

Metanarration of Characters in the Novel "Manazil H 17" by Raghad Al-Suhail

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Introduction

The novel stands as one of the most complex and diverse literary forms, allowing writers to explore new worlds and embody multifaceted human experiences. In this context, Raghad Suhail's *Manazil H 17* emerges as a compelling case study, characterized by its profound narrative depth and rich psychological explorations. The novel grapples with themes of identity, belonging, and individual struggles within intricate social and cultural frameworks, rendering it a significant subject for scholarly analysis. *Manazil H 17* employs metanarrative as a literary device, adding layers of complexity to the text. Metanarrative, broadly defined, refers to self-referential storytelling that exposes the construction of the narrative itself, reflecting the author's conscious engagement with the act of writing. This technique transcends mere plot and character development, inviting readers to contemplate the narrative process and fostering a deeper understanding of the psychological and social dimensions shaping the characters. The Iraqi novelist Raghad Suhail frequently utilizes this technique in her works, particularly in *Manazil H 17* and *Ahabbat Hmaran (I Loved a Donkey)*, employing diverse methods to weave metanarrative into her storytelling. Notably, Suhail repeats character names across her novels, revealing shared traits and interconnected narratives that suggest a unified thematic focus—arguably centering on Iraq. This repetition invites readers to uncover parallels between characters and events, hinting at a collective representation of Iraqi identity and experience.

Characters in the novel play a pivotal role in embodying its central themes. The construction and evolution of characters pose a significant challenge for the author, who must craft multifaceted individuals that interact with their world in ways mirroring their unique experiences. In *Manazil H 17*, characters are not mere vehicles for advancing the plot but dynamic entities carrying hopes, dreams, and conflicts. Through metanarrative, Suhail illustrates how characters articulate their identities and evolve through their engagement with the narrative itself. The significance of studying metanarrative lies in its capacity to provide a

framework for understanding character formation and development. By analyzing narrative techniques, researchers can elucidate how characters are presented and how the narrative interacts with them. Such analysis not only deepens textual interpretation but also enriches broader literary discussions of contemporary works. Furthermore, examining metanarrative clarifies the influence of sociocultural factors on character construction. In *Manazil H 17*, individual identities intersect with social contexts, resulting in complex characterizations. Through metanarrative, Suhail reflects the challenges her characters face in navigating identity and belonging, particularly within Iraq's multifaceted cultural landscape.

Methodology

The research relies on the descriptive-analytical methodology, which is considered a comprehensive and suitable approach for studying meta-narrative elements in the novel. This methodology focuses on analyzing literary texts with the aim of exploring how characters are constructed and developed within the narrative, while emphasizing the relationship between the social and cultural contexts that influence these characters. The research utilizes several critical tools and concepts that represent the core of the meta-narrative study, examining elements such as: the narrative awareness of characters, the multiplicity of narrators, and the overlapping semantic layers within the text, in addition to critiquing the socio-cultural contexts that frame the novel. Within this framework, the focus is on how the author, Raghda Suhail, employs meta-narrative techniques to enhance the depth of characters and highlight their psychological and social complexities. This is achieved by analyzing how characters interact with the narrative and with one another, and how these interactions reflect the human experiences presented in the novel. This critical approach does not merely aim to understand characters as narrative entities but extends to include an examination of the symbolic and semantic layers that these characters carry within the text.

Discussion and Results

The study revealed that the novel "*Manazil H 17*" employed metanarrative as an effective tool to delve into the psychological and social complexities of its characters, particularly through the protagonist Qamar Al-Zaman's transformation into an ant—a symbol of alienation and the struggle between self and society, reflecting the crisis of female identity within a patriarchal context. The novel successfully deconstructed outdated narrative and social traditions by employing techniques such as polyphony and symbolic displacements (e.g., the moon as a symbol of femininity, the prison as a representation of intellectual constraints), exposing the contradictions between modernity and tradition in contemporary Iraqi literature. Additionally, the metanarrative highlighted the characters' interactions with cultural and religious contexts, where the evolution

of the "metacharacter" mirrored the internal and external conflicts faced by women in a traditional society.

The novel affirms that metanarrative is not merely a narrative technique but a critical discourse reflecting the author's awareness of the text's structure and formation, aligning with postmodern theories that view metafiction as a reflection of the text's self-awareness. The protagonist's metamorphosis into an ant symbolizes the reconfiguration of the female body as a space for the interplay between liberation and repression, transcending traditional narrative to reinterpret identity.

Conclusion

The novel's structure is notably complex, allowing for interpretation from multiple angles. The use of metanarrative enriches the text with symbols and multi-layered meanings. The author relies on multiple narrators, including an omniscient narrator, to convey diverse messages about religion, politics, and society. This interplay between characters and narrative reflects the intricacy of social and political life during that era, particularly regarding women's status. The novel masterfully blends reality and imagination, inviting readers to reconsider traditional notions of history and society.

Secondary characters played a pivotal role in presenting the historical and social context. For instance, the character Rustam, the Shah's chamberlain, provided an accurate portrayal of the Iranian royal court and its secrets, while Zafran, the protagonist's governess, added psychological and emotional depth by depicting Qamar Al-Zaman's childhood and character development. These characters highlighted the diverse realities of women during that period—whether educated or unaware of their rights. For example, the character Asia, the first wife of a wealthy man abandoned for her infertility, embodies the patriarchal society's injustice toward women.

Raghad Sihail employed metaphorical characters to deepen the narrative and add new layers of meaning. These characters were crafted as narrators to recount events related to the protagonist's life from varied perspectives. For instance, the unnamed "killer," identified only by traits, added suspense and prompted readers to question the line between reality and fiction. Using metaphorical characters allowed the author to indirectly emphasize women's suffering and challenges, rendering the text more profound and impactful.

Sihail utilized meta-personal fiction to reconstruct a new reality parallel to traditional norms. This technique immersed readers in a state of ambiguity between reality and imagination, enriching the reading experience. For example, the scene where the protagonist transforms into a tiny ant reflects women's suffering under social and political oppression. This approach enabled the author to convey messages of freedom and liberation through sophisticated literary means that transcend linguistic and textual boundaries.

The novel strongly advocates for women's rights throughout history. Through Qamar Al-Zaman's character, the author emphasized the importance of

modern interpretations of religious texts to overcome sectarian conflicts and legislative rigidity. The novel calls for updating religious interpretations to transform Islam into a tool for peace rather than a source of division. It also underscores the need to liberate minds from the intellectual and social constraints imposed by patriarchal societies.

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