ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 5| May 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

THE STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE ARABIC NOVEL '*Al-Liss wa al-Kilāb'* (The Thief and the Dogs) BY NAGUIB MAHFOUZ

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ABSTRACT
Naguîb Maḥfoûz was one of the most influential Arabic novel writers of second half of the twentieth century. In the 1950s and 60s he brought vitality in Arabic novel writing and became the first novelist in Arabic literature who won the Nobel Prize in 1988. His novels can be categorized into three types: historical novels, social realistic novels, and post realistic novels. The Novel Al-Liṣṣ wal Kilâb (The Thief and the Dogs) is an example of post realistic novel. In this short essay I would like to trace the conflicting interests, between the hero of this novel and the ethos of a corrupt society, which resulted in his complete failure to escape from despair and helplessness. In the process some of the techniques of the novel as applied by the novelist, which were considered rather an innovative approach reflected after some fifty years since the publication of Muhammad Husain Haykal's famous novel Zainab (1914).

KEYWORDS: *Arabic Novel, Post Realistic Novel, Existentialism, Bureaucrat, Nation-State.*

INTRODUCTION

Naguîb Mahfoûz (1911-2006) was an Egyptian writer who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 1988. He is regarded as one of the most eminent writers of Arabic literature who have explored the theme of existentialism. He published fifty novels (a mix of historic, realistic and symbolic novels) and over 350 short stories, dozens of movie scripts, and five plays over a career spanning for seven decades. Many of his works have been made into Egyptian and foreign films. He began writing when he was seventeen years old. His first novel was published in 1939 and ten more were written before the Egyptian Revolution of July 1952. It appears that he stopped writing for several years, and again resumed with *Al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilâb* (The Thief and the Dogs) in 1961. Regarding this Muhsin al-Musawî comments:

"Mahfoûz wrote it after some years of silence during which he felt the need to adjust to new order following the Egyptian revolution of 1952, Egypt's valiant struggle against imperial aggression in1956, and its subsequent leading role in third worldism and Arab nationalism. Yet this significant forward progress in world and Arab politics also weighed heavily on Egypt's national life. Many steps were taken to improve the economy, establish equality, enable the peasantry and the lower classes to achieve a better livelihood, and put an end to economic exploitation and forms of social oppression." [1]

After the great revolution of Egypt, Mahfoz started writing in a new spirit, for instance, his Trilogy, comprising of *Bayn al-Qasrayn (*Between the Palaces*), Qasr al-Shawq (*Palace of Longing*),* and *Sukkariya (*Sugarhouse*),* was written in 1956-57 which made him famous throughout the Arab world as a portrayer of traditional urban life. His trilogy is undoubtedly a great literary feat. With its detailed characterization, its records of descriptions, the fine sense of humor that pervades the dialogues and above all the accurate account of the social and political events as seen through the eyes of the family it stands apart as the trilogy a landmark in novel writing.

In the same way, *Awlādu Haārātina* (Children of Our Alley) (1959), he began writing again in a new vein that frequently concealed political commentary under allegory and symbolism. Works of this second period include the novels 'The Thief and the Dogs' (1961), '*Autumn Quail'* (1962), '*Small Talk on the Nile'* (1966), and '*Miramar*'(1967), as well as several collections of short stories.

Dr.Taha Husain, one of the renowned Arabic writers and critics of Arabic literature, once said about him in the following way:
"He enabled the novel to attain a perfection and beauty, a profundity and precision and almost magical impact with which no Egyptian writer before him had invested it. I do not doubt that his novel sustains comparison with any of the international novels in any language of the world." [2]

The novel *Al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilâb (*The Thief and the Dogs) - one of his most great works - was written in 1961 and published in 1962. It is a post realistic novel.[3] It was well received and was followed by a steady stream of fine novels in the sixties that were detailed with finesse and great courage. The crisis of identity and conscience were suffered by Egyptian intellectuals during that period of pervasive malaise and dissatisfaction. The novel is remarkable because it is the first to employ the stream of consciousness style of writing in Arabic. It helped confirm Mahfouz's stature as a pioneer in the field of literature.
The title of the novel contains of two words i.e. *al-Liṣṣ* and *al-Kilâb* and the *'waw'* in between is an *al-'Aaṭifa* (conjunction) that shows the relation between the two words. The word *al-Liṣṣ* (the thief) denotes a person violating social norms; a person denounced almost all the religions of the world, condemned to punishment. However, in this novel Sa'id Mahran, the hero (the thief) though honest, faithful and loyal, is projected against the conventional meaning because of his revolutionary principle. Captivated four years in the prison for

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theft by the betrayal of his friend, he decided to take revenge against his enemies. On the other hand, the word '*al-kilâb'* (the dogs) symbolizes the sincerity and loyalty of a faithful animal.

Naguîb Mahfouz, however, used it with reference to the novel cruelty against the humanity embodied in the person of each of the characters, such as: Nababiyya, Ilish Sidra, and Ra'uf Ilwan. It is the treachery and betrayal these characters commit against Sa'id Mahran, makes the novel at the same time tragic, dramatic as well as fosters a sense of suspense.

Sa'id Mahran, the thief on the other hand has set himself up as a judge and executioner engaged in legal counsel charging penalty to those dogs who betrayed the confidence of his affection. As he goes for a stormy chase of these dogs, his bullet does not hit those fellows who deserved for it, but the innocent people, killing unnecessarily, because he is not really a hero, but a thief and acrobat.

Major Themes of this Novel

- Existentialism and Alienation:
- Said struggles with meaninglessness, betrayal, and the absurdity of life.
- Revenge and Justice:
- The novel examines the destructive nature of revenge and the blurred line between justice and vengeance.
- Societal Critique: Mahfouz critiques social corruption, political instability, and the failure of post-revolutionary ideals in Egypt.
- Identity and Transformation: Said grapples with who he is after prison and how the world has changed around him.

As far as characterization of this novel is concerned, we can notice three types of characters, they are as follows:

1. Principal character
2. Secondary character and,
3. Passing character (co-character)

The principal characters of this novel are- Sa'id Mahran (a thief) who is the hero of this novel, Ra'uf Ilwan (Sa'id Mahran's erstwhile mentor and a symbol of bourgeois bureaucrat typically harsh on the poor), and secondary characters are: Ilish Sidra (friend of Sa'id Mahran who betrayed him); the Shaykh (a Sufi Saint who justifies the reality with spiritual ethos). The co-characters are: Nabawiyya (Sa'id's former wife betrayed him getting marry to Ilish Sidra), Nur (a prostitute who loves Sa'id), Sana (Sa'id Mahran's daughter), and Tarjan (a café owner and a symbol of sincere friendship who helped Said providing him with Pistol and also information about the police.

The basic theme of the novel reflects the life of the hero "Sa'id Mahran", a thief recently released from prison, who intends on having his vengeance on the people who put him in jail. Sa'id's despair reflects disappointment in revolution and the new order that has come in Egypt that treats Sa'id Mahran not only as a thief, but a kind of revolutionary anarchist.

In this novel, the author narrates the story of the thief named "Sa'id Mahran" who was put in jail by his own former mentor Ra'uf Ilwan, on and being freed after four years, he came out and found no one to help him. Even his daughter "Sana" had declined. Being disappointed, he approached to his former friend "Ilish Sidra" and wife "Nabawiyya" to get the share of his property and books, but the former betrayed him by marrying his wife. He therefore became shocked and angry and decided to take his revenge on them. But he could not do so because of confinement and restrictions of this world. Later, he approached "Shaykh Ali al-Jundi", a Sufi saint to cope with the problem but the latter was not concerned to mundane affairs and instead of providing him assistance he advised him to be spiritual. Finally he decided to meet his mentor Ra'uf Ilwan, the successful journalist and businessman. The mentor, however, did not give him a chance to do so, and thus he found the world totally against his will to fulfill his aspiration.

There are two important factors in the novel, they are: main conflict between the thief Sa'id Mahran, as well as the dogs (Nabawayya, Ilish, and Ra'uf Ilwan) and on the other hand, his own psychological turbulence. These form the main structure of the novel.

The *Al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilâb* (The Thief and the Dogs) may be considered a detective novel to the extent that it portrays the causes for such disillusionment, a sense of betrayal, and the converse rise of the petit bourgeois bureaucrat as the opportunistic beneficiary in a corrupt set up. Naguîb's focus is on the increasing isolation perpetrated by the system, its estrangement from people and its mechanical response to challenge. The disappointed young protagonist, Sa'id Mahran, is blinded by anger and betrayal in nature. His shortcomings have an allegorical significance.

Naguîb's own moderate predisposition directs the course of the narrative on the basis of his innate distrust of violence as a solution to moral issues. According to the writer, every act of violence is another trap leading to further mistakes. The teacher Ra'uf Ilwan has now become the primary beneficiary in an abstract space that allows bureaucracy to express its power and make gains on the ruins of petit bourgeois ideals during eras of social and political mobility. Sa'id is unable to grasp the pragmatic side of life and is angered by an overarching corrupt system, and his choice is suicidal. The little light that could have led him out of this impasse comes from Sufism. Sufi orders fit into a popular paradigm, where there is a differential sphere free from total state monopoly.

Through Sa'id Mahran's stream of consciousness, the two powers with unequal bearing on a basically dispossessed, underprivileged character come to the fore: on the one hand, the revolutionary petit bourgeoisie with an infantile leftism that under the new social-and-political will soon turn into an opportunistic bureaucracy, and on the other, the Sufi order which remains unchanged and unconcerned with the outside world and its rewards or retributions. As Sa'id Mahran emerges from prison with an embittered sense of distrust, he takes infantilism to its extreme and faces further rejection from the world he believes in, represented by his daughter, Sana. Only Shaykh 'Ali al-Junaydi remains as he is unconcerned with Sa'id Mahran's mundane complaints and

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disappointments which thereby emerge as merely selfish concerns occasioned by a compelling attachment to this world that is devoid of love for God. This is what Shaykh 'Ali al-Junaydi no doubt intends with his riddle –like responses. On his first visit to the Shaykh, this is what Sa'id Mahran has to say:

"I thought that if God had granted you long life, I would find your door open."

"And the door of Heaven? How have you found that?"

"But there is nowhere on earth for me to go. And my own daughter has rejected me."

"How like you she is!"

"In what way, Master?"

"You seek a roof, not an answer." [4]

Mahfoûz's portrayal of Shaykh in this novel does not carry political undertones. Their pronouncements veer away from mundane abstract space already marred and corrupted by the intrigues and concerns of the nation-state bureaucracy and its newly rich people, the very ones who will soon suffer fatigue and ennui.

These exhortations echo the earlier statements and Sufi intimations that Shaykh gives to Sa'id Mahran in this novel.

The moral sense in this novel is that although Sa'id left prison, he couldn't really get rid of it, as the prison of the self which is still burdened by a sense of betrayal and a consequent desire for revenge. When Sa'id asks for refuge in the house, the Shaykh obliquely denies ownership of any place or property. The meaning of a "house" refers to God's property. The Shaykh gives him a chance to start all over, to purge his imprisoned self from the mundane, and set out on a different path: "Take a copy of the Qur'ân and read."[5] The Shaykh repeated the same version thrice to make the initiative anew he is asked again:

"Wash and read the verses: 'Say to them: if you love God,
then follow me and God will love you' and I have chosen thee for myself." [6]

Literary Style of '*Al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilâb*'

The novel *al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb (*the Thief and the Dogs*)* of Naguîb Mahfoûz has been considered as one of the artistic novels written after the first modern Egyptian novel Zainab (1914) of Muhammad Husain Haykal. Mahfouz uses stream of consciousness to give us intimate access to Said's thoughts, which mirrors the influence of Western existentialist literature (like Dostoevsky). The prose is rich, psychologically intense, and socially engaged.

The critic Dr. 'Abd al-Rahman Yaghi pays rich tribute to the novel with the following words:

"The Novel's Establishment Stage, in other words the Naguîb Mahfoûz Stage." [7]

Moreover, he says:

Al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb of Naguib Mahfoûz has got the third position among other phases of development in Arabic fiction".[8]

In the same way another famous critic Yusuf al-Sharuni mentions in his book "*al-Riwa'iyyun al-Thalatha"* (The Three Novelists):

"Among the important works, which have been written in our contemporary Arabic Literature, are two novels: one of it is: *Al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb (*The Thief and the Dogs*)* of Naguîb Mahfoûz, and the other one is: *Al-Rajul alladi faquda zilluhu (*The man who has lost his shadow) of Fathi Ghanim." [9]

Some of the characteristics that set apart this novel are its brevity, third person narration, and the symbolic depiction of its characters. It consists of eighteen short chapters across which the novelist has applied some poetic odes, and meditations of breakthrough dreams. The readers and the writers observe that Mahfoûz in this novel opens a new chapter in the genre of Arabic fiction, especially in Arabic novel literature. Readers of Arabic literature can observe the perfection achieved by Mahfoûz in this novel where he diverts from the traditional way to a new style of writing.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, an inference can be drawn that Naguîb Mahfoûz was a talented writer especially in the genre of Arabic Novel, by which Arabic literature got a distinct position in the context of modern literature; while Naguîb Mahfoûz could offer an artistic style of innovative approach to Arabic novel literature. Needless to say that the socio-political portrayal is scintillated in his novel, *Al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilâb* with a vivid figure of expression in the hero, and such characters and conflicting ethos are also conspicuous in his other novels.

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