

The Semiotics of Absence in the Saudi Novel

Noura Saeed H Algahtani¹

¹Department of Arabic language and literature, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, King Saud University. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Email: nsalgahtani@ksu.edu.sa

Abstract:

The study attempts to reveal the meaning of absence and appearance in the narrative text when the reader sees a word used by the writer in a particular scene that excites them and then it reappears later in other situations that make the reader remember the word to achieve a certain artistic value.

This issue applies to when the author includes fictional characters in certain scenes and writes them out of other scenes consciously or unconsciously. The reason for the author doing this is the narration game, which is the writer's ability to master suspense through the theme of absence and appearance.

Keywords: absence, narration, narrative protagonist, narrative language, semiotics, the Saudi novel

INTRODUCTION

The main criticisms of the nature of the narrative text are about the writer's means and techniques in creating his aesthetics, the language with its various elements of words, structures, sentences, connotations and references. After the has finished and once you publish the text, he has to wait for the reader to read the book and relive it in their head. Therefore, all writing is stillness and life, and therefore every element is included in the text, Authors create the text and enhance it to give it meaning, in other words, (there is no death in the text in the movement of the words and structures within the component parts of a text through a game of appearance and concealment, which gives some of them a presence, especially even when they are not actually or symbolically present. The evidence for this is that many Arab and global novels and some of their characters have a great influence on our memory and our conscience. Therefore, time determines the success and the survival of a text, where its affect gives it a life cycle that is renewed each time it is read. In this context, the aim of this study, which deals specifically with the Saudi novel, comes as the main goal is to reveal the life inside the text by tracing some means and methods, where development and life are revived in the component parts of the text after their passing on the symbolic level to make aesthetics, contributing to reviving the text at the reception level. The study monitored this issue through the following techniques:

-The disappearance of a word and its appearance

-Protagonist absence and presence

-place and time

1-The disappearance of the singular and its resurrection

In case, the word is considered dead until it is organized into a sentence to give a particular meaning, as al-Jurjani indicated. How is her passing interpreted within the text? When the author composes his vocabulary into sentences and structures, he embodies it in the mind of the reader, and some of them continue moving from one sentence to another by

repeating it, which is a linguistically referring tool, to the affective aspect left by this repetition in the mind of the recipient, as indicated by Ibn Masoum in his saying: "Repeating a word or more with the meaning and pronunciation for a joke, either for emphasis, or to increase the alert or to intimidate, to glorify, or to take pleasure in mentioning the repeated" (Ma'sūm, 1969, p. 345).

Thus, the term takes on an important functional aspect by creating the expectation of the reader whenever the word appears in the text, and illustrations of reviving the word by repetition are seen in what was mentioned in the novel "The Mud" by Abdo Khal:

"I bring you a bereavement that I never expected.

I was waiting for something but this" (Khal b, 2006, p. 7)

The repetition of the word "wait" revives the word in the mind of the reader from the first moment to make him eager and waiting for what will happen.

He will be afflicted by the events that bring him the bereavement that the narrator referred to.

" Is there embarrassment if I say: I became the patient.?

Indeed, I am the patient." (Khal b, 2006, p. 7)

The protagonist of the story repeats the phrase "I am the patient" as an acknowledgement of his illness, and the repetition of the sentence adds to his emphasis, just as he created the foundation of a prior expectation of the reader will keep it until the end, that reveals to him the sincerity of his expectation. The doctor and his patient are one person, and this is what the writer referred to on the next page when he said:

"Language creates a reality that we conspire to fix in our imagination, and it turns into life while there is a reality exterior of it, is this language" (Khal b, 2006, p. 8). The reader feels that the author's awareness was behind this repetition, as if he was deliberately reviving the words, to reach his goal, he, through his repetition of some words, creates an expectation that indicates the end that the author intended, and if the reader wanted to look at the resurrection of a word at the level of the fictional text, he would find that there is a word that is repeated more than other words, such as "delusion, sick, madness,..." and the revival of those words can be without a job that is consistent with the general context of the novel, as it appoints the author to illuminate aspects of his case that he sends through reviving words and through which he tries to revive his experience in the souls of the recipients and then help him discover the deep structure of the text.

In addition, a clear repetition of certain sentences appeared in the narration. For example, we find the sentence: "I am not sick" on p.15. Then, it was missing) for a few pages, only to reappear on p. 38, for this absence is a temporary death, of the sentence and repeating it and emphasizing it in many passages of dialogue between the doctor and his patient, containing suggestive dimensions that are consistent with the situation, the character lives in and reflects the authors 'desire to draw the reader to comprehend his main issue by moving him toward reaching the truth at the conclusion of the novel. The reader's search for the meanings is hidden behind words and sentences, but he assumes other meanings that confirm the theory of the meaning according to Al-Jurjani, which indicates that the words have a "second meaning that connects them to the purpose" (Al-Jurjani, 1992, p. 262), and all of this achieves what we said, regarding the resurrection of the vocabulary after its stillness within the text, for every new meaning is created by it. Therefore, the particular word inside the combinations and sentences has another life for it.

We also see its repetition in several sentences, similar to the imperative, such as:

"I remember being dead.

Now I remember this well...

I am not delusional at all" (Khal b, 2006, p. 15)

This passage was mentioned on p. 15, then it is not mentioned for a few pages and reappears on p. 23, at that point it disappears again and is resurrected later on p. 45, 46 and this alternation between stillness and movement extends, where these sentences are spread throughout the pages of the novel and its events to reflect the authors 'insistence on a specific idea that he wants to confirm and crystallize in the mind of the reader. The ideas remained alive and progressed with the story in following up the events to the point where the protagonist finds the truth that he kept searching for, and in this way, the effect of the text extends even after reading is finished, which is the continuation of his life.

2- Characters' absence and presence

Characters are divided into static, which remain constant and unchanged throughout the narrative, and dynamic, characterized by the sudden transformations that occur within the one anecdotal structure, where importance is also being considered, as the role that the character plays in the narrative, which accordingly makes him either a main character or(central), or a secondary character, i.e., satisfied with a temporary function (Todorov, 1990, p. 215). Therefore, the character that is inside the text, is subject to the law of stillness and resurrection at the hands of the author, as the marginalization of certain characters is the death of the other. It is symbolic by the act of writing, which gives life to a central figure at the expense of the characters of the text, and this is either consciously or subconsciously by the author, and we may recall the novel by the Saudi female author as evidence of the death of some personalities within the work due to exclusion and marginalization "in order to establish a discourse, opposite of man's discourse, just as the man practices the war of exclusion in his realistic discourse, so does the woman. She practices exclusion in the imagination after being unable to achieve exclusion or recover her right to similarity, to the man's speech in reality" (Alnemi, 2004, p. 52). That is why the woman was the heroine in the women's novels, while the man's personality is marginal with no significant effect, as we have not seen or heard him except through the female protagonist, and he may indicate that, this leads to a kind of symbolic killing that women practice through writing, then with a narrative trick that revives it again to life through the technique of remembrance, and this is what we see in the novel "Adam, Sir" by Amal Shata, as it informs us from the first lines of the novel about the death of the man, **"On the day of your departure...something cried out in my depths..."**

Your husband died, Aisha... Abu Adnan died" (Shata, 1997, p. 14)

However, it raises the character in the mind of the reader by interrogating her or imagining her dialogue, as if she is standing in front of her, talking and listening to her so that we feel the depth of the experience and the sensitivity of the sense so that she reveals to us what is raging inside her emotions and feelings: "And I continued to swallow the bitterness of patience, and your image does not leave my imagination and sticks with me like my shadow .I see you in every nook and cranny, I hear your voice, your laughter, your whispers, your footsteps, and I expect your coming at every moment, I keep anxiously staring at the doors, and I hope that you will emerge from behind one of them is" (Shata, 1997, p. 19). Verbs such as "stayed, do not leave, accompany me, see you, hear, stay" indicate an attempt to resurrect.

Thus, the character confirms its existence despite his actual death, and this narrative trick does not make the reader feel the authors 'complicity with her heroine, who deliberately obscures and excludes the character to control her development within the text and how

its presence through the narrative relationships that combine to create the structure of the text.

The absence of the man in the novel of the woman is equivalent to the absence of the female in the novel of the man, in the novel "Fosooq" (Debauchery) by Abdu Khal, where the basis of the story is built on the absent female, as the incidents begin with her death, and the narration begins with this shocking phrase for the recipient "she escaped from her grave" (Khal a, 2006, p. 7), so that the events then begin to restore the biography of "Jalila", that the absent woman is real, she was originally dead, and we did not hear her voice or read her actions inside the text as an animated character, but she was resurrected through the stories that were woven around her by the people of the neighborhood after the news of her escape. "Jalila" is dead and alive within the text, and as a suggestion from the first sentence in the novel, "she escaped" means that she is alive, but the word after it "from her grave" denotes her death, making us proceed with the oscillation between the doubt and certainty of her death "was not certain that she had fabricated death to escape from her grave" (Khal a, 2006, p. 29), which creates a particular expectation for the reader that differs as it progresses in following events, where the duality of the character's death and life at the same time evokes many questions with which the dead character becomes present in the mind and memory of the reader, feeling and hearing its voice, and feeling its movement, despite its mechanical silence until it emerges into the dynamic of life within the text, by building a love story for the cemetery guard who lived with Jalila, through her death, a new life. However, his objectionable act and disgusting ending may gain the reader's sympathy. It is an example of a cruel society that has killed him in reality, pushed him away, and made him love too much, so he turned into a spiritually dead personality and bodily alive, which prompted him to live with the dead for his dead love. It is a clever maneuver on the part of the author to guarantee the continuation of the character, which is present in the mind of the reader despite her death.

3- Space, time and return to life

How does a location come back to life after it has died? Does the law of stillness and movement apply to it within the text? As represented at the level of vocabulary and characters. For questions, we find answers by monitoring each other as well as the places that came back to life due to their artistic employment within the text in a way that establishes the descriptions of the place and determines its importance in the memory of the recipient. The accurate (precise) description of the place enables the reader to imagine its features and increases his sense of the presence of the place knowing its features, to force the recipient to stay in the inner world of the place, and thus to entice him to follow the events of the text and interpret them.

The place outside the text is dead, and the spirit of life is breathed into it when it is formed within the structures of the text. The cemetery, for example, was mentioned in the novel "Fosooq" (Debauchery); it is, in fact, a place for the dead, in which there is no life, but it is due to the events of the text that it started from the cemetery after the story of Jalila's escape from her grave. After this event, it turns into a living place full of living, day, and night.

Jalila's escape from her grave exploded like a bomb, for which the hearts of many were shattered, and it turned into a pass time that moved the stagnation of the dead neighborhood, and the cemetery turned into a park where the people of the neighborhood crowded, to enjoy standing in it, for the doors of the cemetery were closed because of this

congestion, to receive new dead and the neighborhood remained a visiting place for the people of the adjacent neighborhoods. (Khal a, 2006, p. 52)

The place appears here as if it is an important event that corresponds to the content of the anecdotal text, which is related to the death and disappearance of the victim, where the resurrection of places within the text creates an artistic value, that the authors approached in various ways, until the place in some of them became the main hero and the trigger for events.

For a time, its death appears at the level of its negligence and marginalization in favor of the other artistic elements, but it is written as being alive within the text in some narrations by recalling the past and its revival in the mind of the recipient by narrating its events, as the narration draws it deliberately, to confirm its continued existence. The past is an eternal constant that lives in the human soul, and summons it anytime it is required, painful memories that caused a miserable present that the character lives in, or beautiful memories that are more beautiful than the present of the character realized to relieve her pain and expresses her nostalgia for that past, and the memory "does not only tells us about the past, but it also reveals to us what is in front of its present and future" (Al-Ghadami, 1997, p. 221).

In the novel "The Female Spider", the protagonist begins from the conclusion by telling us her story and recalling her past that made her a prisoner awaiting the execution of the penalty for retribution, and it is clear to us from the first pages of the novel that we are in front of the diary of the heroine/narrator, who reveals on paper the feelings and memories that weighed her down.

To me, my past days are like spectra of dreams... You see, have I been wrong all my life, have I been right in all my steps? is my whole being an absolute evil, and I have never known good as some shouted at me I do not know..., but I decided to face the paper with my truth and the last exposure before the self without husks, falsity, or deceit. (Al-Olayan, 2001, p. 10)

Through recollection, I revived its past, which is still ingrained in its heart and thought, so she lit up her miserable present. To explode at the end of the novel, her purpose of remembering her past or telling her story and resurrecting the past within the text is a feature that has spread in most Saudi novels, including women's ones, in which the recovery of memory stands out greatly, suggesting nostalgia for the beautiful past. Therefore, she keeps the reader drawn to him in her discourse so that it is embodied and present within the text.

All that was previously presented of stillness and movement within the text until we reach its end confirms the extension of the text, even after reading it through the semiotics of absence and presence, as the reader continues to reconsider the content of the text, being affected by it and affecting it with his different ideas and positions. Thus, the text turns into a circular ring, which ends to start a new cycle of text life cycles.

Acknowledgements

This research is supported by a grant from the Research Centre at the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Deanship of Scientific Research at King Saud University. I would like to thank King Saud University grant.

References:

1. Al-Ghadami, A. (1997). *al-Marat wa al-lugha* (Woman and Language) (2nd ed.). Beirut: Arab Cultural Center
2. Algahtani.N:<https://makkahnewspaper.com/ampArticle/112250Algahtani>
<https://fastorder.store/book.php?n=128948>
3. Defying convention: Saudi women writers and the shift from periphery to center. Women's Studies International Forum, Volume 59, November–December 2016, pp 26–31.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277539515302405?via%3Dihub>
4. Aiharthi, H. J. (2021). THE SEMIOTICS OF THE UNTOLD STORY IN THE NOVEL" THE CROW'S LEG" BY YAHYA AMQASEM. *Revista Perseitas*, 9, 31-54.
5. Al-Habishi, Rasha Abdul Rauf, and Wafa Alayan Elias Al-Shudayfat. "The Semiotics of the Title in the Diwan (Qadas Jasad) By the writer: Mona Bint Mohammed." *International Journal of Religion* 5.1 (2024): 460-473.
6. Aljahdali, Sawsan A. A functional socio-semiotic reading of the paradox of literary demotion and popular promotion in translated bestsellers: Paulo Coelho's O Alquimista as a case in English, Arabic and Turkish. Diss. Macquarie University, 2022.
7. Al-Jurjani, A.-Q. (1992). *Dalael al-E'jaz* (Evidences of Miracles) (3rd ed.). Cairo: Al-Madani Press
8. Almeflh, Abdullah. Saudi poetry in the last quarter of the 20th century: a creative analysis. Diss. University of Leeds, 2004
9. Al Mutairi, Eman S. The Effects of Translators' Stylistic Choices on Translating Literary Dialectal Dialogue: Saudi and Egyptian Novels as a Case Study. The University of Manchester (United Kingdom), 2019.
10. Alnemi, H. (2004). *Raj' al-Basar* (The Return of the Sight). Jeddah: The Literary and Cultural Club.
11. Al-Olayan, G. (2001). *Ontha al-'Ankabut* (The Female Spider) (2nd ed.). Beirut: Rashad Press Publications.
12. Asiri, Mohammed Ibrahim. "The Political Symbol in the Contemporary Saudi Novel." *International Humanities Studies* 8.2 (2022).
13. Bavanpouri, Masoud, et al. "A Study of the Semiotics of Non-Verbal Communication in the Novel Mawton Saqiron by Mohammad Hasan Alvan." *Researches in Arabic Language* 12.23 (2019): 109-124.
14. Bishara, Hanan. "THE PROHIBITED SPEECH ON THE SACRED PROFANE IN THE LITERATURE OF THE ARAB WOMAN: AREEJ'ASSAF DAMOUNI'S NOVEL:“ANA ISTITHNA... FAHDAR/I AM AN EXCEPTION... BEWARE!” AS A SAMPLE." *European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies* 3.4 (2020).
15. Al-Sharqi, Laila M. "Patterns of Binary Oppositions in Yousef Al-Mohaimeed's Wolves of the Crescent Moon." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 8.5 (2017): 1-8.
16. Danesi, M. (2020). *The quest for meaning: A guide to semiotic theory and practice*. University of Toronto Press

17. Guerra, Elijah. Spatial Politics and Genre in the 21st Century Arabic Novel in English. Diss. University of Missouri-Columbia, 2022.
18. Halliday, Michael AK. "On grammar and grammatics." AMSTERDAM STUDIES IN THE THEORY AND HISTORY OF LINGUISTIC SCIENCE SERIES 3 (1996): 1-38
19. HAMARNEH, Walid. Welcome to the Desert of Not-Thinking. Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée, 2014, 41.1: 86-98.
20. Jarrar, Maher. "The Arabian nights and the contemporary Arabic novel." The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West (2008): 297-315.
21. Helmy, Nada Hassan. "“And with us is Brother Morgan”: A cognitive semiotic analysis of a humorous stock character macro in Egyptian Arabic." Journal of Languages and Translation 10.1 (2023): 40-61.
22. Khal a, A. (2006). Fosooq (Debauchery) (3rd ed., Vol. a). Beirut: Dar Al-Saqi.(2006). The Mud (2ed ed.). Beirut: Dar Al-Saqi.
23. Ma'ṣūm, I. (1969). Anwar Al-Rabee fi Anawaa Al-Badi' (Spring's Lights, Within the Signs of the Creator) (Vol. 5)
24. Sarhan, Omar Ibrahim. "The Image of the Woman and its Implications in the Novel Sofia by Mohammad Hasan Alwan." The Arab World Geographer 24.2 (2021): 132-149.
25. Shata, A. (1997). Adam ya Sayidi (Adam, sir). Jeddah: Al-Madina Printing Company.
26. Al-Zarikat, Asma Muhammad, and Nizar Abdullah Damour. "Intertextuality in the Novel “The Wheat Bearer”." International Journal 8.2 (2020): 93-105.
27. Todorov, T. (1990). The Structure of the Narrative Form. Beirut: Arab Cultural Center.