

## Echoes from the Margins: Weaving Subaltern Agency through Narrative

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### Abstract

In a postmodern age in which the validity of class as an organizing principle is highly debated, classes vanish behind groups, class consciousness gives way to self-identification by race, ethnic group or religion, and class struggle shrinks behind hegemony, class analysis, as this paper attempts to demonstrate, still yields significant insights. The study pivots on an exploration of two Egyptian novels in translation, Khairy Shalaby's *The Lodging House* (1999) and Abu Golayyel's *Thieves in Retirement* (2002), as symbolic interventions in a polemical and strategically driven ideological confrontation between social classes or class fractions. Via a juxtaposition of the diverse ideologemes underlying a bourgeoisie and a subproletariat discourses in conflict within the narratives, the study argues that both texts delineate a complex social fabric and claim a voice of their own subverting both discourses. Crafting allegorical spaces within their texts, both authors call into question the ideologemes employed to appropriate a subproletariat—constructing a periphery-sensitive discourse and desilencing traces of a rebel consciousness. As two “utterances” in a subaltern discourse, which affirms the legitimacy and imaginative scope of a collective class agency, both novels are explored as performative histories “from below” from which their authors delineate a perspective and a political possibility.

**Keywords:** Subaltern agency- class consciousness- cognitive mapping- The Lodging House- Thieves in Retirement-