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Narrative Poetics in Ahmed Menour's Novel "The Prince Returns at Midnight"

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***Abstract*—**This study examines narrative poetics in *Ahmed Menour*'s novel The Prince Returns at Midnight. It first defines poetics and narrative before explaining their relationship within literary discourse. The analysis addresses the novel's morphological, syntactic, and semantic structures.

At the morphological level, present-tense verbs occur more frequently than past-tense verbs and nouns. This verbal predominance creates immediacy, continuity, movement, and narrative suspense. Proper names, particularly those referring to locations in Algiers, establish the novel's geographical, social, and historical setting.

At the syntactic level, verbal sentences dominate nominal sentences, reinforcing the dynamic progression of events. Declarative constructions prevail, while questions and exclamations reveal the characters' emotions and psychological states.

The semantic analysis identifies restrained figurative imagery, colloquial expressions, and Qur'anic intertextuality.

The study concludes that the novel's poetic quality arises from the interaction of its linguistic structures, narrative techniques, imagery, and intertextual references.

***Keywords*—**Narrative poetics; Morphology; Syntax; Figurative imagery; Intertextuality...

Introduction

This study examines narrative poetics in *Ahmed Menour*'s novel "*The Prince Returns at Midnight*". It identifies the aesthetic features that shape the work's narrative poetics by analysing three levels: morphology, syntax, and semantics.

At the morphological level, it considers verbs, nouns, and adjectives in order to determine which lexical categories predominate.

At the syntactic level, it examines verbal and nominal sentences, as well as declarative and non-declarative constructions and the ways in which they interact. At the semantic level, it explores the novelist's use of imagery and intertextuality as means of enriching the novel's narrative poetics.

Finally, we'll examine how Ahmed Menour creates a poetic mode of narration in "The Prince Returns at Midnight". It approaches the novel through morphology, syntax, and semantics: first by identifying the dominant word classes, then by comparing sentence patterns and modes of utterance, and finally by assessing figurative language and intertextual reference. The aim is to show how these linguistic choices work together to produce the novel's aesthetic effect.

The Concept of Poetics

Poetics emerged with *Aristotle*, whose study of literary genres sought to identify the features distinguishing one genre from another. His distinction between the literary and the non-literary rested on mimesis—its kinds,

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degrees, and means—and he regarded literary imitation as fundamentally concerned with human conduct and action rather than with persons in isolation.

Poetic theories continued to develop through the Renaissance and Romantic periods before taking modern form in the work of Roman *Jakobson*, *Tzvetan Todorov*, and others. Unlike *Aristotle*'s genre-centred approach, contemporary poetics investigates literariness and the principles that distinguish literature from other forms of linguistic discourse.

Modern critical theory, especially Russian Formalism, turned attention toward the internal structure of the text and away from external historical, social, biographical, and psychological contexts. In this view, poetics names the laws governing literary discourse (Nadhim, 1994, p.5).

Earlier poetics often concentrated on verse, whereas modern poetics does not draw an essential boundary between poetry and prose. Its concern is literature as literary discourse, distinguished from philosophical, religious, and political discourse.

In *Jakobson*'s formulation, its object is not the interpretation of individual texts but the quality that makes a verbal work literary—its literariness (Newton, 1996, p.140). Poetics aspires to scientific status and relies on descriptive methods, yet it differs from linguistics: linguistics takes language as its object, while poetics studies discourse (Zitouni, 2002, p.151).

Literary discourse certainly depends on language, but it uses language in a distinctive way. It departs from ordinary usage through deviation, reshaping expression for artistic and aesthetic ends. Literary language therefore does more than convey ideas or persuade; it also gives pleasure.

Poetics investigates the possible and the probable because literary language is imaginative: it reaches beyond the visible toward the unseen. Literature treats not merely what exists, but what might exist.

Aristotle draws this distinction between history, which recounts what has happened, and poetry, which represents what could happen—the realm of possibility and probability (Aristotle, 1993, p.64). He consequently associates poetry with philosophy: both address the universal, although poetry embodies universals in particular figures, as jealousy is embodied in *Othello* or miserliness in *al-Jahiz*'s character *Al-Marwazi*.

Definitions of poetics vary from critic to critic. For Todorov, poetics seeks knowledge of "*the general laws that govern the birth of every work*" (as cited in Chaabane, 2004, p.21). It therefore attempts to discover the features that distinguish literature, since literary works are organized by principles that produce their literariness.

Jakobson, by contrast, locates poetic quality in the dominance of the aesthetic element over psychological, intellectual, political, and other elements. Poetics is thus what differentiates literary discourse from philosophical, political, social, and religious discourse (Newton, 1996, p.25).

Kamel Abou Dib's conception of poetics rests on the notion of a gap sustained by a "*distance of tension*," an active force throughout human experience. This distance is the space created when components of existence or language enter what *Jakobson* calls the coding system (as cited in Ben Khalifa, 2011, p.32).

For *Abou Dib*, then, poetics arises from difference: from the distance between ordinary and literary uses of language, or from tensions among the elements within a text. That gap gives discourse its poetic and aesthetic character.

In summary, *Todorov*, *Jakobson*, and *Abou Dib* approach poetics from related but distinct angles. *Abou Dib* stands close to *Jakobson* because both emphasize the features that create literariness, although *Abou Dib* explains them through the gap or distance of tension.

Todorov gives greater emphasis to poetics as a field of inquiry that seeks to discover such aesthetic principles. A final distinction is therefore necessary: poetics may mean the discipline that studies the laws of literature, or it may refer to the properties that make literature literary.

The Concept of Narrative

Narrative is not a foreign term in the Arabic lexicon, yet it has often been burdened with misleading associations that narrow its meaning to a single literary mode and set "narrative" in opposition to "poetic." For a long time, the term was sometimes detached from its proper linguistic sense and at other times stripped of the technical meaning assigned to it by contemporary poetics (Khareb, 2017, p.61).

Although the Arabic word for narrative is ancient, modern scholarship has given it new conceptual dimensions. Modern criticism associates narrative with storytelling, the recounting of events, and their organization in time. Narrative is sometimes treated as the opposite of poetry, although it can operate across several genres and forms,

including the maqama, the short story, the novel, and poetry.

Critics differ in defining narrative just as they differ in defining poetics. *Gérard Genette* describes it as the presentation, through language—and especially written language—of an event or sequence of events, whether real or imaginary (as cited in Al-Khafaji, 2012, pp.39-40).

Narrative is therefore the linguistic presentation, weaving, and ordering of events. Its language differs from the languages of dialogue, description, and poetry, and it conducts events through such devices as analepsis, prolepsis, compression, expansion, and ellipsis. *Hamid ALhamidani* likewise defines narrative as the manner in which a story is told through a narrator to a narratee, under influences arising partly from those participants and partly from the story itself (Alhamadani, 1991, p.45).

Components of Narrative

1. **The narrator:**

The agent who recounts or reports the story, whether factual or imagined. The narrator need not be a named individual and may remain concealed behind a voice or pronoun through which events and incidents are shaped (Ibrahim, 1995, p.11).

2. **The narrated:**

Everything issued by the narrator and arranged into a set of events involving characters within a temporal and spatial frame. The story forms the core of the narrated, the centre in which all its elements interact (Youcef, 2015, pp.40-41).

3. **The narratee:**

The counterpart of the reader or recipient, whether an individual, a group, or even an idea or ideology addressed through a fictional form. The novelist may speak to such a narratee in order to influence the reader and win assent. The relationship between narrator and reader is initially governed by trust, since readers ordinarily begin by granting credibility to the narrator's account (Alhamdani, 1991, p.45).

Narrative Poetics

Once poetics and narrative have been defined, narrative poetics can be understood as the distinctive use of linguistic and structural components that gives literary discourse its particular quality and separates it from philosophical, religious, and political discourse. Poetic force lies in the special manner in which language and textual structure are deployed.

Aesthetic and non-aesthetic materials—ideas, emotions, and ideology—acquire literary value through the way they are arranged. Narrative, in turn, is a mode of seeing and presenting events artistically through temporal reordering, ellipsis, expansion, and other techniques by which the narrator shapes the narrated for the narratee.

Narrative poetics therefore concerns the aesthetic construction of events through a particular narrative vision, whether expressed in the first, third, or second person, and through a distinctive mode of constructing the story or novel.

Narrative Poetics in "The Prince Returns at Midnight" novel

The following analysis identifies the features that create the novel's narrative poetics at the morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels.

a- Morphological Level

A reading of the novel reveals that verbs predominate in the narration. The author uses past, present, and imperative forms, raising several questions: Which tense dominates the narrative? Do verbs outnumber nouns, or do nouns predominate? To what extent does the author employ adjectives, pronouns, active and passive participles, and related forms?

Morphological analysis must also ask what kinds of vocabulary shape the text—religious, philosophical, scientific, political, social, or otherwise—because the richness and variety of a work's lexicon contribute to its distinctive poetic character.

- Verbs

Verbs appear to outnumber the various kinds of nouns. Although the novelist employs past, present, and imperative forms, present-tense verbs are especially prominent across the chapters.

Examples listed in the study include:

jumps, dismounts, possesses him, moves away, prepares, stops, casts, sets off, embraces, changes, pulses, moves, walks, reads, illuminates, persuades, I can, carries, exists, flies, regrets, communes, changes, I find, gleams, collapses, grows heavy, opens, collides, notices, mounts, brandishes, calls for help, finds, asserts, feels, walks, surveys, searches, keeps, arouses, remembers, misses, rises, wakes him, perfumes, arrives, they see her, sits, turns, regards him, penetrates, watches, descends, takes, drives away, waits, I see, passes, changes, brings them together, makes him, his reflections, happens, is lost, they withhold, is surprised, recognizes, organizes, supervises, helps, delights you, takes time, concerns, turns, focuses, looks, stirs, turns around, stands, reassures himself, casts, comes to him, asks him, speaks to me, falls, sends, I know, I say, diminishes, I see you, comes, leads, accompanies me, calms, is reassured, rests, happens, he took him out, I know, occurs to him, revolves, feels, strives, succeeds, finds, you see him, memorizes, occurs, changes, they wear, clings, we took, happens, I admire, governs it, releases, separates it, restores, turns, caresses, contemplates, stops, is delayed, they insert, seems, browses, finds, contemplates, conveys, mingles, waits, uses it, costs him, pities, takes care, becomes accustomed, becomes clear, hates, ignores, destroys, grows bored, crosses, I congratulate you, I want, I say, satisfies, behaves, makes, wills, revolts, takes him, overhears, tells him, makes, they abandon, clings, and remains hopeful.

This is a much larger group than the past-tense forms, among which the study lists:

returned, saw, appeared, closed, became active, opened, fermented, grasped, was satisfied, placed it, flew, wore, went out, was, reached, looked, passed, elapsed, rang, proceeded, was surprised, agreed, loved, asked, dropped, showed, went on, felt, touched, returned, was startled, said, carried, aimed, resolved, sat, confirmed, finished, arrived, ignored, was, refused, gathered, said, sold, reassured himself, and appeared.

The source list also includes several non-verbal forms—such as contemplation, disturbance, shouting, silent, and afraid—among its examples.

The predominance of present-tense verbs over past-tense forms suggests continuity and renewal.

The present tense makes events appear ongoing and places them before the reader as if they were unfolding now, lending the narrative movement, vitality, and suspense.

- Nouns

Just as present-tense verbs exceed past-tense verbs, verbs in the narrative generally appear more frequently than nouns. The narrator’s chief concern is to recount events in time and space through a particular narrative perspective, reshaping them according to the requirements of fiction and plot.

The nouns themselves are varied, with character names and place names dominating the nominal field. Places include the New Mosque, al-Baraka Café, the fish market, Martyrs’ Square, First of November Street, the Palace of the Raïs, the National People’s Assembly building, Terminus Café, Bab El Oued, Ali Boumendjel Street, Abane Ramdane Street, Ben M’hidi Street, Lotus Café, the Teachers’ College, El Biar, Bouzaréah, the Central Post Office, the Higher School in Bouzaréah, and Port Said Garden, alongside common nouns such as street, university, faculty, hospital, and sea.

Character names establish and distinguish identities, while place names build the narrative space and connect it to geographical, social, and historical frames of reference.

- Adjectives

The novelist uses adjectives sparingly. Examples include dark corners, branching alleys, the main street, the valiant hero, a false knight, the bronze horse, a small table, bitter coffee, their pampered daughter, elegant clothes, a calm voice, the national struggle, the invading French armies, the Noble Qur’an, his small briefcase, the higher school, suffocating smoke, a beautiful statue, and a spoiled child.

Such adjectives define a character trait, emphasize the effect of an object, or sketch a particular setting; they remain limited to moments of clear expressive need.

b- Syntactic Level

- Verbal and Nominal Sentences

- **Verbal Sentences**

Verbal sentences dominate the narrative fabric of The Prince Returns at Midnight. This is natural because the novelist is concerned with presenting events, following the protagonist’s movement through time and space, and tracing the plot’s development. The verb is the foundation of narrative action, and verbal sentences

consequently form the novel's living sinew.

"The Prince turned the matter over in his mind" (Menour, 2021, p.52).

"Boualem fell silent for a moment" (Menour, 2021, p.53).

"The Prince shook his head in astonishment" (Menour, 2021, p.54).

"They reached Port Said Garden" (Menour, 2021, p.56).

"The garden's name prompted him to ask about some of the streets and alleys through which they had passed" (Menour, 2021, p.57).

"He gestured toward the garden's three cafés" (Menour, 2021, p.58).

"The Prince noticed human bodies stirring in the darkness beneath the garden's trees" (Menour, 2021, p.57).

"Boualem listened intently as the Prince recounted his memories of Algiers under Ottoman rule" (Menour, 2021, p.62).

"He remained frozen where he stood, as though he were the one who had turned into a crocodile" (Menour, 2021, p.6).

"He carried out his task with the help of a thick stick with which he frightened thieves" (Menour, 2021, p.8).

"He hurried home and exchanged his elegant clothes for work clothes" (Menour, 2021, p.38).

"Boualem listened intently as the Prince recounted his memories" (Menour, 2021, p.62).

- **Nominal Sentences**

Nominal sentences also occur frequently, although verbal sentences remain more common. Narrative alternates between the two structures, but it naturally inclines toward verbal clauses because it presents a sequence of events. This tendency confirms the morphological observation that verbs occur more often than nouns.

"Boualem, too, was watching the café patrons with weary eyes" (Menour, 2021, p.69).

"God is capable of all things" (Menour, 2021, p.45).

"In the play, Galatea was nothing but a doll" (Menour, 2021, p.73).

"Mother, may God guide you—do my present circumstances allow me to marry?" (Menour, 2021, p.84).

The dominance of verbal over nominal sentences gives the narrative discourse a kinetic quality. It foregrounds the succession of events, the characters' interactions, and the development of their actions and attitudes, thereby strengthening the narrative's vitality and sustaining a sense of renewal and continuity.

- **Declarative Constructions**

Declarative constructions are abundant in the novel's narrative body. This is expected because the narrator reports what happens to characters in time and space, presenting the story through analepsis, prolepsis, expansion, and ellipsis. Non-declarative forms become more visible when an involved narrator or character expresses emotion through questions or exclamations. Examples of declarative constructions include:

- He walked along the street, oblivious to everything around him; he neither heard nor saw anything amid the noise of the cars.
- He passed the New Mosque in Martyrs' Square without looking toward the steps descending to its entrance.
- The thought occurred to him that he might miss his night-watch duty that day and claim illness to the car owners.
- I proposed to my supervisor that I study the human struggle between transient life and eternal life.
- At that moment, *Boualem*'s thoughts turned to the statue, and he linked the statue of Galatea with the statue of the Prince.
- Despite Boualem's happiness as he listened to al-Jaziya and his absorption in her talk about their future together.
- Boualem's spirit began to calm and to feel somewhat reassured by the Prince's ghost, and he grew more at ease with his words.
- He sat in al-Raja Café to eat breakfast and paid in advance so that he would not be delayed when the bus to Bouzaréah stopped outside.
- When he reached Bouzaréah, he realized that it was still early; the doors of the Higher School were therefore still closed.

- **Non-Declarative Constructions**

Non-declarative constructions occur less frequently than the declarative forms that dominate the narration. Nevertheless, questions, exclamations, vocatives, imperatives, and related forms animate the narrative. They reveal how characters respond to events and display the narrator's capacity to enter their psychological worlds.

Questions may occur in monologue as well as dialogue. In Menour's novel, narration is closely connected to dialogue and description, and the work rests largely on exchanges between the Prince and Boualem, the car park attendant. Most expressions of wonder and inquiry are therefore associated with these two characters.

- **Inquiry**: "Are you fasting today?"
- **Astonishment and wonder**: "In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful … Did you descend from heaven or rise from the depths of the earth?"
- **Surprise**: "You seem to have drifted far away?"
- **The Prince asks in astonishment**: "Why this great rush to travel to France?"
- **Request for explanation**: "How did you reach that conclusion?"
- **Confirmation framed as a question**: "You surely know Abd al-Qadir al-Mitiji, our neighbour in the quarter?"

Imperatives and vocatives are likewise rare in the novel.

c- Semantic Level

A*hmed Menour*'s The Prince Returns at Midnight does employ artistic and rhetorical imagery, although such language is relatively infrequent. The novelist favours precision, and figurative expression enters the narrative only within narrow limits.

The narrative contains several implicit metaphors. In "*its barbed wires climbing the walls*," the wire is likened to a living creature or climbing insect (Menour, 2021, p.112). In "*giving free rein to his thoughts*," thought is imagined as a horse whose bridle has been released (Menour, 2021, p.116).

The phrase "*the thread of his thought was broken*" gives thought a cord that can snap (Menour, 2021, p.117).

The palace is personified as a proud man who struts over neighbouring houses and palaces in the phrase "*towering proudly over the houses and palaces beside it*" (Menour, 2021, p.118).

In the nocturnal image "*the capital glowed in a sea of lights*," sea and light are blended so that Algiers appears immersed in illumination (Menour, 2021, p.122).

Finally, "*laughing at people's beards*" functions as an idiomatic allusion to mockery or deception (Menour, 2021, p.124).

Overall, figurative usage remains limited in comparison with literal expression. Although the novel rests on an imaginative premise—the return of *Emir Abdelkader*—its language of deviation is restrained. It does not attain the pervasive lyricism found in some Algerian novels; instead, it remains close to everyday life and reality.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is the incorporation of other religious, philosophical, literary, or mythic texts into a narrative. A novelist may evoke them directly or indirectly and deploy them according to the work's artistic development. A literary text is not sealed off from historical, intellectual, and cultural texts; it interacts with them and draws upon them in constructing events and characters.

Menour uses several intertexts from the Qur'an, including the stories of the Companions of the Cave and Ezra, as well as the question of the spirit. These allusions reveal the author's religious culture.

The question, "Did God not awaken the Companions of the Cave after they had slept for three hundred years and nine more? Did He not raise His prophet Ezra after a hundred years?" echoes Qur'anic accounts (Qur'an 18:25; 2:259). The phrase "They ask you about the Spirit. Say: the Spirit is of my Lord's command, and you have been given but little knowledge" recalls Qur'an 17:85.

Conclusion

The study of narrative poetics in Ahmed Menour's "The Prince Returns at Midnight" yields the following observations:

- Poetics is a central component of the artistic and aesthetic distinctiveness of the novel.
- Narrative poetics reveals the novel's principal artistic and aesthetic properties.
- The predominance of present-tense over past-tense verbs suggests continuity and renewal.

- The prevalence of verbs over nouns emphasizes movement and the succession of events, giving the narrative a continually renewed quality.
- Artistic imagery enhances the beauty of the language and gives the novel an aesthetic dimension.
- The dominance of verbal over nominal sentences reinforces movement and the unfolding of events.
- The author also draws on colloquial folk proverbs.
- Intertextuality demonstrates the novel's openness to other texts.

These devices produce the work's poetic quality through their interaction. Metaphor, intertextuality, and non-declarative constructions do not create narrative poetics in isolation; their aesthetic force arises from the particular way in which they converge within the text.

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