with the introductory statement and continuing through the dedication.

The book is written in a style that is fluid, accessible, engaging, and captivating. Ahlam demonstrates remarkable mastery in her narrative techniques, linguistic playfulness, and expressive devices. She reveals an extraordinary literary sensibility grounded in her command of an exceptionally sophisticated Arabic language, reflecting a profound linguistic intelligence

and a remarkable ability to manipulate words and employ similes, metaphors, and figurative expressions in their various forms to articulate the creative self.

This is what compels the male reader—who is supposedly prohibited from reading the book, according to Ahlam’s declaration symbolized by a circular seal bearing the phrase “Sale to Men Prohibited”<sup>9</sup>—as well as the female reader, for whom Ahlam Mosteghanemi expressly wrote the book, to browse its pages and engage with it out of curiosity, astonishment, adventure, or a desire for discovery. Men may read the book as a form of challenge or strategic maneuvering, whereas women are likely to find within it emotional solutions to many of their problems, spread across more than 85 discourses—or, in other words, articles.

The central message of the book serves as an outlet for women. It contains advice and guidance directed to Arab women, encouraging them to forget their love affairs, worries, problems, and even their sufferings associated with the opposite sex (men). More specifically, Ahlam Mosteghanemi refers to the Arab man who exploits women emotionally, given his influential role in many of the difficulties they encounter in their daily lives. In this regard, Ahlam argues that through the process of forgetting the past and liberating oneself from memory, women can find relief from many of their concerns and sufferings, without feeling compelled to relive their memories or replay the record of their emotional pain. For Ahlam, a man’s abandonment of the woman who loved him, his denial of her devotion, affection, and loyalty, does not constitute the end of the world, nor does it justify sacrificing one’s life for his sake. Consequently, a woman must cultivate the capacity to forget whenever separation occurs. In doing so, she acquires an experience that enables her to enter a new relationship and engage in another emotional venture that may prove successful, more successful, or at least less costly.<sup>10</sup>

For Ahlam, man is the true master of forgetting. He may easily forget his wife, his beloved, and even the love he once felt for her and the love she felt for him. He may forget years of companionship and shared memories, regardless of the depth and intensity of his affection. He may even betray her at the earliest opportunity, despite being separated from her for reasons beyond his control. For example, while traveling, he may encounter another woman who fulfills what he lacks at a particular moment through a smile imbued with charm, affection, and coquetry. In contrast, the woman—wife or lover—suffers from his absence and weeps because of the intensity of her love for him.<sup>11</sup>

In this respect, Ahlam Mosteghanemi appears strikingly realistic, almost to the point of enchantment, deeply attached to a reality marked by a culture of female oppression, where women are consumed by social contradictions and compelled to occupy the position of the perpetually vulnerable being.

In this sense, Ahlam rejects the confiscation of women’s profound human emotions and opposes the patriarchal culture of male dominance, a culture whose dimensions were exposed, without ideological bias, by Naguib Mahfouz.<sup>12</sup>

Alongside her discussion of women, Ahlam Mosteghanemi also addresses men and masculinity, criticizing its conventional understanding in contemporary Arab societies. She writes: “Who said that we are obsessed with that virility sold in pharmacies? Or with that puffed-up masculinity that leaves shirt buttons open to display oversized gold chains and an excess of body hair?”<sup>13</sup> She further encapsulates her position through the statement of a French writer: “A real man is not the one who seduces the greatest number of women, but the one who succeeds in seducing the same woman time and again” (p. 13).

Within this context, the author does not hesitate to address those men who have “infiltrated” the book (p. 11), urging them to learn from the mistakes of other males and not to make injustice their favorite myth, for, according to her, the unjust man will inevitably have his day of reckoning (p. 135). Accordingly, she advises women not to believe myths, since their authors were men. Nor does she hesitate to affirm, with pronounced femininity, the value of arming oneself with chocolate (p. 149). To support this stance, she evokes the “perfume of forgetting”

(p. 201) as a means of frustrating men's conspiracies (p. 205), while simultaneously embellishing oneself with the "memory of beginnings" (p. 263) and avoiding sentimental songs—unless, of course, the woman in question is masochistic (p. 131).

This notebook that Ahlam Mosteghanemi presents to her readers reveals the nature of womanhood when a woman becomes angry and mobilizes her entire being in response to men. At times, she expresses her feminine vulnerability; at others, she unsheathes her feminine claws in an attempt to assume the posture of a woman who adopts traditionally masculine traits. Yet, even as she defends women, she simultaneously defends men with a form of feminine cunning. This is what Ahlam expresses at the end of the book when she writes:

"...And I swear by Almighty God, by God and again by God, that if you do not learn your lesson, I shall write a book specifically for men, prohibited from being sold to women, in which I will offer advice on how to forget you" (p. 218).

Ahlam engages in a form of politics even while addressing women. Through them, she calls in this book for the creation of a political party organized around the concept of forgetting and its significance in general, while imagining how such a party might receive support from Arab political regimes. This is reflected in her statement:

"Faced with these masses aspiring to forgetfulness and struggling to liberate themselves from the exclusionary power of amorous memory ... it became necessary to establish an Arab Party of Forgetting, which would undoubtedly become the largest pan-Arab party. The only requirement for membership would be the expectation of recovery from emotional disappointments."

She further declares:

"Anyone who shares my opinion and wishes to join a new party—one with no memory, no banking records, no bloody history, no militant or fundamentalist slogans—is welcome to join us through the website:

[www.nessyane.com](http://www.nessyane.com)"<sup>14</sup>

Ahlam Mosteghanemi continues her discussion throughout the book on the importance of forgetting as a means by which a woman may free herself from the memory of a man who has betrayed her and caused her pain. Adopting a sarcastic tone, she writes:

"People, listen and understand well: by God, I see no salvation for you except in forgetting."

What is particularly significant here is that Ahlam Mosteghanemi advocates forgetting as a form of "spiritual therapy," intended to heal women's vulnerabilities and enable them to rediscover themselves, thereby gaining insight into the secrets and complexities of life. In doing so, she articulates a broader social and strategic vision concerning the relationship between women and men. This mode of writing may be described as a collection of narrative reflections capable of establishing creative standards that contribute to the field of narratology and expand upon the propositions of narrative theory as developed by Gérard Genette, particularly in his critical works *Figures II* and *Figures III*.<sup>15</sup>

Ahlam Mosteghanemi regards forgetting as a blessing for women, and in this respect her view appears persuasive. Human beings are, by nature, creatures of forgetfulness; indeed, one might argue that humanity itself is inseparable from the capacity to forget. Without forgetting, life would become an unbearable burden, for experiences of loss and grief—such as the death of a father, a mother, or another loved one—would condemn individuals to a lifetime of sorrow and misery.

This observation leads us to consider another work that intersects with Ahlam's humanistic perspective while approaching the subject from a markedly different angle and through alternative conceptual mechanisms. Consequently, an important question arises: Which of the two writers proved more effective in expressing the concept of forgetting—Aidh Al-Qarni or Ahlam Mosteghanemi?

## **B-. The Literariness and Philosophy of Forgetting in the Thought of Aidh Al-Qarni (The Burden of Memory and the Triumph of the Spirit)**

Aidh Al-Qarni calls upon both men and women to overcome sorrow, avoid succumbing to it, and actively distance themselves from its causes and manifestations. To this end, he presents to male and female readers alike a work centered on the idea of liberating oneself from sadness in all its human forms. His book *La Tahzan (Don't Be Sad)* is framed in a linguistic form that conveys an emphatic and unequivocal prohibition. The work incorporates a vast collection of religious texts, aphorisms, poetic verses, proverbs, and narratives, all directed toward addressing the issues of sorrow, despair, and the loss of hope among individuals.

The author seeks to provide spiritual remedies and psychological treatments grounded in the teachings of Islam as well as in the accumulated experiences of humanity throughout history and across diverse civilizations.

In my view, this book represents a beacon of hope for all those whose lives have been overshadowed by darkness, whose paths have narrowed, and who have become incapable of meaningful action. It serves as an antidote for the bewildered and a balm for the sorrowful and wounded—both women and men alike. Perhaps the author intended it to function as a cultural candle illuminating the hearts of those who are lost and exhausted, particularly individuals endowed with sensitive emotions and refined feelings.

Aidh Al-Qarni addresses all readers and every individual in need of a glimmer of hope amid the darkness of despair. He does not dedicate his work to a particular group, generation, or country. Rather, as the author himself states, it is a book directed “to everyone who wishes to live a happy life ...” (*La Tahzan*, p. 15). It is, in essence, a book that tells its reader in simple terms: “Be happy, be reassured, rejoice, be optimistic, and do not grieve” (*La Tahzan*, p. 6). Through this approach, the author offers guidance to the sorrowful reader who seeks practical solutions, driven by a human nature often dominated by fear of the future and dissatisfaction with the present.

## **C-. Forgetting as Illness and Remedy in the Perspectives of Ahlam Mosteghanemi and Aidh Al-Qarni: A Textual Approach**

A reader of Aidh Al-Qarni’s *La Tahzan (Don't Be Sad)* and Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s *Nesyan.com* finds themselves confronted with a distinctive discourse and a new mode of writing that has enjoyed remarkable popularity among readers seeking seemingly magical solutions to their problems and concerns. These are readers searching for a different kind of refuge—aesthetic spaces capable of providing inner peace, reassurance, security, and emotional warmth.

For these reasons, I find it worthwhile to undertake a critical comparison between two texts that have achieved widespread circulation in both cultural and non-cultural circles, attracting the attention of the general reader as well as the cultivated intellectual.

1- One of the principal reasons behind the success of Aidh Al-Qarni’s *La Tahzan* and Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s *Nesyan.com*, in contrast to many other books, lies in each author’s choice of a subject that directly touches the reader’s life and appeals to a deeply human sensibility.

To the extent that *La Tahzan* addresses people’s concerns, engages with their daily sufferings, and offers solutions to their practical difficulties, its accessible style remains within the reach of the majority of readers. Equally important is the author’s humility and distance from intellectual elitism. More fundamentally, however, the book addresses an issue experienced by every human being, for there is no person on earth entirely free from sorrow, psychological suffering, or the betrayals of time.

All these factors and others enabled the book to establish a connection with millions of readers. Indeed, on the cover of the twenty-fifth original, revised, and expanded edition, the author printed a circular emblem resembling a red star containing the striking yellow inscription: “The Best-Selling Arabic Book in the World.” Above it, in prominent white lettering set against a

purple background, appeared the statement: “A book that has sold more than 3 million copies” (see the cover of *La Tahzan*, 25th edition).

Given that this book surpassed virtually all previously known sales figures in the Arab publishing market, it is reasonable to approach it from the perspective of reader-response theory as a controversial yet highly consumable text. This status makes it an important work in the history of Arabic literature because of its remarkable capacity to activate the relationship between text and reader.<sup>16</sup> The issue of the relationship between text and reader is particularly significant because it emphasizes the communicative dimension of literary discourse and enriches literary communication in a way that reinforces the notion of consumption as an appropriate criterion for evaluating the degree of reception.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to the publication of *La Tahzan*, reaching the one-million-copy mark belonged largely to the realm of aspiration within the Arab publishing industry—or so the media often suggested. Arab publishing houses were accustomed to printing between three and five thousand copies of new titles. Consequently, this book has become too famous to require introduction, as has its author, whose exceptional sales figures and extraordinary popularity generated extensive discussion and debate. Its success astonished everyone, including the author and publisher themselves, before ultimately surprising readers and exceeding all expectations.

By comparison, Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s book also achieved considerable popularity, particularly among younger readers. In addition to its intriguing subject matter, Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s decision to restrict the “openness” of *forgetting* to female readers by placing a red stamp in the upper-left corner of the cover bearing the phrase “Sale to Men Prohibited” contributed significantly to stimulating curiosity, initiative, and a spirit of challenge. This strategy encouraged male readers to seek out and read *Nesyan*, especially given that the male figure constitutes an active element in the book’s central equation:

Love = Man + Woman → Forgetting

It should be noted that when Ahlam adopted this phrase on the book cover, she appears to have harbored a deliberate desire for publicity and symbolic provocation, and she succeeded remarkably in doing so. The strategy increased the book’s fame and boosted its sales, in accordance with the popular principle that “what is forbidden becomes desirable.” Male readers, prohibited from reading the book, became eager to obtain it, while women were further encouraged to read a work explicitly dedicated to them and ostensibly inaccessible to men. As a result, Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s authority regarding the discourse of *forgetting* was strengthened, contributing to her emergence as one of the ten most influential female voices in the Arab world. According to information provided on the cover of *Nesyan*, sales of her books exceeded 1.3 million copies. This achievement is further supported by the American magazine *Forbes*, which selected her among the ten most influential women in the world and ranked her first in the field of literature, noting that her book sales had surpassed 2.3 million copies. According to *Arabian Business*, she was also ranked forty-ninth among the 100 most powerful Arab personalities.<sup>18</sup>

How could it be otherwise, when she herself declares:

“There are two women inside me: Ahlam and Ahlam Mosteghanemi. Ahlam never stops laughing at what happens to Ahlam Mosteghanemi. I do not take myself too seriously. I am a woman who takes writing seriously, and that is the secret of my success.”<sup>19</sup>

2- The media presence of both Aidh Al-Qarni and Ahlam Mosteghanemi contributed, in one way or another, to the widespread dissemination of their books. This presence endowed their works with cultural, intellectual, and artistic dimensions that few other publications could easily attain.

Aidh Al-Qarni benefited from his continuous appearances on numerous satellite television channels, where he distinguished himself through a simple and accessible style of addressing viewers. This approach earned him both credibility and public acceptance. Such acceptance

was further reinforced by a discourse deeply infused with religious texts. It is well known that millions of people throughout the Arab world are drawn to this type of presentation, and this may have been a significant factor in the book's popularity among readers.

The same observation applies to Ahlam Mosteghanemi, whose media presence has been equally powerful. Through her accessible style, she has reached audiences via her numerous articles and literary reflections published in a variety of Arab magazines, particularly those that featured her work on a regular basis, such as *Zahrat Al Khaleej*, *Kul Al-Arab*, *Al-Hiwar*, *Al-Hawadeth*, and *Al-Mustaqbal*. In addition, her novels have received extensive media coverage. Hardly any cultural media outlet is devoid of references to, or discussions of, one of Ahlam Mosteghanemi's novels.

Furthermore, a substantial body of academic research and critical studies has been devoted to her works in both specialized and general cultural journals, including *Al-Mawqif Al-Adabi* (Syria), *Amman Cultural Magazine*, *Nizwa* (Oman), *Alam Al-Fikr*, *Fusul*, *Ibda'* (Cairo), *Al-Thaqafa* (Algeria), *Al-Tabyin*, *Dubai Cultural Magazine*, *Al-Rafid* (United Arab Emirates), and *Al-Bayan* (Kuwait), among many others too numerous to list here.

In addition, her residence in Lebanon and her ownership of a publishing house bearing her name facilitated her rapid and remarkable dissemination, a success she arguably deserves. This factor may have had the greatest impact on the spread of her name in media, cultural, and literary circles. Although some may object to this assessment, Ahlam's creative talent, boldness in argumentation, mastery of suggestion, metaphor, imagery, and her ability to capture compelling ideas have granted her a form of immunity against oblivion in literary history, in the media, and indeed against the passage of time and place themselves.

Ahlam, who describes her culture as "the culture of beautiful sentences," explains her literary philosophy in the following terms:

"From a single sentence, I create a book. I do not take sentences from books or philosophers; rather, I take them from a taxi driver. That is my philosophy of life."<sup>20</sup>

In this regard, Ahlam Mosteghanemi also maintains that the voice of Jahida Wehbe, who performed her poems, "elevates any prose text to another level." She further acknowledges this contribution with gratitude, stating:

"She has added a great deal to my poetry, and I am very comfortable working with someone whose name is politically and morally unblemished, and who shares my ideas and principles in life."<sup>21</sup>

3- At first glance, it may seem unusual to undertake a critical comparison between Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Nesyan.com* and Aidh Al-Qarni's *La Tahzan (Don't Be Sad)*, given the considerable differences in their orientations and modes of expression. Ahlam writes in an emotional, literary, subjective, and deeply personal language characterized by an intense lyricism that approaches the realm of poetry, despite being framed within a narrative rhythm and a storytelling voice.

For example, under the title *That Pride Which Kills Love*, Ahlam Mosteghanemi writes:

"...A man does not like discounts; he desires what is rare and expensive... Let it be so. Enter the arena of his silence. You will grow through patience with him. Enjoy your separation from him. Do not experience his abandonment as suffering; experience it as an exercise in pride and in affirming your own worth..." (*Nesyan.com*, p. 225).

In contrast, Aidh Al-Qarni writes in a religious language that is closer to preaching, guidance, and moral instruction. His discourse is framed within a style that draws upon narration, storytelling, and exemplification, operating within a cultural framework that may appear relatively restricted in scope, appealing primarily to audiences receptive to religious ideas.

Under the heading *A Reflection*, Aidh Al-Qarni writes:

"Do not grieve if you are poor, for others are imprisoned by debt. If you do not own a means of transportation, others have lost their legs. If you complain of pain, others lie upon hospital

beds... Do not grieve, for grief unsettles your nerves, shakes your being, exhausts your heart, disturbs your rest, and keeps you awake through the night.” (*La Tahzan*, pp. 98–99).

The contrast between the two texts is therefore evident at both the linguistic and conceptual levels. Whereas Ahlam Mosteghanemi relies on an emotionally charged literary discourse grounded in personal experience and the aesthetics of language, Aidh Al-Qarni adopts a didactic discourse rooted in religious exhortation and moral guidance. Nevertheless, despite these differences, both writers converge around a common objective: alleviating human suffering and offering the reader a path toward overcoming emotional pain, whether through the philosophy of forgetting or through the rejection of sorrow itself.

**4-** What ultimately brings these two works together is their subject matter and the sense of curiosity and fascination that surrounds it. In one way or another, they converge in their mode of presentation and in their deliberate search for a particular readership through strategies marked by intelligence and rhetorical maneuvering. This persuasive approach varies in tone according to context and theme in the writings of both Ahlam Mosteghanemi and Aidh Al-Qarni.

For instance, Ahlam Mosteghanemi advises women in the following manner:

“Do not be surprised if he rebels against you despite all this, and do not be sad. Great love frightens a man who, before you, has never truly known a woman. He withdraws in order to protect his masculinity from the abundance of your femininity and to recover from his dissolution within you. Yet I know of no man who has ever recovered from the cancer of the soul by taking the ‘aspirin’ of self-deception. Emotional reports confirm that no one has ever been cured of a great love.” (*Nesyan.com*, p. 88).

For Ahlam, the remedy for forgetting is love itself—or at least this is how she frames the issue. Aidh Al-Qarni, however, presents a similar idea through a different cultural identity and within a distinct conceptual framework. In the section entitled *The Radiance of the Countenance* (*Ishraqat al-Muhayya*), he likewise adopts the language of advice:

“Smile in the face of every crisis, at every misfortune, and with every pain, for regret, weeping, and remorse are of no benefit. A smile, however, is a declaration of victory, a manifestation of triumph, a consolation for the soul, a proof of patience, an acceptance of destiny, and an acknowledgment of reality...” (*La Tahzan*, p. 51).

Thus, although the two authors employ different linguistic registers and cultural references, both seek to guide their readers toward overcoming suffering. Ahlam Mosteghanemi does so through an emotionally charged discourse centered on love, memory, and forgetting, whereas Aidh Al-Qarni relies upon a discourse of spiritual resilience, patience, and acceptance. In both cases, the text functions as a therapeutic space intended to help readers confront emotional and existential hardships.

**5-** Both authors seek a reader who suffers either from forgetfulness or from sorrow. This implied reader, in **Iser**’s sense of the term,<sup>22</sup> is the one who reads Aidh Al-Qarni, and may very well be the same reader who is deeply embedded within the text of Ahlam Mosteghanemi. Such a reader finds an escape from sorrow through the mechanism of forgetting. This is reflected in the dominant presence of the title on the cover of both *Nesyan.com* and *La Tahzan*, where the title appears in a font larger than the author’s name, whether in the case of Ahlam or Aidh.

**6-** From another perspective, the difference in form and mode of presentation (novel versus book) played a highly effective role in both works. Each author succeeds in addressing the reader directly through the presentation of ideas stripped of elaborate literary devices or complex narrative plots. Author and reader thus enter into a direct encounter, as though engaged in a television program requiring no intermediary other than language itself.

For Ahlam, silence is the wisdom of the intelligent woman, a force capable of purifying life from the impurities of love. Accordingly, she formulates her human wisdom in the following manner:

“Silence is a test. Blessed is the one who succeeds in it, no matter how long it lasts. Such a person wins either the eternal crown of love or the wreath of freedom.” (*Nesyan.com*, p. 161). On the other hand, Aidh Al-Qarni associates wisdom with the avoidance of anger, which likewise entails a form of silence. He writes:

“Do not be angry, O human being, with another human being, for we are brothers in the brief journey of life. We share the same father and mother, we boarded **Noah’s Ark** together, and we have all been tested by a life of hardship, toil, and adversity. Therefore, do not add further grief, anxiety, and anger to it, for it already bears enough of its own burdens.” (*La Tahzan*, p. 58).

The symbolic involvement of the reader in the construction of discourse is evident in both writers. Each activates his or her creative and epistemological capacities while introducing a degree of plurality into the textual content through the generation and multiplication of meanings. The objective is to establish harmony between reader and discourse, thereby granting the imagination an opportunity for fusion and identification.<sup>23</sup>

7- Both authors endeavor to offer advice and to “turn the page” on behalf of the reader. They seek appropriate emotional mechanisms for guidance and instruction through endlessly variable formulations shaped by the demands of particular situations and the nature of the discourse itself.

Here is Ahlam presenting what she calls *Advice with a Caravan of Beauties*, to the extent of awakening jealousy within women through an instinctive disposition tinged with an aggressive feminine impulse:

“...If you wish to make him happy, continue tormenting yourself. His sole objective is to punish you for a crime that only he knows. He needs to extinguish your spirit in order to convince himself of your innocence. If you are fascinated by fascistic love and its derivatives, then rejoice. He is preparing a pyre whose fuel is... your foolishness.” (*Nesyan.com*, p. 93).

A nearly identical idea is expressed by Aidh Al-Qarni, though with a tone marked by calmness, dignity, and emotional restraint. In a discourse entitled *Beware of Passionate Love*, he writes: “Beware of becoming infatuated with appearances, for they are a source of present anxiety and continuous distress. Part of a Muslim’s happiness lies in distancing himself from the sighs, passions, loves, and complaints of poets regarding separation, union, and abandonment, for all of this stems from the emptiness of the heart.” (*La Tahzan*, p. 260).

This type of discourse is constructed upon what some semioticians describe as the reflective sign, which is formed within the mind as a mechanism for the production of meaning.<sup>24</sup> Were it not for the intellectual closure resulting from an excessively restrictive religious orientation—one that approaches creative stagnation—it might be possible to describe Aidh Al-Qarni as a master of meaningful signs and symbolic indications.

8- Both authors set before themselves a common objective: first and foremost, to reach the reader’s heart, and only secondarily the reader’s intellect, by appealing to a particular emotional disposition.

Aidh Al-Qarni addresses the reader through religious sentiment, which he regards as an innate dimension of human nature. Consequently, many readers find in his work a response to their psychological needs and a means of satisfying their thirst for religious knowledge, through which they discover answers to their personal and emotional difficulties. In this regard, he writes:

“The confusion that a person experiences throughout the twenty-four hours of the day is sufficient to make him lose his awareness, become anxious, and fall into despair. Yet when he returns, listens attentively, hears, and contemplates the words of the Almighty recited beautifully by a devout reader, his sound judgment returns to him, his soul is restored, his anxieties are calmed, and his inner torments subside.” (*La Tahzan*, pp. 275–276).

Aidh Al-Qarni thus insists on addressing the reader through reason by means of a persuasive and pragmatic language, despite the literary nature of his discourse, which remains rich and varied in its rhetorical and argumentative strategies.

By contrast, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, in *Nesyan.com*, tends toward a provocative style, directed particularly at the male reader, as reflected in the following passage:

“...Which of the two choices is more treacherous and more humiliating to masculinity: for a woman to seek the help of another man in order to forget a man? Or for her to resort to a cat to help her forget him, after finding nothing in him that could assist her in waiting for his return?” (*Nesyan.com*, p. 197).

In this manner, Ahlam does not primarily seek to persuade women through rational argument, nor does she directly address their intellect. Rather, she seeks to intensify their emotional anguish by drawing them toward a heightened awareness of human suffering and oppression. This may be viewed as a semiotic indicator of the intense emotional charge that characterizes Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s attitude toward moments, gestures, or memories associated with men—elements that may represent deep wounds inscribed within her personal and emotional memory.

Indeed, psychological critics might be inclined to explore the deeper layers of her emotional unconscious. The lexical field upon which *Nesyan.com* is constructed, abundant with expressions carrying intense emotional and confrontational connotations, provides strong evidence of the human convictions, and subsequently the philosophical assumptions, that underlie Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s vision of life and relationships.

9- Ahlam Mosteghanemi draws upon the often-neglected emotional dimension of women’s lives in order to achieve her intended effect. She reaches women through what she perceives as their most vulnerable point—the heart—seeking to influence them through an exclusively feminine language. As one critic observes, “*Elle investit le quotidien banal des femmes*” (“She invests in the ordinary daily lives of women”). She transforms both woman and man into protagonists in the drama of forgetting.

The book is presented in a guiding and advisory framework directed specifically toward women. It seeks to explain how a woman ought to conduct herself in her relationship with a man, whether husband or lover. According to Ahlam Mosteghanemi, it consists of elegant reflections on love intended to liberate women from male domination. It is, metaphorically speaking, a surgical operation designed to remove the tumor of passion. In this regard, she writes:

“Every woman must create the magical formula for a perfume that no other woman will wear. It is her personal perfume of forgetting, through which she erases the scent of the past and the scent of other women from a man’s memory, or through which she erases a period of time that has passed with a particular man.” (*Nesyan.com*, pp. 201–202).

In contrast, Aidh Al-Qarni seeks a means of restoring to human beings their sense of happiness so that their lives may not be wasted in time and space. He writes:

“Happiness is neither in time nor in place; rather, it lies in faith, in obedience to the Creator, and in the heart—the heart being the object of the Lord’s gaze. When certainty settles within it, happiness emerges and bestows serenity and comfort upon the soul and the self. It then overflows onto others, spreading across hills, valleys, and the places where trees grow.” (*La Tahzan*, p. 280).

Thus, for Al-Qarni, the concept of the good life resides in the pursuit of happiness and in overcoming pain through transcendence and spiritual fulfillment. For Ahlam Mosteghanemi, however, the meaning of life appears to lie in intensifying women’s emotional anguish, based on the belief that such confrontation ultimately enables them to forget their suffering. In the author’s view, she encourages women to endure their emotional fractures in silence, a position that places them in a state of perpetual self-sacrifice and inward suffering.

**10-** Both writers—Ahlam Mosteghanemi and Aidh Al-Qarni—rely, in their treatment of the concept of forgetting and in their presentation of the subject, on the invocation of a wide range of quotations, aphorisms, and even popular proverbs that reinforce and enrich the central theme of each work.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi, for example, draws upon the sayings and writings of numerous poets, thinkers, novelists, and literary figures, including Bassam Hajjar, Lawrence Durrell, Honoré de Balzac, Ibrahim Najji, Mahmoud Darwish, Alfred Capus, Ibrahim Al-Koni, Alfred de Musset, Abu Nuwas, Wallada bint al-Mustakfi, Qays Lubna, Gabriel García Márquez, Ghazi Al-Qusaibi, Imam Ali, Unsi Al-Hajj, and Abbas Al-Aqqad, among many other literary, cultural, and historical personalities. She frequently incorporates quotations upon which she appears to rely in order to persuade the reader through the authority of these figures.

Likewise, she enriches her discourse with numerous maxims, sayings, and folk proverbs, such as the Algerian proverb:

“With every falling tear, a candle is lit.”

At times, she also draws upon Qur’anic verses through various forms of intertextuality or direct citation. Just as she draws inspiration from the Qur’an, she also incorporates Prophetic traditions, supplications, and poetic expressions (pp. 238, 240, 241).

Unlike Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Aidh Al-Qarni adopts a more direct rhetorical and exhortative approach, grounding his discourse primarily in the Qur’an, the Sunnah, the sayings of the Companions, and related religious sources. At the same time, he remains open to history, poetry, significant events, influential personalities, and ideas that may serve as instructive examples for moral guidance and preaching.

He repeatedly emphasizes that the art of happiness emerges from productive action, citing the Qur’anic injunction:

“And put your trust in the Ever-Living who never dies.”

Aidh Al-Qarni becomes a poet when the situation calls for poetry, an orator when rhetoric is required, and at other times a historian, social analyst, or psychological counselor. His methods and tools remain open to the broader heritage of human thought, although they are consistently articulated through a distinctly religious language, even in his selection of poetic texts. Among the verses he cites are those attributed to Imam Al-Shafi’i:

دع الأيام تفعل ما تشاء وطب نفسا إذا حكم القضاء

Let the days do as they will,  
And keep your soul content when destiny decrees. (author’s translation)

**11-** Both Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s *Nesyan.com* and Aidh Al-Qarni’s *La Tahzan* conclude in a similar manner, without a formally announced conclusion. Instead, each author closes the book through the final piece of advice offered to the saddened reader or to the one seeking forgetfulness.

Aidh Al-Qarni ends his book with a concluding supplication and farewell:

“And in conclusion, I extend my greetings, accompanied by my prayer for your happiness. Glory be to You, O God, and praise be to You. I bear witness that there is no god but You; I seek Your forgiveness and repent to You.” (*La Tahzan*, p. 456).

He constructs the end of his book—not to say its formal conclusion—through the selection of a large number of concise and meaningful aphorisms that consistently emphasize his preference for happiness as a guiding principle for human life. Among these are:

“What has passed is gone, and what is gone is dead; do not think about what has passed, for it is over and gone.”

“Books are the best companions; therefore, converse with books, accompany knowledge, and befriend learning.”

“Before you sleep, forgive people, wash your heart with forgiveness seven times, and immerse it an eighth time in pardon; you will then find the sweetness of faith.” (*La Tahzan*, pp. 407–455, preceding the final page).

The same approach is observed in Ahlam Mosteghanemi, who also concludes her book with a final piece of advice directed toward women. In the last paragraph of the final section, entitled “*And Now... Leave Me Alone*”, she echoes the statement placed on the book’s cover, writing: “I swear by Almighty God—by God and again by God—that if you do not come to your senses, I will write a special book for men, forbidden to be sold to you, in which I will offer them advice on how to forget you. ‘Handle yourselves.’ I no longer have anything to do with forgetting. I am going to prepare for you a ‘Book of Separation.’ I promise it will be as beautiful as this book has been useful. I hope that none of you will come in the future to complain to me of any amorous memory. From now on... forgetting... ‘Nesyan.com’.” (*Nesyan.com*, p. 229).

### Conclusion

From the foregoing, we can conclude that both authors ultimately aspire to advice and guidance at a deeper level, that is, to offer counsel to the reader, albeit from different perspectives and in varying forms in all cases. Creativity is, in essence, a human reality, and both Aidh Al-Qarni and Ahlam Mosteghanemi have succeeded in achieving cultural communication and in constructing a particular type of reader endowed with specific characteristics, objective conditions, and mechanisms of consumption, assimilation, and awareness.

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### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Mosteghanemi, A. (2009). *Nesyan.com*. Beirut: Dar Al-Adab, 1st ed.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Qarni, A. (2011). *La Tahzan* [Don’t Be Sad]. Riyadh: Al-Obeikan Publishing, 25th ed.

<sup>3</sup> On the book title, Ahlam Mosteghanemi states that she hesitated to place a period between the words “Nesyan” and “com,” so that the reader might read it as “Nesyanم” (“Forget you all”). She also notes that *Nesyan.com* is the first part of a planned quartet addressing the four stages of love: after forgetting comes “the pain of separation,” then “encounter and astonishment,” followed by “jealousy and longing.”

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- <sup>4</sup> See: Mosteghanemi, A. (2009). "My new book is a cure for women through laughter," *ArabNet5*, July 15, 2009.
- <sup>5</sup> Greimas, A. J., & Fontanille, J. (1991). *Semiotics of Passions: From States of Things to States of Soul*. Trans. and ed. Saïd Benkrad. Beirut: Al-Kitab Al-Jadid Al-Mutahida.
- <sup>6</sup> Mosteghanemi, A. (2009). "My new book is a cure for women through laughter," op. cit.
- <sup>7</sup> Mosteghanemi is known for having published two poetry collections early in her career: *On the Dock of Days* and *Writing in a Moment of Nakedness*, and she is considered among the prominent figures of 1970s Algerian poetic experience.
- <sup>8</sup> See cover of *Nesyan.com* for further details regarding the book's paratextual framing.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> See, for example: "Men and sudden disappearance," p. 169; "Men also forget," p. 155; "It is not love but forgetting that is the man of your life," p. 169.
- <sup>11</sup> *Nesyan.com*, pp. 5–7.
- <sup>12</sup> Ashour, G. (2010). *Naguib Mahfouz: Symbol and Value*. Cairo: Supreme Council of Culture; Egyptian-Lebanese House, pp. 65–72.
- <sup>13</sup> *Nesyan.com*, p. 11.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>15</sup> Genette, G. (1969). *Figures II*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.  
Genette, G. (1972). *Figures III*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- <sup>16</sup> Holub, R. (2000). *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Trans. Abdelaziz Ismail. Cairo: Academic Library, p. 97.
- <sup>17</sup> Bouhassan, A. (2004). *Contemporary Critical Approaches*. Rabat: Dar Al-Aman, 1st ed., p. 27.
- <sup>18</sup> See Mosteghanemi's statement regarding *Nesyan.com*: "My new book is a cure for women through laughter," *ArabNet5*, July 15, 2009.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Holub, R. (2000). *Reception Theory*, op. cit., pp. 13, 136.
- <sup>23</sup> Barthes, R. (1986). *Semiology Lessons*. Trans. A. Benabdallah. Rabat: Toubkal Publishing, 2nd ed., pp. 62–63.
- <sup>24</sup> Mahfouz, A. L. (2008). *Mechanisms of Novelistic Text Production*. Arab Center for Scientific Publishers / Ikhtilaf Publications, 1st ed., p. 187.