



Research Paper

"Unveiling Literary Brilliance: Exploring the Styles of Al-Manfalûṭî's Al-Nazarât"

Md. Zakaria Alom

Research Scholar, Department of Arabic, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam, India

Dr. Noor Uddin Ahmed

Associate Professor, Department of Arabic, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam, India

Abstract:

This paper offers an overview of the literary styles employed by Muṣṭafâ Luṭfî Al-Manfalûṭî in his influential work, "Al-Nazarât" (The Views). Through a detailed analysis of Al-Manfalûṭî's writing techniques and thematic focus, the study highlights his mastery of the Arabic language and his skilful manipulation of prose to convey powerful messages. Al-Manfalûṭî's style is characterized by masterful composition, rhythmic beauty, eloquence, and clarity, as well as strategic employment of repetition and elaboration. The thematic dimensions of "Al-Nazarât" encompass social commentary and reform, critique of societal flaws, and advocacy for virtuous living. The paper also examines criticisms of Al-Manfalûṭî's style and ideology, juxtaposing them with his enduring influence on Arabic literature. Additionally, it delves into the significance of one of Al-Manfalûṭî's notable articles, "The Hut and the Palace," which exemplifies his literary prowess and profound insights into human nature and societal values. Ultimately, this study underscores Al-Manfalûṭî's lasting impact as a literary figure and his contributions to Arabic literature.

Keywords: Muṣṭafâ Luṭfî Al-Manfalûṭî, Al-Nazarât, Literary styles, Social commentary, Critique, Virtuous living, etc.

Received 15 Apr., 2024; Revised 25 Apr., 2024; Accepted 27 Apr., 2024 © The author(s) 2024.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. Introduction:

Muṣṭafâ Luṭfî Al-Manfalûṭî, a renowned figure in Arabic literature, demonstrated unparalleled mastery over the Arabic language through his seminal work "Al-Nazarât" (The Views). Within this collection of social articles, originally published in the Al-Mu'ayyad newspaper and later compiled into three volumes, Al-Manfalûṭî showcased a distinctive literary style that left an indelible mark on the landscape of Arabic journalism and literature in the early 20th century. This paper offers an in-depth exploration of Al-Manfalûṭî's literary techniques, thematic focus, and enduring influence on Arabic literature. Through a comprehensive analysis of his writing, it becomes evident that Al-Manfalûṭî's style is characterized by masterful composition, rhythmic beauty, eloquence, and clarity, as well as strategic employment of repetition and elaboration. The thematic dimensions of "Al-Nazarât" encompass social commentary and reform, critique of societal flaws, and advocacy for virtuous living. Despite criticisms of his style and ideology, Al-Manfalûṭî's impact on Arabic literature remains undeniable, as evidenced by his timeless works that continue to inspire readers to contemplate life's deeper meanings and pursue genuine happiness. Through the lens of one of his notable articles, *Al-Kûkh wa al-Qaṣr* ("The Hut and the Palace"), this paper delves into Al-Manfalûṭî's profound insights into human nature and societal values, reaffirming his enduring legacy as a prominent literary figure in the Arabic-speaking world.

Biography of Al-Manfalûṭî:

Muṣṭafâ Luṭfî bin Muhammad Luṭfî bin Muhammad Ḥasan Luṭfî al-Manfalûṭî was a creative Egyptian writer and poet, renowned for his exquisite composition in his articles and books, as well as for his poetry characterized by sweetness and delicacy. He received his education at Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, and his star began to shine brightly in 1907 with the publication of his weekly articles in the Al-Mu'ayyad newspaper under the title "Al-Nazarât." He also authored translated books from French, despite not mastering the language himself.

Instead, he enlisted the help of proficient translators who would translate the story for him, and he would then craft it in his own style before publishing it under his name.¹

Muṣṭafâ Luṭfî Al-Manfalûṭī was born in 1876 in the city of Manfalûṭ, located in the Asyut Governorate of Egypt. He grew up in a distinguished family with a lineage connected to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), known for their righteousness, piety, and knowledge. His family produced Sharia judges who held the position for two hundred years, with his father serving as a Sharia judge and a leader in his community.

Al-Manfalûṭī joined the writers of his hometown, excelling like his peers from the Egyptian countryside. He memorized the Qur'ân at a young age, learned the basics of reading, writing, and Islamic jurisprudence, and then continued his education at Al-Azhar. Over ten years, he studied various sciences, particularly jurisprudence, language, and literature. Al-Manfalûṭī's keen desire for knowledge and his love for literature and poetry became evident early on. He composed poetry and crafted essays in his unique style, gaining fame and acclaim at Al-Azhar, especially after studying under Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, from whom he learned extensively and with whom he developed a close friendship. Following Abduh's death, Al-Manfalûṭī returned to his hometown.²

Al-Manfalûṭī was known for his dignity and integrity, never seeking payment for his literary work and never using his poetry or essays for personal gain. He was dignified and reserved, avoiding the company of those whose morals and behaviours did not appeal to him. Describing his character, Hasan Al-Zayyât wrote in his book "History of Arabic Literature": "He possessed a combination of virtues, refined taste, harmonious thoughts, cohesive style, and consistent attire. There is no trace of eccentricity in his words or deeds, and he was known for his cautious tongue and delicate conscience. He was sincere in understanding, slow in thought, and meticulous in action. His heart was tender, his conscience pure, his chest broad, and his belief sound. He distributed his intellect, virtue, and inclinations among his family, his homeland, and humanity."³

Al-Manfalûṭī held various positions in the government, beginning in 1909 when he was appointed as an Arabic editor in the Ministry of Education during the era of Sa'ad Zaghlûl Pasha, a close friend and admirer. Later, he moved to the Ministry of Endowments, then to the Legislative Assembly, and finally to the secretariat of the royal palace.⁴

Al-Manfalûṭī passed away after a brief illness, during which he had suffered from a minor paralysis about two months before his death, causing him to experience some difficulty in speaking for a few days. However, he did not disclose this to any of his friends and kept the matter hidden from them. He did not seek medical attention as he did not trust doctors, and perhaps this neglect was the reason for the progression of his urinary poisoning condition, which ultimately led to his demise. This occurred after an evening spent with some relatives and friends, including writers, musicians, and politicians. His soul departed in the morning of Eid al-Adha in 1924. May Allah have mercy on him. He was mourned by several poets of the Arab nation, including Aḥmad Shawqî and Ḥâfîz Ibrahîm.⁵

Description:

Muṣṭafâ Luṭfî Al-Manfalûṭī's command over the Arabic language was unparalleled, showcased through his adept manipulation of words. His social commentaries, initially published in Al-Mu'ayyad newspaper and later compiled into the renowned trilogy "Al-Nazarât" (The Views), established a literary legacy that left a lasting impact on students and journalists of the early 20th century. Al-Manfalûṭī's literary style stands out for several distinctive traits:

1. **Artful Composition and Rhythmic Prowess:** His prose is a testament to masterful composition and rhythmic allure, weaving a tapestry of words that entrances readers with its eloquence. While avoiding excessive ornamentation, he occasionally employs printed rhymes to infuse his writing with a musical cadence, captivating the reader's auditory senses and enriching the reading experience.
2. **Eloquence and Lucidity:** Clarity and eloquence define his writing, as he navigates the Arabic language with finesse and clarity. Steering clear of colloquialisms and foreign expressions, Al-Manfalûṭī ensures authenticity and accessibility, prioritizing genuine communication over artificial embellishments. This commitment to clear expression ensures that his message resonates deeply with his audience.
3. **Strategic Employment of Repetition and Elaboration:** Repetition and elaboration serve as deliberate tools in his arsenal, akin to the techniques employed by skilled orators to reinforce their arguments. Through strategic repetition and occasional direct appeals—such as "O human"—Al-Manfalûṭī infuses his writing with emotional resonance. Key words are reiterated for emphasis, amplifying crucial themes and infusing his prose with a sense of urgency and conviction.

In his book "Al-Nazarât", Al-Manfalûṭī delves into various dimensions, shaping his articles around themes that reflect his social conscience:

1. **Social Commentary and Reform:** Al-Manfalûṭī's writings are deeply rooted in observations of society, which serve as the foundation for his articles. Influenced by figures like Muhammad Abduh, he leverages these

observations to advocate for social reform. Aligning himself with the views of contemporary reformers such as Muhammad Abduh and Qasim Amin, he presents their ideas with his unique flair, aiming to stir societal change and progress.

2. Critique of Social Issues: Central to Al-Manfalûfî's discourse is the identification and critique of societal shortcomings. He expresses concern over moral decadence, including issues like gambling, dancing, and alcohol consumption. He attributes these societal ills, in part, to the influence of Western culture, which he believes has eroded traditional values and led youth astray, prioritizing entertainment over seriousness and dignity.

3. Advocacy for Virtuous Living: Al-Manfalûfî advocates for a virtuous and compassionate lifestyle, emphasizing contentment, simplicity, and solidarity. He urges acts of charity and empathy towards the less fortunate, underscoring the importance of compassion in building a more just society. Through vivid portrayals of poverty and suffering, he seeks to evoke empathy and motivate readers to address social inequalities.

In his writing, Al-Manfalûfî not only tackles substantive issues but also endeavours to present them artistically. Carefully selecting his words, he aims to evoke emotional responses and engage the reader's senses, drawing inspiration from the ancient tradition of prioritizing the musicality of speech. While he doesn't resort to rhyming, he pays close attention to the rhythm and flow of his prose, employing short, balanced paragraphs akin to the pans of a scale. While some critics argue that his style overly prioritizes aesthetics over substance and may artificially manipulate emotions, "Al-Nazarât" remains a significant work appreciated for its beauty and simplicity by Arab readers.⁶

In his notable article titled *Al-Kûkh wa al-Qaṣr* means "The Hut and the Palace", Muṣṭafâ Luṭfî Al-Manfalûfî offers a compelling comparison between two contrasting symbols of living: the humble hut and the majestic palace. Through vivid descriptions and eloquent prose, he dives into the symbolism embedded within these dwellings, unravelling profound insights about wealth, happiness, and the essence of life itself.

Al-Manfalûfî skilfully portrays the hut as a representation of simplicity, modesty, and genuine joy, juxtaposing it against the opulence and grandeur associated with the palace. Through this juxtaposition, he challenges conventional notions of success and happiness, urging readers to ponder the true sources of fulfilment beyond material possessions.

In the essay titled *Al-Kûkh wa al-Qaṣr* "The Hut and the Palace," Al-Manfalûfî invites readers to contemplate the values of compassion, generosity, and gratitude, highlighting the significance of inner contentment over external displays of wealth. His writing serves as a profound reminder of the importance of embracing simplicity and finding happiness in life's simplest pleasures.

Overall, *Al-Kûkh wa al-Qaṣr* exemplifies Al-Manfalûfî's unique literary style, marked by insightful commentary, rich symbolism, and a deep understanding of human nature. It stands as a timeless work that continues to inspire readers to reflect on life's deeper meanings and pursue genuine happiness. In this connection, we may look into the following translated excerpts of the Arabic texts to find the expected style:

"If I envy anyone for a blessing, I envy the owner of a humble hut for their abode before envying the owner of a grand palace for theirs. If it weren't for the sway of illusions over hearts, the poor wouldn't bow before the wealthy, nor would the wealthy assume that the poor could elevate them to positions of authority alongside God. I only envy the wealthy for their abundance in one aspect of their lives: when I see them feeding the hungry, comforting the impoverished, and using their wealth to benefit orphans who have been deprived of their fathers by fate, and widows who have been struck by tragedy in their families. They wipe away the tears of the destitute and the sorrowful with their hands, and then I praise them in all other aspects of their lives.

I praise them when I see them waiting for the impoverished to fall into distress so that they can tempt them, thereby allowing the devil to enter their hearts through human vulnerability. They extract what little dignity remains in them from their wealth, closing the door of hope in their faces. I praise them when I see them believing that wealth is the epitome of human perfection, thus forsaking virtues and excellences, thinking they have fulfilled all the necessities of striving for them.

I praise and mourn for them if they walk arrogantly, their heads held high, expecting people to bow before them or be awestruck by their grandeur! I pity them with all my heart if they live miserly, obsessed with themselves and their families, despising their people and kin, making their lives a burden and their deaths a relief.

As for the poor, they are, in my eyes, the happiest and most noble of people, except when they are ignorant, weak, and deluded, allowing their feelings to be misled by illusions. They believe that the wealthy are happier, more comfortable, and more content, thus envying them for the happiness they imagine they possess. They sit in the brokenness of their homes, consumed by sadness and grief, sighing and shedding tears one after another. If only they knew that many a wealthy owner of a grand palace wishes for the simplicity and contentment of the poor and their humble abodes. They see that a simple oil lamp provides brighter light and more comfort than the candles and electric bulbs that illuminate their palaces, and that the simple fabric of wool or cotton provides a softer and more luxurious bed than silk pillows and satin bedspreads.

Many people have stooped so low and become so weak that they lavish attention on the wealthy simply because they are wealthy, even if they gain nothing from them or experience only resentment and bitterness. If they must revere wealth and hold it in esteem, why do they not refuse the hands of money changers or refrain from venerating pampered dogs adorned with golden collars — when they know there is no difference between these and those?

If the poor were treated with the same generosity as the wealthy deserve, they would find themselves in solitude among themselves and their possessions. They would feel as though the golden chains were wrapped around their legs and the shackles were fastened around their necks. They would realize that honour lies in the perfection of character, not in the clinking of gold, and that happiness lies in contentment with one's lot, not in the splendour of palaces.

*Let people admire the generous and despise the wealthy, knowing that honour lies beyond wealth and poverty, and happiness lies beyond huts and palaces."*⁷

The excerpt delves into various socio-political dimensions, shedding light on significant societal dynamics:

1. **Class Divide:** It underscores the glaring disparity between the affluent and the impoverished, accentuating differences in their living standards and attitudes towards wealth. This illumination serves as a microcosm of broader societal inequalities, reflecting the unequal distribution of wealth and resources that often perpetuates power imbalances and social stratification.

2. **Illusions of Wealth:** Critique is directed towards the societal construct equating wealth with happiness and success. The text challenges the notion that material possessions inherently bring fulfilment, suggesting instead that such beliefs are shaped by societal norms and expectations rather than genuine satisfaction derived from wealth.

3. **Exploitation and Vulnerability:** There's a discerning critique of how the privileged sometimes exploit the vulnerability of the less fortunate, whether through enticing them with the allure of wealth or by perpetuating systems that uphold their marginalization. This highlights entrenched issues of exploitation and power dynamics entrenched within socio-economic structures.

4. **Values and Virtue:** The passage contrasts material wealth with virtues and moral integrity, positing that true dignity and contentment stem from one's character rather than from material acquisitions. By challenging societal priorities that prioritize wealth and status over ethical values and personal growth, it encourages readers to reassess their own value systems.

5. **Role of Generosity:** Emphasis is placed on the significance of generosity and benevolence, suggesting that true honour should be accorded to those who utilize their wealth for the betterment of others, rather than those who hoard it for self-serving purposes. This highlights the transformative potential of wealth when wielded as a tool for positive societal impact.

In sum, the passage offers a nuanced commentary on the socio-political landscape surrounding wealth, poverty, and societal values. It prompts readers to critically re-evaluate their perceptions and priorities, urging a deeper consideration of ethical principles within the broader socio-economic context.

The literary brilliance of Muṣṭafâ Luṭfî Al-Manfalûṭî shines through in his article "Ayyuhâ al-Mahzûn," a compelling example of his mastery displayed in the book "Al-Nazarât." In this piece, Al-Manfalûṭî employs a rich tapestry of vivid imagery, poignant language, and profound emotional depth to convey his message with striking clarity and resonance. Through meticulous composition and a keen sense of rhythmic beauty, he delves into the intricate facets of human sorrow, inviting readers on a reflective journey through its depths and complexities.

Al-Manfalûṭî's adept use of language captivates the senses, immersing the audience in the raw intensity of sorrow's embrace. Each word is carefully chosen, each sentence crafted with precision, to evoke a visceral response that resonates deeply within the reader's soul. Through his artful manipulation of language, Al-Manfalûṭî creates a poignant narrative that transcends mere words, delving into the very essence of human experience.

Moreover, the article stands as a testament to Al-Manfalûṭî's unparalleled skill in evoking profound emotions in his audience. Through his masterful storytelling and evocative prose, he invites readers to explore the intricate tapestry of sorrow, to ponder its significance in the fabric of existence, and to find solace in the shared experience of human suffering. In doing so, Al-Manfalûṭî cements his place as one of the foremost literary figures in Arabic literature, leaving an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of his readers for generations to come.

"If you know that you have made a pact with time to have things go your way in all your affairs and circumstances, and that it will neither give nor withhold from you except as you desire and wish, then it is fitting for you to unleash the reins of sorrow upon yourself whenever a goal eludes you or a request proves difficult. And if you understand the ways of time in giving and taking, granting and withholding, and that it never ceases to grant a favour until it revisits it and reclaims it, and that this is its custom and that of all human beings, whether they reside in palaces or huts, whether they tread the paths of luxury or sleep upon the dust of poverty,

then lessen your sorrow and restrain your tears, for you are not the first to be struck by the arrow of time, nor is your affliction an oddity in the annals of trials and tribulations.

You are sad because a bright star of hope once shone in the sky of your life, filling your eyes with light and your heart with joy. It was nothing but a mirage, and when you missed it, you found nothing. If you had moderated your expectations, you would not have indulged in such sorrow. If you had seen clearly, you would have recognized as mere fleeting flashes what you mistook for bright stars. There, its rising does not dazzle you, nor does its setting dismay you.

The happiest people in this life are those who, when blessed, acknowledge the blessing and regard it with suspicion, expecting its departure and demise with every passing moment. If it remains in their hands, then that is well and good, but if not, they have prepared themselves for its departure in advance.

If there were no joy at the moment of birth, there would be no tears at the moment of death. If there were no confidence in the continuity of wealth, there would be no fear of poverty. And if there were no joy in reunion, there would be no solace in separation."⁸

It has been observed that the above mentioned excerpt delves into several socio-political dimensions, shedding light on their broader implications:

1. **Fatalism and Social Justice:** It explores the concept of fatalism, suggesting a resigned acceptance of life's unpredictability and the limited control individuals have over their circumstances. In socio-political spheres, this perspective can underscore broader issues of social justice and inequality, wherein systemic injustices and socio-economic structures may perpetuate feelings of powerlessness among marginalized communities.
2. **Expectations and Disappointment:** The passage advocates for moderating expectations to mitigate excessive sorrow and disappointment. In socio-political contexts, this resonates with people's expectations regarding governance, policies, and societal progress. Unrealistic expectations can lead to disillusionment with political systems and leadership, highlighting the need for realistic assessments of societal challenges and potential solutions.
3. **Inequality and Vulnerability:** Acknowledging the universality of suffering, the passage challenges the notion that wealth or status shield individuals from hardship. This mirrors the socio-political reality of inequality, where individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds endure similar trials albeit in different forms. It underscores the importance of addressing systemic inequalities to foster a more equitable society.
4. **Preparation for Adversity:** Emphasizing the transient nature of blessings, the passage advocates for readiness to face adversity. In a socio-political context, this speaks to the need for resilience in navigating challenges such as economic downturns, political upheavals, and natural disasters. Preparedness can empower individuals and communities to weather storms and emerge stronger.
5. **Emotional Resilience and Social Cohesion:** The passage suggests that emotional resilience, encompassing both joy and sorrow, contributes to overall well-being and social cohesion. In socio-political arenas, such resilience fosters solidarity as communities support each other through hardships and celebrate collective victories. It underscores the importance of fostering empathy and compassion to build stronger, more cohesive societies.

In essence, the passage offers valuable insights into the socio-political ramifications of fatalism, resilience, and the acceptance of life's uncertainties. It prompts reflection on individual experiences within the broader societal context, highlighting the interconnectedness of personal struggles and societal challenges.

Critical Views on al-Manfalûṭī's write-up:

Al-Manfaluti's literature was distinguished by its eloquence and depth of expression, setting him apart from other writers. He had a unique and distinct style that Professor Umar al Dasûkî describes as innovative in literary writing. Unlike the writers of the 19th century who often relied on rhyme, rhetorical devices, and borrowed heavily from ancient literature, Al-Manfalûṭī introduced a new method of literary expression. He departed from the traditional approach of using similes, metaphors, and allegories that did not always suit the subject, environment, or era.⁹

II. Discussion:

Muṣṭafâ Luṭfî Al-Manfalûṭî, a prominent Egyptian writer and poet, left an enduring literary legacy through his seminal work "Al-Nazarât." Published in 1910, the book encompasses a diverse array of themes, ranging from social commentary and reform to spiritual reflection and cultural heritage. Through eloquent prose and masterful composition, Al-Manfalûṭî addresses societal issues with sincerity and authenticity, advocating for moral refinement, empowerment of women, and liberation from societal injustices.

Critics, including 'Abbâs Mahmûd al-'Aqqâd, laud Al-Manfalûṭî as the "father of the poor and destitute," recognizing his portrayal of universal human experiences and struggles. His writing, characterized by

vivid imagery and poignant language, resonates with readers, urging them to contemplate life's complexities and embrace authenticity, compassion, and justice.

In "Al-Nazarât," Al-Manfalûṭī's thematic exploration extends to the human experience of sorrow, the dichotomy of wealth and contentment, and the societal implications of fatalism and resilience. Through his essays and stories, he challenges prevailing norms, celebrates intellectual freedom, and champions the resilience of the human spirit. Ultimately, "Al-Nazarât" stands as a timeless testament to Al-Manfalûṭī's literary prowess and his unwavering commitment to addressing societal issues with depth, empathy, and insight.

III. Conclusion:

In conclusion, Muṣṭafâ Luṭṭî Al-Manfalûṭī's "Al-Nazarât" stands as a profound exploration of literature, human nature, and societal dynamics in modern Arabic literature. Through his masterful composition and eloquent prose, Al-Manfalûṭī addresses a diverse array of themes, from social commentary and reform to spiritual reflection and cultural heritage. His dedication to authenticity, compassion, and justice shines through in his portrayal of universal human experiences and struggles, resonating with readers across generations. Moreover, Al-Manfalûṭī's thematic exploration encompasses crucial socio-political implications, shedding light on issues of fatalism, resilience, inequality, and social justice within broader societal contexts. As a literary figure, Al-Manfalûṭī's enduring legacy continues to inspire readers and scholars alike, inviting contemplation of life's complexities and the enduring quest for authenticity, compassion, and justice in the modern world.

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