

The Mechanisms of George Tarabishi's Critical Approach: A Reading of *The Game of Dream and Reality* and *God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey*

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Abstract:

This study examines the influence of global Western critical approaches on the critical works of Georges Tarabichi, spanning fifty years of scholarship and culminating in nine books dedicated to the criticism of narrative fiction. This half-century of critical output provides an insightful overview of the dynamics within contemporary Arab criticism, reflecting its continuous efforts to assimilate, receive, and adapt Western methodologies across three distinct stages. This specific phase produced two key works: **God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey** and **The Game of Dream and Reality**, a period characterized primarily by methodological overlap and fragmentation.

Keywords: Psychoanalytic Approach , Georges Tarabichi , The Game of Dream and Reality, Western Critical Methodologies, Methodological Fragmentation.

Introduction

The relationship between literature and psychoanalysis has been closely intertwined since antiquity. It first appeared in the form of flashes of insight in Aristotle through the theory of catharsis, and similarly emerged in the works of Ibn Qutaybah, Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, and others. However, the widespread adoption of this psychological tendency in understanding and criticizing literature became widely adopted and subsequently developed in the modern era, with George Tarabishi representing a prominent model of a thinker who embraced and fully assimilated it.

In the context of the literary movement, Tarabishi significantly contributed to the development of this field. This research investigates the influence of international Western approaches on Tarabishi's critical works, which span fifty years of writing and encompass nine books dedicated to literary and novelistic criticism.

Half a century of critical production provides an adequate panorama of the Arab critical movement and its efforts to accommodate, receive, and benefit from Western critical approaches across three distinct stages.

This stage yielded two seminal books: *God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey* and *The Game of Dream and Reality*. Methodological overlap and fragmentation predominantly characterized this phase.

Tarabishi's engagement with French culture, particularly its critical approaches and trends, played a pivotal role in transmitting a significant portion of world culture sources. This was achieved through translating aesthetic, psychological, existential, and socialist-realist criticism, as well as the complete works of Freud, Hegel, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Marx, Roger Garaudy, and other Western thinkers. Consequently, these influences clearly manifest in his intellectual, literary, and critical culture.

George Tarabishi extensively developed the psychological tendency in Arab criticism, becoming an exemplary model of the committed Arab literary critic who adopted the psychoanalytic approach. He attempted to adapt it to the exigencies of intellectual criticism, free from ideological extremism. Subsequently, psychological trends and approaches emerged in Arab criticism, bearing the characteristics and features of the human sciences.

This critical model emerged in the late nineteenth century as a byproduct of advancements in scientific research, particularly biology.

This approach remained widely used in modern Arab criticism until relatively recently. Several critics were influenced by its principles and investigations, which stemmed from psychology, notably Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. This theory originated clinically before permeating the realm of Arab literary criticism, initially through Freud himself and subsequently through his disciples.

The intellectual and critic George Tarabishi translated approximately 251 books. Undoubtedly, this vast cultural reservoir profoundly impacted his later writings, particularly his critical works. The pages of his books are replete with names and quotations predominantly exhibiting a French orientation. This indicates that these world cultures had become deeply ingrained in his intellectual memory and stored within his unconscious.

Tarabishi contributed to introducing world cultures and critical trends into the Arab intellectual sphere through both translation and original authorship. His own scholarly output was highly prolific. In literary criticism, he produced approximately nine books over a career spanning half a century. His work can be categorized into three stages, commencing with his initial critical journalistic writings in the second half of the 1950s and continuing until 1984.

During this period, he dedicated himself specifically to the psychological approach, most notably after the publication of his books *The Oedipus Complex in the Arab Novel* and *Masculinity and the Ideology of Masculinity in the Arab Novel*.

However, this research focuses on the early stages of Tarabishi's adoption of the psychological approach in its hybrid form, intertwined with other approaches, as seen in his two critical books.

I. The Corpus of *The Game of Dream and Reality*

The first two books at the outset of his critical career prompt the following inquiry: To what extent did Tarabishi assimilate Freud's critical theories into his psychoanalytic approach?

1. Presentation of the Book *The Game of Dream and Reality*

Reasons for Writing the Book .1.1

This book is considered the genesis of his critical works. It is a work of applied criticism focused on studying the narrative works of Tawfiq al-Hakim. The book draws its premise from its title, *Dream and Reality*, and their manifestations in al-Hakim's literature. Within its pages, Tarabishi melds socialist-realist criticism with psychoanalytic criticism.

This aligns with Nabil Suleiman's assessment, which describes it as an interpretive approach from a Marxist perspective, enriched with select features of the psychoanalytic approach and, occasionally, the mythological approach.

The Main Contents of the Book .1.2

:In this work, Tarabishi discusses and analyzes numerous works by Tawfiq al-Hakim, including *The Return of the Spirit* •

The Flower of Life •
 A Sparrow from the East •
 The People of the Cave •
 The Exit from Paradise •
 The Face of Truth •
 Pygmalion •
 The Hermit of Thought •
 Shahrazad •
 The Dancer of the Temple •
 The Quiet Nest •
 O You Who Climb the Tree •
 The Fate of a Cockroach •
 The Predicament •

However, he selectively omitted thirteen of Tawfiq al-Hakim's most prominent writings. Nevertheless, this omission did not diminish the value of *The Game of Dream and Reality*, through which Tarabishi successfully interpreted the obscurities within al-Hakim's texts.

Tawfiq al-Hakim relied heavily on myths in his texts, notably in *Pygmalion* and *Mephisto*. Tarabishi attributes this to al-Hakim suffering from an absolute existential emptiness. However, al-Hakim did not refrain from intervening in his characters' development and ideas, nor from imposing his ideologies upon them, whether implicitly or explicitly. Consequently, Tarabishi sought to expose al-Hakim's underlying anti-woman ideology, which served as the foundation for most of his works.

2. Manifestations of the Psychoanalytic Approach in *The Game of Dream and Reality*

The Implications of the Book's Title .2.1

In his inaugural critical book, *The Game of Dream and Reality*, Tarabishi experienced a degree of methodological fragmentation regarding both terminology and content—a common phenomenon among critics during their formative stages. The book is predominantly characterized by an interpretive approach interwoven with various other critical frameworks, such as the psychoanalytic, mythological, and socialist-realist approaches. We will examine these progressively.

We begin with the book's title, which serves as the threshold and primary gateway to psychoanalytic literary criticism. The title *The Game of Dream and Reality* aligns with the psychological theories introduced by Freud, who utilized them to interpret dreams and analyze them within literature, such as his studies on the dreams of Hamlet and Oedipus.

Their literary and critical applications were further expanded in Freud's book *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva*. The title of this book is intimately connected to Tarabishi's *The Game of Dream and Reality*, as both works explore dreams and their dynamic relationship with reality.

Delusion represents a form of detachment from reality followed by a return to it. Thus, Tarabishi adapted the phrase "dream and reality" from Freud's *Delusion and Dream*, substituting the word "delusion" with "reality." The former is more aligned with clinical psychoanalysis, whereas the latter resonates more with literary and critical studies, particularly given Tarabishi's influence by the socialist-realist approach, as will be demonstrated later.

The aforementioned points reflect Tarabishi's explicit denial that his methodology in this book belongs to the psychoanalytic tendency. He asserts that his focus is on studying the artistic elements employed by Tawfiq al-Hakim in constructing his novels

Despite the vast number of novels, a single thread connects them all: the human being's internal psychological conflict between dreams and reality. Dreams may soar to the heavens, but ultimately, they crash against the bedrock of reality—whether manifesting as a crisis or as the "bitter truth," as it is commonly phrased

The characters endure a reality entirely divorced from the realms of imagination. This artificial game al-Hakim plays with his characters is merely a manifestation of his desire to subject the protagonist to agonizing pain, echoing Musset's sentiment: "We shall not become great except through great suffering

This introduces a certain ambiguity surrounding the term "dream and reality." Tarabishi employs "dream" to denote the imagination produced by the characters, whether consciously by the characters themselves or consciously by the author. Once consciousness infiltrates the formation of imagination, it transcends the boundaries of a mere dream

From this, we observe that the book's title contradicts its purported content. It implies a study rooted in the Freudian psychoanalytic approach, which contradicts Tarabishi's own assertion that he does not follow the psychoanalytic tendency when analyzing Tawfiq al-Hakim's works in this specific book. Yet, he unmistakably returns to it in his subsequent works, particularly *The Oedipus Complex in the Arab Novel*.

The Psychological Presence in the Corpus .2.2

The psychological elements presented by George Tarabishi in his book manifest not only in the title, but also through his use of specific terms laden with psychological connotations, such as narcissism, duality, and masochism. Furthermore, he provides psychological interpretations of the behavior of certain obscure artistic characters in Tawfiq al-Hakim's writings

For instance, he interprets the character Mohsen in the novel *The Return of the Spirit* as harboring a tendency toward annihilation, describing it as an unconscious desire to restore contact with the earth. The earth is symbolized as the womb to which the neurotic yearns to return and whose connection he strives to maintain, as if separation from it had induced what he terms "birth trauma."

Tarabishi also dedicates significant attention to drawing parallels between the artistic character and its creator. He identifies Tawfiq al-Hakim's biography with the character Mohsen in *The Return of the Spirit*. This methodology is prevalent in psychoanalytic literary studies, often referred to as internal/external psychoanalytic studies. Modern critics and pioneers of the psychoanalytic approach, such as Mohamed al-Nouaihi and Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad, extensively utilized this methodology

3. The Mythological Approach and Its Manifestations in *The Game of Dream and Reality*

The Mythological Approach .3.1

The mythological approach in literary criticism operates on a central thesis surrounding primordial elements or archetypes. Its foundational references stem from the concept of collective memory or the collective unconscious

The concept of the archetype (*Archétype*) is anchored in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings regarding mythology and its relationship with culture. Prominent among these are the works of

the English anthropologist Sir James Frazer, particularly his magnum opus, *The Golden Bough*, published in twelve volumes between 1890 and 1915.

It is equally connected to the theories of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, which posit that certain primordial patterns have continued to exert influence over the collective memory from the dawn of history to the present day

.Scholars closely associated with this approach include Francis Ferguson and William Troy

M. Bodkin is considered one of the foremost scholars who operationalized and theorized this approach. Northrop Frye is likewise regarded as a leading advocate and a foundational figure, primarily through his book *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957).

Frye grounded his attempts to establish this approach on the concept of *mythos*—meaning mythology in its pristine, original form, when its nature was solely determined by its ritual function, prior to its practical transformation into what is now recognized as myth.

Frye postulated the existence of four fundamental mythoi, each corresponding to a season in the natural cycle

- .Spring mythos produces comedy •
- .Summer mythos produces romance •
- .Autumn mythos produces tragedy •
- .Winter mythos produces satire •

After delineating the characteristics of each mythos and its resultant literary forms, Frye concluded that these mythoi have remained immutable since long before Sophocles. According to him, writers do not forge entirely new literature; instead, they continually adapt and modify their works within the overarching framework of the mythos

Consequently, Frye perceived minimal difference between literature and mythology, whether in quality or form. In his view, the primary distinction lies in the "deviation" the literary text exhibits from the original myth. Thus, the task of criticism is confined to measuring the degree of deviation a specific text presents relative to its mythological source

The Mythological Approach among Arab Critics .3.2

The mythological approach garnered substantial attention from a wide array of Arab critics across the Arab world, beginning in the first half of the 1970s

Examples of applied criticism include the works of Palestinian critic Rita Awad, such as *The Myth of Death and Rebirth in Modern Arabic Poetry* (1978) and *Our Literature between the Novel and Expression* (1979).

Contributions also include studies by Ali al-Batal, such as *The Image in Modern Arabic Poetry* (1981), *The Ghost of Cain between Edith Sitwell and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab* (1984), and *Mythological Performance in Contemporary Arabic Poetry* (1992).

The Syrian critic Muhyiddin Subhi contributed works like *Vision in Bayani Poetry* (1986) and *Visionary Studies* (1987).

Syrian critic Hanna Aboud emerged as one of the most prominent scholars operating within this framework, demonstrating profound interest in Frye's theories through both translation and critical application. A major contribution was his attempt to draw parallels between the most ancient Ugaritic poets and modern Syrian poets. He also linked the absurdity present in the works of Camus, Ionesco

,and others, arguing that it is no greater than the absurdity found in some of the ancient texts he analyzed ".such as "The Sumerian Tablets

Theorists of the mythological approach utilize the concept of the "literary system"—viewed as a governing structure that unifies and dictates most acts of imagination throughout history—to justify their claim that all literature is merely myth deviating from its origins, and that the sole merit of later creativity lies in its modification of that myth. However, this perspective strips creativity of its dynamic, living nature, which inherently resists submission to static standards. It also denies creativity its status as an .imaginative activity whose inquiries perpetually renew themselves alongside a shifting reality

4. Presentation of the Mythological Phenomenon in *The Game of Dream and Reality*

4.1. The Mythological Tendency in *The Game of Dream and Reality*

:Several myths can be identified within the text, including

The myth of Paphnutius •

The myth of Faust •

The myth of Pygmalion •

George Tarabishi was influenced by the mythological tendency in literary criticism in its nascent form, as established by Jung. He drew a connection between the artistic and creative covenant undertaken by Tawfiq al-Hakim in his book *The Devil's Covenant* and the "devil of creativity."

Similarly, he links Faust's covenant with Mephisto, drawing comparisons between the profound .losses suffered by both

In analyzing Tawfiq al-Hakim's play *Pygmalion*, Tarabishi employs a comparative approach influenced by mythological criticism. He utilizes the original myth of Pygmalion to interpret the conflicts of al-Hakim's artistic character. He repeats this methodological approach in his interpretation of al-Hakim's play *The Hermit of Thought*, framing it within the myth of Paphnutius and his conflict with Thaïs.

Tarabishi displayed a particular fascination with the concept of "the higher human being," which corresponds to Jung's archetypes and was later expanded by Claude Lévi-Strauss concerning the concept .of divinity

This idea also intersects with Freud's concept of narcissism, mirroring Tawfiq al-Hakim's paradigm .that elevates the artist to the status of a god, towering above ordinary mortals

Tarabishi's adherence to the Western-derived mythological approach is evident in the preceding discussion of *The Game of Dream and Reality*. Nevertheless, he did not forsake his existential philosophical propositions. His profound influence by the pioneer of existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard, stands as arguably the most significant Western philosophical impact on his criticism in this domain.

In his study of Tawfiq al-Hakim's play *Pygmalion*...

the play is anchored in the concept of separation rather than union with woman and life, prioritizing... devotion to art and the pursuit of immortality. Tarabishi invokes Kierkegaard's stance: Kierkegaard abandoned his fiancée based on the conviction that the ultimate relationship a person can establish with .a loved one is separation. Yet, separation, in its absolute form, equates to death

II. The Influence of Western Approaches in *God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey*

The Historical Approach .1

The advancement of the empirical sciences in Europe during the nineteenth century yielded concrete scientific results that broadly impacted society—politically, intellectually, socially, and consequently .culturally

Literary criticism was not immune to the gravitational pull of scientific hypotheses. Conversely, it actively sought to co-opt scientific methodologies, leveraging them extensively to refine methods of .critical study. Chief among these was the historical approach

,The historical approach, or the history-of-literature approach, analyzes texts based on the creator's life" biography, culture, and the prevailing historical circumstances—political, intellectual, social, and ".civilizational—that facilitated the text's production

In essence, it is the approach that traces the genesis and evolution of literary texts through the lived .experiences of their creators and the concurrent events that shaped their creative output

Prominent figures of the historical approach in modern criticism include Hippolyte Taine, Ferdinand .Brunetière, and Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve

,We must also acknowledge the Arab critic al-Qadi al-Jurjani, who, in his critical framework explicitly linked the conditions of nomadic life and social urbanization to literary formulation, noting .how customs, language, and morals shape literary output

The Historical Approach and Its Origins in the West .1.1

.Two pivotal English critics operated within this historical context: Ben Jonson and John Dryden

Jonson documented crucial critical observations in his work *Discoveries*. His criticism showcased a sweeping perspective and a keen ability to juxtapose shifts in artistic methods and traditions across different eras.

This prompted David Daiches to hail him as the first great practical critic in English literature to leverage historical context to explain why certain writers occasionally failed to meet the standards .demanded by modern sensibilities

Meanwhile, Sainte-Beuve and Taine pioneered a critical approach that drew heavily on biological theories. They were instrumental in officially establishing and naming the "historical approach" within the methodologies of literary criticism. Sainte-Beuve dedicated himself to analyzing his contemporary writers, classifying them into specific groups and categories, and explicitly linking the writer's personality with their literary output. He posited that unlocking the writer's personality was the master .key to comprehending and appreciating their work

Sainte-Beuve evaluated his literary subjects through their physical, intellectual, and moral traits, as demonstrated in his comprehensive study of Victor Hugo. Believing firmly in the symbiotic relationship between the writer and the text, he scrutinized his contemporaries through biological, psychological, and .social lenses, categorizing them into classes, groups, and typologies based on shared characteristics

Consequently, under Sainte-Beuve's stewardship, criticism morphed into a discipline more akin to natural history than traditional literary studies. However, regarding ancient writers, he conceded the sheer difficulty of accurately reconstructing their lives due to the fragmented nature of surviving .historical data

Taine, conversely, asserted that a writer, existing within a universe governed by natural laws, is inevitably subjected to those very laws. The writer produces and creates within a specific cognitive and historical matrix that deeply influences them and imprints a distinct character onto their work

Accordingly, Taine delineated three primary factors that dictate literary production and govern a writer's creativity

.Race — denoting the ethnic or hereditary element .1

Environment — denoting the geographic and social milieu that endows an individual with specific .2 characteristics

,The Age — denoting the historical epoch in which the writer lives, encompassing its social dynamics .3 political climate, wars, cultural and religious zeitgeist, and political currents

The Historical Approach and Its Features in Modern Arab Criticism .1.2

The historical approach finds expression in modern Arab criticism through figures such as Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad in his book *The Geniuses of Egypt and Their Environments*, and Taha Hussein in his works *Hadith al-Arbi'a (Wednesday Talk)* and *With al-Mutanabbi*. Like all critical methodologies, the historical approach has garnered staunch supporters, fierce opponents, and moderates oscillating between acceptance and rejection.

Its proponents laud it as a methodology that mirrors the rigorous laws and methods of the hard sciences, particularly in academic settings where phenomena are subjected to intense scrutiny examination, and observation

Conversely, its detractors operate on the premise that literary discourse is fundamentally a linguistic construct—a web of formal and aesthetic relationships and metaphorical visions. They argue it should not be externally benchmarked or evaluated apart from its intrinsic aesthetic and artistic impact. Instead critical focus should remain strictly on the work's internal structure to unravel its artistic secrets and formal aesthetic relationships

The moderate faction acknowledges the historical approach's utility in contextualizing and interpreting literary phenomena but emphasizes its inherent limitations. They argue it is primarily useful for explaining the genesis of a literary movement within a specific generation or nation, or for decoding the motivations behind a particular literary phenomenon or intellectual current

The Social Approach and Its Reception in Arab Criticism .2

Scholars of critical methodology suggest that the paradigm of analyzing literature through the lens of the societies that produce, receive, and consume it reached its zenith in France during the early nineteenth century

The French Revolution birthed a myriad of questions that the preceding Enlightenment era (prior to had only tangentially addressed. A radically new society emerged, accompanied by a new (1789 audience, novel needs, and unprecedented possibilities. No philosopher had previously navigated such a deeply revolutionary societal landscape

Some academics posit that the first methodological iterations of the social approach to literary criticism materialized when Madame de Staël published her seminal work, *Literature in Its Relations with Social Institutions*, in 1800. Through this text, she cemented the foundational principle that literature is, at its core, an expression of society.

The conceptual framework of the social approach, or "social criticism" (*La sociocritique*) as Pierre Barberis designates it, stems from the theory that literature is fundamentally a social phenomenon. It asserts that a writer does not create in a vacuum for themselves, but rather produces for their society—from the initial conception of the work through to its completion.

:In Marxist materialist philosophy, every society is composed of two distinct structures

A Base (Lower Structure): Represented by material production and manifested in the society's •
.economic framework

A Superstructure (Upper Structure): Represented by the cultural, intellectual, and political systems •
.birthed and sustained by the foundational economic base

Consequently, any shift in the forces and relations of material production inexorably triggers
.transformations within social relations and intellectual systems

Social criticism operates on the foundational belief that the dynamic between art and society is deeply vital, and that examining these relationships can profoundly enrich a reader's aesthetic response
.to a work of art

Art does not materialize from the ether. It is not an isolated, purely personal act; it is the deliberate creation of an author embedded in a specific chronological and spatial reality, responding to a society in which they function as an active participant. Therefore, it becomes entirely possible for the critic to
.decode the artist's response to their social environment

The genesis of this tendency is frequently traced back to the French critic Hippolyte Taine, who
.established the three pillars of literary production: the age, race, and environment

Subsequently, the writings of Marx and Engels introduced a vital fourth pillar to Taine's triad: the
means of production.

This ideological fusion catalyzed the emergence and institutionalization of a new branch of the social
.tendency during the 1930s: socialist-realist criticism

However, according to the eminent critic René Wellek, it was Georg Lukács who definitively codified socialist realism in his landmark book *The Historical Novel*. Wellek heralds Lukács as one of the preeminent contemporary Marxist critics.

Lucien Goldmann subsequently advanced this trajectory in his book *The Sociology of the Novel*, adapting Lukács's methodology, particularly emphasizing the theory of the "necessity of reality."

,Goldmann strived to forge direct, empirical links between an era's ideological and intellectual life the socioeconomic realities of society, and the architectural structure of its literature. Under the umbrella of "structure," he seamlessly integrated literary form, genre, and the underlying principles of
.representing reality

,With the maturation of socialist-realist studies—spearheaded by figures like Pierre Macherey .Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, Nikolay Nekrasov, and Nikolay Chernyshevsky—the critical gaze shifted Emphasis was increasingly placed on the writer as an individual who becomes inextricably bound to the
.spiritual and ideological substance of their creative output

A literary work is inherently born of society. If society finds itself somewhat misaligned with the work, the intrinsic value of the literature often becomes more sharply apparent. Conversely, if a society stands in direct, unyielding opposition to the work, it is highly unlikely to attain recognized aesthetic

value. True aesthetic value is frequently only fully realized when the work successfully acquires and projects a resonant social dimension

The Socialist-Realist Tendency and Its Features in Arab Criticism .3

It is imperative to clearly define what is meant by the "realist tendency" in this context, even if broadly, because the concept of realism in criticism—much like in literature itself—is expansive and inherently fluid

Literature has been inextricably tethered to "reality," in all its multifaceted definitions, across diverse cultures and historical epochs. It is arguable that this core relationship has never entirely vanished from any period or cultural tradition

The socialist-realist tendency approaches literature strictly as a byproduct of natural, social, or historical realities, navigating through specific concepts and theoretical principles laid down predominantly by Western Marxist thought

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, this specific tendency so thoroughly dominated the Arab critical landscape that, for numerous critics, it was viewed as a wholly self-sufficient framework

This critical paradigm held immense appeal for critics across both Western and Arab intellectual spheres. The Lebanese critic Ra'if Khoury stood out as one of its fiercest pioneer advocates during the first half of the twentieth century

In 1955, Khoury published a highly influential book titled *Responsible Literature*, in which he fervently championed what he termed "ideological criticism." He argued forcefully for transcending the restrictive confines of purely aesthetic, psychological, and historical criticism.

In Khoury's estimation, it was paramount to critique the intellectual substance embedded within literature through rigorous philosophical and ideological lenses—evaluating it not merely against the historical environment of its genesis, but urgently against the contemporary environment, factoring in both its grim realities and its aspirational ideals

Khoury's advocacy for philosophical and ethical criticism closely mirrored orthodox Marxist criticism, which fundamentally seeks to evaluate literary merit based on ideological content

In that same pivotal year, 1955, critic Mohammed Mandour published a seminal article within his book *Contemporary Criticism and Critics*, explicitly titled "Ideological Criticism." Mandour framed this critical modality as the hybrid offspring of both socialism and existentialism.

The synthesis of existentialism and socialism yielded a novel critical paradigm that can aptly be termed the "ideological approach"

Mandour vehemently rejected the "dogmatic approach" championed by Ra'if Khoury, particularly resisting the notion that a critic must automatically adopt a rigid moral or ideological stance regarding the text

Mandour was personally recognized for employing a Western-style approach marked by a certain deliberate haste and extreme condensation—frequently posing open-ended questions without dictating definitive answers. This naturally begs the question: Was it Mandour himself who originally coined this designation

This ideological synthesis is precisely what George Tarabishi seems to have adopted in his two masterworks, *The Game of Dream and Reality* and *God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey*. This specific dynamic will be the focus of our detailed examination.

Tarabishi embraced existentialist philosophy and seamlessly fused it with socialist realism, clearly demonstrating the profound intellectual influence of Mohammed Mandour

Tarabishi authored several penetrating articles on this exact subject, published in *Al-Adab* magazine in 1958 and 1959. In these texts, he meticulously correlated literature with economic theory and analyzed how the external socio-economic environment directly infiltrates and shapes the internal environment of a literary work. The intellectual specter of Karl Marx looms large and unmistakably over these writings.

In this same vein, we must note the contributions of Saudi critic Abdullah Abd al-Jabbar, whose text *Literary Currents in the Heart of the Arabian Peninsula* introduced the realist current initially as a purely literary movement before it evolved into a formal critical methodology.

Equally significant are the efforts of critic Hanna Aboud in his book *Realism in Modern Arab Criticism*. Aboud chronicles the global dissemination of this tendency—originating in major industrialized urban centers before eventually permeating the Arab world. He attributes this delayed transmission to the agonizingly slow development of economic structures in the Arab region compared to the rapid industrialization of the West.

III. Presentation of the Book *God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey*

The Major Themes of the Corpus .1

This specific book went through three distinct editions. The second edition featured a radical, sweeping revision of its final chapter. George Tarabishi candidly acknowledged this overhaul, admitting that his initial analysis of the story *A Tale without a Beginning and without an End* read more like a basic plot summary than the deep "rereading" that theoretically underpinned the book's methodology.

He confessed that the narrative contained several intricate "locks" for which he had initially failed to forge the correct interpretive "keys." When confronted with an overwhelmingly difficult passage in the first edition, he had resorted to mere summarization. He expressed a sincere hope that the revised edition successfully rectified this glaring flaw, which he noted represents one of the most agonizing hurdles a literary critic must clear

Tarabishi frames this specific hurdle—the practice of rigorous self-criticism—as a monumental challenge for any critic. He courageously places this admission on the public record, acknowledging it as one of the most arduous responsibilities a literary scholar faces

The third edition also underwent substantial, structural revisions, particularly concentrated in its concluding pages

:One of the book's most crucial and expansive sections is the primary study, provocatively titled "Naguib Mahfouz Rewrites the History of Humanity"

Tarabishi characterizes this as an undeniably ambitious literary endeavor. Regardless of its ultimate success or failure, Tarabishi argues forcefully that Mahfouz's core intent in *Children of Gebelawi* was to systematically rewrite the entire history of humanity, tracing it back to the precise moment the first human materialized in the universe.

Tarabishi meticulously delineates the boundary between a traditional "historian" and a "novelist-historian"

The historian is obligated to present the reader with an objective, factual world, where the degree of objectivity is dictated by history's aspiration to function as a strict science. Conversely, the world

conjured by the novelist-historian is inherently subjective, molded by the novel's aspiration to stand as a work of high art, even when strictly utilizing historical raw material

Operating from this specific paradigm, Tarabishi classifies Mahfouz explicitly as a "novelist-historian" because Mahfouz relentlessly imposes a deeply subjective, artistic vision upon his historical foundation

In *Children of Gebelawi*, Mahfouz chronicles humanity's trajectory from the dawn of creation. He dissects the religious narrative, beginning with Adam, filtering it through the lens of a real, gritty, yet intensely mythical and symbolic neighborhood.

The ensuing conflict among the neighborhood's denizens perfectly mirrors the primordial conflict in the story of Adam. Thus

;Adam directly corresponds to Adham •

The subsequent prophetic figures are allegorically represented by the characters Jabalawi, Rifaa, and •
.Qasim

However, the ultimate conclusion drastically diverges. It is forced to diverge because the narratives of the three prophets are inextricably bound to the radical principles they championed. Any attempt to merely narrate their biographies remains hollow and incomplete unless fused with the revolutionary religious doctrines they preached

This structural necessity forces Mahfouz into continuous, heavy-handed intervention, acting simultaneously as a historian, theological interpreter, and moral teacher. Consequently, this severely limits his effectiveness as both a pure novelist-historian and an objective historian

In analyzing the story *Zaabalawi*, Tarabishi deliberately ignores the surface realistic level. Instead, he aggressively links it back to Jabalawi in *Children of Gebelawi*, seeking to amplify the story's symbolic resonance and perfectly align his interpretation with the thesis he established in his reading of *Children of Gebelawi*: the eternal, agonizing search for God.

The existential inquiries raised by this story—concerning its inverted journey toward true knowledge—revolve entirely around the feasibility of successfully reaching and confronting God. The subsequent novel, *The Search*, directly tackles these inquiries by intensifying human desperation regarding such a cosmic encounter, channeled through the protagonist Sabir's frantic search for his missing father.

,Tarabishi dissects this novel along both its realistic and deeply symbolic axes. He notes, however that due to the strict, cold utilitarian logic governing the novel's universe, the warm Sufi characteristics that typically hallmark Naguib Mahfouz's literature are glaringly absent

In this specific context, Naguib Mahfouz crystallizes as one of the very few Arab novelists to comprehensively tackle the theological "problem of God" from the unique vantage point of a deeply believing artist

Tarabishi sharply critiques the societal weaponization of God as a convenient "pretext" or ideological clothing, particularly within Eastern societies, where this theological problem has mutated into a pervasive, inescapable general principle

Tarabishi ultimately concludes that, based on the text's internal logic, *The Search* actually dictates the exact opposite of what its title implies. It is, at its core:

,A non-road •

- An anti-road •
- A dead-end road •
- Or, quite simply, any road that fundamentally fails to lead to God •

This exact paradigm applies equally to the novel *The Beggar*, which operates across two distinct dimensions:

- 1. A gritty realistic dimension, and
- 2. A profound symbolic dimension

Because the symbolic layer is embedded far deeper within the text, Tarabishi deliberately bypasses mere narrative description in favor of aggressive, deep-dive interpretation

The ultimate prize being sought is God, while the desperately seeking protagonist traverses a multitude of fragmented paths attempting to forge a connection—exploring avenues such as moral goodness, aesthetic art, and intellectual knowledge (with the latter proving to be the most viable conduit)

The novel *Adrift on the Nile* breaks entirely from this pattern; it is fundamentally a novel exploring the terrifying *absence* of God, rather than the agonizing search for Him.

Nevertheless, Naguib Mahfouz navigates this terrifying void utilizing his established humanistic philosophy. He fiercely emphasizes that human beings retain their essential humanity even in a godless universe, and that a crime remains objectively a crime even when perpetrated by an individual who has entirely excised God from their moral calculus. There must be an ultimate terminus to existential absurdity, even if that terminus inevitably becomes subsumed into the absurdity itself

Regarding the story *The Lovers' Quarter*, Mahfouz penned it in 1969, in the direct aftermath of the catastrophic June defeat. While it aligned with his earlier philosophical propositions, it radically diverged from his previous works via a suffocating logic of absolute doubt, entirely shattering the comforting certainty that had dominated his pre-war writings

The story triggered wildly divergent, often contradictory interpretations among critics. Naguib Mahfouz explicitly acknowledged this phenomenon, noting that once he releases a novel or story, critics—and readers alike will aggressively interpret it to suit their own psychological and ideological needs and that they possess an absolute right to do so

A critic's or reader's interpretation may violently clash with Mahfouz's own personal vision of the text. He frequently cited *The Lovers' Quarter* as the prime example: following its publication, he conversed with numerous friends and fellow writers, each of whom confidently presented a radically different interpretation, and all of which were entirely alien to his own authorial intent. Nevertheless, he steadfastly maintained that every individual possessed the absolute right to extract whatever meaning they desired from the work.

Tarabishi directly correlates the suffocating ambiguity permeating Mahfouz's later stories—and their violent departure from his earlier, structured psychological journeys—with the collective trauma of the June 1967 defeat. Viewed through this traumatic lens, Tarabishi's exhaustive study of character symbolism within Mahfouz's oeuvre aligns perfectly with this underlying principle

Regarding the story *A Tale without a Beginning and without an End*, Mahfouz transcends the role of mere historian; he emerges as a prophet possessing a sweeping, radical vision.

„He does not reread human history simply to idly imagine its future. This dictates his relentless —"restless oscillation from the gritty level of "what is" to the aspirational level of "what ought to be .launching from the hard earth of reality into the stratospheric skies of utopia

Utopia possesses the potential to eventually materialize into reality, but it simultaneously harbors .the terrifying potential to remain forever unattainable

Mahfouz justifies his eventual abandonment of pure metaphysics by citing its inherent failure to holistically grasp the totality of the human problem and its fundamental inability to yield practical solutions. Consequently, the social solution—empirical science—is aggressively positioned as the sole .remaining path to collective salvation

Features of the Social Approach .2

The social critical approach dominates this text, and Tarabishi's deep immersion in it is unmistakable. This alignment perfectly mirrored the massive global—and specifically Arab—impact of .the social approach during this era

„During the period of the book's composition, Tarabishi was heavily swayed by the social tendency most notably socialist realism. Simultaneously, he was actively translating foundational works by Karl .Marx and Roger Garaudy

Georg Lukács, alongside other monumental intellectual and critical titans who championed this specific tendency, exerted a massive, defining influence on Tarabishi's critical output. Their intellectual .fingerprints are detectable across virtually his entire body of work

Leveraging this specific approach, Tarabishi meticulously dissected the internal social environment constructed within the literary text and forcibly linked it to the external, historical environment inhabited by the author. Consequently, his analyses masterfully oscillated between internal textual scrutiny and .external historical contextualization

By simultaneously interrogating both the internal and external environments, he brilliantly illuminated obscured facets of Naguib Mahfouz's literature and successfully decoded their complex .structural architecture

In analyzing *The Search*, for instance, he delivered a blunt, direct realistic interpretation, asserting the novel operates on two distinct frequencies: the direct realistic frequency and the indirect symbolic frequency.

On the primary level, he diagnosed it merely as a straightforward narrative regarding a desperate search for a missing father. However, on the secondary level, he identified Mahfouz's absolute rejection of society's problematic nature. By vividly embodying this rejection within *The Search*, Tarabishi argued, Mahfouz elevated the text into a towering masterpiece of radical social criticism.

Despite the heavy metaphysical fog shrouding large swaths of the novel, George Tarabishi successfully pierced the veil, brilliantly illuminating its underlying social and material bedrock. He demonstrated how Mahfouz, by anchoring himself to the highest material values, successfully wrestled .the theological problem back down to stark, unforgiving social reality

Tarabishi further diagnosed the crushing ambiguity infecting Mahfouz's later works—and their drastic pivot away from the desperate search for theological certainty (the search for God)—in *The Lovers' Quarter* by directly pointing to the writer's agonizing social realities. Specifically, he highlighted the catastrophic June defeat and its devastating psychological toll on Arab writers and intellectuals, with

Mahfouz being a prime casualty. The defeat shattered both his personal psyche and his literary architecture.

,The collective trauma of the defeat forced Mahfouz into a temporary but profound silence paralyzing his creative production. Consequently, Tarabishi relied heavily on public statements Mahfouz made to the press regarding his radically altered literary style post-defeat—a style inevitably darkened .by the massive shadow the trauma cast over all creative minds of that generation

Regarding *A Tale without a Beginning and without an End*, the critic dissected it across both realistic and symbolic planes. However, the sheer dominance of the interpretive methodology in *God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey* occasionally blinded him, preventing a truly adequate analysis of the gritty realistic level that Mahfouz himself had explicitly prioritized.

Regrettably, Tarabishi initially failed to afford this the attention it demanded. Nevertheless, in his concluding analysis of the story, he finally recognized the absolute necessity of bridging the gap between the fictional society constructed within the text (its characters and geography) and the actual, living .society of the author

He successfully mapped a direct correspondence between Naguib Mahfouz and the specific ,ideologies espoused by his artistic characters. The characters serve as mouthpieces for the author's intent navigating a predetermined path meticulously charted by their creator. This trajectory perfectly mirrors Mahfouz's own real-world pivot toward socialist realism and his desperate, overarching attempt to forge .a functional middle ground bridging religion, science, and political revolution

This constituted Tarabishi's definitive analytical stance. Unsurprisingly, rival critics fiercely opposed his conclusions. Prominent among them was Nabil Suleiman, who aggressively categorized *A Tale without a Beginning and without an End* as a purely, unadulterated realistic story, arguing its sole function was the raw reconstruction of lived reality.

Nabil Suleiman pointed out that its narratives were inextricably linked to traumatic events Mahfouz personally endured—most notably the sequence involving the Rural Organization, which directly mirrored the chilling reality of the 1994 assassination attempt against Mahfouz. This definitively proves .the author aggressively cannibalizes his own social reality to fuel his literary output

Ironically, this is the exact connection Tarabishi ultimately strove to illuminate in his book, thereby .successfully decoding Mahfouz's overarching vision

Manifestations of the Historical Approach

The historical tendency within *God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey* appears repeatedly throughout the text. Arguably the most critical instance is Tarabishi's rigorous breakdown of the parameters governing the volatile relationship between literature and history.

"He draws a hard, definitive line separating the "novelist-historian" from the pure "historian

He argues the gulf between the two is massive. It does not merely reside—as a layman might assume—in the fact that a historian dryly recites events absent a personal bias. Rather, the crucial distinction is that a novelist is entirely unconcerned with merely recording events; their sole, driving .obsession is violently asserting a specific, subjective point of view

He further delineates the boundary between a novel that merely *records* history—where the narrative and characters are suffocated under the weight of historical consciousness—and a novel that actively *resurrects* history, hijacking historical protagonists to serve its own artistic architecture.

These are profoundly significant analytical observations. It is highly probable that Tarabishi was heavily influenced here by Georg Lukács's masterful studies of Walter Scott and Honoré de Balzac specifically Lukács's intense fixation on the collision between the novelistic art form and objective history.

Lukács's deep obsession with the friction between the art of the novel and historical reality clearly infected Tarabishi, leading him to bestow the title of "historian" upon Naguib Mahfouz, while simultaneously cataloging the numerous instances where Mahfouz catastrophically failed to fulfill the duties of that role.

Tarabishi clarifies that a true historian is bound to construct an objective reality, where the degree of that objectivity is tied to history's aspiration to function as a rigid science. The novelist, in stark contrast, constructs an intensely subjective reality, a crucible where even cold historical data is violently transmuted into art.

While the historian obsesses over the broad, macro-level relationships linking vast historical events: sociological phenomena, and titanic personalities, the novelist is consumed by a micro-level obsession making these grand relationships intimately, painfully personal, thereby seizing total control over the historical raw material.

Tarabishi maintains that Mahfouz harbored the colossal ambition of rewriting the entirety of human history, starting from the genesis of the very first human. Yet, Mahfouz fundamentally failed to become a true historian because he was utterly incapable of objectively cataloging every historical detail.

Simultaneously, he failed to ascend to the absolute zenith of the "novelist-historian" because he proved incapable of delivering an artistic text laden with heavy religious doctrine without constantly interrupting his own narrative to preach, explain, and interpret.

Critic Nabil Suleiman, however, stakes out a radically different position regarding Mahfouz's weaponization of history.

Suleiman asserts that Mahfouz launched his novelistic career by directly mining history and continued to aggressively distill historical material across the bulk of his bibliography. His towering ambition undeniably drove him to attempt a definitive chronicle of humanity's religious history in *Children of Gebelawi*.

Concurrently, the raw, lived experiences Mahfouz absorbed during his childhood at the dawn of the twentieth century—stretching all the way into the 1980s—served as a relentlessly fertile, inexhaustible reservoir for his narratives.

Suleiman argues forcefully that Mahfouz was utterly unconcerned with *writing* history; his sole interest lay in *exploiting* it. He ruthlessly distilled historical data, whether it was sweeping religious lore—as seen in his audacious rewriting of human history in *Children of Gebelawi*—or the hyper-localized micro-history of Cairo, as brilliantly executed in *Khan al-Khalili*.

He similarly cannibalized his own social history, extracting raw material from every phase of his existence, from early childhood through the twilight of the 1980s.

Consequently, Mahfouz treated history as a mere buffet, selecting only the specific ingredients required to fortify his artistic text, whether on a gritty realistic level or a soaring symbolic one. In Suleiman's estimation, Mahfouz was a predatory novelist who sought only to extract maximum artistic leverage from the historical epochs that scarred his life. Regarding the profound impact of specific historical traumas on Mahfouz's psyche, it is evident he was utterly devastated by the June defeat, and prior to that, deeply shaped by the Egyptian Revolution. His entire literary output can, and should, be bisected and analyzed along this exact chronological fault line.

Operating from this specific analytical vantage point, George Tarabishi emerges as one of the very few critics who accurately decoded and flawlessly interpreted Naguib Mahfouz's complex literary architecture. This fact was definitively confirmed by Mahfouz himself in a direct letter to Tarabishi, in which the legendary author openly praised the rigorous precision of Tarabishi's insight and the ironclad logic of his reasoning, declaring that Tarabishi's interpretations stood as arguably the most truthful accurate assessments ever written about his work.

Furthermore, while never explicitly announcing his methodology, Tarabishi strictly adhered to a rigid chronological framework when structuring the analyses within his book. He ruthlessly bifurcated Mahfouz's bibliography into the pre-1967 and post-1967 eras, placing massive, unrelenting emphasis on the June defeat's catastrophic ability to violently alter the trajectory of not only Mahfouz's literature but the entirety of contemporary Arab letters.

Consequently, *God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey* operates on a strict "before-and-after" chronological spine:

Children of Gebelawi — published in 1959 •

Zaabalawi •

The Search — 1964 •

The Beggar — 1965 •

Adrift on the Nile — 1966 •

The Lovers' Quarter — 1969 •

A Tale without a Beginning and without an End (a text that triggered massive critical warfare and •
.(was subjected to wildly inaccurate, or at best partially accurate, interpretations

Tarabishi diagnoses the critical chaos surrounding the interpretation of *The Lovers' Quarter* as stemming from one of two primary culprits:

An appalling lack of critical sensitivity among the analytical establishment, or .1

.The brutal, unforgiving difficulty of the text itself .2

The second diagnosis is vastly more probable, given that the overwhelming majority of Mahfouz's post-defeat output mutated into impenetrable puzzles and psychological riddles. This structural choice highlights Tarabishi's deep reliance on the historical approach, which heavily prioritizes strict periodization and rigid chronological division in the pursuit of literary truth.

George Tarabishi undeniably triumphed in delivering a landmark, unparalleled dissection of the divine symbolism pulsing through Mahfouz's literature via his masterwork *God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey*.

The study is a flawless fusion of Tarabishi's lethal analytical precision and his profound encyclopedic grasp of both historical context and religious theology. He completely mapped Mahfouz's genius and successfully navigated the dark spaces lurking behind his texts and literary universes.

This staggering achievement perfectly explains why Naguib Mahfouz later publicly confessed that Tarabishi's critical study represented the closest any human had ever come to truly understanding his works, specifically naming

Children of Gebelawi •

Zaabalawi •

The Beggar •

Adrift on the Nile •

A Tale without a Beginning and without an End •

The Lovers' Quarter •

Tarabishi fearlessly tackled the dense, suffocating symbolism packed into Mahfouz's mid-career works, spanning the era from *Children of Gebelawi* straight through to *A Tale without a Beginning and without an End*.

He launched a massive intellectual effort to track down and weave together the fragmented, chaotic threads of symbolism, tracing them back to the exact moment Mahfouz arrogantly decided to rewrite the entire religious and scientific history of the human race using the novel as his weapon.

Tarabishi further deployed his formidable intellect in a desperate attempt to shatter the impenetrable ambiguity that locked down almost all of Mahfouz's creative output following the 1967 apocalypse.

Mahfouz himself addressed this very phenomenon in a landmark interview published in *Al-Hilal* magazine in February 1970. He starkly admitted that his literary output had mutated into a series of twisted riddles and impenetrable puzzles, hypothesizing that this occurred simply because his own personal existence—and arguably the collective existence of the entire Arab world—had similarly devolved into a horrifying, unsolvable riddle in the wake of the defeat.

For Naguib Mahfouz, the concept of God is absolutely not a cheap pretext or a convenient ideological crutch for human failure. Operating within an Arab society where toxic over-reliance on God (or external authorities) frequently metastasizes into a crippling, overarching social principle, Mahfouz's violent rejection of this dynamic carries massive, radically progressive implications.

Conclusion

In his twin masterpieces, *The Game of Dream and Reality* and *God in Naguib Mahfouz's Symbolic Journey*, Tarabishi unfortunately relied heavily on excessive plot summaries of the texts he was analyzing. This structural choice bogged down his critical arguments with unnecessary narrative dead weight, much of which could have been ruthlessly excised without inflicting any damage upon his core critical thesis.

In his second critical work, he bravely tackled a massive, towering theme that dominated vast swaths of Mahfouz's bibliography: the concept of "God," an entity that materializes symbolically across his works, weaving through complex religious, historical, and sociological battlegrounds.

However, Tarabishi crucially failed to properly diagnose the root cause driving Mahfouz's violent pivot toward symbolism, limiting his analysis to a brief, passing nod toward the trauma of the June

defeat. This represents a glaring, fatal flaw in his critical architecture, as it effectively severs the literary text from the brutal, lived reality of its creator and the suffocating environment that birthed it

Dr. Rajaa Eid sharply notes that one of the primary, overriding engines driving Mahfouz's desperate leap into symbolism was the oppressive, toxic atmosphere of the Egyptian political environment combined with aggressive political censorship and the infiltrating influence of the European "New Novel" movement

Dr. Rajaa Eid further clarifies that Mahfouz, navigating this highly volatile era, made a calculated survival choice: he refused to openly, openly risk declaring his absolute opposition to the regime's draconian policies. Instead, he executed a tactical retreat from blunt, direct realism, fleeing into the safety of surrealism. This resulted in deeply symbolic works that functioned as encrypted manifestos howling his total rejection of the endless crises plaguing his reality

In the final analysis, it is blatantly obvious that Tarabishi deployed a chaotic, overlapping arsenal of critical methodologies across these two books. While the psychological approach was present, it was utterly dominated by the interpretive approach, which effectively hijacked the bulk of both his first and second texts

This was followed by a messy, hybrid deployment of historical, sociological, realist, and mythological approaches, topped off with a highly tentative, almost timid initial foray into strict psychoanalysis

Tarabishi's glaring methodological fragmentation during the infancy of his critical career was not an accident; it was a direct, raw manifestation of the severe critical anxiety and intellectual whiplash experienced by him and his entire generation. They were frantically attempting to process and adapt to the major shifts occurring simultaneously within the global critical arena and the highly unstable Arab critical landscape

In his subsequent literary outings, Tarabishi would finally abandon this chaotic fragmented approach. He would meticulously select and strictly adhere to a single, hyper-focused critical methodology that would define the remainder of his later career: the psychoanalytic approach, a tool uniquely suited to cracking the codes of deep symbolic elements

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