

VARIA

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THE FUNCTIONING OF THE MONOLOGUE
IN MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

1.0. It is only very seldom that one realizes that a literary work is actually a monologue or a composition of monologues. While speaking of a monologue, one has usually in mind a monologue in the current meaning of the term, i. e. a scenic or literary short piece of work, mostly satiric or witty, usually delivered orally by a single person. In the book of 'Anīs 'al-Makdisī on the literary trends in the contemporary Arab world the author, as one of the few if not the only one mentioning the existence of this literary kind in the Arabic literature, inserts a short chapter on the monologue, exactly thus apprehended. He says among others:

المنولوج وهي
لفظة يونانية ويراد بها حكاية حال يمثلها شخص واحد ويسودها عادة
روح الطرفة والتعظيم وهذا النوع شائع في مصر بل تسرب منها إلى سائر
الأقطار العربية وأصبح فنا من فنون الغناء التمثيلي الفكه¹

1.1. However, the monologue seems to make itself more manifest and to play considerably broader role in modern Arabic literature. Indeed, the narrative and inner monologues, mostly retrospective, intermingling each other appear to be the main literary form in many modern Arabic novels and short stories. They are usually told by the narrator or the hero.

It is only through them that the reader becomes acquainted with other characters as well as with the action of the literary work.

2.0.0. This results in a certain "staticity" and mediality of contact of the reader, both with the characters and with the action of a given literary work.

From this point of view, modern Arabic literary works can be divided into two groups:

a) the works with a narrator = chief character = literary subject in which both monologues: narrative and inner come from him and the reader learns everything from and through him;

b) the works with a narrator + [chief-character = literary subject]; in this case, the narrative monologues are delivered by the narrator and sometimes partly also by the chief-character while the inner ones belong to this last one. Here, the reader learns of the hero and partly of what concerns him from the narrator and becomes acquainted with other characters and with the action by and through the chief-character.

2.1.0. In order to illustrate this phenomenon, we adduce the works of four contemporary authors, chosen at random and put to examination in this regard, viz.: Ġuṣṣu 'z-zaytūn by Muḥammad 'Abdu'l-Ḥalīm 'Abdu'l-lāh, 'al-Ḳāhira, n. d., p. 249; 'al-Liṣṣu wa'l-kilāb by Nagīb Maḥfūz, 'al-Ḳāhira, 1962, p. 175; Riḥlātu Sindabād. 'ar-Riḥlatu't-tālīta by Muḥammad Sa'īd 'al-'Uryān, 'al-Ḳāhira, 1963, p. 207 and four short stories: 'al-Ḳub'atu'l-ḡalīdiyya (p. 67-76); Mamarru'l-'ayyām (p. 77-85); Zanūba (p. 39-54); and Ṣaḥrā' 'abadān (p. 29-37) taken from the volume of short stories entitled Duḥḥān min ḳalb-ī by 'aṭ-Ṭāhir Wattār, published in Tūnis, n. d.

2.2.0. Ġuṣṣu'z-zaytūn is a story of an unhappy love of a man to his wife who at first did not requite him with the same feeling but finally learned to love him too. The whole text counting 4146 lines is a report delivered by the main character. 99,98% of it is narrative², 0,02% is an inner monologue³.

2.2.1. 'al-Liṣṣu wa'l-kilāb is a story of a man who for patriotic reasons became a thief and found himself in the prison. Released from it, betrayed by his wife and his friends and robbed of his only little

daughter, he is filled with bitterness and cannot find his way back to the society and to normal life while the society does not seem to want to be helpful for him either. Being not able to adapt himself to the changed conditions and therefore frustrated, he decides to take revenge on those whom he chiefly accuses as a main cause of his misfortune. Committing grave mistakes at this occasion, he begins to be hunted by the society. Wanting not to surrender, he finally pays for everything with his life. The text of the novel contains 2296 lines. 78% of it are narrative monologues of the narrator⁴ and 22% - inner monologues of the hero⁵.

2.2.2. Riḥlātu Sindabād are the adventures of a small boy named Sindabād looking for his merchant-father who is permanently on his commercial trips and somehow the fate causes that he misses his family. The text contains 2968 lines altogether. With the exception of few instances when the narrator speaks up which form 0,3% of the text⁶, the rest i. e. 99,7% is reported by the small hero.

2.2.3. The contents of the four tales by 'aṭ-Ṭāhir Wattār concerns the psychic and moral sufferings of young people of both sexes in their struggle against the traditional customs and indifference of the society. However the youths often succumb to inertia in their struggle (Mamarru'l-'ayyām, Ṣaḥrā' 'abadān) and only rare cases succeed (Zanūba, 'al-Ḳub'atu'l-ḡalīdiyya). The distribution of the texts in the mentioned short stories runs in the following way:

a) 'al-Ḳub'atu'l-ḡalīdiyya: the whole text is a narrative monologue delivered by the narrator who at the same time is the hero and the literary subject of the story;

b) Mamarru'l-'ayyām: the text contains 146 lines. 91,4% of it comes from the narrator as his narrative monologue⁷ and the rest i. e. 8,6% belongs to the main-character, the literary subject as his inner monologue⁸;

c) Zanūba: the text contains 248 lines. In 81,1% it is a narrative monologue of the narrator⁹ and in 18,9% an inner monologue of the hero¹⁰;

d) Ṣaḥrā' 'abadān: the text containing 146 lines comes in 65,1% from the narrator in the form of a narrative monologue¹¹ while its 34,9% belongs to the chief-character as his inner monologue¹².

2.2.4. The structure and the distribution of the texts presented above and in the notes seem to justify the inclusion of 'al-Ḳub'atu'l-ḡalīdiyya by 'aṭ-Ṭāhir Wattār and of Ġuṣnu'z-zaytūn by Muḥammad 'Abdu'l-Ḥalīm 'Abdu'llāh in the above-mentioned a) group of modern Arabic literary works (s. 2.0.0.a) while the rest, i. e. 'al-Liṣṣu wa'l-kilāb by Nagīb Maḥfūz, Rihlātu Sindabād 'ar-Rihlatu't-tālita by Muḥammad Sa'īd 'al-'Uryān and the three short stories: Mamarru'l-'ayyām, Zanūba and Ṣaḥrā' 'abadān by 'aṭ-Ṭāhir Wattār in the above-mentioned b) group (s. 2.0.0.b).

3. The effect of such a literary technics is that:

a) the reader has an immediate contact only with the main-character (or with the narrator), while of the other characters he is only aware and knows them to the extent the main-character lets him to know them;

b) the whole fable appears to the reader rather distant and loses most of its dynamism.

4. The origins and reasons of the preference of the Arab writers to the discussed literary technics seem to lie in the coincidence of the influence of the Western (= European) literature from the turn of the XIX/XX-th cc. the date on which the rebirth of the Arabic literature falls (and time in which this literary technics was very popular¹³), with the traditional Arab tale-telling, one of the most beloved arts among the Arabs even to-day.

Notes

¹ 'Anīs 'al-Makḍisī, 'al-i'ttiḡāhātu'l-'adabiyya fī'l-'ālamī'l-'arabiyyi 'l-ḥadīṡ, 6-th edition, Bayrūt, 1977, p. 432-433.

² Ġuṣnu'z-zaytūn, p. 51.-p. 249 1.18.

³ Ġuṣnu'z-zaytūn, p. 249 1.19.

⁴ 'al-Liṣṣu wa'l-kilāb, p. 7-p. 81.5; p. 8 1.12-15; p. 9 1.9-p. 10 1.12; p. 10 1.14-p. 12 1.19; p. 12 1.21-p. 14 1.5; p. 14 1.9-p. 15 1.2; p. 15 1.16-p. 16 1.12; p. 16 1.15-p. 17 1.5; p. 17 1.8-p. 13; p. 17 1.15-p. 20 1.21; p. 21-p. 31 1.13; p. 33 1.1-3; p. 34 1.10-11; p. 34 1.14-p. 35 1.11; p. 36 1.1-7; p. 36 1.17-p. 37 1.7; p. 37 1.9-p. 39; p. 40 1.2-13; p. 41 1.16-p. 46 1.11; p. 48 1.11-12; p. 49 1.1-10; p. 49 1.12-

-p. 50 1.2; p. 50 1.6-19; p. 50 1.20-p. 61 1.14; p. 62 1.10-p. 63 1.8; p. 63 1.13-p. 66 1.11; p. 66 1.12-p. 74 1.5; p. 77 1.7-p. 78 1.11; p. 78 1.18-20; p. 79 1.2-9; p. 80 1.1-11; p. 81 1.1-12; p. 81 1.14-p. 84 1.3; p. 84 1.4-p. 85 1.14; p. 85 1.17-p. 86 1.1; p. 86 1.20-p. 89 1.3; p. 89 1.10-19; p. 90 1.8-16; p. 92 1.3-p. 96; p. 97 1.11-p. 98 1.11; p. 105 1.20-p. 106 1.18; p. 106 1.21-p. 107 1.5; p. 107 1.8-p. 110 1.10; p. 115 1.10-11; p. 115 1.14-p. 117 1.16; p. 117 1.18-p. 119 1.20; p. 120 1.2-10; p. 121-p. 123 1.11; p. 125 1.11-p. 132 1.2; p. 132 1.5-p. 136 1.10; p. 139 1.6-p. 141 1.15; p. 141 1.18-19; p. 142 1.10-p. 144; p. 146 1.14; p. 146 1.20-p. 147 1.20; p. 149 1.3-p. 152 1.3; p. 153 1.5-8; 1.11-18; p. 153 1.21-p. 154 1.19; p. 154 1.21-p. 158 1.7; p. 158 1.11-19; p. 159 1.2-20; p. 160-p. 165 1.20; p. 166-p. 170 1.15; p. 170 1.18-p. 171 1.8-p. 171 1.8; p. 171 1.15-p. 172 1.12; p. 172 1.14-p. 175.

⁵ 'al-Liṣṣu wa'l-kilāb, p. 8 1.6-12; p. 8 1.15-p. 9 1.5; p. 9 1.9; p. 10 1.13; p. 12 1.20-21; p. 14 1.6-8; p. 15 1.3-4; p. 16 1.13-14; p. 17 1.6-7; p. 17 1.14; p. 31 1.14-p. 32 1.5; p. 33 1.4-p. 34 1.14; p. 35 1.11-21; p. 36 1.7-16; p. 37 1.8-9; p. 40 1.1; p. 40 1.14-p. 41 1.1; p. 41 1.2-4; p. 41 1.13-15; p. 47 1.1-p. 48 1.10; p. 48 1.13-21; p. 49 1.10-11; p. 49 1.17-18; p. 50 1.3-6; p. 50 1.19; p. 61 1.15-p. 62 1.9; p. 63 1.9-12; p. 66 1.11-12; p. 75 1.1-p. 77 1.7; p. 78 1.20-p. 79 1.2; p. 79 1.9-11; p. 80 1.11-p. 81 1.1; p. 81 1.6-7; p. 81 1.12-14; p. 84 1.3; p. 85 1.15-17; p. 86 1.1-20; p. 89 1.3-10; p. 89 1.20-p. 90 1.7; p. 91 1.1-p. 92 1.2; p. 97 1.1-10; p. 98 1.12-p. 105 1.19; p. 106 1.18-21; p. 107 1.5-8; p. 111 1.1-115 1.9; p. 115 1.12-13; p. 117 1.17-18; p. 119 1.21-p. 120 1.2; p. 123 1.12-p. 125 1.10; p. 132 1.3-4; p. 136 1.10-p. 139 1.6; p. 141 1.15-18; p. 141 1.19-p. 142 1.9; p. 145 1.1-p. 146 1.13; p. 146 1.15-19; p. 147 1.20-p. 149 1.2; p. 152 1.3-p. 153 1.4; p. 153 1.9-10; p. 153 1.17-20; p. 154 1.19-21; p. 158 1.8-10; p. 158 1.20-p. 159 1.2; p. 159 1.9-10; p. 159 1.21; p. 165 1.20-21; p. 170 1.15-18; p. 171 1.8-15; p. 172 1.13.

⁶ The voice of the narrator is confined to the words: **قال سند باد** repeated 36 times.

⁷ Mamarru'l-'ayyām: p. 77 1.1-p. 81 1.9; p. 82 1.1-p. 83 1.10; p. 83 1.13-p. 85 1.7.

⁸ Mamarru'l-'ayyām: p. 81 1.10-20; p. 83 1.11-12.

⁹ Zanūba: p. 39 1.1-p. 45 1.2; p. 47 1.1-3; p. 47 1.13-p. 54 1.5.

¹⁰ Zanūba: p. 45 1.3-p. 46; p. 48 1.4-12.

¹¹ Ṣaḥrā' 'abadān: p. 29 1.1-p. 31 1.7; p. 31 1.9-17; p. 31 1.20-p. 33 1.12; 1.14; 1.19; p. 34 1.1-8; p. 34 1.20-p. 35 1.9-10; p. 37 1.1-12.

¹² Ṣaḥrā' 'abadān: p. 31 1.18-19; p. 33 1.13; 1.15-16; 1.20; p. 34 1.9-19; p. 35 1.5-8; p. 35 1.11-p. 36.

¹³ From among its adherents enough to mention here the names of e. g. Prosper Mérimée, Daniel Defoe, James Joyce. etc.