



A Cultural Approach to the Novel's Title: The Disappearance of Mr. Nobody as a Case Study

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Abstract:

*This study offers a cultural reading of the "threshold discourse of the title," focusing on the title of the novel *The Disappearance of Mr. Nobody* by Algerian novelist Ahmed Taibaoui, winner of the Naguib Mahfouz Prize for Literature in 2021. The analysis traces the efficacy of cultural patterns, particularly the dominant pattern within the novel, examining the title as a central element that intertwines concepts of presence and absence through linguistic and semantic contradictions. It highlights how disappearance can represent an existential act embodied in the character of "Mr. Nobody," who symbolizes the marginalized individual deprived of identity and status.*

Disappearance transforms from a physical absence into a profound existential experience intertwined with social oppression and psychological alienation. Through the novel's characters, it becomes evident that disappearance is not merely an individual occurrence but a collective experience reflecting the realities of socially marginalized classes.

By drawing attention to the social margins, the novel challenges traditional perceptions of cultural centrality, restoring significance to these margins and making them the focal point of the narrative. Marginalized identities gain existence through storytelling, resisting erasure and reshaping the self in confrontation with the world.

Keywords: Title, cultural pattern, disappearance, margins.

Une approche culturelle du titre du roman : La disparition de M. Nobody comme étude de cas

Résumé :

*Cette étude propose une lecture culturelle du « discours seuil du titre », en se concentrant sur le titre du roman *La Disparition de Monsieur Personne* de l'écrivain algérien Ahmed Taibaoui, lauréat du prix Naguib Mahfouz de littérature en 2021. L'analyse retrace l'efficacité des schémas culturels, en particulier le schéma dominant au sein du roman, en examinant le titre comme un élément central qui entremêle les concepts de présence et d'absence par le biais de contradictions linguistiques et sémantiques. Elle met en lumière comment la disparition peut représenter un acte existentiel incarné par le personnage de « Monsieur Personne », qui symbolise l'individu marginalisé, privé d'identité et de statut.*

La disparition se transforme d'une absence physique en une expérience existentielle profonde, intimement liée à l'oppression sociale et à l'aliénation psychologique. À travers les personnages du roman, il apparaît clairement que la disparition n'est pas seulement un événement individuel, mais une expérience collective reflétant les réalités des classes socialement marginalisées. En mettant en lumière les marges sociales, le roman remet en question les conceptions traditionnelles de la centralité culturelle, redonnant ainsi de l'importance à ces marges et les plaçant au cœur du récit. Les identités marginalisées prennent vie à travers la narration, résistant à l'effacement et se redéfinissant face au monde.

Mots-clés : Titre, modèle culturel, disparition, marges.



Introduction

Modern critical studies have expanded their focus beyond the text itself, encompassing what is referred to as paratext. Scholars, including Gérard Genette, have highlighted the elements surrounding a text—whether verbal or visual—that contribute to its meaning and interpretation, such as the author's name, titles, and dedications. These elements form what is termed the "paratext,« which acts as a parallel text to the original work»¹.

Viewing the paratext as a parallel text underscores the distinction between the main text and its thresholds, as «each possesses unique functions, modes of operation, forms of manifestation, placement within the textual space, and ideological connotations»². However, this distinction does not negate the interplay and complementary relationship between them.

Thresholds, «as linguistic and iconic structures preceding or following the text, produce descriptive discourses that introduce its content, forms, and genres, persuading the reader to engage with it»³. Positioned as introductory or accompanying components, thresholds are governed by structures and functions that differ stylistically and compositionally from the main text, while remaining semantically and suggestively interactive with it. They hint at meaning without fully revealing it, making the paratext an analytical component that cannot be overlooked.

It is inconsistent to acknowledge the text's broader scope, which includes the cultural context of its production, while disregarding the surrounding discourses that partake in its creation. The text constitutes the intra-textual space, whereas

the thresholds represent the extra-textual realm. A comprehensive analytical approach to the text must encompass both dimensions.

Under the category of authorial paratext (paratexte auctorial), which refers to paratexts created by the author, we include elements such as the author's name, the title, subtitle, dedication, and preface⁴.

Our approach to the title threshold considers it as a reading-oriented discourse that fulfills functions reflecting perspectives and orientations. It also carries an implicit message open to cultural interpretation.

1. A Cultural Reading of the Title Threshold:

The title threshold, in our view, is the most significant entry point for reading a text. Its importance lies in the functions it performs, particularly its attractive function, which captures the reader's attention immediately and encourages them to uncover the implicit discourse hidden behind its aesthetics.

The title performs several functions based on the semantic relationship it establishes with the text it represents. Gérard Genette, in his book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, categorizes these functions as referential, descriptive, connotative, and persuasive⁵. The title is not less significant than the text it denotes, as it «constitutes an independent message, as poetic and aesthetic as the work it titles, sometimes even surpassing it in certain creations»⁶.

Literary titles are open to interpretation. Thus, the title's «function in literature cannot merely be referential. Instead, "a title must conceal more than it reveals and remain silent more than it speaks, prompting the reader's imagination to bring forth the absent, the unspoken, or the hidden under



the surface»⁷." This necessity for engaging with the hidden makes the analysis of the title and its implicit discourse as vital as the analysis of the novel itself. While the title indirectly refers to the novel, it also disrupts conventional references, unveiling concealed meanings and exposing inconsistencies. The title interacts dialogically with the text, moving back and forth to illuminate the semantic connections between them»⁸.

The title encapsulates a set of features that render it an initial reading guide and a marker presiding over the text. «It fulfills various ontological, contextual, and socio-cultural functions related to written works»⁹. The title also broadens interpretive perspectives, «serving as a tool for deconstructing, analyzing, and interpreting the text. This dual movement—from the title to the text and back—helps reveal the narrative and strategic choices behind the titling»¹⁰.

The relationship between the title and the text may vary, ranging from semantic harmony to semantic dissonance or other complex interactions. Analyzing this relationship requires a dual, interactive approach, examining the text through the lens of the title and vice versa.« The stronger the bond between the two, the richer the artistic and semantic dimensions that emerge. This is especially true of contemporary literary titles, which resist singular interpretations and invite multiple readings»¹¹.

Given the linguistic economy and semantic condensation of titles, they must be deconstructed to uncover their hidden layers. Titles serve as masks concealing cultural patterns while maintaining their autonomy as parallel texts. However, this autonomy does not sever the semantic ties

between the title and the text, which communicate through interwoven codes. The relationship between the title and the text has been likened to that between the head and the body, underscoring their inseparability. A title's meaning is inherently tied to its context within the text, forming a part-to-whole relationship. Titles derive their existence from the texts they represent, fulfilling their functions only through this connection.

The allure and aesthetic persuasion of a title, achieved through its linguistic and rhetorical ornamentation, can establish a cultural façade. This makes the title a cultural space that sustains the dominant pattern while exercising aesthetic seduction. In this way, «titles are never chosen arbitrarily but are framed by a broader cultural context»¹². Titles are rooted in cultural foundations that shape their immediate and implicit meanings. Therefore, if a title says something, it is crucial to discover what it conceals and what lies beneath its surface.

3. The Disappearance of Mr. Nobody and the Withdrawal of Self: "The Dialectic of Being and Non-Being"

At first glance, the novel's title seems perplexing and thought-provoking. Disappearance implies a transition from a visible, tangible state to an unseen, hidden one—a movement from presence to absence. However, the paradox within the title emerges when it announces the disappearance of "Mr. Nobody." How does "nobody" disappear? Can absence befall one who never existed?

This paradox immediately invites readers into the novel's world by breaking conventional expectations. The title compels them to seek the hidden and obscured, rather than



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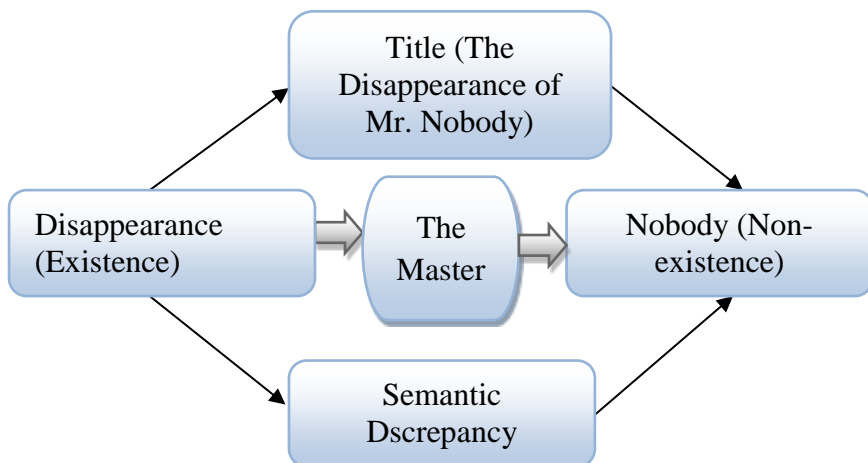
the evident and concrete, reinforcing feelings of doubt and curiosity.

The title relies on the duality of presence and absence, which forms a layered interplay. The act of disappearance presupposes prior presence, and the absence implied by "Nobody" suggests that there was once a "Somebody." The phrase "Mr. Nobody" functions as a singular unit loaded with narrative meaning, symbolizing an erased and marginalized identity. As Paul Ricoeur states, «a person stripped of qualities—or rather of properties—becomes ultimately indefinable. Resorting to a proper name in such a case becomes absurd, as it signifies nothing. The unidentifiable becomes unnameable»¹³.

Throughout the narrative, the first part of the title, "The Disappearance of Mr.," builds anticipation and sets up a reading horizon. However, this expectation is abruptly disrupted by the phrase "Nobody," which introduces an ironic twist. This reversal destabilizes meanings and reveals linguistic playfulness, challenging direct interpretation. The word "Nobody" undermines the title's prior implications of importance and status conveyed by "Mr.," introducing a tone of sarcasm and existential irony.

In the novel, "Mr. Nobody" describes himself with terms that reinforce this contradiction: «I am merely a battered sculpture with no features, fragments, a creation of others' experiments on me. I agreed to be a guard dog because I was broken...a doormat for others' mistakes»¹⁴ Such self-descriptions highlight the protagonist's transition from a person of agency to a submissive, disempowered figure.

The title's dual nature its allure and its paradox frames the narrative's exploration of identity, erasure, and marginalization, making it an essential entry point into the text's cultural and existential concerns.



The title, in its semantic structure, experiences a state of dissonance. How can the disappearance, which implies the prior existence of a master of non-being, "no body," be achieved?

In fact, the negation style confirms the existence of something. «Because negation does not exist in an undefined framework, but rather is a specific negation attributed to something defined»¹⁵.

Also, in the terminology of Arabic grammar, proper nouns are categorized as definite, as they are inherently definite and do not require an additional marker for their definition.

«A proper noun identifies its referent without any need for a marker»¹⁶. Thus, it distances itself from indefinite forms. «Definiteness is based on specification and distinction



Soumission : 13/04/2025 Acceptation : 08/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

because an indefinite noun is absolute»¹⁷." Based on the grammatical characteristic that proper nouns possess, which manifests in the definition that leads to specification and identification, we find that the lack of naming the protagonist in the novel aims to avoid direct reference to any specific person. It attempts to expand and keep the field of disappearance open, not tied to just one individual. «Proper nouns, as distinct from common nouns, seem less subject to the production of ownership. They are not only linked to the ownership that each individual holds in themselves, meaning according to the theory of individualistic possessive tendencies, but literally tied to the ownership one possesses, in that proper names are emphasized in the early contemporary period with the intent of registering them in official documents, allowing the state to count and tax private ownership»¹⁸

Assigning a name to someone means identifying their identity and distinguishing them from others, as the act of naming transfers the named from the realm of obscurity to the realm of specification. It is likely that «The privilege of proper names, which humans enjoy, derives from the subsequent role names play in stabilizing their identities and subjectivities. Even if proper names do not fully fulfill their role in ordinary language, their purpose remains to designate, each time, a single individual, excluding all other members of the group we are talking about»¹⁹.

This is evident in the title, as the act of erasing the name reinforces a system of servitude. The lack of naming the person implies the absence of individual ownership of oneself, a concept embodied in the life of "no body." At no point in his life was he a dominant figure. Instead, his life

was shaped by a philosophy or policy of filling the void, as he found himself taking care of an elderly man after his son abandoned him. He was entrusted with the task of providing care in exchange for a place to sleep and a meal to stave off hunger. The matter didn't end there; the old man took advantage of the situation by calling him by his son's name, "Murad," to maintain the memory of his absent son and erase "no body." He describes his condition, saying, «I lived my life playing roles that weren't mine, or filling in for someone who was absent or delayed... a transient in a transient life».²⁰

The title mirrors the text and intersects with its semantics. The title is the condensed and reduced image of the text, and thus, the text, through an inverse operation, becomes the expanded and detailed image of the title, extending over the narrative space and aligning with the spirit of the long narrative, description, and dialogue. This is evident in the title of the novel, which achieves «the mystery of the novel's statement; if the text contains puzzling events, the title itself contains a mystery that fulfills the secret of the text»²¹.

This forced erasure and marginalization of "no body" by the others who passed through his life pushed him to adopt the idea of disappearance as a self-imposed decision. In order to free himself from imposed constraints, he renounced his national identity, declaring his departure from belonging to a country that had marked him only with misfortune. He says, «I don't have an ID card or any other document to prove my identity»²², He didn't stop at this departure, but further reinforced it by withdrawing from his self. "No body," the protagonist, says, «Legal procedures require documents, but I have no identity, and I don't want to be anyone at all».²³



The act of narrative writing is initiated through a dual path of disappearance for the master "no body," with a prior and subsequent check. The structure of the novel is built on two almost equal sections, and the novel opens with a chapter titled: "The Man Who Took Off His Face and Left," under which the following titles sequentially appear: (Evasion, Clustering, Transparency, Degradation).

The second chapter is titled "Hell Peers from the Window," and under it are five titles: (Naive Introductions, One Hides a Secret, The Heart's Compass, Mere Fates, A Narrow Sidewalk).

What is notable is that the novelist invests in the effectiveness of the titling by using a considerable number of internal titles, given the number of pages of the novel. Internal titles represent «the other voice of the author in directing the process of organizing the reading of the novel's text».²⁴ and act as a reading guide; they indicate the movement of events, facilitating and organizing the reading process.

The main title allows us to uncover the narrative resulting from disappearance. If the disappearance of "no body" is confirmed in the linguistic structure of the title, the text will reveal the circumstances and details of this disappearance. Without disappearance, the narrative would not have emerged. The symbolism of disappearance refers to a motivational factor and an encouragement for the storytelling process, which works as a resistance to absence and non-existence by reshaping the identity of the master "no body" with a narrative identity that works on repairing the damage done to the self and dissipating its identity on the ontological and actual existence level.

It is observed that, on the level of «elements of the title," there is a clear semantic anxiety and gaps filled with perplexing ambiguity. That is, the title as a whole does not aim to accomplish a certain, coherent meaning. Instead, it places the receiver in a space of dissonance and fog, suggesting the fragmentation of the narrative and its dreamlike quality»²⁵.

At the textual level, the narration begins with the chapter "The Man Who Took Off His Face and Left," which semantically supports the main title through anticipatory operations of disappearance (as a realized event). It is followed by a manifestation in the discourse as a narrated event. Internal titles act as «descriptive (meta-title) to their main title as a deep structure. They are deferred answers to the question of the main title's essence, thus achieving the communicative relationship between the internal titles and the main title»²⁶.

It is also observed that the word "master" is replaced by "the man," which is defined to refer to a specific individual.

This act of removing came after attempts to coexist with the harsh circumstances imposed by life on those living on its margins, beginning with evasion, clustering, then transparency, and finally degradation. This point led to the decision to take off the face that had carried the marks of submission and alienation for a long time, allowing the protagonist to revolt, saying, «I want to live without a face or reflection»²⁷.

He did not face the world behind a mask to save his dignity but preferred confrontation over evasion and flattery. This reveals an example of a marginalized class that faced the world with exposed faces, and the protagonist "no body" expresses his position in a life on the margins, saying,



Soumission : 13/04/2025 Acceptation : 08/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

«Nothing in life fit me. My life, which is like a patched-up garment, I want a tailor to remake it according to my desires. What do I really desire? Maybe to take it off and face death naked, as I came into this world naked the first time»²⁸.

The situations of "no body" try to depict him as a defeated character with no decisive opinion, and dependent without the will or ability to act, preventing his formation as an active self. This is confirmed when he speaks of himself, saying, «I am a filthy servant, no body knows me or cares about me, and this satisfies me completely»²⁹.

However, the act of disappearance turned the roles of the character around, transforming them into an active self, thus establishing a culture of rejection. «Although it often occupied the margins, it was able to move this margin from a reactionary position to an active one, from submission to resistance. Some of these margins have even managed to occupy the cultural platform, competing with those who speak officially on behalf of the central culture».³⁰

"No body" decided not to have a reflection in this world because he realized that he was not the ideal example to be followed. The marginalized groups in society and those who live in the underground world see themselves «as if they were removed from their bodies and existence, they remain near themselves, their identity fragmented or marked with whiteness, meaning liberated from the compulsion of identity».³¹

Similarly, "no body" preferred to live with a white identity within worlds of bewilderment, as «bewilderment is often linked to the unwillingness to be oneself, to escape from all the responsibilities connected to bearing a name,

face, lineage, and history. It is the will not to carry the burden of being oneself»³².

As a result of the alienation that "no body" experiences, the feeling of confusion emerged, hastening the loss of being. The condition for establishing being stipulates that «being must be confirmed and guaranteed, otherwise it vanishes. Mutual recognition is what guarantees lineage, protects the name, and affirms the social status».³³

In the second chapter titled "Hell Peers from the Window," the act of disappearance is realized, and "no body" becomes an image of the multiple. His image is reflected in all the characters that pass through this chapter. "No body" is not merely a diagnostic state for a single individual; despite this character's withdrawal from the narrative, the echo of their presence continues to resonate in other characters, who can be classified under the social margin inhabited by those subjected to every form of oppression. He is the hell that peers from the window onto life, transitioning from worlds of silence, neglect, and erasure to worlds of confession, attention, and recall. The novel represents a revealing light spot for the stories of a group of people from shadowy worlds, ignored by history, whose tales were dismissed because they were, in the eyes of the cultural institution, the margins of existence, with no place on the cultural map that recognizes centrality and elitism. This map sees no importance or value in these fragile groups living on the edges, deeming their existence as merely occupying a space in this world. In their view, they do not form a contribution nor carry any meaningful impact that could be valuable to others, as those in the center, according to the cultural classification, are deemed more important and of higher status. Their centrality and the



Soumission : 13/04/2025 Acceptation : 08/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

elitist system controlling their actions prevent them from breaking the aura of superiority surrounding them and incorporating those they consider of lesser status into their sphere of attention.

The novel takes a different path, breaking this centrality, dismantling the elitist system, and flipping the roles, making the margin the center while marginalizing the center and transcending it. In this way, the narrative establishes the question of difference and adheres to a policy of differentiation, opposing the trajectory witnessed in the Arab culture, which adheres to the dominance of « two main systems: the centrality of the center and the marginality of the periphery.

The central in Arab culture strives to assert its masculine authority, establishing its own cultural systems with all its might to become an elitist and dominant force, in contrast to the subjugation of the popular and the marginal»³⁴.

The internal titles of the novel are distributed according to a structure based on contrast, as shown in the following



form:

Evasion: This title refers to a process that demands either physical or intellectual effort. When we look for the impact of evasion in the life of "Nobody," we find it in his struggle with life itself. Anyone familiar with the major events of his life – including his confrontation with death after being kidnapped by a terrorist group at a young age and narrowly escaping a certain death – realizes the wrestling and evasion that "Nobody" engages in with life. However, "Nobody" does not fight to emerge into the light or to live a socially visible life; rather, his greater struggle is to remain "nobody," to live without an image or reflection, avoiding disappointment and heartbreak.

So, does "Nobody" defy the prevailing notion that views the human being as a social creature? Does he inaugurate a politics of difference built upon transgression, divergence, and a rebellion against societal norms?

Evasion in the life of "Nobody" reveals the contradiction between strength and weakness, intelligence and caution, presence and disappearance

Swarmed (takaloub): the problems in the life of "no body" leap upon him, cornering him in sharp and narrow angles. He never finishes one problem without falling into another. Even his mind is questioned for its adequacy, which leads to his being admitted to a mental hospital. It is this sick mind that devised the idea of his escape from the hospital to work as a porter, then a cleaner, ultimately ending up taking care of the elderly "Sulaiman bin Al-Nuwi" and changing his diapers.

**Transparency:**

The title "Transparency" presents a contradictory connotation compared to the previous titles Evasion and Competition, which are immersed in the dark side of the life of "No body." However, upon returning to the novel, it becomes clear that "Transparency" specifically pertains to the life of "No body" as it is presented openly, revealing what had been hidden. The title "Transparency" implies that there is nothing left to hide or to categorize as private; the life of "No body" has become exposed and susceptible to exploitation. He says, «I returned, indifferent, invisible... silent... waiting for my opportunity»³⁵.

The state of indefiniteness adopted by the title does not point to a specific reference but alludes to the generality of the term, not to specificity or identification, making it "transparencies" rather than a single revealing transparency, exposing and laying bare the selves.

Degradation:

The title reveals the point at which the cup overflowed, reaching the lowest depth of humiliation and disgrace, to the extent of exposure to degradation. This drove Mr. "No body" to disappear, even pushing him to do so. «I seek their help to assist me in disappearing... to not be anyone at all, not even myself... Who am I?»³⁶

In the second chapter, titled "Hell Peers from the Window," the journey to search for the missing "No body" begins, resembling a police investigation. The characters, who are assumed to have interacted with "No body," provide information that may assist the investigator, "Rafiq Nasri," in uncovering "No body's" identity. According to this

strategy, "No body" disappears ontologically as a character present in the narrative, and is summoned and recalled through the characters he interacted with.

This allows them the space to narrate their experiences within worlds no better than those "No body" lived through. This situation shifts them from a system of silence and suppression to one of voice and revelation, thereby enabling the establishment of their narrative identity.

This identity is represented in the «moving image of the self that is only realized through narration... For narration composes the permanent characteristics of a character, what one might call their narrative identity, by constructing a kind of dynamic, moving identity that exists in the wisdom that creates their personal identity»³⁷.

This narrative identity, in turn, is «a conceptual issue based on permanence in time. Through the linguistic traditions conveyed by the narrative, the essence of this subjectivity is not the existence of the self, but the existence for others, with others, and among them in an uninterrupted movement of present, past, and future actions transmitted by a present narrative heritage and ready-made traditions that precede the actual existence of the self. In such an ontology, the self refers to the other, and the other refers to the self».³⁸

This results in a discursive violation within the system, as the act of disappearance establishes textual presence and the act of storytelling, which in turn becomes a resistance to absence. It leads to a disruption in the binary of presence and absence, where there is a substitution of positions, making this binary shift in the order of (absence/presence). Moreover, the work of memory cancels out absence to establish presence and activates the consciousness of



Soumission : 13/04/2025 Acceptation : 08/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

permanence in time. Thus, disappearance, which establishes forgetfulness, confronts memory, which is foundational for the process of permanence, based on the following contrast: «In contrast to forgetfulness, which equals apathy, sleep, dissolution, and death, there is memory, which equals self-awareness, reflection, the preservation of reason, and life»³⁹.

Naive Premises:

Given that the validity of the premises leads to the validity of the conclusions, the title reveals to us that the journey to search for "No body" began with naivety and will end with naivety. The investigator, Rafiq Nasri, says: «Where did he come from, where did he disappear, and how did he become 'No body' in the eyes of people?»⁴⁰

Someone Hides a Secret:

The title here serves a warning function for the reader, motivating them to trace the threads of the search for "No body." In a police-investigation style, the title deceives us into thinking that one of the characters in the novel has hidden the secret that prevents the discovery of "No body's" true identity. It directs the finger of accusation towards one of them. However, upon revisiting the novel, we find that all the characters hide a secret, but not the secret of "No body's" disappearance; rather, their secrets relate to their own lives, which push them towards hiding and disappearing.

The Compass of the Heart:

If the compass always points north and has a single, fixed direction, what does the compass of the heart hide, and to which direction does it point? The title combines the

accuracy and stability of the compass with the heart and its disturbances. The decisions of the heart are always unreliable because they are hasty and irrational. This compass of the heart led "Rafiq Nasri" to the conclusion that «disappearance is nobler for the soul than a fake and false existence... erasing all traces, those who escape it do, and there is no comfort for those who hesitate, like him»⁴¹.

Pure Fates:

The title attempts to direct the act of reception towards accepting the principle of chance and the deviation of events from personal will, placing them within the realm of pre-determined fates. This casts a sense of credibility over the relationships and creates an illusory pact with the reader, absolving both the author and the narrator of responsibility for directing the plot and the characters' fates within it. Their lives are based on «coincidences dependent on events; if the events stop, that is, if nothing happens, they cease to exist»⁴².

- Thus, "No body's" life is a sequence of events punctuated by coincidences:
- He was cared for by his aunt as compensation for the son she never had.
- He narrowly escaped a near-death situation at the hands of a terrorist group, thanks to a man who intervened to save his life.
- By coincidence, he met Murad, who took him in and entrusted him with caring for his sick father before leaving for Germany. "No body" disappears after the death of the elderly man.

Narrow Sidewalk:



Soumission : 13/04/2025 Acceptation : 08/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

The initial reading of the title suggests a confined physical space, but a cultural reading that digs deeper into the underlying layers refers to the sidewalk, which represents the margin in relation to the road. Despite its marginal nature, it holds great importance, providing safety for pedestrians and offering them space to move. The characters in the novel, alongside "No body," form the margins at the edges of life. Thus, their life stories remain a pivotal point in understanding social reality, serving as a window through which we view human worlds shaped over time and embodied as a discourse on the human self directed towards the world.

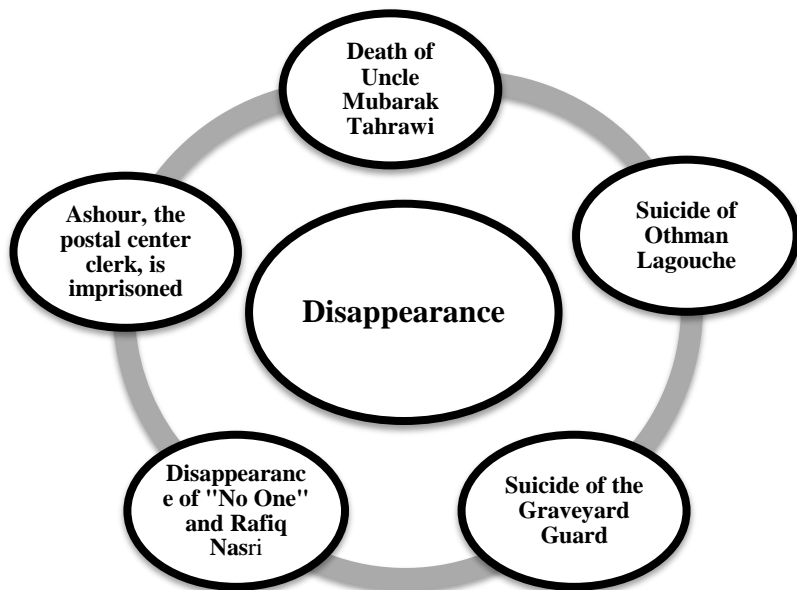
4. The Dialogue between the Title and the Text:

The strategy of not assigning or specifying a particular name to the character and placing it under the act of disappearance in the title reveals that disappearance is not exclusive to one specific person, as it is an action that affects everyone. It's as if we are facing a maze, where anyone who enters it is swallowed by its corridors and disappears from the narrative, with the exception of "No body," who remains within its paths. The title hints at the unified fate experienced by the characters in the novel, which is "disappearance." The event of transformation and change dominates the narrative's events over time. Its causes are numerous, and its forms vary between the fates of the characters (for example, Mr. "No body" disappeared without a trace, and similarly, investigator Rafiq Nasri, Othman Lagauche* committed suicide, Uncle Mubarak was killed, the cemetery guard committed suicide, and the mailman was imprisoned). The characters' situations, as individuals,

differ in their paths, yet intersect in their fate of being doomed to the act of disappearance. Their destinies are determined within narrative paths, which can be illustrated by the following diagram:

The act of disappearance forms a closed circle around which other circles of disappearance revolve, taking various forms (death, suicide, imprisonment, murder). Disappearance is the central act in the narrative, not understood from the explicit discourse but from the tragic rhythm that governs the end of most of the novel's characters. It was both the beginning of the novel (introduced by the title) and the end of its characters, marking the narrative with a dramatic dimension.

Moreover, this act of disappearance was not exclusive to one character over another; it was a disappearance that affected everyone. It thus forms the core of a system in





Soumission : 13/04/2025 Acceptation : 08/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

which disappearance atomizes, taking on different forms as it unfolds.

The Title and the Color Imagery:

The title of the novel appears on the cover, immediately following the author's name, and is written in large letters. It appears on two levels: the first level includes the word "disappearance," followed by the two words completing the title: "Mr." and "No body," as shown in the cover image.

The green color casts its shadow on the deep structure of the title. It represents an implicit discourse that reveals the nihilism of the self and adopts a policy of withdrawal instead of confrontation. How do we escape from the light into darkness? This escape is from life to death. Has humanity's obsession shifted from seeking the elixir of life to searching for the elixir of death?

The green color also «maintains a strange and complex quality due to the duality of its poles: the green of the bud, and the green of decay, life and death»⁴³

Thus, the title is grounded in nihilism that precedes disappearance. The characters in the novel disappear one after another after attempts of push and pull, having made several concessions in an attempt to reconcile with life. This is a discourse of the margin in its clearest form and in its most prominent manifestations. It takes on the image of the multifaceted character of "No body," who appears in the mirrors of life, presenting us with a model of the invisible as a being and entity. The novel strengthens this proposition, as it describes the confusion of the investigator "Rafiq Nasri," responsible for the case of searching for the missing man called "No body." It says: «At the door, he stood looking at

everyone who passed by him, examining them. He found something of the 'No body' described to him in every person he saw, and it baffled him to find him. Each of them had something of him, and 'No body' could be a part of all those who passed and whom he fixed his gaze on, as if he had dissolved into the crowd».44

"No body" represents a multiplicity of images, a symbol of those crushed by life, left to struggle for survival on its margins. Yes, he is me and you, he is her and him. All the signs lead to a person whose life has been marked by the stations of death with all its wounds. His memory is filled with nightmares of murder and explosions, a person raised by the machinery of death, which destroys indiscriminately. Imagine someone who once waited for his turn to be slaughtered. A psychological ruin and a collapsed socio-cultural reality have created the model of "No body," through a narrative where the act of presence is established within circles of absence, according to a dialectical structure between existence and non-existence.

Conclusion:

In conclusion to this study, we arrive at the following results:

- 1) The threshold discourse in the title of Ahmed Tybaoui's novel under study is rich with cultural meanings, making it a fertile ground for the effectiveness of cultural systems. These systems' effectiveness has transitioned from the text to the context, utilizing the aesthetic value of the thresholds to conceal the subversive nature of its cultural



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frameworks. The title embedded an implicit primary discourse that served as a reading guide to uncover the hidden aspects of the narrative discourse.

- 2) The thresholds contain discourses based on processes of deception, obscuration, and misdirection. They guide the reception of the text toward safe paths, supporting the validation of these discourses through paradoxes, temptation, and situations that appear on the surface to endorse a certain position, while their deeper layer is inclined toward distortion and ideological manipulation.
- 3) The model of "No body" is a representation of multiplicity, encompassing the marginalized people of life. They are absent in their presence, subject to the dialectic of existence and non-existence.

Citation:

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²⁷ Ahmed Tayebawi, *The Disappearance of Mr. Nobody*, p. 10.

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²⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

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From the French word *la gauche*, meaning "the left," referring to his leftist political stance in the novel.

* The French word *la gauche* refers, in the novel, to the character's leftist political stance

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁴ Ahmed Tayebawi, *The Disappearance of Mr. Nobody*, p. 64.