

**Tayyib Saleh's Novel: 'Urs al-Zein/ The Wedding of Zein:  
The Wedding of Compromise between  
Traditionalism and Modernism**

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**Abstract:**

Despite the fact that more than four decades have passed since Tayyib Saleh's novel *al-Zain's Wedding* was published, it is still demands exploratory and profound reading and re-reading from time to time. Such readings should not be satisfied with search for immediate meanings, but the meanings of meanings, which are likely to hide new invisible and interesting ideas that hint to the reader that that the novel is a glowing text that deserves more than one fruitful enlightening reading.

*Al-Zain's Wedding* constitutes a stepping stone and the beginning of the journey inside the Sudanese entity through yearning to achieve reconciliation between original traditionalism and the cultural spiritual heritage that it carries through its folds and modernism that carries openness, development and modernity.

While *al-Zai's Wedding* is considered the beginning of the journey inside, the novel of *Season of Immigration to the North* is the journey outside the Sudanese identity and the description of the contact with the other, who is different. It represents a meeting between the Oriental culture and the Western culture there in its original pace, and the return to homeland.

*Al-Zain's Wedding* was published before *Season of Immigration to the North*, and in this way, Tayyib Saleh gave answer to one of the questions that was posed to him. He said: "But I started *Season of Immigration* from where *al-Zain's Wedding* ended. It seems that the author tries to make a compromise between some people who still raise the slogan of "the Present of the Past," from which they cannot get rid, and others, who raise the slogan of the "Present of the Present." It is an attempt to reconcile between tradition and modernism. Actually, the author has succeeded in achieving such reconciliation in his novel.

## 1. Introduction

Although four decades have passed since the publication of Tayyib Saleh's novel, *The Wedding of Zein*,<sup>1</sup> it still deserves more than one deliberate reading due to the novelties that it includes, which suggest that it is a glowing and rich novel that can be read in a new productive way.

Before I start dealing with the topic of this paper, it deserves mentioning that *The Wedding of Zein* had been published before Tayyib Saleh's other novel, *Season of Emigration to the North*<sup>2</sup>. Thus, we can argue that *The Wedding of Zein* constitutes the stepping point of a journey towards the inside, to the Sudanese self, yearning to achieve a compromise between traditionalism with its spiritual and cultural heritage, and modernism with its openness, development and modernism. So, if we consider it as a journey inside the Sudanese self, the *Season of Emigration to the North* is a journey outside the Sudanese self to describe the meeting of the Oriental culture with the Western culture in its natural environment, and its return to its homeland, Sudan, after that meeting.

In an interview with Tayyib Saleh, and in answer to a question about the relationship between *The Wedding of Zein* and *Season of Emigration*, he replied: "But I started the *Season* from where it ended in *The Wedding of Zein*!"<sup>3</sup>

We can argue that *The Wedding of Zein* has two faces: one is legendary, and the other is realistic, but both are interwoven in one literary texture, which is *The*

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<sup>1</sup> Saleh, Tayyib, *Ors al-Zein/The Wedding of Zein*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Dar al-Awdah. Beirut, 1970. The Sudanese author Tayyib Saleh (1929-2009) published his novel *The Wedding of Zein* for the first time in a serial in *Hiwar* magazine, no. 10, and *al-Khortoum*, no. 6, in 1061, and then it was collected and published in a book form in 1966.

<sup>2</sup> The novel was published for the first time in *Hiwar* magazine in 1966; then it was published in *Riwayat al-Hilal* in Cairo and then by Dar al-Awdah in Beirut.

<sup>3</sup> Shaheen, Mohammad, *Tahawwulat al-Shawq fi Mawsim al-Hijrah ila al-Shamal. (Transformations of Yearning in Season of Emigration to the North)*. al-Mo'asasah al-Arabiyyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr. p. 197, 1993.

*Wedding of Zein*. It is a novel charged with interactions, whether on the level of characters or the level of events. Its plot has indications and dimensions that result from the thoughts that the author introduced in the style of realistic mythology, which is wrapped by the language of narration mixed with the local dialect, and this makes it sound more genuine and more connected to reality.

In addition to this, the novel is characterized by a spontaneous motion that leads to putting the reader within the image, which makes him believe at first moment that he is watching live and real scenes that take place in front of him in reality, rather than in the author's imagination only.

## **2. The Theme of the Novel**

As the title implies, it is "The Wedding of Zein". The novel starts with it as: "Halima the Milkmaid – and she came as she used to before sunrise – said to Aminah as she was measuring milk for her at one piaster: Did you hear the bit of news? Zein is going to have a wedding" (P. 5). And she ends saying: "Our affectionate father would come and attend the wedding, if he were alive. Mahjoub put his hand on Zein' shoulder gently and said: May God give him mercy. He was a blessed man. But tonight is your wedding night. No man cries at his wedding night."(P. 127)!

At first thought, one thinks that the central theme focuses on the idea of 'marriage' of Zein, the hero of the novel, to his niece, Ne'meh. As the event of 'marriage' is considered a human act that many people consider as 'ordinary' and 'simple' that is repeated frequently in society, one would think that if the idea of the novel remained moving within this circle, it would lose its uniqueness and originality.

If we remember also that *The Wedding of Zein* was written in 1962, i.e. a few years after the independence of Sudan in 1956, we will be sure of this special type of novel. The society in which the events of the novel take place had to go through a hard conflict at that time between the past and the present, between traditionalism and modernism. Therefore, "Tayyib combines between the magic of the past and

the secret of the present"<sup>4</sup> in an attempt to lead to the development of his society and its openness to modern life, in spite of the resistant causes of that society, which settled in its unconsciousness over hundreds of years. On the other hand, Tayyib gives a special interest to the themes of sex and love as a basic value in human life, as he expressed it in the vents of the novel and the behavior of the characters.

### 3. Zein's Character

Zein's character is seen as an absurd and comic one with no value, but the reader discovers that the final surprise of the novel is achieved through him. Zein also embodies a special discrepancy that is as important as the surprising end, not only in his name, but in his role in the development of most of the events of the novel from the beginning to the end.

In reality, Zein's proves to be in complete contrast to the indication of his name. The narrator describes him with different names or gives him different qualities such as "a giraffe," or states that he has legs like a crane (korki-bird) (p. 16), or like a monkey (p. 16), and he laughs like a donkey's bray (p. 17) or like a frog's croak (p. 19).

In another place in the novel, the narrator says this about him: "When babies are born, they welcome life with cries, which is a known fact, but according to his mother and the women who attended his birth, when Zein touched the earth, he broke in laughter, and remained like that all his life. He grew up having two teeth only: one is in his higher jaw and the other is in his lower one. Zein's face was rectangular, with protruding bones on the face, the jaws and below the eyes. His forehead was protruding and circular; his eyes were small and mostly red; their sockets were deep like two caves in his face. He has no hair on his face at all. He did not have eyebrows or eyelashes. He grew up to be a man, without having a beard or a moustache" (P. 15-16), let alone the fun and frivolity he showed in his

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<sup>4</sup> Shaheen, Mohammad, *al-Adab wa al-Ustoorah (Literature and Myth)*. Al-Mo'asasah al-Arabiyyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr. P. 107, 1970.

daily life. "and when he finished work in the field in the evening, and the people would go home, Zein would walk from his field to his home within a group of young boys and girls, laughing around him, proudly among them, stroking this on his shoulder, and biting that on her cheek, and jumping in the air several jumps, and whenever he saw a tree along the road, he would jump over it" (P. 21).

It is remarkable that such a strange creature called Zein should be able to cause such a rarefaction in such a traditional and conservative society like his society." In this conservative society, where girls are hidden from boys, Zein turns to become a messenger of love, transporting his perfume from one place to another. Love would hit his heart first, and soon it would move to the heart of another one, as if he were a middleman, or a street-seller or a postman" (P. 31).

Soon his news went round and everyone liked him, especially women, and later his name became popular on everyone's tongue: "as soon as the women hear that Zein is at a nearby house, they will go there, as they enjoyed his frivolity. Mothers used to urge their daughters to come and say hello to him. The lucky one would be the one who finds a place in his heart, and her name is mentioned on his tongue. That girl would have a husband during a month or two" (p. 32).

One day, N'emeh found him among a group of women laughing with them as usual. "She scolded him saying: leave that splashing talk and nonsense; go to your work." (p. 38). Zein did not answer, and "stopped laughing and bowed his head in shame, and then slipped away through the women and continued on his way," (p. 38).

The importance of Zein's role is revealed in its being an element of unification rather than separation; one of love rather than hatred between the various strata of the Sudanese society, and as the narrator says: "and his "sweetheart" this time was a girl from the Bedouins who live at the outskirts of the Nile in the north of Sudan... and some of these are the Arabs of al-Quz, who do not marry with the native people, as they consider them pure Arabs, and the local people consider them as rough Bedouins. But Zein broke this barrier," (p. 27-28). This happened to him when he went one day to the parts of the Quz group, where one of their girls,

named Halimeh, drew his attention, and soon Zein shouted: "She killed me, O people,...and she soon became his obsession, which did not leave him till the girl got married. The people heard about her, and many of the rich people of the village, its high class young men, and dignitaries came to ask for her hand from her father. In the end, the Judge's son married her" (P. 28). Thus, we see how Zein succeeded in breaking the rule and going through the artificial unjustified barriers that society imposed and separated its members for many years.

The events take a different direction when Zein's Mother promotes the idea that her son is one of God's holy protectors. Here, the differences between miracles and *karamat* (extraordinary events/ miracles) vanish and people fail to distinguish between them."Zein's Mother spread the word that her son is one of God's holy protectors, and Zein's friendship with al-Hanin strengthened this belief," (P. 35). The people of the village "have always tried to know from Zein the secret of his friendship with Hanin," (P. 36), but in vain. Zein called him "the Blessed" (P. 36) which indicates the strong warm relationship between them. This is not surprising as "God can put his secret in His weakest creatures," as it is said (P. 37). The people of the village exaggerated in believing that "Probably he is the prophet of God, al-Khader; probably he is an angel that God sent in a miserable human body" (P. 37). However, their puzzle about Hanin was greater, and they started "remembering with wonder how Hanin appeared to them without knowing from where" (P. 71).

Zein's character is considered to be the corner stone of the novel, as he is the focus of the events. In fact, he appears nearly in every scene in the novel. However, at the beginning of the novel, he does not appear to be an element of natural harmony, but an element of contrast, confusion and estrangement. This appears in his relations with the people around him in society.

The qualities that the author attributes to Zein, and his description of him as a queer person, especially regarding his connection with supernatural powers, remind us of the heroes of myths and legends. Probably, the author saw in Zein the truest medium to reflect the features of the typical Sudanese.

#### **4. Zein's Wedding Ceremony**

With the spread of the news about Zein's wedding ceremony and his niece Ne'meh, a surprise takes place, and the people of the village started to pass the news on, but none of them believed it. They wondered how such a person like Zein with such an appearance can fall in love. No one can believe he can get married, unless it is a miracle! People forgot that he is made of blood and flesh, like the rest of the people, and he can have feelings like them even if his appearance is ugly. Some of them wondered if such a simple ugly and strange creature can have similar feelings to theirs! Can his heart beat with love like the others?

"Amina did not believe what she heard, and she asked Halima the milkmaid for the tenth time: This boy is going to marry?" (P. 41). When the school headmaster heard about the news, the signs of surprise and puzzle appeared on his face: "the headmaster's jaw fell down of surprise, and al-Tarifi was saved" (P. 6). He said that it was a great miracle, "and the headmaster arrived at the shop of Sheikh Ali in the market, breathless and with a dry throat, and said to the headmaster: but the great miracle is Zein's wedding" (P. 88-89).

It seems that the school headmaster was also thinking about getting married to Ne'meh. Therefore, "he took advantage of her father's slight sickness as an excuse to visit him. Fortunately, he found him. After a short superficial conversation about the prices of the wheat and the school conditions, the headmaster immediately asked for Ne'meh's hand from her father" (P. 90-91), but he failed to achieve his goal, and was disappointed.

"The village was divided into distinct camps" (P. 97) till the day of Zein's wedding. It turned the situation upside down and caused the required change among the members of the same society, and the same people, and to take them away from hatred and separation.

At the end of the novel, Zein becomes an element of combination and unity as this appears in his wedding ceremony. Zein's character turns out to be different from what most of the people thought. At his wedding party, all the people gathered. An atmosphere of joy, love and peace prevailed in their best images in a magnificent

party that combined the different colors of the Japanese spectrum. It looked like a national compromise, which made one of the singers sing in her exciting and touching voice:

"O My tongue, speak and bring praise in cups

The handsome Zein filled the village with joys" (P. 121)

At the end, this character that has no value among many people turns out to be the central one and the hero of the novel. All the people, old and young, men and women, boys and girls, religious and secular, attended Zein's wedding. Trill shrilled till the narrator said:" This is the daughter of Abdullah... this is Salamah...this is Aminah,... this is Oshmana the deaf, .. and then a torch of trilling was raised at the house of Haj Ibrahim. About two hundred voices called together so that the windows of the house shuddered," (P. 117-118). This scene did not take place before.

Men from all parts and sides came to attend Zein's wedding, "and the foundations of the neighborhoods swayed and the houses were filled with visitors; every house hosted a group of people. The house of Haj Ibrahim was filled, despite its big capacity; the houses of Mahjoub, Abdul Hafiz, Said and Ahmad Ismael, al-Taher al-Rawasi, Hamad wad al-Rayyis, al-Nazir, the Mayor, the Law Judge, were filled as well. Sheikh Ali said to Haj Abdul Samad: I haven't seen such a wedding since God created me!" (P. 118).

True, neither the village nor society has seen such a wedding in their history! We will not be far from the truth if we say that the scene of Zein's wedding is one of the best picturesque paintings in the novel, if not the best!

Neither differences nor contrasts or disagreements affected or prevented the society of the village, and ultimately the Sudanese society, from integration and melting in such a happy occasion, which is Zein's wedding, where "the opposites of those days gathered together. The odalisques of the oasis sang and danced in front of the Imam. The sheikhs were praying the Kuran at a certain house, and the odalisques were singing in another house; the ballad-mongers were beating their drums at a certain house, and the young people were drinking in another. It was a party that



The Bible's tablets, and the Koran book

I believe in the book of love wherever its horses went

As love is my religion and belief!

The end of the novel of *The Wedding of Zein* constitutes a wonderful festival of national compromise, taking into consideration the uniqueness of the social Sudanese texture, where the spirit of tolerance, love and solidarity overcome the spirit of hatred, separation and conflict.

### 5. The Sudanese Village

Though the author concentrates on the events of the novel around the central character Zein, he does not ignore the setting of the novel, which is the Sudanese village. He describes it as it is in reality, including its pluralistic and multicultural structure, which is at the heart of the Sudanese reality.

The reader notices that the author kept most of the characters in the shadow, except for Zein, the protagonist. His intention is not to develop them so that they reach the degree of real heroes. He does not want them to take a more important role than Zein's or the Sudanese village. The author shows great interest in describing the Sudanese village, which means that the village is a parallel hero with Zein, the main hero, and its role is not less important than the hero's. The author points out the change that has taken place on both of them. "Tayyib Saleh employs the diversion from the familiar in his life as a parallel with the diversion of the Sudanese village from the familiar in its daily life. It seems that through the experiences that changed the state of life, Zein expresses in the novel the change that the people of his village experienced."<sup>6</sup>

The village lived a primitive life, and in spite of that, its people showed happiness, satisfaction, and content. He does not mention the name of the village in the novel,

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<sup>6</sup> Al-Riyahi, Najwa, *al-Lugha al-Sardiyyah Baina al-Waqi wa al-Ustoorah. Madkhal Ila Ors al-Zein (Narrative Language between Reality and Myth: an Introduction to the Study of The Wedding of Zein)*, *al-Majallah al-Arabiyyah Li al-Thaqafa*. Issue 30, P. 168. Cairo, 1996.

but he refers to it as a village that extends between the Nile on one side, and the desert on the other, saying: "The chest of the Nile swells... and the water flows on its two banks, covering the planted land till it reaches the edge of the desert at the bottom of the houses," (P. 47) which reminds us of all Sudan from the beginning to the end. "The village is Sudan itself with its disharmonious tribes, the nomadic and the settling in Hollaba and Zanja, and their different Arabs in their conflicting and fighting classes, and its imported or inherited cultures, whether Sufi or secular."<sup>7</sup>

The author introduces a realistic picture of the ordinary life in that Sudanese village, making it a typical one, not only for the Sudanese villages, but probably for all the villages and rural areas in the other Arab countries. Through the village, the author introduces the society of *The Wedding of Zein* with its various components, traditions, customs, beliefs, concerns, relations, and cares of everyday life, and among its individuals and numerous social strata. The characters of the novel do not seem to be living in social, economic or class conflicts, but the essential conflict is the conflict of the village towards development and openness.

## 6. The Two Faces of the Village

The village has two faces: realistic and mythical. The reader notices that in some parts of Zein's village, there is a spirit of myths and Sufism. What helped to promote such atmosphere is the fertile land that Tayyib Saleh created so that such spirit would grow and live. The majority of the citizens of the village do not have a rebellious village against that reality. In fact, there is a submissive belief in supernatural hidden powers that control matters, and lead their life. However, the calls of the Sufis constitute the urgent motive that pushes them to acceptance and response. Since these calls were responded mostly, or that is what they thought, the people gave special respect to the Sufis and God's holy guards, and believed that God granted them the power to make miracles, and blessings thanks to the call of Hanin; "the supernatural miracles occurred one after the other in a fascinating way.

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<sup>7</sup> A Group of Writers: Tayyib Saleh, *the Genius of the Arab Novel*. P. 187. Dar al-Awdah, Beirut, 1976.

The village did not see in its life a prosperous and blessed year, like (Hanin's year!), as they came to call it" (P. 81).

The people of the village looked at the approaching process of development and change as a miracle that human beings have no hand in. In their opinion, it is a blessing from the blessed Sufi Hanin or one of his extraordinary deeds. The people exaggerate in their love, respect and admiration of him. In their opinion, it is Hanin who developed their village, and not the government that comes from the city. They were sure that Hanin had supernatural powers and can make extraordinary deeds. They believe in him and his deeds and they have nothing to do but accept and submit. The good deeds that took place in their society were attributed to Hanin, and they believed that they have no right to refuse the coming development because it is predestined by powerful and supernatural powers. They cannot resist and have no will to do that, because their resistance can anger those hidden powers and consequently the powers' curse can fall on them!

The supernatural, metaphysical, and mythical thought, where Sufism prevails, found a fertile land in Zein's village and society. This resulted from the accumulating cultural historical heritage during hundreds of years, which was difficult for the author to ignore, deny or skip. The atmosphere was pregnant with echoes of the blessings of miracles and extraordinary deeds besides the spiritual Sufis, which lasted also for many years.

The reader senses that this reality is reflected in Hanin's name, which implies 'yearning to the past', as the Arabic name means. It is a yearning to the traditional heritage. In this way, Hanin's character becomes an embodiment of the heritage of the village. We will not be exaggerating if we say that, for the people of Zein's village, Hanin is the first messenger of the hidden higher supernatural powers, who has a spiritual power that can cause miracles and extraordinary deeds. The myth and the absurd or the unreasonable are represented in the novel through the character of Zein. Here, the unreasonable or the absurd with all that it includes of myths, legends and miracles, approaches the reasonable, and all that it includes of the atmospheres of development and change that took place under the influence of

openness and modernism. This meeting between the reasonable and the unreasonable achieves compromise and reconciliation in the shade of the overwhelming joy of the wedding party.

The novel moves along two parallel lines that are artistically drawn together by the author Tayyib Saleh, "the son of the cultural and the ethnic mixture of the African and the Arab elements.- Sudan,"<sup>8</sup> who managed to make these two lines meet in the best possible atmosphere of reconciliation, love and happiness at the festival of Zein's wedding. One line is realistic, and it reflects the realistic life of the people; the other line is mythical, and it reflects the unconsciousness of the people of the village, and their absolute belief in the absurd or the unreasonable, like the Imam and his group.

This reality caused division between the people of the village, "and the village was divided into clear camps in the face of the Imam" (P. 97), which resulted in three main camps:

*The first camp* was under the control of the Imam, "who has no other job than reminding the people of death" (P. 96-98).

*The second camp* is mostly formed of "young men below twenty, and is antagonistic to the Imam openly. Some of them are school pupils, some travelled and returned, and some feel in anyway the flow of life hot and strong in their blood; they do not care of a man whose profession is to remind people of death. This was the team of the adventurers – some of them drink wine secretly, and stay secretly at the oasis at the end of the desert" (P. 98). These are a group of pioneering young men; they are educated and rebellious youths, who travelled to the city and were influenced by it, and by what happened through communications, and engagement in trade; and the young people who came to the city to look for education and work, or through coming frequently to the city looking for its temptations, or its attractive cultural landmarks. These young people were known

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<sup>8</sup> Saleh, Tayyib, *The Complete Works. Introduction*; by Amad Saeid Mohammadiyyeh Dar al-Awdah. Beirut. (n.d.)

as frivolous, who do not care for the past that the people of the village respect neither do they respect anything of the spiritual heritage. They feel that life is a streaming flow of continuity and progress. In short, these young people want to rebel against their reality. Among them, there was "the group of the educated people, who read or heard about dialectic materialism" (P. 98), which influenced them and made it their cultural resources, and their authority in their principles and behavior.

The third camp is the camp that the narrator calls: "Mahjoub's Team," who constitute the most valuable group. These are seven young men, who have wisdom, mind, and far sight. They are 'Mahjoub, Abdul Hafiz, al-Taher al-Rawasi, Abdul Samad, Hamad Wad al-Rayes, Ahmad Ismael, and Saied" (P. 98). These people made every effort to develop their country and its openness to what is going on around it. They have authority over the village, and thanks to them, "there were schools, a hospital, and an agricultural project, as they are the undertakers and the supervisors, and the responsible committee for everything" (P. 99). They have achieved actual power in the village; "these are the men of actual influence in the village," (P. 98). One day, the inspector said to some people that "Mahjoub's gang" controls everything in the village" (P. 109).

On the other hand, the other end of the Sudanese equation appears. The events accelerated stirring what had been silent, and what has to be done, which is the contact with the city, and openness towards the outside.

The wind of change started blowing on the Sudanese society as a whole in that period of national independence. What had been expected took place. The Sudanese village carried in its womb the seeds of change, whose idea soon crystallized, and the new birth has taken place and come out to life to confirm that nobody can stand in the face of culture and civilization or stop it.

Even Zein himself could not hide his feelings of wonder and fascination after he had returned from the city of Marwa, where he had been treated medically. "Zein was a team of himself" (P. 100). The narrator says, "and when Zein returned from the hospital in Marwa, where he stayed for two weeks, his face was clean and

shining; his clothes were white and bright... He would tell them what happened to him: The moment I arrived, they took off my dresses, and gave me clean ones to dress. The bed was white. The curtains were like milk. The shoes slip on the floor." (P. 61-62).

In conclusion, we can say that Tayyib Saleh exposes a project of development, which was at its beginning stages. The value of the actual participation of the people of all social layers appears clearly in this project. Its success lies in its achievement of real national compromise, which was crowned by Zin's wedding. The purpose of the project is to lead to the development and awakening of the Sudanese society so that it will become a real modern society.

The new culture puts its weight on the ancient heritage of the village. The idea succeeded and was achieved at Zein's wedding, which constituted a wonderful opportunity for national reconciliation, and turned into a national and typical festival, and set an example that should be followed by everyone.

Thus, we can say that the author sought to make compromise and achieve reconciliation between people who are still raising the slogan of "the present of the past," from which they are unable to disconnect themselves, and others, who raise the slogan of "the present of the present"; which is the reconciliation between traditionalism and modernism. Indeed, he succeeded in that perfectly!

Finally, it is not far from the truth to argue that the author expressed the idea of the possibility of achieving success in developing and modernizing the village, not only in the Sudanese society, but in the Arab society at large.

تلخيص:

على الرغم من مرور ما يزيد على أربعة عقود من الزمن على نشر رواية ((عرس الزين))، فإنها ما تزال جديرة بأكثر من قراءة متأنية وسابرة. قراءة لا تكتفي بالمعنى وإنما تبحث عن معنى المعنى، لما قد تحتوي عليه في طياتها من جدة وطرافة، تُلمح للقارئ بأنها رواية ذات نص متوهج، يمكنه من استقبال غير قراءة منتجة مضيئة.

رواية ((عرس الزين)) نقطة الانطلاق والبداية إلى الداخل؛ داخل الذات السودانية شوقاً إلى تحقيق المصالحة بين الأصالة بما حملت في أعطافها من موروث روحاني وثقافي، والمعاصرة بما حملت من انفتاح وتطور وحداثة.

وإذا كانت رواية ((عرس الزين)) تعدّ رحلة الانطلاق إلى الداخل، فإن رواية ((موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال)) تعدّ رحلة الانطلاق إلى الخارج؛ خارج الذات السودانية، لتصوير اللقاء مع الآخر المختلف، لقاء الحضارة الشرقية مع الحضارة الغربية، هناك في عقردارها، ومن ثم العودة إلى أرض الوطن. ((عرس الزين)) كانت قد سبقت رواية أخرى إلى النشر، هي رواية ((موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال)) بهذا المعنى، أجاب الطيب صالح نفسه عن أحد الأسئلة التي وُجّهت له ذات مرة قائلاً: "ولكني بدأت ((الموسم)) من حيث أنتهي في ((عرس الزين))!"

يسعى الكاتب، في ما يبدو، إلى التوفيق بين أناس ما زالوا يرفعون شعار ((حاضر الماضي)) الذي يصعب عليهم الفكك من إساره، وآخرين يرفعون شعار ((حاضر الحاضر))، إنها محاولة للتوفيق بين الأصالة والمعاصرة، وبالفعل، فقد نجح الكاتب في التوفيق بينهما أيما نجاح!