

The Quest for Memory in Abdelhamid Benhedouga's Narrative Text: An Outline of the "Mystical Cognitive Story"

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Abstract

This article explores a rather unconventional theme within the context of modern and contemporary Algerian literature, focusing on what we refer to as "the spirituality of memory," particularly when it pertains to the quest for self. The central story that presents this theme is "Hollowed Memory / الذاكرة المنقوبة," a short story by the novelist Abdelhamid Benhedouga, published in 1988. The concept of "spiritual conquests," especially in the Sufi sense as conceptualized by Ibn al-Arabi, seems fitting for this analytical context, serving as both a key and operational concept. In this article, we examine the poetic function, or the literality, employed in Benhedouga's narrative to describe the workings of memory, especially in relation to its cognitive function. Therefore, the analysis of the metalanguage used in the text will be a crucial part of this study.

Keywords: Quest of Memory; Abdelhamid Benhedouga; Mystical cognitive Story; Narrative Identity; Metalanguage.

Introduction

This article seeks to explore two interrelated themes: the narrative work of Abdelhamid Benhedouga (1925-1996) and the concept of the "Mystical Cognitive Story," as stated in the subtitle. The connection between these themes is rooted in the fact that the latter term was derived from one of the lesser-known works of the author mentioned in the title, the late Benhedouga, a novelist and short story writer whose contributions we aim to analyze in this foundational outline. Specifically, the work in question is a short story titled *The Hollowed Memory*, first published in 1988. This year is notably significant in the history of Algeria, marking a turning point that encourages deeper reflection on the broader implications of the issues at hand. By introducing the term "mystical cognitive story," we intend to offer a new perspective for understanding Benhedouga's work and its wider literary impact. The use of quotation marks is deliberate, indicating that while this concept serves as a useful framework for organizing our thoughts and interpretations, it warrants critical examination. It should be discussed, tested, and potentially refined or reconsidered in light of further engagement with the text and its broader literary and cultural context.

The central theme of the narrative revolves around memory, critically examining and questioning its role in shaping a coherent life story. The effort to link disparate, often fragmented events into a unified whole challenges the very concept of a stable narrative. In this regard, the narrative closely aligns with Paul Ricœur's theories on self-understanding, narrative identity, and memory (Ricœur, 1984). The narrator's struggle with memory, identity, and their connection to the external world introduces the possibility of dementia, a condition that erodes one's connection to the past and, by extension, to their sense of self. However, this potential diagnosis is intentionally

questioned within the story. While dementia might initially explain the narrator's forgetfulness and confusion, the narrative rejects this explanation, instead presenting a deeper existential crisis: the disintegration of meaning and identity within the fluid landscape of reality. This complexity invites readers to confront the discomfort of uncertainty, trapped in an endless search for meaning that remains unresolved. Rather than being a simple decline in cognitive function, this situation should be viewed as an inquiry into mystical cognition. The narrative, referred to here as the "gnostic story," transcends traditional storytelling by merging the "obvious" with the "profound," resembling a puzzle that challenges readers to reconsider their perceptions of reality, truth, and self. Through this lens, the author's exploration of memory, identity, and reality becomes not just a search for answers but a meditation on the complexities of existence. The term "gnostic" in this context refers to the narrator's journey toward self-knowledge, where understanding is not given, but uncovered through introspection and self-examination. This situates the story within an existential and spiritual tradition, where insight is achieved not through certainty, but by wrestling with paradoxes and uncertainties. In addressing these dimensions, we argue that the cognitive story is more than just a literary form, it is a method of understanding the self and engaging with the world on a deeper, often philosophical level. It enables the writer to process personal experiences, explore psychological states, and grapple with the complexities of identity and existence, all while offering readers a window into the writer's mind and worldview. In this way, it becomes a powerful tool not only for personal expression but also for broader existential exploration.

1 The theme of Dissociative Amnesia

Chronic memory loss, alienation, and capitulation have long been explored in literature as interconnected psychological and relational struggles. Memory, alongside time, is one of the central themes in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In Proust's novel, memories, reflections, and various recollections unfold, with the madeleine episode being the most iconic. The term "memory" is complex, encompassing both meanings of the Latin word *memoria*, the "faculty of remembering" and the "totality of memories." It is this faculty that Proust examines in depth: what captivates him, even as he draws on his personal recollections, is the very movement of memory itself (Serça, 2017, p.209). These struggles reveal the deep psychological fractures that occur in individuals who have faced trauma, loss, and prolonged hardship. In many stories, these themes are closely tied to the characters' internal emotional conflicts, especially those related to guilt, self-blame, and suspicion, born from their mental suffering. This repetitive, often compulsive thought process, though unwelcome, entraps them in a cycle of self-criticism and existential doubt. As a result, their minds become prisons, perpetuating emotions that obstruct healing. This concept of repetition is best understood as a performative reconstruction (Basseler, 2006, p.308).

These issues become especially distressing when they concern historical figures or individuals who have experienced or participated in significant suffering, resistance or political struggle. For these individuals, the impact of their past actions, whether defined by success or tragedy, becomes an enduring burden. The sacrifices made for a greater cause, often in the hope of securing a better future for the next generation, eventually turn into a psychological anchor that hinders their progress. Over time, they may become disillusioned with the idea of legacy and, in their later years, may even begin to reject the very history they once fought to preserve. This rejection is not merely a dismissal of the past, but a painful surrender to the overwhelming, often contradictory, nature of the present. Their struggles may come to feel futile, leaving them trapped in a sense of hopelessness that prevents them from moving forward. As often happens, works of fiction explore this theme in a more direct and insightful manner. A striking example is the protagonist of *La Page blanche*, a 2012 graphic novel by Pénélope Bagieu. In this story, a young amnesiac searches for her past, but the heroine no longer remembers who she is, and in a state of emotional detachment, she fails to recognize the objects she

handles in her apartment, experiencing them as strange and unfamiliar (Thomas-Anterion, 2017, p.213). The use of narrative imagery deepens the portrayal of fragmented memory.

At times, life's harsh realities compel these characters to confront their past, sparking memories of what once brought them meaning and direction. Yet, this reflection is rarely comforting. Instead, it often forces them to confront the painful gap between the idealistic dreams they once held and the disheartening reality they now endure. These revived memories can feel like a form of self-inflicted agony, constantly reminding them of everything they've lost or failed to achieve. For some, this drives them to completely distance themselves from the past, seeking to escape the pain it triggers. However, in trying to run from their history, they only find themselves more disconnected from both their own identity and the world around them.

This sense of alienation is further intensified by the environment in which these characters exist, and that environment that should ideally provide support and understanding, yet only deepens their suffering. The social and psychological pressures they face are not merely external; they are often ingrained in the very structures and relationships they encounter. The indifference, or even active hostility, from the world around them creates an added layer of isolation, making it nearly impossible to find solace or meaning in their lives. Pushed to the edge, these characters teeter on the brink of complete abandonment, sinking further into alienation as they grapple with the incoherent nature of their memories and the overwhelming burden of insomnia. The mental exhaustion from this internal battle leaves them with only one refuge: their own minds, where they engage in long, solitary monologues in an attempt to make sense of their suffering, to find logic in the illogical, or perhaps simply to endure the silence that marks their existence. These monologues, often filled with contradictions and despair, become their sole outlet, their final defense against the relentless pressure of a life that offers no reprieve. In the end, it is the fragile, tormented conscience that serves as both the root of their pain and the last bastion of their will to survive.

In his last works of committed literature (such as *Les vigiles*), Tahar Djout (1954-1993), just before becoming a martyr for freedom of expression and thought, presents us with characters full of contradictions, drawn from the historical context of the Algerian revolution aimed at regaining national sovereignty. One of these characters is the symbolic freedom fighter, "Menouar Ziada", who is overwhelmed by painful memories of the past. He takes refuge in an imaginary world, under the influence of sedatives and hypnotics, to escape the traumatic images, the harsh realities of the present, the negativity of those around him and the uncertain prospects of the future (Djaout, 1991). Similarly, the characters created by Abdelhamid Benhedouga (1925-1996), who mastered the art of writing short stories with a theatrical touch, are historical but deeply personal, intimately linked to his own life. With the help of a few key details, he makes it clear that the self and the subject were destined to merge.

This impressionistic parallel may constitute an interesting subject of study, as was done by the short story writer and critic Ahmed Menouar in his article titled " *The Textual Interweaving between Benhedouga's Jazia and Yacine's Najma* " (Menouar, 1997, p.129). This highlights the fact that modern and contemporary Algerian literature emerges from a common root, regardless of the language in which it is written, be it Arabic, French, or Berber. Especially since both works (Benhedouga's story and Djaout's novel) appeared during critical turning points in Algerian history (1988/1991). The research does not aim to focus on influence and being influenced, as some have narrowed the scope of comparisons, particularly within the field of comparative literature, which, according to the most precise experts, is concerned with various types of relationships in literature across both time and space (Bassnett, 1993, p.35).

In this context, the comparison between *Jazia* and *Najma* highlights how both authors reflect on the tumultuous era they experienced. Through direct commentary or allegorical storytelling, their

works delve into themes of memory, identity, and the psychological toll of societal and historical upheavals. By examining the relationship between these texts, we gain a deeper understanding of how Algerian literature serves as a lens through which the country's struggles and aspirations are explored, offering valuable insights into the emotional and existential journeys of its people during a time of transformation. These works not only showcase the literary creativity and depth of Algerian authors but also function as historical records that illuminate the complexities of the nation's evolving identity. By exploring their connections, critics can gain a greater appreciation for the unique role Algerian literature plays in representing a nation shaped by a rich mix of languages, histories, and cultures. With this common foundation in mind, our goal is not to take a comparative approach, but rather to introduce the concept of cognitive narrative. Let us begin, therefore, by exploring how to define this concept.

2 The Concept of "The Mystical Cognitive Story"

2.1 New Literary Genre

In *The Hollowed Memory*, as outlined in the introduction, Benhedouga crafts a narrative that explores the complexities of memory, perception, and identity in a manner that moves beyond conventional storytelling. The "mystical" aspect refers to the intricate, often elusive quality of the mental processes portrayed, while the "cognitive" aspect ties these elements to deeper philosophical and psychological reflections. In this sense, Benhedouga's narrative is not merely concerned with events or characters in a traditional sense but with the cognitive processes through which memory and identity are formed, lost, or transformed. Given the significance of the year 1988 in the historical trajectory of Algeria, when the story was published, it is important to contextualize this work within the social and political upheavals of the time. This period marked a major turning point for the nation, one that undoubtedly influenced the way in which writers like Benhedouga conceptualized and expressed their personal and collective histories. *The Hollowed Memory* reflects not only the psychological and emotional states of its characters but also the larger forces shaping their experiences, making it a critical text for understanding how literature engages with moments of historical crisis.

By examining *The Hollowed Memory* through the framework of the "mystical cognitive story," we aim to illuminate how the story reflects an exploration of inner consciousness, memory, and existential uncertainty. This proposed concept invites further discussion and debate, particularly as we consider the role of such works in shaping our understanding of memory and identity, both personal and national. What is of utmost importance to us, beyond simply acknowledging the short story writer for his creative contribution in introducing a new literary genre, is demonstrating his value as a cognitive storyteller. This is not just a matter of his narrative skills, but also of his capacity to explore and engage with the complexities of human consciousness, memory, and perception. His work, as evidenced in his contributions to Algerian Arabic literature, reveals a depth of understanding of the human mind that elevates his storytelling from mere plot-telling to a sophisticated investigation of how we process and experience the world.

What makes this even more remarkable is that, despite the writer's focus on cognitive storytelling, much of his narrative technique aligns with experimental forms that challenge traditional structures of storytelling. This is similar to the approach taken by Marcel Proust in his iconic work *In Search of Lost Time*. A significant portion of Proust's novel fits into the category of experimental narrative, particularly in how it addresses the concept of time and memory. Proust's exploration of "lost time" challenges the conventional understanding of time as linear and fixed, offering instead a subjective, malleable experience of time shaped by memory, emotion, and perception. For those who wish to examine the parallel between Proust's notion of "lost time" and the concept of "hollowed memory" explored in the short story, a deeper exploration may reveal significant connections between

the two. Both works engage with the fragility and impermanence of memory, and how these fleeting moments shape our identities and experiences. Analyzing the similarities between these two narratives could lead to valuable insights into how both writers use memory as a central theme to explore broader existential questions, such as the passage of time, the nature of identity, and the search for meaning in a fragmented world. By delving into this comparative analysis, one can better appreciate the cognitive and philosophical dimensions of their respective works.

2.2 Hallucinations, Cognition and Metacognition

As we have noted, the term "cognitive story" deserves deeper exploration, especially in relation to the word "cognitive." This adjective, rooted in the concept of cognition, plays a crucial role in shaping the meaning of "story". A "cognitive narrative" goes beyond the traditional idea of a story; it explores the mental processes and structures of the human mind. This type of story incorporates elements of mental functions such as perception, memory, reasoning, and imagination, key faculties that influence how we acquire knowledge, form concepts, and make sense of the world. But in cognitive narrative, imagination can run wild to the point of causing hallucinations and dementia. In this context, the term "cognitive" takes on a specific meaning, referring to the way stories reflect or even attempt to map the workings of the human mind in relation to these transformations in behavior. Given that neuroscience has firmly established the concept of "cognition," encompassing mental processes such as consciousness, thinking, learning, and memory; significant emphasis in the cognitive narrative is placed on metacognition, because of its extension in terms of semantic features that fit with the storytelling process. As Bernard J. Baars and Nicole M. Gage explain, « Metacognition is an important aspect of normal memory retrieval. A memory trace may be retrieved spontaneously, or more often by cues or reminders. A cue could be as simple as ' Recall the words you just studied ' or as complex as ' Describe in detail what you did today '. The kind of self-monitoring we tend to do when we try to remember a missing word is a kind of metacognition that involves prefrontal cortex » (Baars & Gage, 2010, p.338). When applied to storytelling, this concept elevates the narrative beyond a simple sequence of events or emotions, transforming it into a representation of how those events are processed, interpreted, and understood within the cognitive framework of an individual or collective consciousness.

While the substitution of the term "cognitive" with the more commonly used terms "knowledge" or "epistemology" has become increasingly popular, it's important to recognize that this shift, although valid in some contexts, often introduces ambiguity or even distorts the meaning. The term "knowledge," in its broadest sense, may be too general to fully capture the specific mental activities encompassed by "cognition." Cognitive processes go beyond simply accumulating facts; they involve complex mental operations such as processing information, creating meaning, and interpreting sensory data. These processes extend beyond intellectual knowledge, influencing emotional responses, personal interpretations, and even imagination. Moreover, some scholars and thinkers have drawn upon the language of mysticism, borrowing terms like "cognition" or "cognitive" to explore a deeper, almost spiritual aspect of the mind's workings. This connection to mystical traditions introduces an additional layer of complexity to the term, as it can suggest not only rational thought but also the subconscious, the transcendent, and the non-material dimensions of human experience. By invoking these mystical or philosophical undercurrents, the concept of "cognitive story" moves beyond a simple narrative and into the realm of exploring consciousness itself, how we perceive, interpret, and ultimately construct reality through both rational and non-rational processes.

2.3 Metalanguage and the Interpretation of Human Experience

The "cognitive story" is also uniquely tied to the idea of Metalanguage, or the language of description. This is the language we use to articulate and describe cognitive processes, such as the ways we think, feel, and remember. Metalanguage serves as a tool for explaining the structures of

thought and mental experience, making it a vital aspect of the cognitive story. It allows storytellers to not only recount events but also to give insight into the mental and emotional processes behind the characters' actions and decisions. This kind of storytelling is not just about what happens, but about how it happens in the mind. In essence, a "cognitive story" engages with a deeper understanding of human experience by focusing on the cognitive mechanisms that govern our perception of the world. It allows the narrative to explore the invisible workings of the mind, such as memory, imagination, and perception, and to show how these mental processes shape and are shaped by the stories we tell. This kind of narrative structure emphasizes the complexity of human cognition, making it a unique and valuable tool for exploring the intricate relationship between thought, emotion, and action.

The concept of the cognitive story goes beyond a simple formalistic approach to writing, encompassing the process and function of metalanguage. It can be viewed as a therapeutic tool, particularly favored by some short story writers. What sets the cognitive story apart is its emphasis on the writer's personal experience, making it intrinsically autobiographical. For many authors, this narrative form becomes intertwined with their own personal growth, especially as they reach a stage of maturity where writing serves as a means of coping with a life that feels overwhelming or devoid of meaning. In this sense, writing transforms from an artistic endeavor into a way for the writer to anchor themselves to life when they might otherwise feel disconnected. Essentially, it becomes an exercise in survival and self-preservation, with the writer using narrative to explore, understand, and regain control over their life and circumstances. Rooted in the psychological domain, the cognitive story heavily relies on self-reflection. It is not simply about recounting events but about constructing meaning, exploring the psyche, and revealing the inner workings of the mind. This process allows the writer to define their perspective and shape a personal stance, which is reflected in their narrative choices. Through psychological narration, the author expresses their mental and emotional landscapes, offering not only insight into the story itself but also into the individual behind the words.

Moreover, narrative, as an activity that generates meaning, is a vital force in our existence. It shapes our understanding of the world around us and the relationships we cultivate with others. By engaging in the act of storytelling, we position ourselves in time, shaping both our personal history and the broader historical context in which we live. The narrative process, then, becomes a key mechanism in constructing cognitive frameworks, essentially, ways of knowing and interpreting the world. It is through these stories that individuals formulate their own sense of identity and understanding of reality.

3 Cognitive Aspects in "The Hollowed Memory"

3.1 Psychological and spiritual unity

The search for individual identity is often a central theme in cognitive stories. For many writers, this search transcends a mere quest for self-understanding. It evolves into a philosophical exploration of existence itself. The cognitive story is no longer just about the author's life but transforms into a space for existential inquiry, where the writer grapples with profound questions about their place in the world. For some, this journey culminates in an existential or philosophical perspective, which, while deeply personal, can resonate on a universal level. Benhedouga, for example, is a writer who utilized this existential angle in his work. What began as an exploration of individual identity soon transformed into an inquiry about the very nature of human existence. His narrative became a lens through which he could examine larger philosophical concerns, questioning not only who he was but also what it meant to be human in a world that could sometimes seem indifferent or inscrutable. In doing so, he moved from the personal to the universal, using his personal story as a gateway to broader philosophical reflections on life, identity, and existence itself.

In this short story, the pursuit of psychological and spiritual unity is depicted through the exploration of recovering lost memories, framed as a spiritual journey. The complex interplay of

affect, cognition, and motivation in shaping personality (Singer and Salovey, 2010, p.90) is central to this narrative. Specifically, we argue that autobiographical memory arises from the intersection of two competing needs: the necessity to record an experience-based account of ongoing goal activity and the simultaneous requirement to maintain a coherent, stable record of the self's interactions with the world that transcends the present moment. The first of these needs, which we term adaptive correspondence, and the second, self-coherence, are fundamental. The self-memory system's ability to respond flexibly and appropriately to both demands defines healthy memory and self-functioning (Singer and Salovey, 2010, p.92). Benhedouga's heightened capacity to record all aspects of ongoing reality (adaptive correspondence) ultimately leads to the erosion of any clear or delineated sense of self, undermining self-coherence.

3.2 Mending the Holes with the Spaces of Time and Place

In the story, memory takes center stage as a critical cognitive function, yet it is fraught with imperfections, lapses, and fragmentation. These memory gaps symbolize not only the character's psychological struggles but also the broader human experience. In this context, the dimensions of space and time play a vital role in both reflecting and exploring the nature of memory. Time and place are not simply backgrounds for the events but active forces that shape the memory process, representing the disjointedness and ruptures the protagonist endures. The physical spaces where the events occur and the time periods they encompass are intricately designed to mirror the fractured state of the narrator's mind. Additionally, the imagination used to depict these elements of space and time articulates a fragmented and erratic psychological state. The writer's intentional manipulation of these settings goes beyond merely setting the stage for the events; it emphasizes the cognitive struggle of reconstructing memories, highlighting the writer's deeper connection with the "popular imagination", the shared cultural and personal histories that surface within an individual's memory. This approach underscores the writer's intent to reconnect with long-buried emotions and experiences, which, though hidden, resurface through the interplay of time and space in the narrative.

By engaging with these intricate cognitive processes, the writer actively participates in mending the fragmented memory of the character, weaving together the elements of time and place to create a coherent narrative from the scattered pieces of experience. The exploration of memory in this way is not just about recovering lost moments, but also about confronting the repressed and forgotten, linking past trauma with present identity. In this sense, the story becomes a journey of psychological reconstruction, wherein the very framework of space and time offers a medium through which the protagonist might begin to mend their fractured sense of self.

Thus, the spatial and temporal contexts do not merely represent external factors; they are intimately intertwined with the protagonist's cognitive and emotional recovery, offering a pathway to reconfigure the holes in memory. This hypothesis will be tested further in the following analysis, where we delve deeper into how the writer's use of time and place affects the broader themes of memory, selfhood, and healing.

3.3 The *Hollowed* Memory: Between Recovery and Alienation

The title "The Hollowed Memory" is not only a linguistically significant construct but also a complex metaphor that invites a deeper understanding of the narrative's exploration of memory. Both morphologically and syntactically, it belongs to the category of adjectival compounds, where the adjective "holey" qualifies the noun "memory." This choice of words creates a dual effect that mirrors the theme of the story: a memory that is fragmented and disjointed, yet still capable of partial reconstruction and recovery.

Semantically, the pairing of "memory" and "holey" initially suggests a sense of loss, impairment, and fragmentation—elements typically associated with conditions like Alzheimer's disease or dementia. The narrator is portrayed as grappling with a memory that is far from complete,

filled with gaps or "holes" that obstruct a coherent recollection of the past. These "holes" represent the emotional and cognitive toll of memory loss, isolating the individual and creating a disorienting experience of selfhood. The reader might initially interpret this as a portrayal of psychological alienation: the narrator is distanced from their own past, unable to fully access or trust their memories.

However, the writer skillfully subverts this initial interpretation by employing artistic opposition. Rather than merely presenting the narrator's fragmented memory as a debilitating condition, the narrative also allows for moments of clarity and recovery. The narrator's memory, while indeed "holey," is not static; it is active, almost hyperactive, at times. As memories surface, events from the past—long buried and forgotten—begin to emerge, offering the narrator the chance to re-examine and reconstruct the fractured narrative of their life. This dynamic interplay between loss and recovery suggests that memory is not simply a passive recollection but a process of continual negotiation, where even the "holes" can offer new insights into the past.

In this sense, "The Hollowed Memory" is not only a story of alienation, but also one of potential redemption. The "holes" in memory are not merely obstacles but spaces where the narrator can engage with the past in a way that is more dynamic and reflective. The narrative thus invites a reconsideration of memory—not as a static repository of fixed facts but as a living, evolving process that both reflects and reshapes one's sense of self. This tension between alienation and recovery forms the core of the story's exploration of identity and memory, suggesting that even in the absence or disintegration of memory, there remains the possibility for understanding and reconnection. The concept of memory, and its related forms, meanings, and images, with all their poetic possibilities, takes center stage in this short story to the extent that one can conclude it is the primary and overarching theme. This makes the story almost a meditation on memory itself. The writer, with his sophisticated artistic style, amplifies the impact of the title, "The Holey Memory," by weaving it into both the narrative and the suggestion, crafting it in a way that both directs and deepens the reader's engagement with the theme. Through the meticulous construction of each sentence, using specific stylistic choices and punctuation, the writer not only conveys his ideas but also subtly emphasizes his layered intent.

The repetition and recurrence of certain scenes, which act as triggers for the reader's memory as well as the narrator's, are central to this effect. These repeating moments underline the idea that memory is not a fixed entity; it is fluid, capable of shifting between times and perspectives. By repeating key moments, the writer activates a dialogue between the narrator's recollections and the reader's own memory, creating a shared space of understanding, as both become immersed in the past and its fragmented nature. This process underscores the reciprocal relationship between the two: memory is both individual and collective.

Furthermore, the writer emphasizes the fragmented nature of memory by introducing gaps, pauses, and disjointed sequences. Through punctuation marks that indicate emptiness, like pauses, ellipses, or breaks between sentences—the writer visually portrays the cognitive voids the narrator encounters. These gaps are not merely interruptions in the flow of the narrative, but also mirror the disorientation and fragmentation that occur when memory becomes unreliable or elusive. The absence of clear logical or chronological links further amplifies this fragmented sense of recollection, reflecting the narrator's constantly shifting mental state.

This technique of disjointed narrative and fragmented structure is not just an artistic choice, but a deliberate reflection of the cognitive struggles associated with memory loss, where cause and effect blur, and past events float up without warning, sometimes linked to present feelings or circumstances. By using this method, the writer unveils the problematic nature of memory: at times isolated from its direct causes, and at other times connected to a web of surrounding factors that are not always easy to decipher. Through this approach, the narrative becomes an exploration not only of

the physical gaps in memory but also of the emotional and existential voids that come with the process of forgetting and trying to remember.

3.4 Substitutions and Metaphors (The Holey Memory)

The idea of "holey memory" in this narrative extends beyond the personal experience of memory loss, delving into existential and ontological themes of identity, belonging, and the limitations of human consciousness. The narrator's inability to recall his wife's name is not merely a matter of forgetfulness, but rather a reflection of a fragmented and imperfect memory that mirrors his larger struggle with identity and his place within a cultural and historical context. His attempt to retrieve this lost memory reveals a deeper tension: while the memory is not entirely gone, it is marked by gaps, voids that cannot be easily filled. These voids are not simply empty spaces; they represent pathways that require more than just time or effort to navigate, they demand life experience, wisdom, and a kind of lived reality that only someone deeply immersed in history and personal trials can understand.

The narrator's journey to fill these gaps through various reflections indicates an effort to not just recall a lost piece of his personal past, but to understand how memory operates within the larger framework of cultural and societal history. In his search for his wife's name, the narrator becomes acutely aware of how his memory is shaped by forces beyond his control—forces rooted in social structures and historical legacies. These forces manifest in the metaphors he uses, describing memory as both a physical and metaphorical container with holes, a vessel that holds but also leaks, storing some pieces of information while discarding others. The "holey memory" is thus a metaphor for the narrator's struggle to reconcile the past with the present, to bridge the gap between personal history and collective memory.

This metaphorical gap in memory speaks to the broader existential issue of the search for meaning and identity. The narrator's attempts to recover his wife's name reveal an internal conflict between the desire for a concrete, stable identity and the reality of a fragmented, shifting self. This fragmentation is not merely a result of individual forgetfulness, but also a consequence of the collective historical trauma that shapes the narrator's experience. His struggle with remembering his wife's name becomes symbolic of a larger, more profound struggle with the erosion of cultural and personal continuity in the face of social and political upheaval.

Furthermore, the references to his family's traditions and his father's beliefs about inheritance underscore the tension between individual identity and the cultural norms that govern it. The father's declaration that his daughters will not inherit, because "money, like the family name, does not transfer to a foreigner," reflects a rigid, patriarchal worldview that restricts both memory and identity to a narrow, ancestral framework. This belief in the immutability of family and land contrasts with the narrator's own fragmented memory, revealing the disjunction between inherited values and personal experience. The narrator's inability to recall his wife's name, even while he vividly remembers the conversations and sentiments surrounding it, highlights the limitations of traditional memory systems that rely on fixed, unchanging structures of identity.

This tension between personal memory and collective history also speaks to the role of social and cultural systems in shaping individual consciousness. From the perspective of the recently emerged concept of (geocriticism), even the semiosphere system does not rest solely on a cognitive basis (Westphal, 2007, p.85). It could well be a cultural understanding. The narrator's struggle with memory is not only a private experience, but one that is influenced by larger historical and societal forces, forces that limit personal freedom and control. The father's refusal to allow the inheritance of land and name to pass to a woman, or the narrator's own inability to remember his wife's name, reflects a broader societal framework that imposes its own constraints on the individual's ability to shape their own identity and history.

Through these reflections, the narrator not only critiques the limitations of memory but also the limitations of the social structures that attempt to control and define it. The "holey memory" is not just a personal issue—it is a symbolic representation of the larger social and cultural dynamics that govern how people remember, how they identify, and how they are remembered. The narrator's frustration and sadness in not remembering his wife's name underscore the painful reality of trying to reconcile the past with the present, personal history with collective memory, and the self with the social world.

In this passage, the writer's exploration of human relationships is deeply interwoven with themes of personal crisis, societal fragmentation, and the struggle for identity. The narrator's reflections on his marriage serve as an allegory for broader societal concerns, particularly the erosion of connections—both intimate and national—that he feels around him. The deterioration of his marital relationship mirrors the weakening of social bonds and national unity, and both are presented as fragile entities prone to collapse under pressure.

The narrator's questioning of his own choices—"What should I do? Is it reasonable to emigrate just for a meal or a drink? Is it reasonable to end our marriage because it didn't satisfy a small desire of mine?"—points to an internal conflict about whether the pursuit of personal happiness or desires should justify abandoning deep connections. These questions are not just about his marriage but serve as a critique of the larger existential struggles individuals face in a world where relationships, whether personal or national, are increasingly strained. The rhetorical nature of these questions highlights his profound uncertainty, both about his life's direction and the stability of the systems that once anchored him.

The narrator's desire to escape and search for his wife's name elsewhere—"Why not leave the country, everything and everyone I know, to search for my wife's name in other lands?"—reflects a yearning for renewal, a quest to reestablish lost connections and rediscover what has been forgotten. His internal struggle is framed as a desire to leave behind the trivialities and disillusionments of his current life in search of something more meaningful and complete. This search is both literal and figurative, as he longs to recover not only the name of his wife but also a sense of identity and purpose that has been eroded by time and circumstance.

3.5 The introspective nature of the narrator's reflections

The introspective nature of the narrator's reflections, combined with the minimalist style, creates a narrative that is emotionally charged and existentially resonant. The lack of traditional stylistic flourishes and the focus on the stark reality of the narrator's condition enhance the sense of urgency and helplessness that permeates the story. Through the careful exploration of the narrator's emotional and cognitive paralysis, the story invites the reader to reflect on their own relationship with memory, identity, and the fragility of human connections. The narrator's failure to remember his wife's name becomes a profound statement about the complexities of memory, the burdens of the past, and the difficulty of finding meaning in a world that seems increasingly detached and alienating.

The narrator's struggle with his memory and his desperate attempts to recall his wife's name reveal much about his internal conflict and the profound sense of alienation he experiences. His yearning for connection, expressed through his plea for his wife to speak to him as "a woman fully human," highlights his emotional isolation. This is not just a failure of memory but an existential crisis that transcends the personal and touches upon a larger sense of disconnection—both from his own identity and his place within the framework of gender roles.

The narrator's reference to "more than two thousand years of masculinity" is particularly telling. It suggests that his relationship with his wife is entangled with centuries of cultural and societal expectations, particularly regarding the roles of men and women. His inability to remember her name, therefore, is not simply a trivial lapse in memory but an emotional and cognitive rupture

that exposes the fault lines in his sense of self. He is caught between a history of masculine identity and the realization that this identity is insufficient in nurturing or even maintaining his most intimate relationships.

As he recites the alphabet, searching for the letters that could form her name, the process becomes a metaphor for his mental and emotional paralysis. Despite knowing the individual letters, he cannot piece them together. This mirrors his inability to fully connect with or understand his wife, who lies beside him. The act of "reciting" the alphabet becomes a futile ritual, highlighting the deep void within him.

In the narrator's mind, the alphabet is static, "glued to the wooden board," symbolic of how the knowledge he once absorbed is now imprisoned in the rigidity of his memory. The letters, once lively and full of meaning, are reduced to mere symbols, detached from their emotional context. The name of his wife, which should be a comforting, familiar part of his inner world, remains elusive. This distance, both cognitive and emotional, underscores the alienation that pervades his relationship with her.

The narrator's eventual conclusion—that his memory is "defying" him—reveals his frustration and helplessness. He is trapped in a cycle of failure, unable to access the very thing that should be central to his personal identity: the memory of his wife's name. What should be a simple act of recollection becomes an insurmountable challenge, symbolizing his larger inability to reconcile his past with his present. This scene poignantly illustrates the narrator's struggle with not just personal memory but also with broader themes of identity, connection, and the breakdown of human relationships.

4 Memory between the Man's Delirium and the Woman's Intuition

In this section, we will explore how the divide between intuition and logic reveals the deeper emotional and psychological dimensions of the characters' interactions. The wife's intuition, depicted as an almost supernatural ability, represents a form of knowing that transcends outward appearances, enabling her to navigate complex emotional landscapes. In contrast, the husband's rationality, though seemingly grounded, may hinder his capacity to connect with his wife on an emotional level. This dynamic highlights the idea that relationships are shaped not solely by logic or emotion but by the tension between these two forces, each influencing how individuals perceive and respond to their environment. Here, the emotional depth of the wife's intuition clashes with the logical defenses of the husband, resulting in an ongoing struggle for connection and understanding.

4.1 Resistance to Forgetting Through Existential Questions

The idea of "forgetting" in this context carries both literal and symbolic significance. The narrator's failure to remember his wife's name is a metaphor for the broader process of forgetting important, foundational aspects of life—relationships, identity, and national heritage. His personal crisis of memory becomes an emblematic reflection of the larger issue of cultural and societal disintegration. The writer uses this forgetfulness to underscore how personal loss and national decay are intertwined. The narrator's inability to recall his wife's name becomes a poignant representation of a disconnect from both his personal history and the collective memory of his homeland.

4.1.1 Memory Hallucinations or Existential "Paramnesia"

The concept of "paramnesia" was coined by German psychologist Emil Kraepelin in 1886 to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative memory disorders. When it reappeared in Kraepelin's *Clinical Psychiatry* (1907) as part of a broader discussion of memory disorders, its definition had evolved further. In this context, paramnesia was described as "a mixture of invention and actual experience," resulting in "hallucinations of memory". It is most commonly seen in conditions such as "paresis, paranoid dementia, and manic forms of manic-depressive insanity", and occasionally in "epileptic and hysterical states of confusion" (Potter, 1999, p. 130). Benhedouga's account reflects a

memory disorder in which actual memories are distorted or confused with imagined or fabricated memories. At the same time, the narrator's existential questioning becomes more intense as he contemplates an uncertain future. But alongside this uncertainty, another tone emerges, that of bickering and provocations with his partner or more precisely his wife, which often leads both characters to the lowest emotional level. This dynamic is illustrated in the following passage: « Are you sleeping or do you not want to talk to me? What did the doctor say about your memory? When you don't want to talk to me, you start snoring! I know you, it's not the first time » (Benhedouga, idem, p.62).

The conflict between the narrator and his wife exemplifies the emotional and relational fallout caused by his memory loss. What starts as an internal, existential crisis for the narrator grows into a palpable strain on the couple's relationship. The existential questioning—the sense of uncertainty and fear of the unknown—becomes intertwined with the interpersonal dynamic between the two. The narrator's worry about his memory, his fear of forgetting his wife's name, becomes not only a personal burden but also a source of tension that leads to quarrels and frustrations. In the aforementioned scene, the wife's questions about the narrator's memory, along with the sarcastic remark about his snoring, signal his growing disillusionment with the situation. Rather than being a supportive partner, she becomes a mirror of the narrator's own frustrations, offering no comfort but instead reinforcing the sense of helplessness. The sarcastic remarks and cutting tone reveal that the memory loss is not simply a health issue in their relationship, but one that challenges the very foundations of their bond. This type of questioning, rather than seeking answers, shifts the interaction to a place of emotional survival. The narrator attempts to resist the encroaching forgetfulness, but at the same time, his inability to remember his wife's name becomes a symbol of the disconnect between them. This represents a significant loss: not only of memory, but of emotional intimacy. But he can still find in forgetting a certain arrangement of things: « I forget that I forget », declares the narrator (Benhedouga, idem, p. 62).

The existential questions that arise within the narrator also reflect his deepening alienation. He is faced with an overwhelming uncertainty about the future, compounded by his struggle to engage meaningfully with his wife. The inability to recall something as intimate as her name underscores the deep emotional rift that has formed. The crisis of memory, though seemingly cognitive, becomes a relational one—blurring the line between the self and the other. The emotional toll of this loss is evident, as the narrator is unable to bridge the gap between his internal world of existential worry and the external reality of his relationship. The result is a sense of profound disconnection, where the narrator not only fears forgetting but also fears the irreparable rupture of his connection to the person closest to him. In the broader context, this dynamic speaks to the psychological and emotional costs of memory loss—how it ripples through relationships, influencing communication, trust, and even love. The wife's reaction, often frustrated and sarcastic, shows how memory loss doesn't just affect the individual but also those who are part of their lives. The relationship, in this case, becomes a battleground between the painful realities of aging and the deep human desire for connection and recognition. The narrator's existential questioning, then, becomes not just about his own fate but about the fate of his relationship and his identity, both of which are tied to the memory of his wife.

The events unfolding in this provocative and emotionally charged dialogue in the scene reveal a complex web of accumulated emotions, unspoken tensions, and unresolved sensitivities built up over the course of the couple's life together. These accumulated feelings form the backdrop to the moment where the husband is confronted by his wife's seemingly innocuous question about her name. The wife, shifting between lightheartedness and a more serious tone, stirs her husband's sense of guilt and confusion. Her emotional fluctuations raise questions: Has she always been this way, testing his memory, challenging him with sudden mood changes? Or has her behavior shifted as time wore on, in

the later years of their marriage, as both of their lives become marked by aging, memory loss, and the strains of routine ? The narrator's response, "I don't remember anything," captures the essence of his frustration and confusion. His inability to remember his wife's name, despite the intimacy of their relationship, is emblematic of a larger, existential crisis. The sweet mood his wife adopts becomes a symbol of the contradictions within their relationship, playful, yet painful. The husband's reaction—blushing with embarrassment, highlights the emotional toll of the situation. He is confronted not only with his forgetfulness but also with the fact that this lapse in memory is occurring within the intimate space of his marriage, where the simple act of recalling his wife's name should not be such a monumental challenge.

This scene captures the convergence of personal and relational crises. The wife's question about her name transcends a simple inquiry; it becomes a metaphor for the gradual erosion of shared identity and memory. The emotional turbulence in their relationship reflects a larger existential theme: the inevitability of loss, the fading of the past, and the fragility of human connections over time. The narrator's embarrassment isn't just about forgetting, but also about the symbolic dissolution of the close bond they once shared, an emotional reminder that, over time, not only names but identities and relationships can blur and fade. In this sense, the conflict between husband and wife reveals a deeper tension that goes beyond the superficial argument over his snoring. The wife's accusation that he is faking his snoring highlights a playful antagonism, yet also suggests a deeper dissatisfaction and possibly a desire for control in their relationship. The husband's responses to these accusations, though coming from an older figure than the narrator, reveal his own bitterness, though in a different form. His defensive reaction carries a stubborn refusal to acknowledge his wife's intuition, dismissing it as a mere misinterpretation of his physical condition. He insists that her snoring isn't faked, but rather a result of an illness, a condition he feels compelled to explain in detail. His logical, fact-based rebuttal sharply contrasts with his wife's emotional accusation, illustrating that their interaction is about more than just memory or snoring; it's a broader conflict between the wife's emotional intuition and the husband's rational explanations.

4.1.2 Mystical Intuition

The narrator's statement about his wife trusting her intuition more than others is crucial here. It suggests that the wife's understanding of reality is not based on tangible evidence or facts but on a gut feeling, a deep, inherent sense of what she perceives to be true. This statement elevates her intuition to something profound, almost mystical, capable of cutting through the surface level of things. Her intuition becomes a form of wisdom, a means of understanding the complexities of human behavior and emotion that may escape logical reasoning. In contrast, the husband's reliance on logical, fact-based reasoning shows his grounding in the material world, where things must be accounted for with clear explanations. His attempt to defend himself through reason further isolates him from the very intuition that his wife trusts. Intuition and insight are intriguing phenomena of non-analytical mental functioning: whereas intuition denotes ideas that have been reached by sensing the solution without any explicit representation of it, insight has been understood as the sudden and unexpected apprehension of the solution by recombining the single elements of a problem (Zander & al., 2016, p.01). This distinction between the wife's intuition and the husband's rationality highlights a broader societal division between emotional and intellectual responses to the world. Traditionally, women have often been associated with intuition and emotion, while men have been expected to rely on logic and reason. The narrator's portrayal of these gendered differences goes beyond mere character traits; it reflects a fundamental understanding of how gender roles shape perception, communication, and conflict resolution in relationships.

The belief in women's intuition has long been a subject of fascination and exploration in literature, often evoking deep philosophical and psychological considerations. In many works, this

intuition is either revered as an innate wisdom or dismissed as a mere flight of fancy. However, in this context, the author presents the wife's intuition not as something to be mocked or written off as eccentric, but rather as a powerful, almost transcendent form of knowing that challenges the more calculated, logical approach of the husband. This nuanced portrayal indicates that her intuitive grasp of situations, particularly in the complex emotional landscape of their marriage, holds a significant value that cannot be easily dismissed.

This tension between intellect and intuition is further illustrated by the way the husband reflects on his wife's ability to perceive things beyond his logical reasoning. While he attempts to engage with the rational, often reaching conclusions based on what he can see or deduce, the wife's intuitive insights consistently surpass his understanding. It is in this contrast between their modes of cognition, rational versus intuitive, that the narrative finds much of its complexity. Her intuition, which is both deeply personal and rooted in the subtleties of emotional and relational dynamics, is positioned as more perceptive than the logical conclusions drawn by external authorities, such as the judge who insists on divorce as the only solution.

The husband's growing appreciation for his wife's intuition suggests a deeper acknowledgment of the feminine perspective. However, his reflections are tinged with a sense of frustration and resignation. His wife's intuitive understanding, coupled with her seemingly trivial responses (like her refusal to buy anything from the 'white' market), marks a clear divide between their approaches to life and their relationship. Her refusal to cater to his desires represents more than just an act of defiance; it is a subtle form of power, a challenge to his expectations and the societal norms that often prioritize male logic over female intuition.

Moreover, the husband's reference to her memory as being like that of an elephant adds another layer to this dynamic. Elephants, often symbolizing wisdom and memory, are here used ironically to point out the wife's persistence in holding onto her position. The use of "memory of an elephant" conveys both admiration and frustration, indicating the husband's simultaneous recognition of her depth of understanding and his feeling of being overwhelmed by it. Her consistent use of negation and denial—symbolized by her response "Ma-kan-sh" (there is none)—further underscores her role in challenging him and denying him the comforts he might expect in their marriage.

The contrast between the husband's memory and his wife's memory becomes a focal point for deeper reflection on the nature of memory itself. The husband's frustration is amplified by his acknowledgment of his wife's extraordinary memory, which he likens to that of an elephant, yet it is clear that this memory is employed in a highly selective, almost trivial way. Her recollection of mundane details, such as food purchases, becomes a tool of control or negotiation in their relationship, rather than a useful instrument for addressing larger, more existential matters. This creates an intriguing tension: while the husband is troubled by the seeming imbalance between their respective memories, the wife's memory operates within the realm of daily, domestic concerns, which are reduced to a game of denial and scarcity. This is not simply a complaint about his wife's behavior but also a way for the husband to reflect on his own perceived inadequacies in dealing with life's larger emotional challenges.

This contemplation illustrates the tension between *voluntary* and *involuntary* memories, a concept described by Gérard Genette in his study of temporal paradoxes (Genette, 1980, p.132). Voluntary memories are those that can be intentionally recalled, while involuntary memories are those that surface unexpectedly, often triggered by a specific sensation or event. The passage presents a contrast between these two types of memory: while others seem to have an abundance of *voluntary* recollections, the narrator's inability to recall even the simplest details highlights the lack of control he has over his own memory. This creates a temporal paradox, where the narrator is aware of his memory's failure, yet he cannot directly access the memories he wishes to recall.

The writer employs this technique to examine how memory operates not just as a cognitive process but as an emotional and psychological one as well. By contrasting the narrator's frustration with the exaggerated memories of others, the writer highlights the elusive nature of memory and its impact on our sense of identity. These contrasts, between the "accurate" memories of others and the narrator's fragmented recollections, underscore the fragility and subjectivity of memory. The narrator's struggle is not only with the loss of specific memories but also with how his difficulty in recalling details challenges his sense of self and his connection to the past. This detail also touches on the idea of "critical thoughts" or self-reflection in memory retrieval. The narrator's contemplation of his memory loss goes beyond trying to remember specific events; it involves evaluating his memory in comparison to others. Rather than simply presenting a linear recounting of memories, the writer uses these moments of introspection to explore the more complex, nuanced workings of memory. In doing so, the writer invites the reader to reflect not just on the factual aspects of memory, but on its subjective, interpretive role in shaping our lives.

Thus, in every decision or action the narrator faces, a well-trained memory is crucial, and the process of manipulating memories invariably engages the psyche as a whole to some extent. But this intentional manipulation of facts and dates is neither arbitrary nor merely an everyday requirement. Rather, it serves to sharply critique the way in which history can be distorted, forgotten, or deliberately altered: an act that mirrors the nation's treatment of its collective memory. By exposing this deliberate disruption of historical facts, the narrator highlights the way individuals and nations reshape their memories to suit the needs of the present, often obscuring original truths. This technique becomes even clearer in the passage where the narrator lists names that are both "correct and distorted" (such as "Tassadit" and "Dheila"), implying that the manipulation of memory is not just a personal but a national affair. In this regard, the individual's memory of his or her past is not only a reflection of his or her personal experience, but is deeply linked to the broader national context, which can also be fragmented, manipulated or selectively remembered.

The mention of the Berber woman is also significant here. It serves as a reminder that history is not just about grand events, but about individuals and cultures whose stories are often silenced or overlooked. By referencing the symbolic "old chest" of the narrator's mother, the writer invites the reader into the personal and intimate sphere of family history, where the chest is not just a physical object, but a symbol of continuity, tradition, and cultural memory. It's a cultural artifact, a marker of the past that ties generations together. However, the chest also embodies the fragility of memory—while it endures, the narrator's personal memory falters and becomes unreliable. This duality—of the chest's enduring physical presence and the narrator's fractured memory—mirrors the larger tension between national memory and personal recollection.

The narrator's fractured memory is crucial here. His inability to recall specific details, contrasted with his vivid memory of the chest, represents how memory, both personal and collective, is a selective process. It is not a clear, linear recollection but a fragmented, sometimes elusive experience that shapes identity. Memory is both a source of creative potential and a limitation—it drives the narrative forward but also shapes the narrator's understanding of the past. The passage where the narrator attempts to remember something—anything—only to be stopped by a blank space, except for the image of the chest, highlights this dissonance. The chest, despite being a part of the narrator's mother's life and history, becomes a symbol of what remains in the narrator's mind amidst the vagaries of time.

The wife's tone, laden with accusation, further intensifies the emotional implications of memory loss. Her statement, "Don't speak if you don't want to, your words no longer matter to me much," implies that the narrator's failure to remember—or even to be present in their relationship—has caused a rift. She has grown indifferent to his words, a stark contrast to the emotional engagement

that a healthy relationship thrives on. The clash between her emotional frustration and his cognitive shortcomings reflects the complexity of human memory, showing that memory loss is not just an individual experience but one that reverberates within interpersonal dynamics, often reflecting broader themes of neglect and alienation.

This scene also fits into Greimas's perspective, which questions the idea of pure sensation and instead advocates a deeper and more complex understanding of desire and meaning. For Greimas, desire is not just a response to physical stimuli, but something that transcends basic meaning (Greimas and Fontanille, 1993, p. 69). It precedes any semiotic or linguistic expression. Here, the wife's emotional outbursts and the narrator's memory lapses go beyond a simple breakdown in communication or the refusal of linguistic exchanges. They reveal an undercurrent of emotions, resentments, frustrations, and unexpressed desires that shape the relationship in ways that are never fully verbalized. The wife's complaints about and because of her husband are felt by him as a catalyst. It's almost as if he needs a jolt to remind him that he is truly living in the present reality.

Greimas's notion of "zero degree of vitality" and the "apparent level of being" can be applied to this moment, as the narrator's forgetfulness, coupled with his wife's emotional reaction, captures a sense of lifelessness or stagnation. Their relationship, which once may have been full of meaning, is now reduced to a series of forgotten moments, unspoken needs, and emotional disconnection. This lack of vitality is not merely the result of cognitive failure but of a more profound breakdown in the emotional and relational fabric of their lives, marking the "present existence" as a fragmented, hollowed-out experience.

In this way, the memory loss depicted in the story becomes more than a medical or cognitive issue. It becomes a metaphor for the unraveling of a relationship, showing how emotional distance and unresolved desires can distort and ultimately fracture one's personal reality. The story highlights how memory, far from being an isolated mental process, is inextricably linked to the emotional and relational dimensions of human life.

The writer uses the binary opposition of memory loss and excessive selfishness as a vehicle to explore the nuances of aging and the evolving dynamics in a long-term relationship. By framing these two opposing concepts—one potentially related to a mental disability and the other to an emotional or psychological flaw—the writer delves into the complexity of human interactions in the face of both physical and psychological changes. The husband's memory loss, which could be interpreted as a physical or cognitive decline, contrasts sharply with the accusation of selfishness, which is more of a behavioral flaw with a moral dimension.

By placing this opposition in the context of a marriage that has endured for many years, the writer emphasizes how these shifts in behavior are not isolated but are intricately connected to the way individuals interact over time. The wife's instructions, such as "Don't forget to turn off the light before you sleep," may seem trivial on the surface, but they carry deeper implications. These instructions reflect the way the wife compensates for the husband's failing memory, but they also indicate a shift in the power dynamics of the relationship. Her instructions become a way to maintain control, subtly shifting the balance of dependence and authority in the marriage.

The use of the compensatory strategy highlights how, within the confines of a long-term relationship, roles evolve, and behaviors that might once have been overlooked or accepted are now magnified. The wife's insistence on seemingly minor details is not simply about managing day-to-day life but about asserting her role as the caretaker or the one who is in charge of the household. Over time, the husband's memory loss is less about a medical condition and more about how it becomes a symbol of his increasing reliance on the wife and the breakdown of the self-sufficiency that he may have once enjoyed.

The power of the compensatory strategy here is also underlined by the emotional intensity with which the wife expresses herself. Her reasoning is not merely logical; it is emotionally charged, highlighting frustration, resentment, and perhaps even a sense of exhaustion. These sentiments show the complexities of long-term love, where the intimate bond that once united the couple now carries with it layers of tension and dissatisfaction. In this way, the writer subtly critiques the idealized notion of lifelong marriage, showing how the passage of time can introduce not only affection and understanding but also conflict, resentment, and a redefinition of roles.

Thus, the opposition between memory loss and selfishness, though presented within a marital relationship, serves as a microcosm of the larger psychological and emotional transformations that occur as individuals age. The writer does not present these changes as inevitable, nor does he isolate them from the larger dynamics at play in the relationship. Instead, he shows how these shifts are interwoven with the lived experience of the characters, creating a rich, layered narrative that speaks to the complexities of memory, identity, and power within long-term relationships.

The narrator's journey unfolds as a profound psychological struggle, characterized by a constant tension between movement and stillness, reality and illusion. His internal conflict, a mixture of sadness and hope intertwined with fleeting dreams, draws him into a space where his thoughts gradually disconnect from the outside world, descending into a state of internal delirium. This transition from reflective thinking to a nearly dreamlike state underscores that the narrator's search for meaning, whether through memories, dreams, or the pursuit of existential truth, ultimately brings him back to himself. He comes to realize that the answers he seeks have always been within him. As a result, the structure of these phenomena can be described as almost epistemological. In other words, it seems that the psychotic subject (or their mental products) grasps the structure of the mind, which is otherwise unknowable through individual cognitive introspection (Davidoff, 2017, p.359).

The use of delirium as a tool by the author is intentional and serves to magnify the psychological depth of the narrator's conflict. The voices he hears are not simply external distractions but reflections of his inner turmoil, as though the boundary between reality and the mind has blurred. In the context of this narrative, delirium is not a mere symptom of mental instability, but a key mechanism through which the narrator's unconscious thoughts and desires become manifest. This allows the writer to explore not just a fragmented memory or a disintegrating sense of self, but the very human condition of seeking meaning in a world that seems increasingly elusive.

This theme of the cyclical nature of the narrator's search for meaning highlights the psychological and existential struggles that underpin the narrative. The narrator is in a constant state of conflict, chasing something external that he believes will bring him answers, but it is only when he is forced to confront his own internal state that he begins to understand that what he seeks has always been within him. The role of the elder figure, then, is not just to provide guidance but to act as a mirror, reflecting the narrator's inner conflict and showing him that the resolution he seeks lies not in distant places or external achievements, but in self-realization.

In this sense, the story takes on a deeper philosophical and existential dimension. The journey, whether it is a literal one or a psychological one, is revealed to be a process of self-discovery, where the external world can only serve as a reflection of what is already present within. The author's use of delirium, dreams, and the recurring theme of return underscores the central idea that true understanding and peace come not from external validation or discoveries, but from an internal reconciliation with oneself. Thus, the narrator's journey becomes both a search for meaning and a confrontation with the self, illustrating the complex interplay between the external world, memory, and the inner workings of the mind.

In this passage, the narrator's delirium takes on a deeper, more existential quality as it intertwines with mythological and philosophical themes. The confusion he experiences is not just

psychological but also temporal. Time, once a linear progression in the narrator's mind, becomes unstable, stretching and collapsing into itself. The shift from the "synchronizing moment of events" to "the farthest point in the narrator's personal history" mirrors the unraveling of his sense of self and the loss of a coherent narrative. The past no longer informs the present in a straightforward way; instead, it exists as a fractured, constantly shifting entity that resists fixed understanding.

The image of the "mirage" in the narrator's mind is significant. It symbolizes not just the elusive nature of hope, but also the deceptive nature of his search for clarity and meaning. As he "urges himself forward" through his delirium, the mirage dissolves, revealing nothing but barren sand. This progression captures the futility of his efforts to find something tangible in his journey—his memories, identity, and understanding of the world around him remain as elusive as the mirage itself. The comparison between his wife's name and the sand highlights the fragility of memory and how even the most personal and foundational aspects of his life are subject to erasure. The narrator's inability to remember his wife's name becomes symbolic of his larger struggle to hold onto his identity, his past, and his place in the world.

Incorporating the figure of the elderly man, who "resembles the shepherds of the Torah," adds a spiritual or mythological dimension to the narrator's struggle. The "Torah" here acts as a signifier of wisdom, tradition, and moral clarity. The elder becomes a figure of guidance, offering the narrator a chance at redemption, or at least a deeper understanding of his own inner turmoil. However, the guidance he offers is paradoxical: the narrator has not traveled anywhere; he is still in the same place. The search for meaning and identity that the narrator embarks on is, in essence, a search within himself. This idea—suggesting that the answers he seeks are already within him, but hidden beneath layers of confusion—is central to the existential crisis portrayed in the text.

The narrator's physical journey of walking is juxtaposed with his psychological journey. While walking may be an attempt to relieve his worries or engage his mind, it also becomes a metaphor for the act of searching for answers. His wandering does not lead him to any external destination; rather, it reflects his internal state of being lost, both physically and mentally. This search for clarity—combined with the overwhelming confusion—adds to the feeling of being trapped in a cycle of unending frustration, where the answers always seem out of reach.

In this context, the reference to the "Torah" and the "old man" is particularly resonant. The Torah, as a text of moral and spiritual guidance, contrasts with the narrator's fragmented mental state. His quest for truth, then, is not simply about finding external answers, but about reconciling his fractured sense of self with a deeper, more universal wisdom. The elder's appearance suggests that this wisdom is available to him, but he cannot access it fully. This dynamic highlights the tension between the narrator's desire for clarity and the pervasive uncertainty that surrounds him.

The narrator's difficulty recalling his wife's name, which symbolizes his personal history, highlights the broader theme of memory. The interplay between "symbolic memory" and "incidental memory" becomes crucial here. Symbolic memory refers to deeper, cultural, or historical recollections that ground an individual's sense of identity, while incidental memory is more personal and episodic in nature. As the narrator's memory becomes increasingly unreliable, these two types of memory begin to merge, creating a sense of disorientation. His struggle to access both personal memories (such as his wife's name) and collective memories (such as the wisdom of the Torah) intensifies his confusion. This is reflected in his words: « There are many bright names that delight the soul when remembered, yet I do not recall them easily, while dark names I seldom strain myself to remember. Does the radiance of my wife's name dazzle my memory to the point that it cannot distinguish it among other names ? Why then do I remember our sweet days when we were engaged, when we slept on dreams and woke up to hopes ? I see her clearly, with her modest smile and shy gestures, at twenty years old, calling out from behind her purple dress ! I even remember our silent meetings and our

eloquent silence! I remember the car that carried her as a bride, a '404'. A time when cars were synonymous with fantasy ! » (Benhedouga, idem, p.64).

This passage ultimately highlights the existential struggles woven throughout the text. The narrator's journey is not just about recalling the past or seeking external meaning, but about confronting his internal unraveling, where time, identity, and memory become fragmented and unreliable. The imagery of the "mirage" and the appearance of the elder symbolize the narrator's quest for truth and clarity, while also revealing the futility of looking for external answers when the true journey lies in self-discovery. The tension between memory and identity, the internal and external, produces a disjointed narrative that mirrors the narrator's fragmented mental and existential state. Drawing a parallel to Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, which centers on the search for meaning in human existence, we can see a similar emphasis on healing through meaning. Logotherapy, while acknowledging the fleeting nature of life, is not rooted in pessimism but rather in active engagement with life's challenges. To illustrate this, Frankl uses the metaphor of a person with a calendar. The pessimist views each passing day with fear and sadness as the calendar grows thinner, whereas the active individual removes each page and reflects on the richness of their experiences, taking pride and joy in the life they have lived to its fullest (Frankl, 1992, p. 55).

4.2 The Complex of Memory and the Illusory Resolution

The passage where the narrator confesses to forgetting his wife's name reveals much about the complexities of his inner turmoil and the larger themes at play in the text. His inability to remember something so fundamental—her name—becomes symbolic of a deeper existential struggle. The memory, or the failure of it, serves not only as a personal loss but also as a metaphor for a larger sense of disconnection: disconnection from his own identity, from his past, and, most poignantly, from his connection to the people he loves.

The elder's calm yet direct response places the narrator face-to-face with his own limitations. In the elder's words, there is an implicit suggestion that the narrator's inability to remember is not a mere lapse but a reflection of a deeper issue—one that transcends the simple act of forgetting. By asking the narrator to describe his wife, the elder is not merely seeking a description of her physical characteristics, but rather challenging the narrator to reconcile his emotional and psychological state with his identity and reality. The elder's interruption—"Surely you are poor, you describe your wife as gold!"—forces the narrator to confront the disparity between his idealized memory of his wife and the reality of his situation. This tension between idealization and reality underscores the central conflict of the narrator's mind: the desire for freedom from his internal chaos versus the painful truth that freedom cannot be attained simply by willfully deciding to remember or forget.

In his description of his wife as "like gold," the narrator clings to an image of her as something precious, eternal, and pure, an idealization that contrasts sharply with his current situation—one where his memory is fragmented and unreliable. This description of his wife as gold also suggests the narrator's attempt to hold on to something tangible and valuable amidst his increasing sense of disorientation. However, the elder's cynical response—suggesting that the narrator is "poor" for equating something so precious with his wife—reminds him of the emotional poverty that his forgetfulness and confusion have caused.

This moment of realization forces the narrator to confront not just the immediate issue of forgetting his wife's name, but the larger implications of his fragmented memory and fractured sense of self. His struggle with memory, as portrayed in this dialogue, is not just about an inability to remember facts or details; it is a confrontation with his own identity, his relationship to others, and his sense of purpose. The memory of his wife, and the failure to recall it, reflects his struggle to reconcile his internal chaos with the reality of the world around him.

The elder, in many ways, becomes a mirror for the narrator. While the elder offers wisdom, his words also reveal the narrator's internal contradictions and the illusions he holds onto in his quest for meaning. The very idea of "freedom" in this context is illusory. The narrator wants to believe that by remembering or forgetting, he can control his reality, but the narrative exposes this freedom as a false hope. In fact, the narrator's true freedom may lie not in trying to escape the constraints of memory, but in facing the fragmented nature of his own existence, accepting it, and finding meaning within that chaos.

This scene also underscores the broader theme of the story: the interplay between memory, identity, and the passage of time. The narrator's memory is not merely a passive reflection of the past, but an active participant in shaping his current reality. His struggle to remember and the elder's pointed responses push the narrator to examine how much of his life—and indeed his very identity—is shaped by what he chooses to remember and forget. The idea that his wife's name, a key part of his identity, can so easily slip from his mind speaks to the fragile nature of human memory and the instability of personal identity, especially when confronted with existential crisis.

Ultimately, the dialogue between the narrator and the elder reveals that the dissolution of memory is not simply about forgetfulness; it is a symbolic unraveling of the narrator's entire worldview. His quest to recover the name of his wife is a search for something more profound—perhaps for a deeper understanding of himself, of his life, and of the way time and memory distort reality. In this sense, the scene marks a pivotal moment in the story, where the narrator must confront the limits of his own mind and grapple with the illusion of control over his own fate.

In this passage, the narrator grapples with the confusion between his present reality and the memories that he is desperately trying to recall. The images from his current life, shaped by the constraints of his surroundings, overwhelm his mind, while the memories he is attempting to retrieve slip further away from him. These present images—rooted in the immediate, harsh reality—have a disorienting effect on the narrator, leading him to conclude that they have tainted his nature and left him feeling lost and purposeless. The memories that once seemed significant now appear blurred and distorted, no longer providing the clarity or meaning that the narrator sought. This dilution of memory suggests a deep inner conflict, as if the very essence of his identity has become fluid and ungraspable.

The elder, despite his wisdom and experience, does not offer the narrator a clear solution. His response highlights the complexity of the narrator's psychological state, one that cannot be remedied through simple fixes or magical solutions. The narrator's experience of forgetfulness is not just a cognitive lapse, but rather a profound existential crisis. The elder's analysis of the narrator's poverty, triggered by the description of his wife as "like gold," further underscores the narrator's internal contradictions. This remark reveals how deeply the narrator is torn between idealization and reality, between the purity of his love and the harshness of his circumstances. The mention of gold—a symbol of wealth and value—reveals the narrator's longing for something precious, but it also highlights the disparity between his desires and his reality. This disconnection echoes his struggle with memory, as the precious memories he seeks are now inaccessible or distorted.

Memory, as explored here, is not a simple, static process. It is intricately linked to mental and emotional functions like thinking, imagination, and intelligence. These processes, in turn, are shaped by the brain's neural and physiological activities. The narrator's memory issues are not just a matter of losing specific recollections but also a reflection of his deteriorating sense of self, as his cognitive functions fail to align with the reality he is experiencing. This becomes a metaphor for the fragility of the human mind, where memories, though vital, can become unreliable or even obstructive when one's inner world is disrupted by external forces.

Conclusion

The text analyzed presents a deep reflection on the nature of storytelling, particularly focusing on how Abdelhamid Benhedouga uses narrative to explore the intersection of cognitive processes, perception, and reality. The key idea here is that the narrative does not merely tell a story; it actively participates in a mental and emotional correction process for both the narrator and the reader. Benhedouga's work goes beyond the traditional notion of narrative, moving into a space where the boundaries between subjective experience and objective reality become blurred. His choice to deviate from purely objective storytelling challenges conventional ideas, bringing attention to the ways in which individual experiences—especially those shaped by memory, emotion, and perception—can conflict with or enrich the broader social and existential context. By breaking free from the rigid structure of objective narrative, Benhedouga allows the narrator's subjective impressions to dictate the flow of the story. This becomes particularly evident in the narrator's fluctuating memory and emotional states, where the idea of "reality" is not static but continuously shifting, just as the narrator's thoughts and perceptions do. In the author's hands, this narrative instability becomes a powerful tool that invites readers to engage deeply with the narrator's inner world. Here, the text emphasizes the creative nature of storytelling as it transcends merely presenting events or characters. Instead, it seeks to engage with the philosophical and psychological underpinnings of human experience.

The author's use of punctuation, frequent question marks, exclamation points, and ellipses, reinforces the introspective nature of the story. These stylistic choices create a rhythm that mirrors the narrator's inner turmoil and constant search for meaning, mirroring his emotional states and cognitive dissonance. Such punctuation marks not only break up the text but also serve as a conduit for the narrator's fragmented thoughts. The frequent pauses suggested by ellipses or the emphasis of exclamations draw attention to the conflict between the narrator's mind and the external world, the self and the other, the known and the unknown.

The ultimate paradox revealed in the story is the futility of "awakening in darkness." Here, the phrase becomes a metaphor for the narrator's condition: a kind of existential paralysis. He is awake, but he remains in the dark—trapped between the pursuit of knowledge, the confrontation with reality, and the inability to fully comprehend or regain what he seeks. The choice to "sleep" rather than to "stay awake in the darkness" becomes a symbol of surrender, not in the personal sense of giving up, but in the recognition that the search for truth or meaning may not be fully attainable. This surrender, however, is not isolated but collective. It reflects the collective experience of alienation, where the struggle is not just an individual battle but one that is shared by many, particularly those who have suffered exile, oppression, or the loss of their cultural and personal identity. This collective dimension of surrender is highlighted by the use of the French term *Capitulation* in the introduction. In French history, *Capitulation* is associated with significant moments of collective surrender or defeat, particularly in revolutionary contexts. By invoking this term, the author ties the narrator's personal crisis to a broader historical and social context, aligning the individual struggle with the collective struggles of oppressed peoples, particularly in Algeria and France. These are the people who have faced exile, persecution, and a loss of identity, and whose experiences resonate deeply within the story. The story's exploration of memory, identity, and the search for meaning becomes a reflection of these larger social and historical processes.

Thus, the text serves as a powerful meditation on the complexities of self-knowledge, existential struggle, and the elusive nature of truth. Through the interplay of subjective experience, narrative form, and historical context, Benhedouga challenges readers to confront their own understanding of identity, reality, and the human condition. The journey toward understanding is not linear, and the answers are never fully revealed, just as the narrator's quest for his wife's name remains unresolved. Instead, the story emphasizes the paradox of "awakening in darkness," where the search for meaning itself becomes a journey into the unknown. In this development, the writer

deliberately distinguishes their work from what could be classified as a psychological or psychoanalytic narrative. While both of these genres deal with the workings of the mind and human behavior, they typically demand a more expansive, intricate structure that is more characteristic of novels due to their in-depth exploration of character development, psychological depth, and the unfolding of complex issues over time. These extended narratives can often delve deeply into an individual's psyche, but this extended form may inadvertently lead to a sense of redundancy or artificiality when stretched too far.

The author's primary focus here, however, is the exploration of a new literary type, what they define as the "gnostic story." Unlike the traditional psychological or psychoanalytic narrative, which often requires a significant amount of length to fully unpack the psychological complexity of its characters, a "gnostic story" is concerned with exploring mental, psychological, and neurological processes, but in a much more condensed, focused manner. The essence of this genre lies in its ability to convey complex cognitive issues and internal struggles through brevity and poetic suggestion. This brevity, however, is not merely for the sake of simplicity but is a deliberate artistic choice, one that allows for deeper reflection in the reader. A "gnostic story" thrives on subtlety and the ability to hint at profound truths through a minimalist approach. The tension between external events and internal cognitive processes is often presented indirectly, leaving much for the reader to interpret, with the most significant elements often implied rather than explicitly detailed. So, while the story is capable of exploring a similar direction, the writer emphasizes that a long-form narrative is not always the best vehicle for this type of exploration. The risk of over-complicating the narrative or lapsing into tedium is high when psychological or emotional states are dissected too extensively over a lengthy period. In contrast, the "gnostic story" encapsulates key psychological conflicts in its succinct, evocative style, allowing it to effectively engage with deep mental or existential themes without overstaying its welcome. This creates a powerful contrast between what is said and what is left unsaid, offering a unique and reflective experience for the reader.

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