

Realistic Images in Nafsat al-Masdur

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ABSTRACT

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Nafsat al-Masdur is a work by Mohammad Zaidari. According to the author, the book was written to express pain and sorrow and describe the suffering and oppression of the Mongol invasion. Excessive attention to verbal and rhetorical devices has fabricated the text and made it difficult to understand the meaning. However, since literature has always expressed the social, cultural, and political realities of its time and the theoretical framework of this article is realism, focusing on the realities of life, society, and individuals as components of this school is important. Zaidari skillfully created realistic images to depict the realities of everyday life and the social challenges of his time. This research, using an analytical-comparative method and using library resources, seeks to find the facts expressed in Naftah al-Masdur and the extent to which it conforms to the school of realism. Accordingly, images were extracted from this work and, by analyzing them based on the characteristics of this school, an attempt was made to examine examples of the text that are close to and consistent with the characteristics of realism and to analyze its impact on our understanding of the society of the author's time.

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Introduction

Nafthat al-Masdur, authored by Shahab al-Din Muhammad Zaydari Nasawi in the 7th century AH, is widely regarded as a pinnacle of ornate, technical Persian prose (*nasr-e masnu'*). Composed four years after the demise of Sultan Jalal al-Din Khwarazmshah, the work articulates the author's personal anguish and trauma in the wake of the catastrophic Mongol invasions and the subsequent collapse of the Khwarazmian state. While traditional scholarship has primarily analyzed the text through the lens of ornate rhetoric, stylistic devices, or formalist frameworks—often assuming that heavy ornamentation obscures historical reality—this study argues that beneath its elaborate rhetorical surface lies a vivid, uncompromising representation of social and historical realities. The primary research problem is to determine how and to what extent Zaydari's descriptive strategies conform to the principles of literary Realism, and how his imagery constructs an objective socio-political portrait of 13th-century Iranian society.

Method

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical and comparative methodology based on library research. Utilizing the theoretical framework of 19th-century European literary Realism (drawing upon Balzac, Lodge, and modern critical theorists), the researcher categorizes and analyzes textual excerpts from *Nafthat al-Masdur*. The investigation systematically examines five major components of Realism: (1) representation of social status and interpersonal relations, (2) individual characterization and psychological profiling, (3) objective empirical reportage and chronological causality, (4) environmental conditioning and human determinism, and (5) rational investigation of the causes and nature of historical events.

Results

The analysis reveals that despite its heavy reliance on rhetorical figures, Arabic verses, and Qur'anic citations, *Nafthat al-Masdur* exhibits pronounced realistic mechanisms:

- **Social Reality and Interpersonal Relations:** Zaydari portrays human relationships not in isolation, but as direct outcomes of socio-political conditions. He critically depicts the political hypocrisy of opportunistic envoys, the ethical erosion of local leaders submitting to Mongol authority, and the emergence of rogue elements (*ayyarun*) who exploited the chaos to loot displaced victims.
- **Characterization and Social Typification:** In alignment with Balzacian Realism—where characters function both as distinct individuals and as typifications of their social classes—Zaydari provides biting descriptions of figures like Jamal Ali Iraqi, symbolizing the corrupt and incompetent bureaucratic elite. Furthermore, through monologue and detailed behavioral accounts, he delves into the psychological and moral corruption of figures such as the ruler of Amid (*Sahib-e Amid*).
- **Empirical Experience and Chronological Causality:** Rather than relying on mystical allegory or myth, events unfold along a clear chronological axis underpinned by concrete cause-and-effect relations. The narrative reconstructs realistic spatial-temporal details, harsh geographical journeys (such as the treacherous crossing of the Pargari pass), and visceral scenes of warfare and abandonment.
- **Environmental Conditioning (*Ta'assor az Mohit*):** The text demonstrates how extreme historical catastrophe alters human nature and ethics. The collapse of the state structure and the ensuing anarchy turn cities into battlegrounds, dissolve religious and moral solidarity, and lead citizens to plunder state treasuries or betray their masters to survive.
- **Etiology and Historical Rationality:** Zaydari rejects superstition and fatalistic passivity when analyzing the Mongol conquest. He explicitly diagnoses the collapse as the direct consequence of military incompetence, political complacency, hedonism, neglect of intelligence, and the absence of meritocracy in the Khwarazmian court.

Conclusion

The study concludes that *Nafthat al-Masdur* transcends the boundaries of ornamental prose to serve as an early, indigenous manifestation of literary

and historical realism. Zaydari's prose functions as an objective socio-political chronicle that prioritizes rational critique, environmental determinism, and empirical verisimilitude over ungrounded fantasy. The predominant atmosphere of grief and catastrophe in his imagery reflects the realistic premise that in moments of civilizational collapse, depicting suffering and social degradation is the closest approximation to the genuine truth of human existence.