

The Aesthetics of the Diversity of Narrative Forms within the Novelistic Space in the Novels of Ahmed Mourad



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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the aesthetics of the diversity of narrative forms in the novels of Ahmed Mourad, through analyzing patterns of narrative discourse represented in narrated discourse, reported discourse, and presented discourse, and clarifying their artistic and aesthetic functions within the novelistic text. The study proceeds from the premise that the novel constitutes a space in which voices intersect and modes of expression multiply, thereby contributing to the formation of a rich and ever-renewed narrative structure.

The study reveals that narrated discourse serves as the fundamental basis for presenting events, describing settings, analyzing characters, and linking different temporalities. Reported discourse, on the other hand, performs the function of condensation and abbreviation, aiding in accelerating the narrative pace and preserving the coherence of the narrative structure. Presented discourse contributes to infusing vitality and realism into events, thereby enhancing the dramatic and interactive dimension within the novel.

Keywords: narrative forms, aesthetics of narration, narrated discourse, reported discourse, presented discourse, Ahmed Mourad, narrative structure.

Introduction:

The contemporary Arabic novel has witnessed profound artistic and aesthetic transformations, manifested in the embodiment of narrative techniques and the development of methods for constructing the fictional world, in ways that align with the social and cultural transformations

experienced by Arab reality. Among the prominent figures in this context is Ahmed Mourad, who stands out as one of the leading novelists capable of employing modern narrative tools to craft engaging fictional texts that combine artistic depth with wide popular appeal.

Ahmed Mourad's works are distinguished by the richness and interaction of narrative forms within a diverse novelistic space, granting his texts a distinctive character that merges the literary dimension with a visual, cinematic one. This technique does not function as a separate tool or an isolated formal element; rather, it interacts within the narrative fabric to contribute to the construction of a rich novelistic space, where all narrative elements intertwine. From this perspective, the present study seeks to uncover the aesthetics of the diversity of narrative forms in Ahmed Mourad's novels, considering them as part of the trajectory of the contemporary Arabic novel.

Approaching narrative forms within the framework of the novelistic space establishes relationships shaped by discursive construction, whose diversity is governed by the manner of their formation. It is not possible to achieve a complete analysis of language in isolation from the boundaries of this marked diversity, since restricting narration to a single form limits its aesthetic richness. As Said Yaqtin notes: "In defining the form, I find myself starting from Todorov's definition, where he sees it as related to the way in which the narrator presents the story to us. This definition parallels the other components in defining it (time, perspective, and voice)"

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Through the world of Ahmed Mourad, language is transformed via narrative forms into a semiotic given and a stimulating element charged with semantic intensity, through which events transcend the written textual reality toward a visionary, imaginative narrative perspective, mediated by the communicative link between narrator and receiver.

Thus, "form, in its variations (presentation and narration), is indispensable to any narrative work. These two stylistic modes (presentation and narration) do not exist independently or separately within narrative discourse; rather, they are subject to states of succession or interpenetration, depending on the narrator's position and the nature of the narrative perspective" ²

1.The Aesthetics of Narrated Discourse:

Narrated discourse constitutes the broadest domain within the novel, through which the narrator presents events, describes settings, analyzes characters, and connects different temporalities. It is defined as "the discourse transmitted by a speaker who maintains a certain distance from what is

being said, addressing a narratee, whether this recipient is direct (a character) or the narratee of the entire narrative discourse”³

Through narrated discourse, Ahmed Mourad works on presenting the narrator’s rendering of characters’ thoughts rather than their spoken words. This is evident in numerous instances throughout his novels. An example can be found in the narrator’s voice in the novel 1919:

“It was his habit that things would not take more than a few days...

But this time the threads grew tangled and intertwined... wrapping around his neck...

restraining him... slowly strangling him... He does not love... for love is an illusion and has no existence...

glory to the body that conquers and prevails, then its flame fades temporarily,

and with it the fiercest states of passion subside... sex is always the driving force...”⁴

Here, the narrator employs the narration of events as a narrative mechanism, addressing the narratee throughout the novel. This is exemplified in this narrative scene, where he frames the details of “Abdelkader,” taking pleasure in capturing his character and tracing its finest nuances, which acquire a spatial dimension that dominates feelings and sensations, reflecting them in a clearly structured narrative form. As “Abdelkader” is a central character, he contributes to the unfolding of the narrative imagination and linguistic creativity. There is no doubt that narrated discourse here, through its representations, plays a crucial role in recording highly significant events in all their detailed and minute aspects especially since the language of the novel aligns with a stream of spatial consciousness, accompanying the present with its space that imposes isolation, fragmentation, and boredom upon the character, while also evoking the past through documented events scattered across the narrative atmosphere. For “it is through language that characters speak, events intensify, the environment becomes clear, and the reader comes to understand the nature of the experience expressed by the writer”⁵

Narrated discourse occupies a wide space in Ahmed Mourad’s novels. We observe that the narrator relies on it in passages that captivate the reader through vivid scenic tableaux, inviting them into their theatrical space and allowing them to savor a style rich in aesthetic value. This is because language becomes a pretext in his novelistic writing for articulating the hidden, leaving to the reader the task of analysis and interpretation, as illustrated in the following narrative scene:

“After two weeks, the walls rose higher, and the trees merged together, defying their eyes.

Among the branches, modern surveillance cameras peered in every direction.

No one managed to pass the gate not even with a glance, not even Hussein with his revealing glasses.

Rumors circulated about the owner of the villa.”⁶

In this scene, the specificity of language emerges as an essential necessity in its use, undertaken by the narrator as he describes the place inhabited by “Bergas,” suggesting a narrated discourse charged with declarative force. While recounting a sequence of historical events, the narrator inserts this scene as a qualitative shift, detailing its closure and mystery one that no one could penetrate, not even visually. Here, narrative forms are shaped within the novelistic discourse through the retrieval of memories unearthed by “Taha,” who presents his intellectual and linguistic reservoir as the central character in *Diamond Dust*. The narrator thus relinquishes part of his discursive authority in a manner that parallels the merging of the narrating character who documents both technical and aesthetic details through narrative activity. The distinction emerges through the multiplicity of narrative forms in the structure of discursive language, achieved by “fragmenting conventional narrative threads and presenting a number of units, scenes, and initial structures, each incapable of forming a narrative substance on its own, and whose juxtaposition also fails to form a coherent story due to their independence and divergence into different directions”⁷

2.The Aesthetics of Reported Discourse:

Reported discourse is the form in which the narrator intervenes to convey the speech of characters in his own style, condensing or reshaping it. The importance of this technique in Ahmed Mourad’s novels becomes evident when the narrative requires acceleration or seeks to avoid lengthy dialogue. This type of discourse takes shape within Mourad’s fictional world in two ways: first, by conveying the characters’ speech verbatim; and second, by granting these characters the opportunity to express themselves through dialogue. As it has been noted, “the speaker does not merely inform the recipient of something through narration or presentation, but also transmits the speech of others, whether narratively or dramatically; through this mode, we are confronted with a second speaker conveying the words of a first speaker”⁸

We perceive the presence of the second aspect in the novel *The Blue Elephant*, when “Sherif” engages in dialogue with “Dr. Sameh,” influenced by a psychological disorder within a mental hospital, saying:

–“ Why are you confessing to me?

– Because he threatened to kill me when I told him I couldn’t let him marry my sister...

because she’s already married! Yehia has gone mad... he would do it... he’ll kill me because there’s a vendetta

ever since I refused to let him marry her... I’m dead either way...

Here I stopped the recording... I needed to process what I had just heard...”⁹

The speech of “Sherif,” as a psychiatric patient who is originally a psychiatrist operates on linguistic levels grounded in an intense spatial memory that connects him with his friend “Yehia.” It unfolds through explicit rhetorical forms that propel the event forward. Thus, narrative language becomes “a linguistic expression fundamentally based on achieving a mental relationship between words, rather than relying on rhythmic or formal relations”¹⁰. The intentional evocation of character dialogue signals an underlying meaning embedded within the forms of reported discourse, transforming into an indicator capable of generating narrative dynamism through extended dialogues. According to Abdelmalek Murtad, an excess of dialogue may lead to a disruption of linguistic aesthetics, a loss of linguistic positioning, and an evasion of complex situations that require analysis and description¹¹

Ahmed Mourad generally presents dialogue through an expansive language that reflects his narrative world, occupying a significant portion of his narrative discourse especially when he grants a particular character a larger share of speech. This is illustrated in the narrator’s account:

–“ Is this your first time seeing the Sultan in real life?

Ahmed snapped out of his reverie: Yes... first time... I didn’t imagine he’d be so short... he looks taller in pictures.

– My father says he’s very intelligent... and very knowledgeable in finance.

– Reaching the throne doesn’t require intelligence... it requires blue blood.

– Do you hate him?

– Can anyone hate the Sultan? he said sarcastically.

She whispered: I don't like him... but I think the blame should fall on the English...

they're the ones who put him on the throne.”¹²

The narrator and behind him, the author avoids marginalizing the functions of characters. In this narrative scene, however, we observe the presence of “Abdelkader” alongside “Nazli,” whose refined language dominates. Their dialogue extends over several consecutive pages without interruption, giving “Nazli” greater space to speak, allowing her to recount events and clarify details unknown to “Abdelkader,” who assumes the role of a receptive listener, yielding to the conventions of dialogue. The narrator undertakes the task of transmitting the exchange between characters while clothing narrative language with markers of class distinction between them. This aims to reflect a lived reality from the perspective of the general class represented by “Abdelkader,” and the bourgeois viewpoint conveyed through “Nazli's” language. Such a technique strengthens the semantic dimension within the narrative discourse and grants narrative language an artistic depth, since “language possesses characteristics and tools, among the most important of which are conveying intent and transmitting the state one seeks to express”¹³

3.The Aesthetics of Presented Discourse:

Presented discourse is among the most prevalent forms in Ahmed Mourad's novels, owing to its ability to animate the narrative scene and allow characters to express themselves directly. This is evident through the intensive dialogues that reveal the tense relationships between characters. In this type of discourse, “the speaker addresses a direct recipient, and they exchange speech without the narrator's intervention; this is what Genette terms “immédiat”, which he considers a variation of reported discourse”¹⁴. “Moreover, the narrator presents all the characters' utterances without interfering in them, since this discourse is generally related with the subjective aspect of language, although this subjectivity sometimes recedes when the information appears as if it were issued by the fictional character”¹⁵. An example of this appears in the narrator's statement:

“He entered through the door, heading straight to his room: Good morning.

He tossed it hurriedly, as if it would cost him time and money... He entered his office and shut the door audibly... This was not strange... everyone in the office was used to that behavior... He was harsh, merciless... tireless, as if he were the devil himself

in his monotonous routine... His intensity had escalated recently...”¹⁶

What we observe in this narrative scene is the narrator’s use of a direct style of storytelling, presenting a discourse that maintains the unveiling of both the words and actions performed by “Galal Morsi,” even pointing to his slight speech defect. This technique, adopted by the narrator, produces a unique linguistic flavor that establishes a relationship among the characters, dominated by a dialectical form that results in an ongoing dialogue with the narrator, who remains the central point in the novel. Furthermore, “it is impossible to conceive of a story without actions, and impossible to conceive of actions without characters”¹⁷. Thus, one of the most important aspects of narrative construction lies in the presence of characters and the way they interact. In presented discourse, characters acquire a status within narrative forms that grants them intellectual and cultural referentiality, as seen in the novel *Vertigo*, where the narrator and behind him the author is compelled to allow characters to participate in distributing speech and actions that contribute to expressing Egyptian identity and shaping both stable and evolving spatial representations over a given period.

The form of presented discourse is clearly evident in the dialogue between “Dawlat” and “Abdelkader” in the novel *1919*, as illustrated in the following narrative scene:

“She looked at him in a way that made him bury the photograph between his fingers... Silence prevailed

before he added: I was following you yesterday.

– I know.

– Why are you pushing me away?

... –

– Do you have a vendetta in your hometown?

... –

– Aren’t we in the same boat? We’re supposed to...

She interrupted him: You’re supposed to listen and do as Ahmed Effendi

said... we do our job, nothing more.”¹⁸

This scene, through its discourse, embodies the form of presentation, as “Abdelkader” directly addresses “Dawlat,” attempting to inquire whether she is bound by a vendetta. After he had elaborately displayed his car and even the machine gun he tried to boast about, these appeared to her as entirely unimpressive, which led to his frustration and prompted him to shift the subject. The narrator seeks to present their exchange in a way that propels the narrative toward a turn that captures the reader’s attention from the outset. Through this presented form, the ideas and perceptions of both characters are conveyed by blending the internal and external narratee. Presentation thus becomes an essential means of expressing the novel’s content, where the dominant factor lies in the space of presentation itself, which implicitly absorbs the role of discourse and merges it with the characters in accordance with discursive norms.

The dominance of speaker and recipient within presented discourse refers us back to narration that relies on a phenomenon completed through the presence of the narrator, who functions as the dynamic and essential coordinator within the narrative structure. This is clearly evident in the novel *The Blue Elephant*, as seen in the following narrative scene:

- “ This whole thing ended before it even began...
- The way you talk about her says it didn’t... don’t you see yourself...
- Maya, you’re drunk...
- I’m not drunk...
- You are... but I won’t lie to you, when I saw her, I got a bit confused...”¹⁹

Presented discourse emerges in the dialogue between “Yehia” and “Maya,” accompanied by scenic elements that construct a tense moment revolving around the presence or implied recall of “Lubna,” reintroducing past events through flashbacks that immerse the reader in overlapping scenes. In this passage, events are revisited through Yehia’s encounter with Lubna, a meeting that continues to dominate the protagonist’s imagination. Here, the discourse is directed toward the internal narratee represented by “Maya,” leading to a convergence of narrative voices. The narrator begins to dramatize and present events through the juxtaposition of characters and narrative thresholds, aligning them with the blurred ideas characteristic of novelistic creativity.

The presence of presented discourse in Ahmed Mourad’s fictional world necessitates the use of a direct and explicit style within the narrative field. This is a mode from which the author cannot detach himself during the creative process, as it lends the narrative a sense of credibility and realism

in what it offers the reader. Furthermore, this type of discourse involves characters in the production of the narrative, without neglecting the subtle, almost magical touch of the narrator in shaping discourse even in the smallest effects and details as he accompanies the characters in both their speech and actions.

Conclusion:

The study of the aesthetics of the diversity of narrative forms in Ahmed Mourad's novels demonstrates that the author has achieved a clear artistic distinction through his skillful employment of various modes of narrative discourse namely narrated discourse, reported discourse, and presented discourse. These forms do not appear as isolated formal elements; rather, they are harmoniously integrated within the novelistic structure, performing aesthetic and semantic functions that enrich the text and deepen its impact on the reader.

The alternation between these narrative forms contributes to the creation of a balanced rhythm that combines movement and stillness, as well as dramatic tension and psychological interpretation. It also helps shape a vibrant novelistic space in which times, places, and human situations intersect. In this regard, the جمال of Ahmed Mourad's novelistic writing lies in his ability to transition smoothly between different discourses in a way that sustains the reader's engagement and preserves narrative suspense.

Accordingly, it can be argued that the diversity of narrative forms in Ahmed Mourad's novels constitutes one of the most significant factors behind his artistic success. It enables narrative discourse to function as a flexible tool capable of representing reality, probing the inner self, and constructing narrative worlds that combine aesthetic pleasure with artistic quality thereby consolidating his position among the leading contemporary Arab novelists.

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