

Narrative Analysis of the Novel, *the Beggar*, by Naguib Mahfouz

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Received 4 August 2014

Accepted 20 May 2015

Extended Abstract

1- Introduction

The present article is a narrative reading of the novel, *The Beggar*, by Naguib Mahfouz. The main narrative elements of this novel including point of view, focalization, method of presenting dialogues and thoughts, title, description, simile, time (time of narration and commencement of the novel), and place are analyzed. *The Beggar* is one of the masterpieces of Naguib Mahfouz, the eminent Egyptian writer. Usage of modern story writing techniques, polyphony, etc., have turned this novel into a clear reflection of the third stage of Naguib Mahfouz's literary life, mostly considered as philosophical realism or a semi-psychological stage. In this novel, objectivity and realism, as the main characteristics of the first stage of Mahfouz's literary trajectory, are supplanted by subjectivity and abstractionism. Many of Arabic literary analysts and critics have divided Mahfouz's literary life into four different stages: historical stage (1939-1944), critical realism stage (1945-1957), philosophical realism stage (1961-1967), and finally the stage of return to critical realism (1972 until the end of his life). *The Beggar*, which we aim to analyze here in terms of narration and semiotics, has been penned during Naguib Mahfouz's philosophical-realism stage, a stage which also includes many of his masterpieces such as *the Thief and the Dogs*, *Miramar*, and *Children of Gebelawi*. Many features can be mentioned for this stage, the most salient of which can be the author's digression from objectivity and realism and his inclination toward subjectivity and abstractionism. Although all these important features are discernible in all the novels of philosophical realism stage, undoubtedly, its embodiment and epitome is to be found in *The Beggar*. The present study shows how this crucial feature has emerged in all the elements and narrative techniques of *The Beggar*, including title, narration, time, and place.

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2- Point of View

The Beggar is narrated from three different points of view; hence there is a multiplicity of narrators. Some parts of this novel are narrated from a third person point of view. The next point of view is that of first person which comprises a considerable portion of the novel. This point of view takes various forms in the novel such as first person singular which is used to explicate Omar's inner crisis and commotion, in a naked and nude way. Obviously, no one can express this crisis for the audience as well as the character himself. The second one is monologue, where in fact Omar is talking to himself. In this type of narration, he addresses himself. This type of narration reveals another aspect of Omar's psyche for the reader. The third point of view is the first person plural which expands the realm of Omar's psyche, transforming it from a singular I to a plural I. Another point of view is the second person which is in fact a fusion of the third person and monologue. In this type of narration, the author, one way or another, addresses the reader. In fact, the author asks the reader to step into the character's shoes and interact with the narration.

3- Focalization

Focalization in *The Beggar* takes two different forms, among which the author has created a relative balance: zero focalization and internal focalization. In parts of the novel, the narrator takes an overhead vision; thus zero focalization reigns over the narrative. But, not before long, this type of focalization is replaced by internal focalization. In this type of focalization that, usually, materializes in inner monologues of the main character, narrator's point of view accompanies the character. Concerning the way of presenting speeches and thoughts, it should be mentioned that direct, free presentation of thoughts along with pure narration are more frequent in *The Beggar*, the former corresponding with internal focalization and the latter with zero focalization. However, another salient narrative point discernible in *The Beggar* is its polyphonic feature, compared to Mahfouz's previous novels, specifically in the critical realism stage. In fact, *The Beggar* can be taken as a perfect example of a polyphonic novel, a notion propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin in his dialogism.

4- Title

The Beggar, regardless of being a set of words, has many connotations within itself which become clear as the reader pores over the novel. It is a description of the protagonist (Omar al-Hamzawi) or the bourgeoisie class during the 60s in Egypt, to which Omar al-Hamzawi belongs. A class divest of its past (especially in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century, which had a pivotal role in 1919 revolution and anticolonial movements) aspirations, zest, and gusto, and then, having been drowned in the superficiality of life, in seeking what it has missed.

Commencement of the Novel

Naguib Mahfouz, by presenting a digressing and technical beginning, induces the two mentioned functions—giving information and creating incentive—in the best possible form into his work. To achieve this, he has used a narrative technique known as *mise en abyme*.

4-1- Description

It is known that usually description in a novel is presented either through objective description or expressionistic description. Taking a brief glance at *The Beggar* we can realize that the preponderance of the descriptions used in this novel is of the latter type, while in the novels pertaining to the second stage of Naguib Mahfouz's literary life (critical realism) objective description is absolutely dominant.

5- Place

Contrary to the previous novels, the majority of places in *The Beggar* are confined places such as a doctor's office, Omar al-Hamzawi's house, his workplace, a cabaret, a new apartment, a house on the outskirts of the city ,etc., which are more commensurate with the protagonist's mental and psychological crisis and lend a lot of strength to the abstract aspect of the novel.

6- Time

Concerning the element of time, what distinguishes this novel from not only the novel of the critical realism stage, but also from other novels of his philosophical realism stage (e.g., *the Thief and the Dogs*) is the entwining of past and present in an abstract, non-objective process, materializing in Omar's monologues.

Key word: Naghib Mahfouz, Philosophic. Realism, Beggar(AL shahaz), Narrative Study.

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