

# Beyond the City Limits: Literary Reception of "Nicosia" and Perspectives of 4th Semester Arabic Language and Literature Students

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## Abstract

This study examines the literary reception of Saadi Youssef's short story "Nicosia" among 14 fourth-semester undergraduate students of Arabic Language and Literature from the 2023 cohort at the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, who are categorized as general readers. The literary reception approach highlights how literary works are received, experienced, and processed by readers, focusing on the interaction between text and reader in creating meaning. The short story was chosen due to its thematic relevance to the main character, Tahir's, journey in understanding identity and social reality amidst conflict, and its Arabic language level, which aligns with the respondents' proficiency. The research methodology combines quantitative methods for data processing and qualitative methods for describing results, with data collection conducted through open-ended questionnaires focusing on the short story's structural elements (characters, setting, theme, mandate) and reader responses. The objective of literary analysis is to obtain the full meaning of a literary work by analyzing and demonstrating the relationships between the elements of the material as well as investigating the morals of the short story under study through an analysis of its psychological, sociological, and structural elements. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents (79%) identified "Search for Identity" as the core plot, (79%) perceived the main theme as "Search for Identity and Alienation", the character Tahir is predominantly portrayed as introverted and reflective (71%), the contrast between bustling and alienated Damascus and Nicosia as a symbol of hope and recovery (86%). From the perspective of reader response and experience, 79% of respondents felt emotionally connected, 57% of respondents acknowledged that their personal experiences, and (79%) agreed that interpretations of literary works can vary due to differences in individual backgrounds and experiences. This is reinforced by Tahir's experience of alienation in Damascus and his efforts to find meaning and identity in the new environment of Nicosia. This research provides insight into how readers respond to the themes raised by Youssef in a broader social and cultural context, emphasizing the crucial role of the reader as an agent in shaping meaning in literary works.

**Keyword:** *Literary Reception, Nicosia, Arabic Language and Literature Students*

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji resepsi sastra cerpen "Nikosia" karya Saadi Youssef di kalangan 14 mahasiswa Program Studi S1 Bahasa dan Sastra Arab semester IV angkatan 2023 Fakultas Humaniora Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, yang dikategorikan sebagai pembaca awam. Pendekatan resepsi sastra digunakan untuk menyoroti bagaimana karya sastra diterima, dihayati, dan diolah oleh pembaca, dengan fokus pada interaksi antara teks dan pembaca dalam menciptakan makna. Cerpen ini dipilih karena relevansi tematiknya dengan perjalanan

*tokoh utama, Tahir, dalam memahami identitas dan realitas sosial di tengah konflik, serta tingkat bahasa Arabnya yang sesuai dengan kemampuan responden. Metode penelitian ini menggabungkan pendekatan kuantitatif untuk pengolahan data dan kualitatif untuk deskripsi hasil, dengan pengumpulan data melalui kuesioner terbuka yang berfokus pada unsur-unsur struktural cerpen (tokoh, latar, tema, amanat) dan respons pembaca. Tujuan analisis ini adalah untuk memahami makna lengkap suatu karya sastra dengan menganalisis dan menjelaskan hubungan antara unsur-unsur yang terdapat dalam karya tersebut. Serta menggali nilai dari cerita pendek yang diteliti dengan menggali nilai dari struktur, aspek sosial, dan aspek psikologis cerita. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas responden (79%) mengidentifikasi "Pencarian Identitas" sebagai alur cerita utama, (79%) memandang tema utama sebagai "Pencarian Identitas dan Keterasingan", karakter Tahir digambarkan secara dominan sebagai introvert dan reflektif (71%), kontras antara Damaskus yang ramai dan terasing dengan Nicosia sebagai simbol harapan dan pemulihan (86%). Dari perspektif respons dan pengalaman pembaca, 79% responden merasa terhubung secara emosional, 57% responden mengakui bahwa pengalaman pribadi mereka, dan (79%) setuju bahwa interpretasi karya sastra dapat bervariasi karena perbedaan latar belakang dan pengalaman individu. Hal ini diperkuat oleh pengalaman keterasingan Tahir di Damaskus dan usahanya menemukan makna hidup serta identitas di lingkungan baru Nikosia. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan tentang bagaimana pembaca merespons tema-tema yang diangkat oleh Youssef dalam konteks sosial dan budaya yang lebih luas, menegaskan peran krusial pembaca sebagai agen pembentuk makna dalam karya sastra.*

**Kata kunci:** Resepsi Sastra, Nikosia, Mahasiswa Bahasa dan Sastra Arab

## Introduction

In the world of literature, the role of the reader is crucial in the process of enjoying, discussing, and studying literary works. There are two commonly recognized types of readers, namely expert readers and lay readers. Expert readers usually have in-depth knowledge of literary theory, writing techniques, and the historical context in which a work of literature is set. They are capable of complex analysis and interpretation of the text. In contrast, lay readers may not have an academic background in literature, but are still able to experience and enjoy literary works with a unique and personalized experience. (Satyam Kumar, 2023). Both types of readers are equally important in literary research, especially in the literary reception approach, which highlights how the work is received, lived and processed by readers.

Literary reception studies have undergone significant development since their emergence in the mid-20th century, particularly through the contributions of theorists such as Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser from the University of Konstanz, Germany. Jauss, in his famous work "Literary History as Challenge to Literary Theory" (1967), introduced the concept of "horizon of expectation" (Erwartungshorizont), emphasizing that the meaning of literary works is not fixed but constantly changes in line with changes in the historical and social context of the reader (Rockhill, 2020). Meanwhile, Iser developed a theory of the "implied reader," which suggests that literary texts have a structure that actively involves readers in the process of meaning formation, where reading is seen as a creative activity that brings texts to life through the reader's imagination (Colley, 2023). Both thinkers successfully shifted the paradigm of literary criticism from a focus on the author and text to the importance of the reader's role as an active agent in the interpretation process.

The literary reception approach cannot be separated from the broader intellectual movement of the time, including Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics. Phenomenology provides a philosophical foundation for understanding how the reader's consciousness interacts with aesthetic objects, while hermeneutics offers a methodological framework for understanding the process of interpretation as a dialogue between the reader and the text (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). Gadamer, in particular, developed the concept of the "fusion of horizons," emphasizing that understanding always depends on historical and cultural context, and that interpretation is a productive dialogical process between text and reader (KONURBAEV & GANEEVA, 2024). In the context of contemporary Arabic literature, this approach is increasingly relevant given the cultural and historical complexity underlying the works of modern Arab writers such as Saadi Youssef, whose works often reflect the struggle between tradition and modernity, as well as the diaspora experience of many Arab intellectuals in the 20th century (AHMED & Amin, 2024).

Based on the theoretical and philosophical foundations that have been developed, the literary reception approach does not place the author at the center of attention in research. Although authors have a comprehensive understanding of their works, this approach focuses primarily on the interaction between the text and the reader. This approach emphasizes the aesthetic dimension, namely how a literary work is responded to and undergoes a transformation of meaning in accordance with the reader's experience. Therefore, the author is not directly involved in research using the reception approach, because the main focus is on how the meaning of the work is produced and developed through the reader's activity of reading and reception (Mohammed Al-Haba, 2013).

In this way, the literary reception approach opens up opportunities for diverse interpretations and meanings that arise from the varied backgrounds of readers, both experts and laymen, as mentioned earlier. This keeps literary works alive and relevant through the active role of readers as agents of meaning, rather than mere passive objects. This principle aligns with Jauss's concept of the "horizon of expectation" and Iser's "implied reader," which emphasize that each reader brings unique contexts and experiences into the interpretive process. Therefore, readers become a central subject in literary studies with this approach, as they are the ones who absorb, evaluate, and utilize literary works within various social and cultural contexts (Benharrouse, 2022).

Referring to the importance of the reader's role in this literary reception approach, this article will discuss how readers receive the short story "نيقوسيا" (Nicosia) by Saadi Youssef. The short story "نيقوسيا" was first published in a collection of Youssef's works that reflect his experiences and views on life in the city of Nicosia, located on the island of Cyprus. This short story describes the journey of a character who tries to understand identity and social reality amid the conflict that has engulfed the region. This work was selected because the Arabic language used in the short story is equivalent to level B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which aligns with the respondents' proficiency level in Arabic. In the context of contemporary reception studies, an empirical approach has become increasingly important for formulating empirical information through various verifiable research methods (Almelhes, 2024). The cognitive approach in literary studies also provides a framework for understanding how readers' cognitive structures, such as memory, attention, and emotions, influence their interpretation of literary works, particularly in the context of cognitive and cultural character construction (Yin & Childs, 2024). The

analysis of this short story is expected to provide insights into how readers respond to the themes raised by Youssef in a broader social and cultural context.

To apply this literary reception approach, the respondents used were 14 fourth-semester students majoring in Arabic Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities, Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang, class of 2023. As fourth-semester students, the respondents had not yet decided on their thesis specialization (literature or language), so they could be categorized as lay readers. The selection of lay readers aligns with the principles of the reception approach, which prioritizes the diversity of readers' perspectives. Interpretations emerging from an academic background that has not yet been specialized can provide valuable insights into how literary works are received and understood more broadly. Methodologically, the use of verbal data collection techniques is the most popular method in empirical reception studies, as it can reveal readers' responses directly and systematically (Widiastuti & Syamsi, 2023). Furthermore, empirical research on narrative empathy shows that textual factors interact with reader factors in the experience of empathy toward characters in narratives, so that the Indonesian cultural background of respondents can influence their interpretation of Arabic texts (Nurviyani, 2023). The cognitive approach in literary studies also provides a way to test and falsify theories about how readers process literary texts, enabling a more objective analysis of the diversity of cognitive responses from lay readers (Dong, 2022).

## Methods

The method used in this research is quantitative method to process data and qualitative method to describe the research results. Data collection was done by giving a questionnaire with all questions using an open-ended question model (Karaman & Büyükkıdık, 2023). The open-ended question model was chosen to explore the answers and reasons that really come from the respondents' personal thoughts in assessing the short story "نيقوسيا" (Nicosia) by Saadi Youssef. The questions asked focused on the elements of the short story structure, namely character, setting, theme, and mandate, where all answers were complemented by sentence excerpts from the short story. Respondents were given one hour to answer the questions, given that they had read and understood the content of the short stories under study beforehand. From the analysis of the respondents' answers to these questions, it can be seen how much the respondents understand the structural elements of the short story "نيقوسيا" (Nicosia) and how they respond to the theme raised by Youssef. (يوسف, 1994)

## Results

This study analyzes readers' responses to the short story "Nikosia" using a structuralist and literary reception approach. The results show that readers have a consistent understanding of the structural elements of the short story, but also provide diverse interpretations based on their personal experiences.

### Text Structure:

**Plot:** The majority of respondents (86%) identified the core plot as a "search for identity." The main character, Tahir, is depicted as feeling alienated in Damascus and seeking meaning in life in Nicosia, symbolized by the quote, "I want to see Nicosia as it is, not as it appears when compared to other cities."

**Theme:** Most respondents (79%) considered the main theme to be “The Search for Identity and Alienation.” This is illustrated by the pivotal moment when Tahir begins to realize that he is a painter and feels alienated from Damascus society, even though he is surrounded by good people.

**Character:** Tahir is described as “introverted and reflective” by the majority of respondents (71%). This trait is evident in his tendency to reflect and observe rather than interact directly, as well as his inability to form new relationships.

**Background:** The setting shows a striking contrast between Damascus and Nicosia. Damascus is depicted as a bustling city but one that symbolizes alienation for Tahir, while Nicosia symbolizes hope and opportunity for self-recovery. The social setting emphasizes Tahir's marginal position, which makes him feel isolated, both among the poor and among artists. The atmosphere of the story, which shifts from the bustling chaos of Damascus that leaves him feeling alienated to the tranquility of Nicosia, also supports the themes of identity search and healing.

**Symbol:** There are two main symbols identified by respondents: “the sea and port symbol” and “the shadow of Damascus.” The port in Paphos symbolizes freedom, peace, and new opportunities not found in Damascus. Meanwhile, “fish” serves as a metaphor for Tahir's identity and inner calling, reminding him of his true self that may have been neglected.

### **Reader Responses and Experiences:**

**Emotional Connection:** The majority of respondents (79%) felt connected to Tahir's experience. The alienation experienced by Tahir, even though he was surrounded by good people, is a universal experience that many people can relate to. Tahir's search for meaning in life is also a theme that is familiar to many readers.

**Empathy:** Feelings of empathy arise when reading about Tahir's sadness and isolation in Damascus. Tahir's moments of nostalgia and loneliness, as reflected in the quotations, create a deep emotional connection for the reader.

**The Influence of Personal Experience:** The majority of respondents (57%) agreed that their personal experiences, such as moving house or feeling alienated, influenced their understanding of the story. These similar experiences allowed them to better understand Tahir's anxiety and search for meaning. This shows that literature serves as a mirror of human experience, connecting readers through strong emotional resonance.

**Interpretation:** Most respondents (79%) agree that readers can have different interpretations of literary works. This is due to the different backgrounds, experiences, and emotions of each individual, which enriches the discussion and appreciation of literary works. In other words, literary understanding is a dynamic interaction between readers and texts, in which readers actively construct meaning based on what they already know and feel.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Literary Reception**

By definition, the term literary reception comes from the Latin word “recipere” and the English word “reception,” which means reception or welcome from the reader. In a broader context, literary reception can be understood as the process of processing

texts and ways of giving meaning to literary works, thus enabling a response from the reader. (Yudin, 2023). According to the literary reception approach, a text will only have 'meaning' if there is a relationship with the reader. The text requires an impression, which is not possible without the presence of the reader (Astuti, 2023).

Ratna argues that literary reception emerged as the dominant theory since the 1970s, with the following considerations: a) as a solution to overcome the structuralism approach which is considered to focus only on the elements; b) the emergence of awareness to revive human values in the context of universal humanism; c) recognition that the values in literary works can develop only through the ability and competence of readers; d) awareness that the permanence of art values is determined by readers; e) understanding that meaning lies in an ambiguous relationship between literary works and readers. (Dewi, 2025).

This approach sees literature as a dialog between the text and the reader. Hans Robert Jauss introduced the concept of a "horizon of expectations", which refers to the framework of understanding, experience and knowledge that readers bring with them when encountering a text. This horizon is shaped by genre conventions, knowledge of previous works, and social and cultural expectations. The meaning of a work is not static, but rather constantly interacts with this horizon of expectations, and can even change over time (Jambak et al., 2022).

Wolfgang Iser, another key figure in reception theory, puts forward the concept of "the text as a gap to be filled by the reader". According to Iser, a literary text has many "empty places" or uncertainties that are not explicitly explained by the author. It is precisely these "gaps" that encourage readers to actively participate in the creation of meaning. Readers fill in these gaps with their imaginations, personal experiences and interpretations, so that each reader can construct a unique understanding of the same text. Therefore, the meaning of a literary work is not considered to be completed in the text, but is realized in the reading process itself. (Lane, 2022).

## **Structuralism**

For structuralists, a literary work is understood as a totality that is built coherently through the various elements that compose it. The structure of a literary work refers to an understanding of the relationship between (intrinsic) elements that are interrelated, mutually determining, and mutually influencing, so that together they form a unified meaning. (Nurhamidah, 2024). In other words, each element in a literary work will have meaning and significance only if it is connected to other elements in the work.

Structuralism emphasizes the importance of analyzing the elements of a work. Every literary work, regardless of genre, has varying elements as a result of differences in the reader's reception process. Therefore, literary works are considered to have unique, autonomous, and non-generalizable characteristics, so that each assessment will produce different conclusions. (Say, 2022). This autonomy means that literary works cannot be analyzed using rigid rules, because in each work there will be differences in the dominance of the elements being analyzed and differences in the objectives of the analysis. The elements analyzed in this study are limited to characters, setting, theme, and message. The following is an explanation of these four elements.

## **Figure**

In structuralism, characters are seen as structural elements in a narrative system, not as real individuals with independent psychologies. Characters are seen as part of the

story's structure, fulfilling specific roles or functions, such as protagonist, antagonist, or plot supporter. Characters are not merely "characters in a story," but symbols representing conflicts, values, and binary oppositions (e.g., good–evil, strong–weak) that shape meaning within the text (Lee & Fink, 2023).

Structuralism focuses more on the relationships and roles of characters within the overall structure than on their uniqueness or personal backgrounds. Characters function as tools to drive the story forward and build a network of meaning through their interactions with other elements such as plot, theme, and setting. Therefore, the identity and function of characters in structuralism depend entirely on their position within the narrative system, rather than on their psychological depth or realism (Elisa, 2022).

### **Background**

In structuralism, setting is understood as a narrative element that creates space for events to take place in a literary work. Setting refers to the physical or geographical location where events occur; temporal setting pertains to temporal aspects such as time, day, season, or historical period; while atmospheric setting describes the emotional or psychological tone that permeates a scene, such as tension, sadness, or hope. These three elements are not independent but are structurally interconnected to form the narrative context and support the creation of overall meaning (Puxan-Oliva, 2024).

Meanwhile, social setting includes values, norms, social status, customs, or cultural conditions that influence the characters and conflicts in the story. From a structuralist perspective, these four types of setting are not considered mere complements, but rather integral parts of an interrelated narrative structure that forms a system of signs. In other words, setting does not merely provide the location for events to occur but also reinforces binary oppositions, symbolic patterns, and contrasts within the text, thereby facilitating readers in interpreting the story's meaning in a more structured manner (Athiyah Rahmah Zamrud, 2023).

### **Theme**

In structuralism, themes are understood as fundamental and abstract structures of meaning that form the foundation for the development of the story as a whole. Themes are not considered to be moral messages directly conveyed by the author, but rather as part of a system of signs within the text that work internally and are interrelated with other elements such as characters, plot, and setting. Understanding of the theme can only be obtained through a thorough reading of the narrative structure, as the theme is often not explicitly stated but implied through the relationships between elements within the text (Aziz, 2021).

Structuralism views text as an autonomous system, where meaning is formed from internal relationships between elements, not from external factors such as the author's intent or social context. Therefore, themes in this approach are the result of recurring structural patterns that form a unity of meaning. Thus, themes are concepts that emerge from the integration of narrative elements in the text and can only be analyzed through the entire structure, not from quotations or specific parts alone (Mustabsyiratul Fajriyahti, 2024).

### **Mandate**

In the perspective of literary structuralism, the message is one of the intrinsic elements that emerges as a result of the integration of other structural elements such as

theme, characters, plot, and setting. The message is not viewed as an explicit message from the author, but rather as a narrative function that emerges through the text's structure itself. Therefore, in a structuralist approach, the message is not analyzed as the author's intention, but as a product of the structure operating within the text system, including the interconnections between symbols, conflicts, and resolutions (Dianti Sriyuni, 2022).

Structuralism views literary texts as self-contained closed sign systems. Therefore, the message is understood symbolically and implicitly, present through the regularity and repetition of patterns in the narrative. Readers do not immediately "grasp the moral message," but rather discover it through the process of interpreting the narrative structure that is systematically analyzed. Thus, the message in structuralism is part of the overall system of signs in the text that reveals social, cultural, or moral values through structural relationships (Putri, 2025).

### **Plot**

In structuralism, plot is a meaningful configuration of narrative elements, not merely a sequence of events. It is a system of relationships that underlies the meaning of a story, similar to narrative "grammar" in which characters interact in recognizable patterns. Analysis involves breaking the story down into basic units to understand its coherent structure. A key concept is the distinction between *fabula* (chronological sequence) and *syuzhet* (presentation of events). Meaning often emerges from the manipulation of *syuzhet*, that is, how the narrator chooses to reveal information. Figures like Propp and Lévi-Strauss demonstrated how structural patterns underlie various narratives, revealing cultural meaning. Thus, plot in structuralism is about the abstract structure that enables a story to function and communicate (Keen, 2015).

### **Symbols and Language Style**

In structuralism, symbols are part of semiotics, a system of signs. Each sign has a signifier (physical form, e.g., the word "rose") and a signified (concept, e.g., love). Meaning is not inherent, but rather constructed from this relationship. Roland Barthes developed the concept of myth as a "second semiological system," where existing signs become new signifiers for connotative/ideological meanings. A rose, which denotatively refers to a flower, can become a symbol of passion (connotative). Style is the way signifiers are arranged to produce meaning and effect. It is a semiotic strategy, not decoration. Metaphors or irony manipulate signs to create layered meanings. Barthes demonstrates how everyday language and popular culture use this sign system to construct narratives and ideologies. Understanding symbols and style semiologically helps us deconstruct how meaning is created and disseminated (Nazra Zahid Shaikh & Rafique Ahmed Memon, 2023).

### **Discussion**

Data on respondents' understanding of the short stories studied was obtained through a questionnaire distributed to 14 students as respondents. The percentage results were calculated using a predetermined formula:

$$\frac{F}{N} \times 100\% = x$$



#### Description:

F : Responden  
N : Total responden  
100% : Percentagse  
X : Percentage results

The following is a detailed presentation of data describing respondents' responses to the elements that make up the structure of the short story "Nikosia." This detailed presentation is presented in a table that includes the number of respondents who provided responses (F) along with the percentage of results (%), as well as descriptive sentences explaining the reasons behind the respondents' answers. In the response column of the table, there is always a "Other Responses" category in the last row. This category is used to represent various responses that, although not significant in terms of quality and quantity, when totaled can result in a fairly high percentage. Questions 1 through 8 will focus on structural analysis, i.e., how the elements of the story work systematically. Questions 9 through 12, on the other hand, tend to delve into the realm of reception or reader response, which is closer to the reception or reader-response approach rather than structuralism.

#### Text Structure

##### Plot

**What is considered to be the core of the plot of the short story "Nicosia"?**

Answer	F	%
The Search for Identity	12	86
Other answers	2	14

The majority of respondents answered "search for identity." The main character, Tahir, experiences deep alienation in Damascus, where he feels disconnected from his surroundings. Throughout his life, he strives to find meaning and identity. This is evident when he reflects on his life and tries to understand his place in the world, especially after receiving a letter from his cousin, Syaban, inviting him to live in Cyprus. This encounter becomes the starting point for Tahir to explore who he is and what he wants from life, as illustrated by the following quote.

"أريد أن أرى نيقوسيا كما أراها، لا كما تبدو في المقارنة مع مدينة أخرى"

This is clearly evident in Tahir's statement, "I want to see Nicosia as it is, not as it appears when compared to other cities." The city he currently sees is not diverse and appears plain or simple.

"أنا غير قادر على إقامة علاقات جديدة حتى في مأواي بـ "مساكن برزة"، أجد صعوبة في الاندماج مع الثلاثة الذين يشاركونني المكان"

Even Tahir is unable to socialize well, being introverted. He finds it difficult to communicate with people there. This is evident when he meets the people who live with him. He says, "I am unable to form new relationships even where I live in 'Barza Housing Complex'. I find it difficult to get along with the three people who live with me there."

##### Theme

**What is the main theme of this short story? How is this theme expressed through the elements of the story?**

Answers	F	%
The Search for Identity and Alienation	11	79

## Other answers

3

21

The majority of respondents noted that the main character, Tahir, was clearly searching for his identity in his efforts to understand himself in his new environment, Nicosia. Based on this excerpt:

"اللمرة الأولى يقول شخص عني إنني رسام"

What he said to himself, "For the first time, someone said about me that I am a painter," marked an important moment in Tahir's search for identity, where he began to recognize himself as a painter, yet he still felt difficulty in applying it.

Then, he felt alienated from his hometown, Damascus, and tried to find meaning in his life in a foreign place. Tahir's alienation was profound, both from the people around him and from himself. Although the people around him were kind and helpful, he felt disconnected from them. As quoted below.

"نحن نعيش في هامشها القصي ، نأكل مثل فقرائها، وننظر بجسد إلى واجهات مخازنها ومطاعمها، مثل فقرائها"  
" هو اجسي لي . لا أتحدث بها، لكنني بها مسكون"

"We live on the outskirts of the city, eat like poor people, and look with our own eyes at the shop windows and restaurants, like poor people," Tahir said, as if he were walking and looking around alone.

The quote above illustrates how Tahir and his friends feel alienated from Damascus society and shows how Tahir's thoughts and feelings make him feel isolated from the people around him.

"بمنأى عنهم هو اجسي تنهض كالجدار بيني وبينهم"

Not only that, Tahir's inner conflict reflects his struggle to find his true self and overcome alienation, where he is trapped between the past and hopes for a better future. In the above quote, which means, "Far from them, my worries rise like a wall separating me and them."

This sentence reflects the inner conflict experienced by Tahir, where his thoughts prevent him from connecting with others.

## Character

**How would you describe Tahir's character? What makes him interesting or relatable to you?**

Other answers	F	%
Introvert dan Reflektif	10	71
Other answers lain	4	29

The majority of respondents answered introverted and reflective because Tahir is described as an introverted and reflective person, which can be seen from the way he reflects on his life and feelings. He prefers to observe rather than engage directly with the people around him, which creates the impression that he feels isolated. The inner turmoil he experiences also reflects his inability to build new relationships, even though there are good people around him. This is consistent with the quote below.

"أنا غير قادر على إقامة علاقات جديدة"

The meaning of this sentence is "I am unable to form new relationships." It is clear that Tahir cannot be an easy-going character who easily makes new acquaintances or friends when he arrives there. From these words, it is evident that he reflects an introverted personality.

"أمر، ولا أجلس فالشاي هنا"

This sentence shows that Tahir prefers to be an observer rather than engage in social interaction. As is typical of introverts, he chooses to remain silent and tends to listen, but on the other hand, he can also be an observer who does not engage much in conversation or join in with a group of people.

## Background

### Place

**How do the settings (Damascus and Nicosia) influence your understanding of the story?**

Other answers	F	%
Contrast between Damascus and Nicosia	12	86
Other answers	2	14

The majority of respondents said that in the short story "Nicosia," the contrast between Damascus and Nicosia is very striking. Damascus is described as a busy city full of activity, but it also symbolizes alienation for the main character, Tahir. On the other hand, Nicosia becomes a symbol of hope, new connections, and opportunities for recovery. The transition from Damascus to Nicosia reflects Tahir's emotional and psychological journey in searching for identity and overcoming alienation. Here is evidence of both. Damascus as a Symbol of Busyness and Alienation.

" في هذه الساعة من المساء، تكون دمشق في أوج حركتها الناس والسيارات والأسواق . أما هنا، فالشوارع شبه خالية"

The above quote, which means, "At this hour of the night, Damascus is bustling with people, vehicles, and markets. Here, the streets are almost deserted," shows that the hustle and bustle of Damascus contrasts with the quiet atmosphere in Nicosia, emphasizing the feeling of alienation experienced by Tahir and becoming a symbol of hustle and bustle and alienation for Tahir.

"أريد أن أرى نيقوسيا كما أراها، لا كما تبدو في المقارنة مع مدينة أخرى"

The above quote, which means, "I want to see Nicosia as it is, not as it appears when compared to other cities," shows that Tahir really hopes to make new connections, even though his circumstances and personality would certainly require a smooth recovery.

"لا تزال معي ، إلا أنني غير معني"

Tahir muttered to himself, "Still with me, but I don't care," which clearly reflected Tahir's desire to start seeing Nicosia as a place that could offer him opportunities for himself, in other words, recovery from the isolation he had experienced in Damascus at that time.

## Social

**How does the social setting depicted in this story influence the characters and plot?**

Other answers	F	%
Social Exclusion and	11	79

## Marginalization

Other answers	3	21
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Many respondents noted that the social background in Damascus created alienation for Tahir's character. His marginal position in society, both among the poor and among writers, made him feel isolated and disconnected from others, which drove the storyline toward a search for identity and connection. The explanation above is in accordance with the statement below.

رسامين "أحيانا، أمر بـ"القنديل"، حيث يجلس أدباء وفنانون، حول موائد كباب وعرق وريحان، وحيث لوحات معروفين معلقة

Which means, "Sometimes, I visit Al-Qandil, where writers and artists gather around tables laden with kebabs, arak, and basil, and where paintings by famous artists hang on the walls". This statement shows that Tahir visited a place where writers and artists gathered, but he did not join them because of differences in social and economic status (the price of a cup of tea was equivalent to one of his meals). This emphasizes his separation from that circle.

## Atmosphere

**How do you feel about the atmosphere created in this story? Does the atmosphere support the theme?**

Other answers	F	%
Atmospheric Support for the Theme	12	86
Does not support	2	14

The majority of respondents agreed because the atmosphere in the short story "Nicosia" strongly supports the themes raised, such as alienation, the search for identity, and healing. The settings depicted, both in Damascus and Nicosia, create a mood that reflects the feelings of alienation and loneliness experienced by the main character, Tahir. This alienation is reinforced by descriptions of a quiet environment and minimal social interaction, which make readers feel the emotional burden experienced by Tahir. Additionally, the changing atmosphere as Tahir begins to explore Nicosia signifies his journey of identity search and steps toward healing, as he strives to find new meaning in his life.

**Did you feel a difference in atmosphere between Damascus and Nicosia? If so, how did that feeling affect your reading experience?**

Other answers	F	%
Strong emotional contrast	10	86
Other answers	2	14

Respondents answered that strong emotional contrasts were a factor in the difference in atmosphere. This directly affected the reading experience because readers were invited to feel Tahir's emotional transition. This is clearly evident from the two quotes below, where Tahir moves from the bustling atmosphere of Damascus—which makes him feel alienated and "plunges him into a dark abyss of sorrow"—to the quiet city of Nicosia, which instead provides him with space to 'relax' and "the tension that once surrounded him begins to ease."

"بدأت العقد التي كانت تطوقها في السابق تتحلل. كنت مسروراً لأنه كان يرسم أحياناً بالقلم على حصير طاولة المطعم"  
"يبتسم طاهر باستمرار. بدا وجه رومان مسترخياً. اعتقدت أنه كان متوتراً للغاية من قبل"

This contrast highlights that different physical environments can trigger significant inner changes. As Tahir himself said, "The bonds that previously bound him began to loosen. I am happy because sometimes he draws with a pen on the restaurant tablecloth," and after that Tahir felt a calmness or relaxation that previously triggered his inner self, "Tahir kept smiling. Roman's face looked relaxed. I think he was very tense before."

## Symbol

**Are there any powerful symbols or metaphors in this story? If so, name them and explain their meaning.**

Other answers	F	%
Symbols of the Sea and Ports	6	43
Shadows of Damascus	6	43
Other answers	2	14

Some respondents answered the sea and port symbols because they indicate that the port in Pafos provides a sense of freedom and beauty that cannot be found in Damascus. Tahir's interest in the port and his desire to "go to the port often" show that he sees the port as a place where he can find peace and freedom from his boring life in Damascus. The port has become a symbol of natural beauty that offers hope and new opportunities for Tahir.

لقد انبهرت بپافوس منذ الوهلة الأولى، منذ اللحظة التي قمنا فيها بجولة سريعة في الميناء. كنت متأكداً من أنني سأذهب إلى الميناء كثيراً، وسأقضي معظم وقتي هناك.

Some respondents answered Fish as a metaphor for identity and inner calling, reminding Tahir to return to his true self and dare to face change.

"اقتربت السمكة أكثر. كأن ذيلها قدامان. اقتربت حتى شممت رائحتها. كانت رائحة غابة صنوبر بعد المطر"

In this sentence, the fish is described in a very vivid and symbolic way. Its presence and interaction with Tahir show that the fish represents a part of Tahir's identity that may have been neglected. The scent emitted by the fish, "the scent of a pine forest after rain," evokes associations with nature and authenticity, reminding Tahir of his deeper self. This fish serves as a reminder of his true self, which may have been lost along the journey of his life.

## Reader Responses and Experiences

### Feelings

**Do you feel connected to the experiences or feelings of the main character? If so, how?**

Other answers	F	%
Emotional Connection and Relatability	11	79
Does not support	3	21

”هم شبان طيبون مرحون ، يساعدونني كثيرا، لكني أجد نفسي ، بمنأى عنهم هواجسي تنهض كالجدار بيني وبينهم“

This sentence shows that the majority of respondents agree because Tahir experiences a deep sense of alienation. Even though he lives with good people, he feels “distant” from them. This creates a strong sense of loneliness, which can be felt by many people in similar situations. This alienation is a universal emotional experience, where a person feels disconnected from others even though they are physically close to them.

”هم في رحلة البحث حكن الخبز، ونحن في رحلة المقهى نبحث عن معنى للأمس ، ولليوم ، وربما للغد“

Added to this is this quote, which reflects Tahir's search for meaning in his life. He is not only searching for meaning in the context of everyday life, but also in the deeper context of his existence. The search for meaning is a very common theme and can be related to many people who feel confused or lost in their lives. This shows that Tahir's emotions and experiences are familiar to many people.

### Empathy

**How did you feel when you read this short story? Was there a particular part that resonated with you?**

Other answers	F	%
Empathy and Emotion	6	54
Sadness and Alienation	3	21
Calmness and Reflection	3	21
Optimism and Hope	2	14

”وأقول صراحة انني تأثرت لرؤيته ، وكدت أبكي. لا بسبب أنني رأيته ، لكن بسبب أنه رأي“

These sentences describe the deep loneliness Tahir experiences in Damascus. The sense of alienation and sadness he feels when separated from those around him creates empathy for the reader. The emotional moment when he meets Syaban, who reminds Tahir of a part of himself that is lost, adds emotional depth to the story and makes the reader feel moved.

”هواجسي لي. لا أتحدث بها، لكنني بها مسكون ، وفي الليل ، كثيرا ما يوقظني أحدهم ليخلصني من أحد كوابيسي“

These sentences show how deep Tahir's sadness and alienation are. The sound of the call to prayer reminds him of his home and the life he left behind, creating a strong sense of nostalgia and sadness. This allows readers to feel the emotional burden Tahir carries, creating a deep connection with his experiences and feelings.

”أحببت بافوس ، منذ النظرة الأولى، منذ دورتنا السريعة في الميناء“

These sentences create a calm atmosphere in Pafos, but also show that behind this calmness lies sadness and loss. This reflective moment illustrates Tahir's search for identity and the importance of human connection, which is a central theme in the short story. Readers can feel the calmness accompanied by sadness, creating a complex emotional experience.

”وأعتقد انني سأكون قي الميناء كثيرا، وأقضي فيه ساعات طوالا“

These moments show a change in Tahir's emotions as he begins to find connections with Syaban and his new environment in Nicosia. Tahir's laughter and happiness create a sense of optimism and hope. His desire to spend time at the harbor also shows that he is beginning to feel more comfortable and connected to his new surroundings, sending a positive signal to readers.

## Experiences

**Do you feel that your personal experiences influence how you understand this story? If so, how?**

Other answers	F	%
Experiences of Displacement and Alienation	8	57
Does not support	4	14

From the above results, it can be explained that many respondents felt they shared similar experiences with Tahir, the character in the short story. Their personal experiences with relocation, feelings of alienation, and difficulties in building relationships in a new environment allowed them to better understand the anxiety and search for meaning experienced by Tahir. This shared experience creates an emotional connection between the readers and the character, making the story feel more personal and relevant. They are not just reading Tahir's story but also seeing a reflection of their own life experiences, which deepens their empathy and understanding of the narrative. This demonstrates how literature can serve as a mirror for human experiences, connecting readers through a strong emotional resonance.

This demonstrates that similar life experiences can foster empathy and emotional connection, allowing readers or respondents to more deeply engage with and feel the emotional journey experienced by the character in the story (Alatawi & Harshan, 2023).

## Interpretation

**Do you agree that readers can have different interpretations of literary works? Why?**

Other answers	F	%
Agree with Variations in Interpretation	11	79
The Influence of Background and Experience	6	43
Does not support	2	14

Most respondents agreed that readers can have different interpretations of literary works. They noted that each individual brings different backgrounds, experiences, and emotions, which influence how they understand and interpret literary works. These differences enrich discussions and appreciation of literature, as they bring forth diverse perspectives that may not have been considered by other readers or even by the author themselves. This also demonstrates that there is no single "correct" or "incorrect" interpretation, but rather various valid and defensible perspectives as long as they are supported by the text (Hamby et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, respondents answered that readers' backgrounds and life experiences greatly influence how they understand characters, themes, or symbols in stories. Each individual's personal experiences and unique perspectives become the lens through

which they interpret the implied meaning in a narrative. This means that literary understanding is not a one-way process, but rather a dynamic interaction between the reader and the text, where readers actively construct meaning based on what they already know and feel. As a result, the same literary work can evoke various interpretations and emotions from each person who reads it (Djauhari et al., 2023).

## Conclusion

A literary reception study of the short story "Nikosia" by Saadi Youssef, involving 14 fourth-semester Arabic Language and Literature students at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, revealed consistent structural understanding among general readers. The majority of respondents identified "Self-Discovery" as the core plot (86%) and "Identity Search and Alienation" as the main theme (79%). The character Tahir is predominantly portrayed as introverted and reflective (71%). Additionally, the contrast between bustling and alienated Damascus and Nicosia as a symbol of hope and recovery (86%) significantly influenced respondents' understanding of the story's setting and atmosphere. The social setting that creates alienation for Tahir in Damascus is also recognized by 79% of respondents as a driving force in the plot. The symbols of the sea, port, and fish are interpreted as freedom, beauty, hope, and metaphors for identity, indicating a symbolic understanding, though not at a homogeneous level.

From the perspective of reader response and experience, this study reveals a strong emotional connection between respondents and the story. 79% of respondents felt emotionally connected and considered Tahir's experience relatable, particularly regarding feelings of alienation and the universal search for meaning in life. The short story successfully evoked various emotions in readers, ranging from sadness, sorrow, calmness, to optimism. Interestingly, 57% of respondents acknowledged that their personal experiences, particularly those related to displacement and alienation, influenced how they understood the story. Consistent with literary reception theory, the majority of respondents (79%) agreed that interpretations of literary works can vary due to differences in individual backgrounds and experiences.

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