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Narrative Patterns in Critical Discourse : A Reading of Said Boutajine's Poetics of Narrative

أنماط السرد في الخطاب النقدي:

قراءة في كتاب شعرية السرد للسعيد بوطاجين

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Abstract:

This analytical study is situated within the epistemological framework of literary metacriticism. Its primary objective is to critically examine the procedural distinctiveness and various levels of critical practice evident in Said Boutajine's book, Narrative Poetics: The Novel "Tomorrow is a New Day" by Abd al-Hamid Ben Haddouga as a Model. The study investigates the methodological value of the theoretical conceptualization that framed his critical work in approaching the Algerian novelistic text. It assesses the extent to which it offers new insights into it. The study concludes that the critic consciously assimilated structuralist and semiotic narrative theory paradigms, thereby contributing new knowledge about the novel and constructing a metacritical discourse that fostered the dynamism of critical activity in Algeria.

Keywords: Methodological Conception – Critical Terminology – Critical Practice – Literary Metacriticism.

المخلص:

تتنزل هذه الدراسة التحليلية في إطار تموقعها المعرفي ضمن خطاب نقد النقد الأدبي، وتهدف مسائلة الخصوصية الإجرائية للممارسة النقدية ومستوياتها في كتاب "شعرية السرد، رواية غدا يوم جديد لعبد الحميد بن هدوقة أنموذجا" للسعيد بوطاجين، وتتلمس القيمة المنهجية لتصوره النظري الذي أطر عمله النقدي، لمقاربة النص الروائي الجزائري والبحث عن مدى تقديمه معرفة جديدة به، وقد انتهت إلى نتيجة مؤداها، أن الناقد تمثل بوعي مقولات علم السرد البنيوية والسيمائية، فقدم معرفة جديدة بالرواية، وبني خطابا ميتانقديا أسهم عبره في دينامية الفعل النقدي في الجزائر. الكلمات المفتاحية: التصور المنهجي، المصطلح النقدي، الممارسة النقدية، نقد النقد الأدبي.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Algerian literary criticism has embraced the insights of modern Western theory, keeping pace with its developments. This engagement stems from an awareness of the necessity to leverage established theoretical frameworks to generate productive readings of literary discourse, whether poetry or prose. It is also driven by a conviction in the inevitability of intercultural interaction, despite the challenges it may entail. Consequently, Algerian criticism has forged a new understanding of the act of reading by assimilating contemporary critical perspectives. These perspectives are characterized by diverse epistemological backgrounds, varied cognitive objectives, and multiple procedural tools, serving as methodological alternatives to effectively interrogate creative texts, elucidate their unique aesthetic and cognitive properties, and offer a novel understanding of literary texts through strategies of differentiation and transcendence.

Engagement with critical discourse and the scrutiny of its issues constitute an epistemological field of paramount cognitive importance within the realm of literary metacriticism. The latter is driven by the imperative to seek "knowledge of knowledge" and to unveil the scientific dimensions of critical discourse at both theoretical and practical levels. Thus, the metacritical act becomes transcendent, governed by a dialogue with the critical text, a deconstruction of its cognitive and methodological system, an unveiling of its epistemological implications, and an examination of its various strata.

From this perspective, the present descriptive analytical study is positioned. It is framed by the methodological conception proposed by the French epistemologist Johanna Natali for approaching critical discourse, relying on the mechanisms of

description, analysis, and comparison. In my estimation, this model facilitates the achievement of the intended cognitive objective in the context of engaging with the critical work, *Poetics of Narrative*, published in 2017. This objective is defined by revealing the scientific dimensions of critical discourse and elucidating its effectiveness and productivity, as a critical endeavor driven by a horizon of transcendence and differentiation, thereby contributing to the dynamism of critical activity in Algeria.

This critical work possesses significant importance, which, in my view, derives from its intellectual conviction regarding the necessity of openness to the paradigm shifts of modern literary theory. It seeks to establish a new awareness of the act of criticism – an awareness that keeps pace with contemporary trends. This involves framing the question of critical methodology and the Algerian novelistic text within a cognitive inquiry, thereby producing a critical discourse that is conscious of its epistemological trajectory and its objectives, in light of its engagement with Western theory and its interrogation of the novelistic text.

This study proceeds from a theoretical premise asserting that critical discourse is governed by intellectual references, shaped by various methodological conceptions, and realizes its essence through distinct descriptive languages with diverse intellectual implications, all within a cognitive system dependent on achieving specific cognitive and aesthetic goals. From this perspective, the cognitive imperative guiding the development of this study is to provoke the following epistemological questions:

What is the nature of its methodological vision? How did the critic utilize his system of critical concepts? Where does the specificity of his critical practice lie? What is the style of his metacritical discourse?

2. Poetics of Narrative: Structural Engineering

The critic Said Boutajine constructed his critical work, *Narrative Poetics: The Novel "Tomorrow is a New Day"* by Abd al-Hamid Ben Haddouga as a Model, upon an architectural framework comprising five scholarly sections. Each section is dedicated to discussing a specific mode of narration in Ben Haddouga's novelistic writing, structured as follows: "Repetitive Narrative," "Composing Narrative," "Subordinate Narrative," "Prospective Narrative," and "Instantaneous Narrative." These sections were preceded by an introduction to the second edition, in which the critic affirmed his methodological conviction and his belief in the efficacy of narrative theory's propositions for elucidating the worlds of the novel, despite the transformations it has undergone in terms of vision, conceptual frameworks, and terminological apparatus, in light of the methodological revision of literary theories, in addition to his reference to the terminological challenge encountered by the term "narrative" within the French school.

What can be noted in this context, based on the theoretical awareness underpinning the architectural structure of this critical discourse, is its articulation into two distinct critical discourses: a metacritical discourse concerned with examining each narrative mode individually—in terms of its definition, manifestations, characteristics, and functions—and, in narrower contexts, addressing the issue of critical terminology. The other discourse is an analytical, critical discourse that stakes its claim on affirmation, confirming the effectiveness and productivity of its critical perspective and examining the theoretical paradigms developed in light of the adopted methodological conception for analyzing the novelistic text and revealing narrative methods and modes. This examination, in my view, necessitated adopting a strategy for constructing its critical discourse, based

on two discourses: a metacritical and an analytical critical one.

It is clearly observed that the titles of the book's sections intersect with the term "narrative" but vary in their description, indicating its mode based on textual possibilities. These possibilities reveal the strategies for conveying the story in the studied novel and frame the recurring narrative forms: repetitive, compositional, subordinate, prospective, and instantaneous. Thus, critic Boutajine approached the theoretical paradigms related to narrative modes as conceptualized by theorists like Todorov and Gérard Genette. He deconstructed the novel in light of these concepts, conscious of the necessity of engaging with the theoretical visions framing the study before the act of manifestation as an epistemological practice. This was done to generate knowledge about the novel and to affirm that it is a critical thesis establishing a new perspective.

3. Poetics of Narrative: Cognitive and Methodological Objectives

In his critical work, *Poetics of Narrative*, critic Boutajine aims to achieve specific cognitive and methodological goals. Focusing on the literariness of narrative within the novel and exploring how narrative patterns are realized and their functions defined, he starts from a theoretical premise, stating in this critical text: «It can be said that the method of narration constitutes an aesthetic stance adopted by the writer for the text's structure, following certain aesthetic and philosophical principles.»¹ This assertion points to an awareness of the unique nature of novelistic writing and its interpretation, acknowledging that it is governed by textual possibilities based on the novelist's philosophical convictions and aesthetic viewpoint, a thesis adopted by contemporary literary criticism.

Building on this theoretical premise, the critic defined his cognitive objectives within his investigation of repetitive narrative in the chosen novel. He states: «As we observe certain samples, we aim to highlight the

transformative values of repetitive narrative, which has not settled on a fixed function or a single narrator.»² Furthermore, he articulates his cognitive ambition in his treatment of composing narrative, seeking «to understand the reason behind resorting to composing narrative in its two types.»³ The critic also aims to achieve a cognitive objective through his focus on prospective narrative, which involves «an attempt to reveal the possible functions considering the positioning of the narrative with the macrostructure and the micro-narrative structures.»⁴

These critical texts delineate the cognitive objectives that this critical work seeks to achieve. Their core revolves around clarifying narrative patterns in the novel, identifying their specific qualitative characteristics, investigating the relationship between story time and discourse time, and focusing on the act of narration in terms of sequence and frequency. This aims to determine the positioning of the narrative act, reveal how narrative types articulate and are textually realized, and define their narrative functions. Thus, it transcends merely exploring how narration occurs to investigate the meaning of narration and its semantic implications.

These are the cognitive objectives related to the novelistic text. As for the methodological objectives linked to his theoretical conception, they become clear through his critical practice, which is built on an awareness of critical paradigm shifts and the necessity of moving beyond contextual criticism of the novelistic text, deepening the understanding of these shifts to produce a critical discourse that possesses productivity and effectiveness.

In this context, we inquire about the nature of the methodological vision he adopted to achieve his goals. We also raise the question of the congruence between the methodological conception and the cognitive objectives.

4. Poetics of Narrative: Methodological Conception and Critical Issues

A close examination of the Poetics of Narrative reveals theoretical indicators and a system of critical concepts that point to the nature of the methodological conception framing the act of reading. This is evident both in his critical introduction and across his categorized theoretical and analytical sections. The critic benefited from the theoretical framework of narrative theory's theses, declaring his transcendence of contextual criticism. He acknowledges that «this approach has contributed significantly to how we deal with the literary field, and it will remain tied to its ability to reveal the details of narrative methods, its levels, its possible functions, and concerning narrators and genres.»⁵ This critical text confirms critic Boutajine's assimilation of narrative structuralism as a methodological starting point for approaching the structural components of the novelistic text. He focuses on the concept of relationships among textual elements to uncover types of narration in the novel and how they contributed to shaping its poetics, embodying Gérard Genette's critical concepts.

The critic did not limit himself to focusing on the manner of formulation and narrative levels; he went beyond this to address function and to deconstruct the semantic worlds of the novelistic text. Therefore, he engaged with narrative semiotics and employed some of the mechanisms proposed by Greimas for analyzing narrative texts. This is evident in his statement: «Because travel alone avoids conflict between the active subject and the assaulted, and between him and the supporting characters.»⁶ In this sense, the critic benefited from the actantial model in his search for the dynamics of actors within the narrative text. Furthermore, he utilized the concept of the narrative program within his exploration of the articulations of prospective narrative, seeking to understand the transformations of the self in relation to the object of value.

To implement the logic of suitability and to transcend a monolithic methodological view, the critic also adopted the concept of

"motives" from the Russian Formalist Tomashevsky. He starts from the thesis that a novel is an object with a structure, composed of primary and free motives. The former necessitates the principle of causality and adheres to chronological order, while the latter does not.⁷ From this premise, the critic coined the terms "free motive" and "common motive," seeking repetitions in the discourse, whether actions, statements, or ideas, to determine the reasons for relying on composing narrative in the novel.

Based on the foregoing, it can be stated that Poetics of Narrative was framed by methodological perspectives developed by Russian Formalists, represented in Tomashevsky's thesis, and by narrative structuralist views articulated by Todorov and Gérard Genette. The book also engaged with narrative semiotics to achieve its objectives, focusing on the manner of narration, the time and sequence of events, their frequency, and the totality of states and transformations present in the novelistic discourse to arrive at meaning. Based on this, his cognitive ambition aligned with his methodological vision. Critic Boutajine, striving to present an effective and productive critical discourse, theoretically raised numerous critical issues related to the question of critical methodology, the strategy for engaging with it, issues of critical terminology, and the relativity of critical perspectives. This resulted in a critical discourse that varies between instructional and investigative. To deepen the thesis of methodological awareness, he focused on the positioning of the structural approach to narrative in light of the transformations literary theory has undergone and its adaptation to civilizational and cultural contexts, by developing critical alternatives that transcend structuralist paradigms of narrative analysis, such as experimental narrative. He is convinced by the thesis of transformation and differentiation, while simultaneously acknowledging the productivity of structural and semiotic analysis of narrative.

In this context, the critic emphasizes a crucial issue related to the relativity of critical perspectives. He believes that «all methods, ideas, readings, and conceptions are subject to revision and invalidation, since they may erode with the accumulation of theories and applications, and with research's need to update its tools and visions in search of an optimal method of analysis.»⁸ This critical statement indicates the critic's awareness of the relativity of critical methodologies and that human knowledge is subject to the logic of transformation, governed by the dynamic action imposed by civilizational contexts, in response to the spirit of the age.

Consistent with this critical perspective, the critic revealed his strategy for engaging with Western-originated critical methodology. He states: «What the reader can easily notice is my constant endeavor to escape the mechanistic applications of the 'other's' achievement, regardless of its references and analytical capabilities. This is what I did when I approached narratology with caution, and then resorted to circumvention of its rules and strictness, or even infusing it with some interpretations and readings...»⁹ It is clear from this critical text that the critic is aware of the necessity of engaging with Western influences through a strategy rooted in epistemological dialogue with critical paradigms, moving away from a literal application of critical methodological mechanisms, and focusing on what suits the specificity of the Arabic text and its culture.

Among the critical issues raised by the critic is that of crucial terminology, specifically concerning the term "narrative" in Western theory, which suffers from terminological and conceptual instability. Furthermore, he asserts that terms related to the description of narrative and its types have not reached a consensus in our Arabic discourse.

5. Poetics of Narrative and the Nature of the Studied Corpus

The critic precisely defined the scope of his studied corpus in the title of his critical work, choosing the novel "Tomorrow is a New Day" by the Algerian novelist Abd al-Hamid Ben Haddouga as a sample for the study. This choice was made to examine the system of procedural concepts that he believes would help him elucidate narrative patterns and uncover their specific structural, semantic, and functional characteristics. He based this selection on a criterion of choice informed by his awareness of this corpus's suitability for his cognitive objective and methodological conception. He justified this selection by stating: «As I observed in some literary samples, including 'Tomorrow is a New Day,' the narrative itself repeats in terms of wording and structure, in addition to the narrated content, of course. That is, the form reiterates itself because it recurs in the same manner, and thus, the possibility of keeping the term within specific limits because it signifies the previously mentioned meaning.»¹⁰

Based on this critical text, it can be concluded that the critic selected "Tomorrow is a New Day" as the study's corpus based on its structural and artistic characteristics, as it responds to his previously defined cognitive objectives. He emphasized that the repetitive nature of the narrative, both in wording and structure, was the determining factor in his selection. It is noteworthy that he chose a single novel to ensure control over the study and to produce a coherent discourse in terms of conception, practice, and value judgments.

6. Poetics of Narrative and Critical Practice

Critical practice, described as «a methodological and cognitive moment that prompts an examination of the critic's arguments in his secondary text, dissecting its main themes through a scientific alignment necessitated by the critic's adherence to the rules of his specialized field»¹¹, reveals the specificity of the critic's act of criticism and demonstrates his awareness of the paradigms within his

epistemological domain that frame his critical work. It is worth noting that, at the level of his critical practice, the critic focused on presenting theoretical critical knowledge related to his methodological conception and conceptual framework, which he would employ to describe and deconstruct the novel. This approach reflects his awareness of the necessity of this presentation, which falls within an instructional discourse aiming to introduce the Arab reader to the articulations of his critical discourse.

To deepen the investigation into the poetics of narrative in "Tomorrow is a New Day," critic Boutajine focused on the narrative forms employed by novelist Abd al-Hamid Ben Haddouga to convey the novel's events, in terms of their type and function, embodying Gérard Genette's critical thesis. He described the methods of writing the novel, defined the situations of the appearance and disappearance of narrative patterns, and observed the most important recurring events. He revealed the repetitive narrative, which is governed by the repetition of a single event, «and this type of narration often appears in multiple perspectives of events to reveal various psychologies and situations.»¹² After establishing the recurring events, he focused on how repetitive narrative transforms from specific to general and revealed its functions.

To achieve his cognitive aims, the critic observed composing narrative as a second type of narrative pattern in the novel, which contributes to accelerating the pace of narration, as «what happened in the story more than once is narrated in the discourse only once.»¹³ In this context, the critic focused on narrative that refers to internal composition, embodying Gérard Genette's thesis, through which he distinguished between types of compositional narrative. Furthermore, he acknowledged that «there is another type of composing narrative that does not revolve around the central story as much as it concerns itself with marginalia, minor purposes, and characters that hold a

significant functional position.»¹⁴ Consistent with his method of studying the repetitive pattern, the critic identified the functions of composing a narrative.

Continuing this analysis, the critic treated the subordinate narrative in the same manner, in his quest for the temporal positioning of the narrative act within the story. The critic termed the subsequent narrative as a subordinate narrative, pointing to the disorder in critical terminology. He confirmed that he adopted Gérard Genette's concept and utilized it to define subordinate narrative in the novel, focusing on the situations of its appearance and disappearance, given the dominance of mi

metic narrative, and relying on the textual indicators of this narrative pattern.

The critic continues his analysis of the novel, searching for narrative forms. He focuses on prospective narrative or anterior narrative, adopting the concept proposed by Gérard Genette. He examined how prospective narrative articulates within the novel, confirming that segments of prospective narrative are complex narratives combining both instantaneous and prospective narratives. This is «due to the articulation of prospective narrative around the evocation of the past with its temporally and spatially embodied events, and not around the future.»¹⁵ The critic approaches instantaneous narrative following the same steps: defining the concept's boundaries, establishing essential differences between it and prospective and subordinate narratives, and searching for its articulations within the novel.

These data confirm that the critic interrogated the novelistic text, adopting structuralist narratology and narrative semiotics as a methodological framework to identify the articulations and semantic implications of narrative patterns.

7. CONCLUSION

Said Boutajine's book, *Poetics of Narrative*, marks a significant addition to contemporary Algerian critical discourse. Its author contributed to the dynamism of critical activity in Algeria by engaging with

critical issues raised by structuralist narratology and narrative semiotics, which served as the theoretical framework for his critical work.

Boutajine addressed questions of critical methodology, embracing the relativity of critical perspectives. He also focused on the problematic nature of narrative critical terminology. Moreover, he explored narrative aspects such as duration, frequency, and mood, demonstrating a conscious engagement with the new critical paradigm shifts imposed by contemporary literary theory and necessitated by the methodological imperative to produce productive cognitive discourse. It is worth noting here that Boutajine was aware of the need to consider the specificity of the Arabic text while working within the framework of non-indigenous critical perspectives.

Building on this, he adopted an epistemological dialogue approach, constructing a metacritical discourse that encompassed both instructional and investigative elements. Operationally, the critic identified the narrative forms employed by the novelist to present the reader with an analytical critical discourse that diverged from the prevailing approaches at the time, guided by the principle of alignment between his methodological vision and his cognitive objectives.

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