A Pragma-Stylistic Analysis of Muhammad Asad's *The Road to Mecca*

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Abstract

The Road to Mecca (1954), Muhammad Asad's autobiography, written in elegant, highly evocative English prose, is a masterpiece of literary style bursting with tenderness and thoughts emanating from a profound spiritual and existential experience. In a combination of pragmatics and stylistics, the current study explores the effectiveness of language, style and authorial illocutionary intents. The rich literary style of the text is to be understood within its larger contexts: linguistic, thematic, and emotional in addition to the physical and cultural environments. The analyzed book, in its elegant, unobtrusive and subtle style, adds a great deal to emphasizing the common humanistic factors of all civilizations. The current study focuses on the literary style of the writer and its pragmatic effects to fill in a gap in previous studies which only focused on the religious and intellectual values of Asad's writings in general. It is an attempt to prove that *The Road to Mecca* is more of a work of art than a travelogue or religious proselytizing.

Keywords: Stylistics, pragmatics, M. Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, evocative literary style, existential

1. Introduction

The Road to Mecca (1954) is essentially a spiritual autobiography creating a literary representation of a profound existential experience lived as a journey in a physical austere environment and within the human soul. This autobiography is a work of art and not a travelogue book which tells interesting anecdotes about adventures and new virgin places for both writer and reader. It, nevertheless, abounds with adventures, a near-death experience, and various thrilling aspects that engage the readers' symbolic involvement. However, all that is a literary pragmatic technique used to convey a spiritual message of seeing the eternal and the sacred in the simplest details of human life. The book is sometimes compared to vaguely similar books written by T.E. Lawrence of Arabia, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), and the much earlier book of Sir Richard Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Medina and Mecca* (1855), about their experience in Arabia although Asad's book is by far much more elegant, moving and profound. More importantly it has a completely different message, which is the genuinely soul-stirring experience that brings man to God. He abandoned the materialistic vapid diversions of Lvov and Berlin searching for the spiritual meaning of life and existence. He left behind the worldly "divertissement" critiqued by Blaise Pascal who "argues that we pursue diversions as a way of individually confronting our own sense of nullity and despair" (Wood, 2013, p. 77). Pascal further explains that humans believe in diversion and amusement to avoid inward looking, i.e. introspecting their authentic beings.

T.E. Lawrence's memoir is politically motivated to prompt or aid the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire for the benefit of Britain, and Richard F. Burton's book is a controversial book of adventures meant to entertain and shock. A similarly famous book, written by explorer and travel writer Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (1959), relates the authors adventures crossing the Empty Quarter of the Arabian Peninsula between 1945 and 1950, describing the Bedouins' life in a distinguished style. However, as a writer he was, just like, Richard Burton and T.E. Lawrence, a colonial explorer and in love with adventure. He was after a highly stimulating and dangerous experience in exotic places with exotic people, which greatly diminishes the veracity and value of his writing. Despite his classic detached style of travel writing and perspicacity of observation, his motive and understanding of writing in this almost ethnographic approach is his basic fascination with "barbaric splendor" (Thesiger, 1996, p. xv).

Thus, such writings, travelogues, memoirs, autobiographies, ethnographic studies are immensely different from the autobiography, *The Road to Mecca*, in theme, authorial intention and style—the components this study attempts to investigate stylistically and pragmatically.

Using a recent approach within applied linguistics, the current study attempts an analysis of an important English text that has value for both English and Arabic speaking cultures. It demonstrates how language and style can evoke rich feelings and profound thoughts in a natural flowing prose that ends up by enriching the reader with a genuine spiritual and cultural experience.

The present study has a major significance since it adds to understanding a wide-ranging cultural experience that instructs readers and engages both their feelings and knowledge about an important humanistic experience. This also adds to the endeavor of emphasizing the common cultural factors that unite East and West.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Pragma-stylistics

To avoid impressionistic, subjective assessment of a literary text, the critic uses tools of applied linguistics, in the form of both stylistics and pragmatics, in an attempt to realize objectivity and credibility. Revealing stylistic, lexical and syntactic relations between words and sentences is not enough to account for the intended meanings and significance of the text. The total effects of the text are assessed as well through the situational context with its wider sense, hence the importance of integrating the pragmatic approach within the stylistic framework. Adding the "pragmatic dimension" and "tracing cultural and cross-cultural references – that is, comparing what we read in the text with our personal experiences, knowledge and cultural background – seeks to complete text-external relations". The reason for such approach is necessitated by the fact that sometimes "complex and elaborated stylistic devices, such as metaphor and metonymy, help to encode sophisticated messages" (Miššíková, 2007, p. 99), which is the case of the style used by Asad in his highly artistic autobiography.

As a branch of applied linguistics, stylistics analyzes various texts through different approaches which have emerged under the influences of "different branches of linguistics and literary criticism" (Wales, 2011, p. 399). In her book, *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (2011), Katie Wales argues that most stylistic studies aim at displaying "how a text 'works'." This does not merely describe the formal textual features, but it rather aims higher at showing "their functional significance for the interpretation of the text" (p. 400). Such studies assume that every linguistic feature of the text has potential significance, raising stylistic to the status of "an analytical science which covers all the expressive aspects of language as phonology, prosody, morphology, syntax and lexicology" (Cuddon, 2013, p. 688). Stylistics, succinctly put, is the study of style which often includes foregrounding, i.e., various levels of deviation from the norm or standard linguistic use in order to produce esthetic, literary, rhetorical, and persuasive effects.

However, the rigorous methods of applied linguistics, manifested in both stylistics and pragmatics, were initially reluctantly accepted by students and scholars of literature. Paul Simpson (1997) pointed out that general reception in a literary conference to the idea of introducing linguistic studies into the study of literature was one of a tired and resigned collective groan. This "tired and resigned groan going around the auditorium" reflects a widespread "misconception in literary-critical circles that stylistics is some sort of impersonal mechanical device which is used to dismantle literary texts" (pp. ix–2). The 1960s witnessed the Fowler-Bateson controversy about the "usefulness" of stylistics as a branch of linguistics to literary creativity. "Linguistics is a science, claims Bateson, but literature has what he calls an 'ineradicable subjective core' which is inaccessible to science" (Fowler. 1984, p. 81). Today, nevertheless, stylistics has greatly matured and partnered with other disciplines to enrich itself, realizing that most important among these disciplines is pragmatics.

Both stylistics and pragmatics have gained high recognition and esteem because of their invaluable contribution to the study of literature. Leech and Short (2007) argue that pragmatic analysis of language investigates "that aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words and constructions, but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered" (p. 233). The new branch of applied linguistics which merges pragmatics and stylistics carries the appellation "pragmastylistics" and, in the words of Yan Huang (2017), "refers to the application of the findings and methodologies of theoretical pragmatics to the study of the concept of style in language" (p. 14). He gave an example of Elizabeth Black's book (2006). In *Pragmatic Stylistics* (2006), she posits:

> Since Pragmatics is the study of language in use (taking into account elements which are not covered by grammar and semantics), it is understandable that stylistics has become increasingly interested in using the insights it can offer. We are in a world of (relatively) unstable meanings; the role of the reader is that of an interpreter, not a mere passive recipient. (p. 2)

Thus, it becomes clear that the methods used by pragmatics greatly enrich those of literary stylistics. Furthermore, "pragmatics coincides with stylistics in that both are directly interested in speakers' choices from among a range of grammatically acceptable linguistic forms" (Hickey, 1993, p. 578). However, each branch emphasizes its own approach: pragmatics scrutinizes choices related to performance of actions (request, promise, etc.) and stylistics investigates choices effecting consequences on the linguistic level (register, formality, elegance etc.). To elaborate, "pragmastylistics offers more complete explanations for many hitherto unexplained phenomena than stylistics or pragmatics can do alone" (p. 579). This is achieved through the contributions of pragmaticists whose goals "have been to establish the ways in which what words literally mean and what speakers may use them to mean may differ … and perhaps to offer some explanation as to why such differences typically occur in various communicative situations" (Chapman and Clark, 2014, p. 2).

Pragmastylistics contextualizes stylistics; that is, it moves stylistics toward its contextualist mode. It makes prominent the ways of forming literary style and how it is influenced by its contexts in the wider sense. These involve:

> 1. the competence and disposition of the reader; 2. the prevailing sociocultural forces that dominate all linguistic discourses, including literature; and 3. the systems of signification through which we process and interpret all phenomena, linguistic and non-linguistic, literary and non-literary." (Bradford, 1997, p. 71)

Thus, the two disciplines have come closer to one another, which made Leo Hickey (1993) coin the term *pragmastylistics*, arguing that "it can keep clear the differences between stylistic effects (elegance, formality, aesthetics etc.) and pragmatic effects (what is being done and whether it is done politely, clearly, effectively etc.) while allowing each area to enlighten the other" (p. 584). Hickey further succinctly summarizes the similarities and difference in this multilayer interdisciplinary study in the following questions, determining the respective

areas of interest:

> [I]f linguists are interested in asking "What do you say?", stylisticians ask "How do you say?" and pragmaticists ask "What do you do?", then pragmastylisticians ask "How do you do?" The answers they provide to this question can be interesting and useful. (p. 584)

Stylistic analysis of a literary text definitely sheds illuminating light on lexical, syntactic, and semantic meanings, but it stands short of revealing the authorial intentions together with the illocutionary effects on the readers. It discloses what the text "says" not what it "does". In contrast, a pragmastylistic approach discloses what the text both says and does.

2.2 Research on Asad's Writings

Most scholars who studied Muhammad Asad's writings were interested in his religious and intellectual contributions. The interest in his style, literary or academic, is mostly limited to his translation and interpretation of the Quran, *The Message of The Qur'an* (1980), which shows profound knowledge of the original Arabic text and style, and is rendered in English in an erudite elegant style as well. However, this translation cannot be considered a work of art.

In 1955 a book review of Asad's *A Road to Mecca*, John B. Philby, praised the book for its excellent English, except for the occasional solecism or unusual turn of phrase. He criticizes the lack of geographical and geological details in a travel book, saying the writer's main purpose was the author himself and his sensations and feelings, driving toward an emotional dénouement. Philby, then, questions the veracity of some of the events narrated by Asad.

Martin Kramer (1991) contributed a whole chapter, "The Road to Mecca: Muhammad Asad (born Leopold Weiss)" to the book he edited, *The Jewish Discovery of Islam* (1991). He described how Asad's book immediately won critical acclaim, most notably in the prestige press of New York. However, the rest of the chapter discusses Asad's religious journey, his modernist, rational view of the new faith and eventual breaking up with the traditional Muslims and retreating back to the West. No attempt is made to study the *Road to Mecca* as a book, literary or otherwise; it is merely the symbolic *road to* that is investigated.

In an English book review of Gunther Windhager's *Biography of the Early Leopold Weiss [Asad], von Galizien nach Arabien 1900-1927*, Murad Hoffman (2002) makes a reference to Asad's *A Road to Mecca*, considering it partially a literary work of art, saying, "it is elegantly fictitious" (p. 143), alluding to Goethe's autobiography, *Truth And Fiction Relating To My Life* (1902).

Michael Wolfe (1997) includes long excerpts from Asad's book in a book he edited *One thousand roads to Mecca*, claiming that it is full of good travel writing, "yet this is not a travel book at all," but an expression of a psychological process and a conversion narrative. However, he praises it, saying "its evocations verge on the rhetorical at times" (p. 363).

Some researchers confine their interest to one thematic thread of Asad's book, such as the "alienation and spiritual vacuum" of modern, and especially Western, culture (Tayyab, 2017). In *Islam and the West* (2023), Safvet Halilović depends heavily of Asad's *The Road to Mecca* to authenticate his ideas. However, Asad's book is used here as a source of information while the literary and stylistic qualities are ignored, except for the first mention of the book as "an exceptional literary cry of his soul's longing for the embrace of God's faith" (p. 7). Generally speaking, the interest in *The Road to Mecca* limits itself to its related events, the revelation of the author's religious conversion and the trajectory of his thoughts. The literary style of Asad as an adroit prose stylist is mostly ignored—a gap the current study is trying to fill

3. Autobiography as Literature

For hundreds of years, readers have been turning the pages of autobiographies with pleasure. However, "autobiography has received relatively little critical attention as a separate branch of literature" (Mandel, 1968, p. 2). It was even dismissed as non-art or even trivial writing. In the 1960s, the New Critics put great emphasis on the work of art as an autonomous entity completely divorced from its creator, arguing that "autobiographical writing was a suspect mode of "trivia" or "personal" writing" (Smith & Watson, p. 118). Nevertheless, this outlook has now changed greatly as there is an element of fiction in autobiographies, and an element of autobiography in fiction. In recent years, the distinction between autobiography and fictions has been largely blurred "as authors include themselves under their own names in novels", or autobiography writers write in the manner of fiction as they "mingle fiction and personal experience as a way to get at one's essential life story" (Abrams & Harpham, p. 31).

This intermingling of fact and fiction is subtly crafted, as Jayaannapurna (2017) argues, "to represent what the writer means to convey". In this manner fiction uses metaphors to represent a deeper reality; there is no misrepresentation or imaginary events involved. Using techniques of literary fiction, the author sometimes relinquishes the liner movement of time, occasionally moving between past and present to trace the fine elements that contributed to shaping his understanding of the world, or more importantly, himself. This is especially the case when the writer is tracing the journey within.

The authentic value of this manner of telling the writer's life story bestows on the work credibility and an esthetic value which turns a non-fiction travelogue into an autobiographical work of Art. In his study, "Towards an Aesthetics of Autobiography" (2008), David Parker mentions "autobiography's own struggle for recognition in Anglo-American literature departments of the 1950s and 60s," and comments that "judgments of value, not least aesthetic value, are made all the time." The controversy has been about "the highly complex question of truth and fictionality." If an autobiography is to be considered a work of art, "what Aristotle calls poetry", that is art according to his

Poetics, it has to acquire two qualities, wholeness and universality. In other words, the work of art should be crafted according to a single action that is probable. "For Aristotle, *poēsis* is the hand of the artist shaping events into a unified whole that has universality" (Parker, pp.41–48).

The Road to Mecca gains unity and universality through its structure and texture. Both are manipulated artistically in a poetic way through highly evocative prose, and are built around the life-changing epiphanies experienced by the narrator. Additionally, delineation of events and usage of metaphors of music, the desert and the sea are literal description of actual events/places, and at the same time conveyors of the theme. They have the status of symbols, holding together various parts of the narrative and weaving them in a unified whole. The rich texture of the narrative is teeming with metaphors and rich details—variations on the major theme born of an existential experience which resonates with humans everywhere.

4. Epiphany as a Stylistic and Structural Device

A major element composing the structure of this autobiography is a literary epiphany in the Joycean manner, but it is epiphany that is almost a theophany. Similar to James Joyce's work, as in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where the texture and structure are punctuated by epiphanies, *The Road to Mecca* is based on three epiphanies that reveal the major theme of the book. Similar again to Joyce's work, the technique of epiphanies is interwoven into the autobiographical structure. As epiphany is originally a religious term that has entered literature to acquire a secular denotation, it still carries the connotations of the two usages in both Joyce's novels and Asad's autobiography. The religious meaning has been explained as:

> relating to transcendence it refers to a visible and freq. sudden manifestation of a hidden divinity, either in the form of a personal appearance, or by some deed of power or oracular communication by which its presence is made known. (Danker, 2021, p. 340)

Joyce's adoption of the term keeps the religious denotation and adds to it the general sense as a component of his aesthetic theory. Joyce partially developed his theory from his linguistic interests where he was concerned with words as symbols. This "led to a concern with reproducing both the reality of an event and its symbolic or spiritual meaning" (Walzl, 1965, p. 436). Joyce's definition keeps the classic meaning of *manifestation*, but "reflects the later sense of the word as a revelation of inner significance by means of outward appearance" (p. 436).

The central moment of epiphany in Asad's text takes place near the opening of the book where the narrator suddenly pauses to ponder the miraculous eruption of life in a harshly arid spot in the middle of a vast sparse desert—"the miracle of life awaking in a plant that has been watered by chance." It is a miracle triggered by a few drops of water spilled over a dried-up tuft of grass at his feet:

> .. a miserable little plant, yellow and withered and lifeless under the harsh rays of the sun. But as the water trickled over it, a shiver went through the shrivelled blades, and I saw how they slowly, tremblingly, unfolded. A few more drops, and the little blades moved and curled and then straightened themselves slowly, hesitantly, tremblingly... I held my breath as I poured more water over the grass tuft. It moved more quickly, more violently, as if some hidden force were pushing it out of its dream of death. Its blades - what a delight to behold! - contracted and expanded like the arms of a starfish, seemingly overwhelmed by a shy but irrepressible delirium, a real little orgy of sensual joy: and thus life re-entered victoriously what a moment ago had been as dead, entered it visibly, passionately, overpowering and beyond understanding in its majesty. (*The Road to Mecca*, p. 14)

The tremendous effect this observation had on the writer is a life-changing thrust to a new world within. The shiver of the budding life, coming out of apparent death, sends a shiver down the spine of the writer and of the reader. Suddenly the subject of the experience is in the presence of God's power—intimation of a sublime experience like that of Moses on Mount Sinai in the overwhelming presence of God.

This epiphany occurs in chapter one, "Thirst", which stands as the prelude to the rest of the book without being described as such. The 13 chapters are titled: 1. Thirst, 2. Beginning of the Road, … 13. End of the Road, which epitomizes the intent of the narration as revolving around the idea of thirst to the absolute reality behind the transient, false appearances. It is not man's and plant's thirst for water; it is rather man's thirst for the true meaning of his existence, that brought him out of nothingness (le néant) to existence. The writer simply narrates events and ponders ideas without directly expressing the general theme and purpose of his work. This autobiography follows the structure of a novel in the manner of representational literature not argumentative or expository prose. However, the structure and texture of the prose reflect the major theme of discovering man's authentic being and unity with the true origin of existence. The whole existential experience is allegorized in terms of an arid vast desert, drops of water, life erupting as if out of *le néant*, to use Sartre's words, but in a spiritual context.

The 'thirst' in the title of the chapter, the governing prelude, and the rest of the text is used in the referential sense, the actual experience that almost killed the writer before being rescued, but it is clear from the distribution and structure of the text that it is the overarching metaphor that sums up the book in one word. This lexeme, or metaphor, also reverberates with numerous biblical allusions as in "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you" (Psalm 63:1). The covert allusion gives the text universal appeal that resounds in the consciousness of humans in general not only Muslims, Christians and Jews.

This epiphany is further emphasized with another minor one with a different tone later in the narration. The writer, in the company of a

Catholic priest, was standing on the planks of a ship on his way to the East.

> A red sail emerged out of the veils of fog and slipped by close to the ship; .. A few pale rays, thin as threads, fell on the mist over the sea. Their paleness had something of the hardness of metal. Under their pressure the milky masses of fog settled slowly and heavily over the water, then bent apart, and finally rose to the right and left of the sun rays in widespread, drifting arcs, like wings. …. I tried to determine for myself the movement of colour in the breaking waves. Blue? Green? Grey? It could have been blue - but already a shimmer of amaranth red, reflecting the sun, glided over the concave slope of the wave, while the crest broke up into snowy foam and steel-grey, crinkly rags raced over it. What a moment ago had been a wave-hill was now a trembling movement - the breaking-open of a thousand minute, independent eddies in whose shaded cavities the amaranth red changed into deep, satiated green; then the green rose up, changing into oscillating violet, which at first fell back into wine red, but immediately after shot up as turquoise blue and became the crest of the wave, only to break up again; and again... (pp. 82-83)

Compared to the bare, sparse, vast almost colorless desert, the present experience overwhelms the subject's consciousness with rich varied colors (blue, green, gray; then a shimmer of amaranth red changing into green, to oscillating violet, back to wine red, shooting up to turquoise blue, white foam, change, movement, gliding, rising, breaking off, coming together, under covering fog)—a vivid picture of a symphony of tremendously rich elements entangled beautifully in a complex structure and richly poetic prose. The experience captures the soul of the beholder, and like the simple clear one of the desert leads both narrator and reader to perceive in awe the presence of the divine, but for a different sensibility. The narrators comments:

> It gave me an almost physical sensation of disquiet never to be able to grasp this play of colours and its eternally changing rhythm. When I looked at it quite superficially, only from the corner of my eye, as it were, I felt, for seconds, that it might be possible to catch all this within an integrated image; but deliberate concentration, the habit of connecting one isolated concept with another, led to nothing but a series of broken-up, separate pictures. But out of this difficulty, this strangely irritating confusion, an idea came to me with great clarity - or so it seemed to me at the time - and I said, almost involuntarily:
>
> 'Whoever could grasp all this with his senses would be able to master destiny.' (p. 83)

The narrator is overwhelmed with awe, but discovers that this is too much for his sensibility; the experience is so rich and definitely leads the soul to the eternal presence of the divine, but it is still confusing and does not lead him to the serenity of conviction and simple surrender to the Absolute. The reader is of course aware that the narrator uses this rich and complex experience as a symbol of the Christian theology, while the earlier one symbolizes the simplicity and clarity of the Muslim approach.

A third epiphany, less intense in tone, takes place while the author is strolling around in the streets of the Old City of Jerusalem, admiring the relics of the past and reflecting on the biblical stories concerning places he was then exploring. The people around him were perhaps descendentsof the ancient Hebrews but suddenly his:

> dream-fantasy broke. And then I remembered with a start: this man was an Arab, while those others, those figures of the Bible, were Hebrews! But my astonishment was only of a moment's duration; for all at once I knew, with that clarity which sometimes bursts within us like lightning and lights up the world for the length of a heartbeat, that David and David's time, like Abraham and Abraham's time, were closer to their Arabian roots - and so to the beduin of today - than to the Jew of today, who claims to be their descendant. (98)

These were Arabs. The people around him in Jerusalem are Arabs, and the Biblical stories, or at least the moral derived from them, refer to Arabs of the pre-biblical times. Abraham had this simple clear vision of experiencing the spiritual presence of the divine in the same manner of the Ancient and modern Arabs. This "clarity which sometimes bursts within us like lightning and lights up the world for the length of a heartbeat" is the epiphany which the narrator experiences, and for the third time he is in the presence of the divine through biblical memories that are apparently Jewish, but through certain understanding this is not specific to Judaism. From the Islamic perspective, Abraham is a prophet of God sent for all nations not only for the Jews. The Quran describes him as a prophet who "surrenders" his soul to God irrespective of religious affiliations and denominations. He was Muslim in this very general sense:

﴿ مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴾ (آل عمران 67)

> Abraham was neither a "Jew" nor a "Christian", but was one who turned away from all that is false, having surrendered himself unto God; and he was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him. (The Quran, 3:67)

The rich emotive narrative used here proves the capacity of the narrative "to give rise to experiential states and responses in recipients". The experiences lived by the narrator are recreated in a smoothly flowing narrative that seeps to the reader's consciousness. The reader, consequently, lives the experiences. The art of the narration here is "a movement that focuses on the psychological processes underlying recipients' engagement with stories" (Hühn P., Meister, J. C., Pier, J. & Schmid, W., 2014, p. 154).

Epiphany is used here as the culminating point or the climax of the narrative. However, the narrative does not move linearly and chronologically, but is diverted every now and then from the linear track to relapse into flashbacks, remembering past events and

contemplation on them. The climax, the main life-changing epiphany, is foregrounded in the opening chapter "Thirst," then emphasized with the other two and the general flashes of illuminating experiences and self-knowledge embedded in the texture of the narrative.

5. Prose Texture and Structure

The structure of the whole text takes the form of a plot, moving steadily from the thematic setting of the first chapter, "Thirst" to the next eleven chapters starting with "Beginning of the Road and ending with "End of the road". It is a concrete, physical journey, traversing the arid desert, aspiring to reach Mecca (both Mecca and mecca: Makkah, KSA, the great place of pilgrimage of the Muslims, and a place which one regards as supremely sacred, or which it is the aspiration of one's life to be able to visit [Oxford English Dictionary]), the end goal of the narrator. It is simultaneously a road journey and a journey within the soul seeking an ultimate truth. On one plane, it is the classic structure of linear plot. However, the personal trajectory of the journey is interspersed with disruption of the linear process, going back in time reviving memories and past events.

The modernist multi-temporal structure weaves storytelling of past memories, triggered by present events, into the texture of the narrative. Thus the tools of narrative varies the overall rhythm through "elision of events we expect ... the quick enumeration of events that takes a much longer time, and its opposite, the scene that spins out a single event over a relatively long stretch of text; and the slowdown that stretches time beyond simultaneity," (Bal, 2021, p. 117) which creates a multi-temporal texture and overall structure as well. Thus, the texture of the narration, in *The Road to Mecca*, creates a unified structure and a revealing texture as well. The disruption of the narrative in the present tense with stories and memories of past events uses the past events to illuminate the present ones in an indirect manner, the stream of the narration is simply dotted with past events similar to the cinematic technique of flashbacks. It is a stylistic device to help pragmatically in driving home the intended effect in a smooth manner without stopping to comment and explicate. The narration starts in the present tense as in:

> We ride, ride, two men on two dromedaries, the sun flames over our heads, everything is shimmer and glimmer and swimming light. … (p. 1)
>
> The afternoon glides slowly past us with its dunes, and its silence, and its loneliness. After a while, the loneliness is broken … (p. 17)
>
> The word Zayd uses for "destiny" is qisma — "that which is apportioned. … (p. 35)

Zayd's words strike an elusive chord in the narrator's memory, so he shifts to the past tense: "… there was a grin that accompanied them . . . whose grin?" (p. 35). Then, the spatio-temporal context shifts to a rather long narrative of past experiences. When a new section starts, the spatio-temporal context shifts back to the present. The stretches of past narrative are woven into the main narrative, which maintains the unity of the text and creates the intended total effect.

The main line of the narration is in the present tense, creating a vivid picture of what is happening in the present moment (historically for the narrator and through deictic transformation, the present moment of the reader). The uni-temporal and uni-spatial line of the narrative is sporadically interrupted to weave in an old story, biblical, historical, or personal, shedding light on the current events of the narrative, artistically involving the reader in the events, and eliciting empathy, not mere sympathy. Moreover, the texture, with its numerous physical details, and the three epiphanies experienced by the narrator, as detailed above, contributes as well to the coherent structure.

Through foregrounding, "the aesthetic exploitation of language takes the form of surprising a reader into a fresh awareness of, and sensitivity to, the linguistic medium which is normally taken for granted" (Leech & Short, 2007, p.23). This deviation from the automated linguistic and social norms is "artistically motivated deviation," (p. 39) and achieved through poetic devices, even in prose, such as metaphors and prose cadences. Leech & Short further argue that the writer's creativity tends to be destructive of rules and conventions, which necessitates cooperation on the part of the reader (p. 24)—a pragmatic tenet which includes the reader in the process of creating sense and significance: sense arising from elements of content, and significance as the total effect of content and form within the larger context. Foregrounding is achieved through a number of device, one of which is using metaphorical modes of meaning, shared by both stylistics and pragmatics. In *The Road to Mecca*, the narrator uses controlling metaphors to convey the sense and significance of his experience. Monophonic music, sounds, singing, mosque call for prayers—all create one controlling metaphor that runs through the whole text to convey the sense of simplicity, clarity, and seeking a unifying ultimate truth.

Images of monotone sounds and singing abound. The winds circling the sand dunes, "the wooden wheels over the wells make music and sing to you with- out stopping"; the herdsmen "chant in chorus while the water is drawn up in large leather buckets" (p. 15); "the Jinns make the sands sing under the sun" (p. 42); "chants which men sing to keep their animals to a regular, quick pace" (p. 110). Zayd starts to sing while riding his dromedary:

> … he suddenly opened his mouth and sang, with the suddenness of a mountain wall precipitously jutting out of a plain. It was a Najdi *qasida*, a kind of ode a swaying of long-drawn-out tunes in an unchanging rhythm, flowing, like the desert wind, from nowhere into nowhere. (p. 220)

Like all music, welcoming sounds and singing in the text, the tune is monotonous, not in a pejorative sense, but rather in a texture of monophony—the monophonic texture that was the prevalent musical style during the European medieval period. These "tunes in an unchanging rhythm" (p. 205) recur in different forms throughout the text, which creates stylistic coherence, thematic unity, and a pragmatic illocutionary message: the narrator's intention of displaying the one ultimate truth without any equivocation.

This monophonic texture created in the metaphors of music and desert landscape is still expressive of multiple voices, from other characters and experiences, but they all move together harmonically to reach the same purpose. Another sample of the music metaphor is followed by meditation that is, in fact, explicitation instead of the stylistic implication and the pragmatic implicature as the narrator breaks the flow of the narrative to interfere with abstract exposition as in the following:

> We ride and Zayd sings: always the same rhythm, always the same monotonous melody. For the soul of the Arab is monotonous — but not in sense of poverty of imagination; he has plenty of that; but his instinct does not go, like that of Western man, after width, three-dimensional space and the simultaneity of many shades of emotion. Through Arabian music speaks a desire to carry, each time, a single emotional experience to the utmost end of its reach. … And its strength: for the faith in the possibility of an endless linear ascent of emotional knowledge can in the sphere of the mind lead nowhere but to God. Only on the basis of this inborn drive, so peculiar to people of the desert, could grow the monotheism of the early Hebrews and its triumphant fulfillment, the faith of Muhammad. Behind both stood the motherly desert. (p. 144)

This excerpt rounds off chapter 4, Voices, with Zayd's singing just as it started with Zayd's singing—a technique to both create coherence and emphasize the thematic meaning and the authorial intention. The 35-page chapter relates the narrator's travel in Egypt, Syria and Palestine, in addition to different events that took place during the narrator's trips. It contemplates subthemes of the Western views concerning the Arabs and life in general, but the subthemes are woven around one thread or one tune.

Another controlling metaphor is that of the desert and nomadic life in harsh vast spaces. The desert and such places are part of the different places described in the text. They are of course meant literally. However, the landscapes used as settings for events are dealt with on the two planes: realistic and symbolic. The landscape of Sinai, Sothern Levant and Arabia evoked unexpected feelings in the narrator. The harsh, bare, arid landscape did not bear any connotations of danger or threatening death; it instead symbolized sublime setting for meeting the sacred eternity and a look inward in the depth of man's soul. Another day of wandering is over, and in the enveloping silence around, mirroring the silence within, the narrator admires the surrounding landscape:

> There are many more beautiful landscapes in the world, but none, I think, that can shape man's spirit in so sovereign a way. In its hardness and sparseness, the desert strips our desire to comprehend life of all subterfuges, of all the manifold delusions with which a more bountiful nature may entrap man's mind and cause him to project his own imageries into the world around him. The desert is bare and clean and knows no compromise. It sweeps out of the heart of man all the lovely fantasies that could be used as a masquerade for wishful thinking, and thus makes him free to surrender himself to an Absolute that has no image: the farthest of all that is far and yet the nearest of all that is near. (p. 155)

The seemingly innocent matter of fact description, read carefully within the context of the total text and the implied theme, reveals its illocutionary force: it is here and now that man's consciousness is ready to "surrender himself to an Absolute that has no image: the farthest of all that is far and yet the nearest of all that is near," which is the basic call of the Quran. It is here in the paradoxically "empty desert" which is "as near to you as your own heartbeat," that the narrator feels the presence of the Absolute. Moreover, the phrase "to surrender himself to the Absolute" expresses the fundamental meaning of the word *Muslim*. The subtle style of the narration embeds deep religious thoughts within a literary narration and depiction of landscape and inner feelings. No proselytizing is involved. It is the power of the story, the beauty of the images, the force of illocutionary manipulations that do the work.

This autobiography of course expresses the feelings and ideas of its author together with the numerous impressively interesting events that he lived through. Its major theme is to explain why the author converted to Islam. However, all this is related as a captivating story, almost a thriller, abiding by the norms of literary works of art. The ideas discussed do not take the form of argumentative prose. They reveal the narrator's sensibilities and epistemological way of thinking. No contentions arise anywhere in the text despite the fleeting, covert comparisons of beliefs and religions. In defending one faith that appeals to the narrator's inherent disposition, the narrator does not denigrate other beliefs, but simply shows a leaning towards the simple, clear ideas that leave behind dichotomies of body and soul, and the original ideas of sin and man's doom. He does not adhere to the old duality of Western thought, Descartes' error, preferring:

> to grasp the spirit of these Muslim people: not because their religion attracted me (for at that time I knew very little about it), but because I recognized in them that organic coherence of the mind and the senses which we Europeans had lost. (pp. 107-108)

Criticizing the post-war Europe and the great loss of faith after the catastrophic brutalities of WWI, the narrator intimates:

> It now began to dawn upon me that Europe's lack of inner integration and the chaotic state of its ethics might be an outcome of its loss of contact with the religious faith that had shaped Western civilization. (p. 150)

The narrator does not proselytize for one religion against another; he rather advocates a return to pure simple faith, adopting the idea that there is meaning and purpose in life and that a spiritual bond with the Absolute may restore peace to planet earth.

These two excerpts, like some others, stop the flow of the narration of events and delineations of scenes without burdening the reader with ideas and discussions. They instantly vanish, releasing the flow of the events that are thrilling, and engage feelings and instinctive reactions of sympathy. The ideas arising from these intermittent contemplations seep into readers' consciousness while they are eager to

follow the events: what is going to happen next? The writer's ideas dissolve in the flow of the events with their rich texture dotted with novel images and exotic details. This turns almost every locution into and illocution that shapes the reader's consciousness.

The rich varied style enriches itself further by resorting to what Lawrence Venuti calls foreignization despite the fact that this book is not a translation. The author includes many sentences in the dialogues that are translation from Arabic to which he is keen to give both fidelity to the original and elegant rendering, evoking the classic times of the Quran as well as the actual situation of the vernacular used today. When characters call one another, the reader does not see sentences like "Muhammad, look at this!" or "Zayd, will you come here?" but instead it is always "O Muhammad, … O Zayd…":

> "Wilt thou not grant me the pleasure of dining with me now, O Muhammad?" Amir Ibn Musaad's voice breaks through my reverie. (p. 165)

In addition to using the old vocative case, utilizing the early modern English second person singular pronoun *thou* and its declensions with the proper verb conjugation is another example of creating the image of a distant land, culture, and idiom together with the elegant style of both the Bible and the Quran—a stylistic device to conjure up the desired atmosphere, and further stir the interest of the reader. This is not done in an affected way; it is gracefully and sparingly introduced within a rich and varied style.

Three major symbols infiltrate the texture of the narration and create structural coherence. The symbols of desert, music, and water are omnipresent in the text and appear as both realistic descriptions of desert, music/singing and water in addition to their stylistic role of creating the connotative meanings of simple clarity, monophonic approach, and life-giving elements.

6. Conclusion

Muhammad Asad's spiritual autobiography, *The Road to Mecca*, is composed as a narrative work of art abiding by the stylistic and pragmatic norms of creative literature. It creates a literary representation of its basic theme of thirst for the divine absolute approached through a simple, clear, monophonic vision. The book is written in a sophisticated, highly evocative English prose, bursting with tenderness and thoughts emanating from a profound spiritual and existential experience. Through a pragma-stylistic approach, the current study explored the effectiveness of language, style and authorial illocutionary intents of the book, revealing a part of its rich literary style as understood within its larger contexts: linguistic, thematic, and emotional in addition to the physical and cultural environments. The author maintains the unity of the narrative through elements of literary epiphanies and metaphors used as symbols that infiltrate the whole text.

This autobiography has established its literary value through rhetorically rich and evocative style, stylistic coherence of structure and texture, in addition to controlling metaphors and symbols. It further gains universality through basing both structure and texture on life-changing epiphanies in the Joycean manner. The analyzed book, in its graceful, subtle style, adds a great deal to emphasizing the common humanistic interests of all civilizations.

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Authors' contributions

Dr. Haroon Alsager and Dr. Mohamed Aly were responsible for the study design and revising. Dr. Aly was responsible for the data collection. Dr. Alsager and Dr. Aly drafted the manuscript and Dr. Alsager revised it. Both of them read and approved the final manuscript.

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