



The Rhetoric of Narrative Voices and Their Spatial Manifestations in the World of Ahmed Mourad



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Abstract:

This article examines the rhetoric of narrative voices and their spatial manifestations in the fictional world of the Egyptian novelist Ahmed Mourad, by uncovering the mechanisms of polyphony and its role in constructing narrative discourse. The study focuses on three main voices: the narrator's voice, oscillating between presence and concealment, as the narrator shifts between emergence and withdrawal, thereby opening space for multiple perspectives; the protagonist's voice, which constitutes a psychological and narrative axis revealing internal crises and a distinct personal imprint; and finally, the unknown voice, which lends the text an atmosphere of ambiguity and suspense, contributing to the dynamism of narration.

The article also highlights the role of space as a structural and semantic element that does not merely contain events but actively participates in shaping characters, directing voices, and producing meaning.

Keywords: rhetoric of narrative voices, polyphony, narrator, protagonist, unknown voice, Ahmed Mourad

Introduction:

The novelistic narrative is considered one of the most capable literary genres in absorbing the aesthetic and intellectual transformations witnessed in modern literature. This is due to its structural flexibility, which allows for multiplicity of voices, interweaving of discourses, and diversity of narrative levels. The contemporary novel has thus become an open space for experimentation, where the writer transcends the boundaries of traditional storytelling to construct a complex narrative world

in which artistic and semantic elements interact foremost among them the narrative voice and space as two fundamental components in the formation of meaning.

In this context, the fictional world of the Egyptian novelist Ahmed Mourad emerges as a remarkable model in modern narrative writing. He has succeeded in establishing a narrative discourse based on polyphony and the interpenetration of perspectives, with an intensive use of spatial setting as a semantic component that goes beyond its descriptive function to assume symbolic and interpretive roles. For him, the novel is not merely a recounting of events, but rather an artistic construction in which the internal and external voices of characters intersect, and where spaces interact with psychological and social transformations, granting the text a dynamic, multilayered character.

Based on this premise, the present article seeks to approach the dialectical relationship between the rhetoric of narrative voices and their spatial manifestations in the novels of Ahmed Mourad. This is achieved through analyzing the mechanisms of polyphony within the text and exploring the dimensions of space as both a narrative and semantic structure, ultimately highlighting how these two elements interact in shaping an integrated narrative vision that reflects the specificity of his literary experience.

Narrative voices constitute the gateway to any narrative work. Through them, and by means of them, the author engages in linguistic relations emerging from the voices participating in the dialogic structure, which arise in creative texts through the multiplicity of expressive forms: “for language does not actualize itself when separated from the multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and positions, nor from the dialogic nature of the text as a whole”¹. Accordingly, the texts of Ahmed Mourad form a linguistic structure that reflects a system of narrative voices in their intellectual and cultural diversity. The multiplicity of narrative voices is indeed one of the central themes of his creative writing, adorned with spatial manifestations embodied within the narrative discourse. These voices contribute to conveying emotions and interactions from within the novels outward toward the reader, for “each character in the novel possesses its own voice, expressing parts of the main event, and through the convergence of these voices, the reader comes to understand the novel’s event in its growth and development”².

If we trace the narrative world of Ahmed Mourad, we can observe the openness of narrative voices to space and their deep-rooted influence by it, shaped according to differing viewpoints within the narrative discourse. This narrative world thus becomes colored with the hues of polyphony, while the novels extend dynamic standards derived from multiple characters, since “a character resembles

a voice in language; its nature cannot be understood except through the totality of voices that differ from it or resemble it”³. Therefore, the author’s reliance on multiple narrative voices renders his works a platform for the presence of various characters that resonate across the horizons of narration through diverse voices charged with semantic significance. These voices cause the narrator to fluctuate among them in various forms, among which we may mention:

1.The Narrator’s Voice Between Presence and Concealment:

The narrator’s voice occupies a central position in the construction of the novel. However, in the world of Ahmed Mourad, it is characterized by flexibility and concealment. It does not impose itself as an absolute narrative authority; rather, it oscillates between subdued presence and deliberate absence. The narrator remains the active and dominant voice shaping the structure of narrative discourse in Mourad’s works, activating characters, setting their stances, and revealing their ideas indirectly through dialogue, since it is not merely “a means for dramatizing events and concealing the narrator, but rather dialogue has become an end through which we can uncover the extent of divergence and heterogeneity among narrative voices”⁴.

Thus, we observe the narrator’s presence fluctuating across different positions as a narrative craft that captivates the reader and artistically depicts events governed by narration and embodied by the author. It is therefore unsurprising that Ahmed Mourad strikes this sensitive chord, employing the narrator as an entry point to articulate the meanings and foundations of presence and concealment. As expressed by the narrator:

“For an entire year, those images never left Ahmed’s imagination, nor did the thought that his reaction had not gone beyond the confines of the camera. How cowardly he was! Was it not possible that his friend had still been alive when he left, even though his appearance suggested otherwise? How could he bring himself to take a shot of the place without even thinking of checking his pulse...?”⁵

In the presence of the narrator’s voice, narration flourishes. The omniscient narrator appears as a guide and interpreter of events, while in other instances he recedes, allowing other voices to speak freely. This oscillation creates a form of narrative balance, as events unfold through the spirit of the novel, and language becomes a semantic tool that stimulates the reader’s cognitive dimension. Through the previous narrative scene, we perceive that the author works to intensify the narrator’s vocal presence by suppressing other narrative voices. Even the protagonist’s voice, “Ahmed,”

becomes incapable of emerging, as the narrator's voice dominates, rising from the depths of narrative worlds that silence all speaking voices associated with the act of narration.

This gives the reader the impression of an intermingling between external time and narrative time, reinforced by internal flashbacks to the events of Vertigo Bar, which Ahmed had witnessed. The author thus relies on the harmony and cohesion of voices to break the rigidity of the conventional and familiar, creating an interwoven narrative texture. In this case, the narrator's presence functions as a witness to events experienced by the protagonist, shifting from external description to the internal guilt of "Ahmed," who remained passive while watching his friend die. Consequently, the narrative space becomes an energy that unifies voices, signaling transformations resulting from the suppression of expression.

Through his narrative works, Ahmed Mourad succeeds in granting the narrator a distinctive domain of presence. Often, this is due to the dominance of space, which plays a role in silencing the narrative voices participating in the construction of the novel. In the novel Diamond Dust (Turab al-Mas), characters fade within the confines of Taha's apartment, and the spatial void transforms into a narrative voice cloaked in the narrator's language, as illustrated in the following scene:

"Obtaining the medicine had been easy; he filled his cabinet with a supply that would last for months, especially his migraine medication, which clung to him like a companion. He had grown more inclined to silence; even his circle of friends had become strangers, leaving him motionless like a broken chair everyone avoids leaning on..."⁶.

Amid the absence of speaking characters in this narrative scene, the author introduces a narrator who "shifts within a single story, altering his mode of expression from time to time appearing openly at times and disappearing at others, speaking in the first person at times and in the third person at others. There are no constraints obliging the narrator to adopt a single method or pattern; the use of one narrative form or the blending of two or more remains subject to the writer's freedom and stylistic choice"⁷.

Accordingly, the previous scene acquires symbolic significance through the interplay of the narrator's presence and absence during Taha's isolation in his apartment following his father's death. The narrator's voice oversees the coloring of the scene by attuning itself to the pulse of characters and amplifying the whisper of silence through heightened symbolic energy. It draws the reader into the darkness of space in search of echoes of selves embodied in restrained and muted voices striving

to grasp the keys to inner worlds. At the same time, it evokes the Other through the rhetoric of detail such as obtaining necessary medication and distancing oneself from friends.

We also perceive the eloquence of the narrator's voice immersed in the spirit of narration as a companion to solitude, through which the author seeks to enrich the narrative atmosphere and provide Taha with a form of familiarity after the crisis he endured the traumatic loss of his father in a brutal manner and the illness he survived. This, in turn, contributes to the eruption of the text with diverse narrative voices of differing principles and beliefs beyond that of the narrator. For "in the novel, the narrator is always, to varying degrees, an ideological producer, and his words are always an ideological sample"⁸.

Thus, the narrative space of the narrator's voice and the suppression of other voices converge, transcending formal boundaries within a rhetorical representation where all events intersect.

2.The Protagonist's Voice and Its Narrative Imprint:

The protagonist's voice in the novels of Ahmed Mourad represents a fundamental axis in shaping the narrative structure. Its role is not limited to driving events; rather, it extends to expressing the internal vision of the fictional world. This voice is distinguished by what may be termed a narrative imprint that is, the unique character that differentiates each character from others through its inner language and mode of thinking. The protagonist in Mourad's novels is capable of embracing meanings and integrating narrative content into a realistic framework, while enjoying intellectual freedom and independence. He assumes an active role as a central voice that delineates narrative details.

This stems from the fact that the protagonist is "the character around whom events revolve, appearing more prominently than others, while the speech of other characters centers upon him. No other character overshadows him; rather, all aim to highlight his traits, thereby revealing the idea the writer seeks to convey"⁹. Moreover, the protagonist is endowed with qualities that render him distinctive, as he "bears features of transformation that can be traced across various literary genres related to the novel; he is the axis from which the extraordinary event emerges and upon which it falls"¹⁰.

Thus, the protagonist's voice elevates the narrative event and connects it to the reader, gradually revealing a particular perspective that often conceals itself behind the dramatization of the narrative world. This dynamic reshapes artistic transformations, as illustrated in the following passage:

“Her uninjured arm brushed against me, as if I were electricity itself.

She cried out in pain, looked into my face for a moment a moment that felt like an hour. Her eyes carried words I was on the verge of reading before she pushed me; I stumbled over the carpet and fell...”¹¹.

This narrative scene represents a simple embodiment of the protagonist “Yahya” in the novel *The Blue Elephant*. Here, the character merges with the narrator, transforming the secrets of narration and the reaction of “Maya.” The protagonist’s narrative gaze, functioning as a signifying counterpart to the narrator, revolves around sensing things and movements in their finest details. This reveals the multiplicity of characters within the novel, reflecting “the multiplicity of inclinations, doctrines, ideologies, cultures, civilizations, and human concerns diversity without limits”¹².

The protagonist’s voice emerges within the narrative context through its heroic function, serving as an indicator of memory activation. This feature governs the progression of narrative presentation. Despite the harsh attributes attributed by “Maya” to her lover, her narrative voice does not reach the level of “Yahya’s” voice, which oscillates between a panoramic role shaped by the unfolding events and a renewed heroic role responding to evolving narrative conditions. This reflects his inclination toward narrative techniques and confirms “a decisive turning point in the plot, and consequently in the structure of narration and its dramatic trajectory”¹³. As a result, narration transcends the stagnation often felt by readers in more traditional narrative works.

A contemplative reading of the novels of Ahmed Mourad reveals the prominence of the protagonist’s role in clarifying what may appear ambiguous in the narrative issues that the reader may question or anticipate. This occurs through a dynamic interplay that unites the narrator’s voice with that of the protagonist in flashes of heroism shared by both. Through this fusion, “Taha” succeeds in conveying his intent to the recipient, as illustrated in the following scene:

“Minutes later, the service car departed... The street carried Taha’s dust and his dream a dream whose meaning he could not fully grasp. He had merely nodded and uttered a word of mockery when he heard it. Taha watched from the window until it vanished. He swallowed a pill, attempting to suppress a pulse pounding around his head... drums creating a roaring rhythm that hammered his mind.”¹⁴

This scene exemplifies the fusion of the protagonist’s voice, “Taha,” with the narrator of *Diamond Dust*, to the extent that the reader may nearly confuse the two. Narrative voices intertwine with Taha’s attempts to rid himself of the “service,” while gradually awakening a desire for revenge

an indication of invoking an absent voice. The protagonist's intentions become clear through his actions, intertwined with his speech and his implicit dialogue with the narrator, thereby reinforcing heroism and intensifying suspense. Narration thus rises to a level where it uncovers the essential impact embodied by the protagonist in shaping the event.

It is as though narration in the world of Ahmed Mourad directs its discourse through the protagonist's voice, while also relying on active characters as narrative focal points, each possessing a distinct effect in expressing itself through voices seeking integration with narration. Hence, the author evokes the protagonist's reflections, which shape his narrative sensibility a feature that clearly unifies the narrative corpus of Mourad's fictional world.

3.The Unknown Voice and Its Activation of Narrative Dynamism:

Alongside the narrator's voice and the protagonist's voice, there emerges in the novels of Ahmed Mourad what may be described as the unknown voice. This is a voice of indeterminate identity that performs a significant narrative function: it creates an atmosphere of ambiguity and suspense, prompting the reader to reconstruct events and reconnect narrative threads. It also contributes to dismantling the notion of a single, absolute truth within the text in favor of a multiple and open-ended truth.

Ahmed Mourad presents his novels through an engaging narrative substance, successfully creating atmospheres colored by multiple narrative voices recounting events. He blends these voices within his texts and grants the reader the task of distinguishing them and understanding their roles within a broad vision of narrative multiplicity, as "the writer brings together several narrators within his novel. Their number may correspond to the number of main characters in the story, and such a novel is called a 'novel of viewpoints'" ¹⁵.

This dimension is embodied in Mourad's work through the dynamic fusion of voices, resulting in a strategy of narrative activation. At the center of this process lies that elusive voice whose source remains unknown among the various narrating voices, as illustrated in the following passage from the novel *Vertigo*:

"As is the course of life, the news gradually faded away, replaced by other, more sensational news, until the story died and the truth was lost along with it. In any case, his photographs would have offered no more than spices for yellow journalism, increasing its weekly revenue! ..." ¹⁶.

Within this context, we encounter an event carrying a narrative dimension manifested in the evocation of reflections and associations that suggest the confusion of narrative voices. These voices present events along the margins of characters through an artistic touch that creates the illusion of a stable narrator. From this, we perceive a hypothetical voice that nearly assumes the role of the true author of the novel, as it gives rise to an unknown voice that activates the narrative spirit. This passage invokes that voice out of the narrator's need for it, drawing upon the past upon which the novel's events are constructed in a story-like form.

This unknown voice, shaped by creative sensibility, operates in synchrony with the merging of the character "Ahmed," enabling a more credible narration of events, especially when revealing a truth obscured by sensational journalism. In doing so, the narrator assumes the role of unveiling hidden aspects and embodying conflicting viewpoints.

Narrative voices proliferate throughout the works of Ahmed Mourad and dominate their narrative trajectory. "However, all these voices appear equal in value, making it entirely impossible to determine the position adopted by the author, as he orchestrates the ideological conflict in complete neutrality"¹⁷. The unknown voice contributes to coloring the novels with its shades, harmonizing with the narrator in a movement that establishes truths through an aesthetic mechanism, situating the novel within a creative system.

To support this perspective, we may consider a scene from the novel 1919, where the narrator states:

"Nazli became absorbed; Ahmed watched her sway and clap with every passage, bursting into laughter like a child seeing life for the first time. Then he sensed her emotion when al-Rihani appeared and mentioned that Saad Pasha had attended that performance in the same theater before being exiled to Malta..."¹⁸.

This narrative scene represents a point of convergence upon which the relationship between the narrator and the unknown voice is constructed, revealing a shared emotional and affective resonance. Language becomes a whisper pursued by the author through narrative voices that convey the intimacy of the relationship between "Ahmed" and "Nazli." Thus, narrative voices function to present the roles of characters and distribute them in a balanced manner. This is because "the polyphonic novel offers a multiple vision of the world, linked to the diversity of character types and perspectives and to the dialogic relations that prevail among them"¹⁹, thereby deepening the impact on the reader.

From this, we may conclude that Ahmed Mourad employs the narrator/unknown voice as a stimulating element for generating events and charging narration with semantic density. This strategy ultimately contributes to highlighting the spatial manifestations within the narrative field.

Conclusion:

A close examination of the rhetoric of narrative voices in the fictional world of Ahmed Mourad reveals that his narrative construction does not rely on a single voice or a unified perspective. Rather, it is founded upon a multiplicity of voices and their interaction within the text, achieving a clear artistic and semantic richness. The narrator's voice oscillates between presence and concealment guiding events at times, and at other moments retreating to allow characters the space to express themselves.

Thus, it can be argued that the rhetoric of narrative voices and their spatial manifestations in the works of Ahmed Mourad constitute one of the most prominent secrets behind the distinction of his narrative experience. In his novels, voices integrate with the narrative space to produce texts that are vibrant, multilayered, and open to interpretation. This is what renders his works a significant model in the development of the contemporary Arabic novel.

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