

The Influence of the Western Novel on Arabic Narrative From the Perspective of "Abdullah Ibrahim"

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Received: 12/05/2025

Accepted: 05/01/2026

Published: 08/07/ 2026

Abstract:

Most modern Arabic narrative studies often depends on Western theories and methodologies, which has led Arab critics to impose on the Arabic text within visions alien to it that do not grasp its aesthetics and the culture in which it was produced. Abdullah Ibrahim is one of the most important critics who tried to refute the idea that the Arabic novel is a product of Western literature and that it is foreign to Arabic literature due to the conditions that prevailed in the West in the 19th century - which had a great impact on the countries of the Levant, especially during the colonial campaigns - and accordingly, Ibrahim tried to deconstruct the old Arabic texts and study their development by linking them to Arabic culture and its particularities without neglecting their relationship to Western influences, especially after the Arabization movement and the colonial campaign, in order to ultimately demolish the assumption that the Arabic novel is a purely Western product.

Key words : Modern Arabic Narrative ; influences ; The Western Novel ; Abd al-Ah Ibrahim

Introduction

Abdullah Ibrahim succeeded in establishing a comprehensive critical project based on dismantling established assumptions and rereading the Arab narrative heritage in light of contemporary critical approaches, linking it to cultural, historical, and ideological contexts. He analyzed the emergence of the novel as a literary and cultural phenomenon resulting from the fusion of the inherited tradition with modern influences, rejecting its subservience to the Western novel and emphasizing that modern narrative is a restructuring of old narrative systems to suit societal changes and the developments of the nineteenth century.

Given that the novel is the vessel that can carry all the issues of humanity and society with all their contradictions and ideological and cultural interactions, the novel emerged as an expressive genre that carries these issues with all their complexities and moves humanity from a complex period to a more complex stage.

1.The Concept of Narration

1.1 Narration in language:

It is the presentation of one thing to another, bringing them together in a coherent and sequential manner. To narrate a hadith or similar is to follow it in succession. So-and-so narrates a hadith well if he has a good flow of events. Regarding the Prophet's speech, peace and blessings be upon him, it was said: He did not narrate hadith in a rapid, continuous manner, meaning he did not speak hastily

or in a rush. To recite the Quran is to follow its recitation carefully. Continuous narration. (Ibn Manzur, 2002, S.R.D)

1.2 Narration in terminology:

Narration is an act without limits, it expands to include various discourses, whether literary or non-literary, created by man wherever he is found and wherever he is. Roland Barthes states: "Storytelling can be performed by means of the language used, whether oral or written, and by means of the image, still or moving, and by means of movement, and by means of the organized blending of all these materials. It is present in myth, fable, parable, tale, story, epic, history, diamonds, drama, comedy, suggestion, painted picture, in decorated glass, cinema, and the circus, variety shows and conversations..." (Yaqtin, 1997, p. 19)

Narration, in its simplest definition, is storytelling that progresses from primitive acts of uttering words that convey successive meanings, culminating in the novel that embodies its artistic existence in its fullest form.(Saleh, 2003, p. 9)

The term "narrative" has also ranged from being an unfinished discourse to a literary story performed by a "narrator" who is not necessarily the author, but rather an intermediary between the events and their recipients. This is linked to the term "narratology," which refers to the way in which a story or myth is actually told. Narratology, therefore, is an exploration of what makes a story or novel a narrative literature through a series of facts and events after establishing certain relationships between them(Sattar, 2003, pp. 62, 63). Narration is (the means of conveying the story to the listener or reader, through the presence of an intermediary between the characters and the recipient, who is the narrator) (Sattar, 2003, p63).

It is clear here that the technical definition of narrative does not differ from the linguistic definition; it is the sequence of things, one after another, which is also the technical definition. Narrative is a fertile field encompassing action in general, whether oral, kinetic, or visual. The oral includes storytelling, narration, and history. The sequence of events, one after another, is called narrative, and one fact after another is also called narrative until the purpose of each action is fulfilled. The kinetic represents rituals and human practices of movement and activity. One movement is followed by another in a narrative, and a ritual practice or activity is followed by another activity, also characterized by sequence and succession until it reaches its desired goal. This is also called narrative. Similarly, the sequence of colors, one after another, and one shape after another to form an image, is also called narrative.

According to the second, third, and fourth definitions, narration is closely linked to storytelling. The relationship between them is complementary, as narration works to convey the story, and the story is formed or takes its final form through the process of narrating its actions one after the other. Narration, therefore, is the active element within the entire process, as it works to build the narrative fabric, along with other elements, and to convey it from the characters to the listener. Thus, the narration process here is a dual process: the process of constructing the story narratively in the mind of the narrator, piece by piece, and at the same time, its transmission through oral and kinetic narration during delivery (the sequence of speech, movement, and gestures). The sequence and organization of speech also play a crucial role in myth construction, as Raymond Trusson states: "Myth is a narrative composed of a sequence of distinct basic sentences. These myths, or basic mythic

elements, are common to several myths. A particular myth is distinguished by the choice of myths and the way they are organized." (Trousson, 1981, 61)

2.Components of Narrative Discourse:

After defining narrative and narrative perspective, it is necessary to examine the components of narrative discourse. Narrative discourse, or narrative text in general, consists of several components essential for the completeness of the text. These components are:

2.1 Narration:

This refers to the way a story is told, or the method by which a narrative text is presented. It varies from one writer to another according to several factors, including the writer's perspective (Lahmidani, , 1991, p. 45) and their presence in the text through their unique vocabulary. Multiple writers contributing to a single text will result in a variety of narrative

2.2 The narrative character:

It is a major component of narrative discourse. A novel cannot be written without characters. The character is the focus of every narrative work. The connection is very close between the characters of the narrative text and the intended event in the narrative text (Lahmidani, , 1991, pp. 50-52).

1.3 The narrative space:

This is the place chosen by the narrator or writer to set the events of their novel or story. It is a very important element of narrative discourse, as specifying the place where the events of the narrative text take place greatly increases the likelihood that the text actually occurred. The setting brings the text from words to a concrete image in the reader's mind when they open their imagination to visualize the events of the text within the defined narrative space.

2.4 Narrative time:

This is the time that the writer chooses for the events of his story to take place in, and it is also necessary to complete the picture of the event in the reader's mind. The events of a story or novel cannot take place without mentioning the time of these events, and the chronological sequence between the events in the text must be logical and reasonable.

2.5 Description in narration:

This depends on the writer's imagination. Beautifying the description and creating suspense by describing the smallest details of the event attracts the reader, and this is the aesthetic function of description. As for its interpretive function, it lies in explaining many things that need to be addressed in their smallest details to be perfectly clear.

Narrative perspective and narrative forms: This is a critical concept that addresses narrative discourse or the method a writer uses to narrate the events of their story or novel. Narrative perspective deals with the specific components of the narrated text, such as characters, events, the main plot, and so on. Narrative forms, on the other hand, are distinguished from one another by the element of time. Time is the sole factor that differentiates these narrative forms (Lahmidani, 1991, pp. 73-79).

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distinguished from one another by the element of time. Time is the sole factor that differentiates these narrative forms:

3.1 Sequential narration:

Sequential narration is a narration based on a pre-planned conception of the time of the text. Sequential narration means that the writer narrates events according to their chronological sequence in an accurate manner. This narration applies perfectly to texts related to history, or texts whose parts are dedicated to writing sequential events on a daily basis. This sequence is logical and flexible, as the writer moves from the introduction to the event, then the plot, then the solution, then the conclusion in a logical manner.

3.2 Discontinuous narration:

As for the definition of discontinuous narration: it is the opposite of sequential narration; it is based on the lack of precision in the logical sequence of events, so there is no clear beginning, plot and end in the text. The writer may mention the plot in the last event of the text, and this is what is called discontinuous narration.

3.4 Alternating narration:

Alternating narration is a narration based on the alternation of events. The writer may be in one story, then move to another, then return to the first story. This is common in the way stories are narrated that are turned into filmed television works. (Lahmidani, 1991, pp. 73-79).

4. Narratology or the science of narration:

(French: Narratologie) is a theory concerned with the study of narrative genres (short story, novel, maqama, anecdote, myth, fable). Narratology, or the study of narrative, is a term coined by structuralism, originating with the Russian Formalists and Vladimir Propp in his work on the formation of the story. However, Tzvetan Todorov first coined the term "narratology" in 1969 in his book **The Rules of the Decameron**, defining it as "the science of the story." Narratology was then further developed by critics and scholars such as Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Greimas, Julia Kristeva, and others.

5. The narrator's functions:

The narrator's functions in a story include:

- a. Narrative function
- b. Coordinating function
- c. Informative function
- d. Attention-grabbing function
- e. Expository function
- f. Ideological or commentary function
- g. Informative/influential function
- h. Impressionistic or expressive function (Harama, <https://www.alukah.net>)

6. Narrative methods:

Narrative takes many forms, whether in short stories or novels, allowing us to distinguish between three narrative perspectives (Todorov, n.d., pp. 58-59).

6.1 The omniscient viewpoint:

In this viewpoint, the narrator is characterized by knowing everything about the characters in his world, including their psychological depths, feelings, and thoughts, breaking through all barriers and

moving through time and space with ease. A story that adopts this narrative perspective is typically told in the third person.

6.2 The vision with:

Here the narrator is equal in knowledge to the character, as he does not give us any explanation of the events before the character himself reaches him, and he uses the first-person or addressee pronoun in this vision, where the narrator is identical to the fictional character.

6.3 External perspective:

In this perspective, the narrator has less awareness and knowledge than any character in the story, and thus he can only describe what he sees and allows, without going beyond that, such as talking about the characters' consciousness and thoughts, for example, or commenting on the events. He is a neutral narrator

7. Modern Arabic Narrative from the Perspective of Abdullah Ibrahim

Modern Arabic narrative is a field of knowledge that has been crystallizing since the nineteenth century, especially in its most prominent manifestation, the novel. This literary genre still constitutes the focus of attention for writers, critics and researchers, and occupies the first position globally and in the Arab world, to the extent that it can be said that we are living in the age of the novel par excellence.

The Iraqi researcher **Abdullah Ibrahim** explored this topic in a two-part book. The first part deconstructs the colonial discourse that explains the emergence of the Arabic novel solely through the influence of the Western novel, disregarding any Arab influences. The second part examines narrative and semantic structures. Thus, the two parts complement each other in chronicling the origins of the modern Arabic narrative and deconstructing its structures, combining historical and critical analysis of the novel.

1. In the first part, entitled "**Modern Arab Narrative - Deconstructing Colonial Discourse and Reinterpreting Origins**," Ibrahim states in the introduction the book's ambition to "construct the cultural context for the emergence of modern Arab narratives, especially the novel," and he works to achieve this ambition over five chapters, in which he adopts a single methodology.

1.1 In the first chapter, which he titled "**The Western Cultural Influence and the Deconstruction of Colonial Discourse**," Ibrahim deconstructs the colonial discourse that claims Western credit for the emergence of the Arabic novel, through an examination of the French campaign in Egypt and the exposure of the romantic vision of the campaign that characterized the literature of the nineteenth century. He reveals the exaggerations that considered the campaign a dividing line between two histories, stripping it of any positive results based on the campaign's own documents. He exposes the religious colonial hypocrisy represented by Napoleon's prophethood, and deconstructs the campaign from within, based on the memoirs of one of its officers, which depict the clash between the romantic view and reality.

He sees Napoleon's archaeological campaign as merely a campaign to plunder Egyptian antiquities, taking advantage of Muhammad Ali's ignorance and weak connection to history. However, he soon points to the latter's interest in scientific missions and the printing press, which is inconsistent with his accusation of ignorance and weak historical sense. He explains the campaign's role in tearing apart the Egyptian social fabric and playing on the strings of minorities... Thus, he reviews and criticizes the consciousness disseminated by the colonial discourse, concluding that the

influence exerted by Western culture on Arab culture during that historical period was limited. In doing so, he breaks a stereotypical consciousness and established assumptions.(Ibrahim, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 11-65).

Abdullah Ibrahim focuses on deconstructing Western cultural hegemony and the colonial discourse that attributes the emergence of the Arabic novel solely to the West. He uses the French campaign in Egypt as a case study—drawing on the campaign’s own documents, such as Napoleon’s religious hypocrisy and the memoirs of his officers—to expose the contradiction between Enlightenment slogans and colonial practice. In doing so, he challenges the romanticized Western view that regarded the campaign as a watershed moment separating two eras and as the starting point of modernity in Egypt.

1.2 ***In the second chapter***, entitled “The Disintegration of the Narrative Heritage,” Ibrahim moves from dismantling colonial discourse to dismantling the narrative heritage, distinguishing between two established styles of linguistic expression known to this heritage: the written style based on artifice, affectation, eloquence, and fluency, which the modern novel has abandoned, and the oral style based on oral tradition connected to the taste of the masses, which the novel inherited and worked to develop since the middle of the nineteenth century.(Ibrahim, 2013,vol.1,pp.67-99).

In this chapter, the researcher deconstructs the Arab narrative tradition, distinguishing between two established modes: the written style—characterized by craftsmanship, affectation, rhetoric, and formal constraint—and the oral style, which relies on direct oral delivery attuned to the tastes of the general public. Consequently, the researcher concludes that the novel did not emerge in a vacuum but rather as the result of a conflict and transformation in local modes of expression, playing out between the oral-vernacular and the formal-written traditions.

1.3 ***In the third chapter***, entitled “**Arabization and Imitation of Narratives**,” and in line with his statement about the limited influence of the West on the Arabic narrative, the researcher downplays the importance of Arabization and its impact on the Arabic novel, and goes further when he sees that the process of Arabization, whether in choosing the Arabized novels or dealing with them, is what was subject to the Arabic narratives, and was influenced by them, and responded to the horizons of reception that these narratives established. While we understand the author's attempt to connect the Arabic novel to its roots and ground it in its own land, tracing its narrative transformations in an effort to correct the misconception that it is severed from its origins and linked solely to the Western novel, his denial of Western influence on Arabic texts is the flip side of claiming exclusive Western influence in the emergence of these texts. Perhaps a more balanced view of their origins and circumstances is closer to accuracy and objectivity.(Ibrahim, 2013, vol.1, pp. 109-158).

In this chapter, the researcher discusses "Arabization" and mimesis. He downplays the artistic and structural merit of early Arabization efforts, arguing instead that modern Arabic narratives were shaped by—and indebted to—ancient Arabic narrative traditions, while also responding to local horizons of reception. In doing so, the researcher rejects the notion of a purely Western influence on the genesis of the Arabic novel; simultaneously, he seeks to reconnect the genre to its indigenous roots, thereby dismantling the premise that the Arabic novel is merely the offspring of the Western novel.

1.4*In the fourth chapter*, titled "**Reconstructing the Context of Novelistic Pioneering**," the author reconstructs the context of novelistic pioneering, arguing that many critical opinions were overlooked and "failed to be employed in the analysis of the novelistic phenomenon." This led most researchers to attribute the establishment of novelistic consciousness to the novel "Zainab," an attribution that is misplaced. Ibrahim concludes the first part of his first book with a study of the narrative corpus in the nineteenth century. (Ibrahim, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 163-206).

The researcher moves on to address the issue of "novelistic pioneering"—a subject that has sparked considerable debate among critics. Abdullah Ibrahim argues that many critical perspectives have employed the concept of pioneering without a proper understanding of the "structure of the novel," thereby marginalizing works that predated "Zaynab" and attributing the distinction of being the absolute starting point to Muhammad Husayn Haykal. Consequently, the researcher calls for a structural and historical re-examination of the narrative output that accumulated prior to 1914.

1.5*In the fifth and final chapter*, entitled "**The Narrative Corpus in the Nineteenth Century**" he studied novels by Khalil al-Khouri, Marash al-Halabi, Salim al-Bustani, Ali Mubarak, Jurji Zaydan, and Muhammad al-Muwaylihi, concluding that this corpus constitutes the first signs of the Arabic novel genre, whose narrative identity gradually crystallized in later stages. (Ibrahim, 2013, vol.1, pp. 219-259).

The researcher concludes the first part of his book with an examination of the nineteenth-century narrative corpus—ranging from the novels of Khalil al-Khouri, Francis al-Halabi, Salim al-Bustani, Ali Mubarak, and Jurji Zaydan to those of al-Muwaylihi. He views this body of work, despite the varying artistic merit of the texts, as representing the early precursors to the Arabic novel, the features of which would evolve subsequently

2.*In the second part*, "**Modern Arabic Narrative - Narrative and Semantic Structures**", in which the author deals with narrative and semantic structures in seven chapters, following the same methodology. He begins with an introduction and ends with a conclusion, and in between are subheadings, ranging between four and eight headings in one chapter.

2.1 *In the first chapter*, entitled "**Modern Narrative and the Cultural Stance**" Ibrahim explains the negative cultural stance towards narrative, a stance based on official, religious, and conservative moral considerations. This manifests itself in Imam Muhammad Abduh's view of mythical books as "pure lies," in Muhammad Husayn Haykal's fear of being labeled a lawyer by a short story writer, leading him to use a pseudonym for his "pioneering" novel, in Naguib Mahfouz's disavowal of the early stories he published, and in the condescending view of the novel held by Al-Aqqad, Al-Rafi'i, Muhammad Abduh, Muhammad Omar, Ya'qub Sarruf, and Tawfiq al-Hakim. (Ibrahim, 2013, vol.2, pp. 07-33)

In it, the researcher discusses how the narrative oscillates between a negative cultural stance—rooted in official or religious considerations, such as Imam Muhammad Abduh's view of superstition as mere falsehood—and a positive cultural stance grounded in creativity and imagination, exemplified by figures like Al-Aqqad, Al-Rafi'i, Taha [Hussein], Muhammad Hussein Haykal (in "Zaynab"), and Naguib Mahfouz (in his early stories).

2.2 *In the second chapter*, titled "The Problematic Nature of the Novel 'Zainab'," Ibrahim examines the novel "Zainab" and the issue of its pioneering status. He presents two opposing viewpoints on the novel, refuting the motivations behind them and casting doubt on the opinions

claiming its pioneering status based on the available textual data prior to it, as well as on the opinions that question it. In doing so, he does not deviate from his preconceived stance regarding critical assumptions, as he examines them, questions them, deconstructs them, presents the two opposing viewpoints, and ultimately sides with one of them—often the viewpoint that undermines the assumption.(Ibrahim, 2013,vol.2,pp. 39-75).

The researcher re-examined the components of Muhammad Husayn Haykal's novel "Zaynab", analyzing its structural and semantic makeup, its alignment with modern horizons of reception, and whether it truly merits the title of "first novel."

2.3 *In the third chapter*, entitled "**Patriarchal Values and Interpretive Narrative**," the researcher addresses patriarchal values and interpretive narrative through Naguib Mahfouz's narrative corpus. He demonstrates Mahfouz's celebration of fatherhood and its strict values based on masculinity at the beginning of his experience, coinciding with the coherence of the narrative structure of patriarchal novels. He observes the transformations of fatherhood from the realistic social dimension to the metaphysical and then the epic... coinciding with the transformations of the structure from coherence to fissure to fragmentation to intense echoes, so that each patriarchal stage had its own structure that was compatible with it.(Ibrahim, 2013,vol.2,pp. 81-124).

The researcher examines Mahfouz's engagement with paternal values and expository narration across his body of novels, highlighting the cohesive narrative structure of his early classic realist works. The Arab society in which the novel first emerged was quintessentially patriarchal—a setting where the "father" held absolute, singular authority over the lives of those under his sway, and where the narrator assumed the role of father, teacher, or moral arbiter. The study also elucidates the subsequent transformations of fatherhood in response to shifting social realities (as seen in "Children of Gebelawi"), tracing the erosion of paternal authority as its echoes faded from the novels in tandem with its decline in real life.

2.4 *In Chapter Four*, entitled "**Narrative Representation and the Multiplicity of Cultural References**" by Ibrahim addresses the multiplicity of cultural references to which modern narrative alludes, ranging from identity, nature, culture, society, colonialism, multiple identities, tyranny, and exile. This multiplicity coincides with the multiplicity of narrative techniques, styles, forms, and perspectives .(Ibrahim, 2013, vol. 2, pp. 139-188).

This chapter examines the transformation of the Arabic novel into a complex space charged with diverse and varied cultural references. It analyzes Tayeb Salih's novel "Season of Migration to the North" by exploring the cultural references it invokes—which oscillate between identity, nature, culture, and society across various contexts (colonialism, freedom, tyranny, and exile)—alongside the novel's multiplicity of narrative techniques

2.5 *In Chapter Five* ,Entitled "**The Fracture of Narrative Representation and the Cracking of Virtual Worlds**" The way in which narrative material is constructed, narrative methods and perspectives, the transformation of narrative from a tool for producing the story to a tool for exploring the world, and the transformation of the story from the core of the text to an element in the context of an interconnected network of elements.(Ibrahim, 2013,vol.2,pp. 193-224).

In this chapter, the researcher demonstrates that the Arabic novel reached the pinnacle of its modernity following the breakdown of traditional narrative representation. The novelistic text ceased to be merely a story mirroring society; instead, it evolved into an experimental text where virtual worlds

and epistemological certainties intersect, reflecting the fragmentation of the social fabric and the turbulence of contemporary Arab reality.

Here, the researcher moves from the phase of foundational establishment—marked by a struggle against paternal authority and established frames of reference—to a phase of deconstruction and pure modernist experimentation.

2.6 *In Chapter Six*, entitled "**Dense Narrative: From Research to Discovery**," identifies two types of narrative in the novel: transparent and dense. When the narrator disappears behind the events and recedes as far as possible in favor of the story, transparent narration emerges, allowing the events to present themselves without the reader sensing the narrator's presence as a narrative intermediary between them and the imagined events. However, when the novelist refers to themselves, controlling the characters' movements and destinies, the reader does not merge with the imaginary narrative world, and its transparency is not achieved. The illusion dissipates or its foundations are broken because the narrator intervenes, speaking about themselves and their role in the imaginary world, expressing their observations about everything. This is where dense narration appears. Every narrative discourse has two levels: the direct verbal level and the imagined narrative level from which it emerges. (Ibrahim, 2013, vol.2, pp. 227-263).

In this study, the researcher examines the dichotomy between "transparent" and "dense" narration through the texts of Edwar al-Kharrat. He observes that when the narrator recedes behind the events—drawing as far as possible to facilitate transparent narration—the narrative appears to present itself without an intermediary, paradoxically making the reader aware of the narrative medium. Conversely, dense narration turns the reader into a genuine partner in the creation of meaning, as they perceive the narrator actively controlling the characters' fates and movements.

2.7 *In Chapter Seven*, entitled "**The Novel and Narrative Structure**" argues that the awareness of novelists familiar with narrative techniques led them to incorporate many of these techniques into their novels. For example, Cervantes included short stories in his **Don Quixote**, and this practice became widespread in other novels. This phenomenon was also present in the Arabic novel as early as the nineteenth century, as seen in the works of Khalil al-Khoury, al-Bustani, and Jurji Zaydan. Perhaps the most notable examples of this relate to the narrative structure of novels, and the corpus of twentieth-century Arabic novels is replete with such examples. (Ibrahim, 2013, vol.2, pp. 271-314).

In this chapter, the researcher examines the definitive structural form that the contemporary Arabic novel has adopted—or what he terms its "narrative composition." In its current stage of maturity, the novel is no longer merely a story being told; rather, it has become a complex construct that reconfigures narrative elements—time, space, narrators, and perspective—within a structural framework where forms intertwine and semantic levels multiply. He further asserts that the corpus of the twentieth-century Arabic novel is linked to a continuous structural consciousness, rather than one severed from its roots.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident across both volumes that Abdullah Ibrahim has invested significant research effort, frequently highlighting the methodology and techniques he employs; the chapters abound with methodological observations that serve as his research tools. This two-volume work stands as an indispensable reference for researchers studying modern Arabic narrative and its

transformations, while also correcting numerous long-held assumptions. The author concludes that modern Arabic narrative emerged from an intense interaction between cultural frames of reference and literary genres—a product of a blend combining traditional narrative heritage with new cultural influences. Consequently, he rejects the notion that the Arabic novel was shaped solely by the Western novel, while simultaneously acknowledging the impact of certain Western influences.

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