



The function of square and circle symbols in the tragedy of the author of the short story by Ibrahim Nasralla

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Introduction

This research seeks to delve into the semiotic significance of square and circle motifs within Ibrahim Nasrallah's recent novel, "Masā'at Kātib al-Qiṣṣah al-Qaṣīrah." Our objective is to reveal how these geometric shapes contribute to the novel's resonance with contemporary life's evolving dynamics. By focusing on the square and circle, we aim to uncover and reinterpret their deeper semantic implications. Considering the pivotal role these symbols play in the narrative and their broader significance in literary symbolism, our analysis from this angle is crucial. We will utilize a descriptive-analytical approach, drawing upon semiotic theory and the recurrence of these geometric figures to thoroughly examine the novel's rich content. Our primary goal is to ascertain the author's purpose behind employing these symbols: How are the square and circle used to communicate specific ideas? When do they adhere to their traditional meanings, and when do they forge new interpretations within the narrative?

Methodology

Forms, whether incorporated into a text or standing as distinct entities in any language, play significant roles; these roles are deeply rooted in cognition and linguistic structures and are consistent across various eras and locations. Consequently, it is reasonable to accept many statements concerning the domains of language, texts, and symbols.

The concept of "Form perception" directs us toward the role of signs and semiotics within a text, whether it is an artistic piece, an event, or even a phenomenon in the real world. Essentially, on this journey, we encounter a sign that either represents something else or substitutes for it. Signs aid in our

understanding, and "it is through this ability that we achieve coexistence and dialogue with others" (Gadamer, 173:2006).

Discussion and Results

The square, a geometric shape universally acknowledged in the symbolic lexicon worldwide. Symbolizing the core of human existence, the square often appears in artifacts made by humans. These items, created out of necessity, embody the earthly and human characteristics present in every location and circumstance. Thus, the square's main semantic importance lies in its representation of the physical and earthly aspects, contrasting with the spiritual and heavenly realms.

In "Masā'at Kātib al-Qiṣṣah al-Qaṣīrah," the author initially draws attention to the active involvement of humans in their surroundings, emphasizing this concept by focusing on the number 4, which symbolizes the realm of the square:

"The square holds various meanings. It signifies the earth, contrasted against the sky (heaven), and embodies the concept of permanence and stability." (Niinoja, 2019:272) This idea deeply intrigues the author in the development of specific events, narratives, and characters. Nasrallah emphasizes that being human inevitably leads to residing in squares, indicating a responsibility to consider not just the inhabitants of squares but also the vastness of the world: The concept of intersection is highlighted as a key interpretation of the square. Characterized by four equal sides that meet at right angles, the act of squaring also involves multiplying a number by itself, depicting the square as a result of blending and intersecting pathways.

In "Masā'at Kātib al-Qiṣṣah al-Qaṣīrah," the narrative traverses the genre of the short story, intertwining the distinct aspects of the square and the circle. The story initiates with the perspective of the square and transitions into the sphere of the circle towards its conclusion.

Attaining tranquility is a paramount concern among humans, increasingly viewed as a necessity in today's world amidst escalating crises. In this novel, the author leverages the symbolic potential of the square shape to illustrate this critical need. The primary interpretation of tranquility, as derived from the square symbol in Nasrallah's text, appears to stem from its protective aspect. The circle is identified as the second among the four essential symbols, essentially being an expanded point. This point plays a crucial role in the

circle's formation and simultaneously shares symbolic qualities with it, such as completeness, harmony, coherence, and the absence of excess or corners. The circle may not only encapsulate the hidden perfect number at the core of creation but also reflect the ramifications of the creation process itself. (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 2008: Vol 3, p.165)

In "Masā'at Kātib al-Qiṣṣah al-Qaṣīrah," the theme of the circle is depicted through a female character who resides within the sphere of the circle, along with other nuanced elements. Although the story initially begins in the realm of the square, the influence of the circle steadily grows more pronounced as the narrative progresses. This development enables readers to more fully grasp the deep significance tied to this symbol, leading up to the novel's final scenes and the protagonist's encounters with the woman associated with the circle.

The circle symbolizes the heavens and "embodies completeness and perfection, negating the constructs of time and space. All circles function as dynamic cycles. In a similar vein, God is depicted as a circle, with its center being omnipresent." (Niinoja, 2019:273)

In Nasrallah's story, the contrast between the slender woman, who represents the circle, and the square woman, as well as the overall comparison between the domains of the circle and the square—including the circle's subsequent emergence in the narrative compared to its counterpart—seems to highlight this motif.

Wonder signifies a state of confusion and an incapacity for understanding. Philosophically, wonder involves lingering in uncertainty, yet in the realm of art, and particularly within literary works, its complexity renders it indispensable. The circle's relation to the notion of time, attributed to its infinite nature without a start or finish, embodies the essence of wonder. In Nasrallah's narrative, this concept, alongside other meanings extracted from this emblem, merits reflection. The cyclical movement and rotation inherent to the circle often result in instability. This characteristic, especially in the complexity of the modern world, can amplify feelings of uncertainty in individuals, leading them to confront intolerable situations.

The fragmented narrative and unique storytelling approach in "Masā'at Kātib al-Qiṣṣah al-Qaṣīrah," along with the dispersed unfolding of events and the novel's distinctive storyline, mirror an era where individuals seek to grasp the essence of life but frequently find themselves unsuccessful. Nasrallah frequently employs the symbol of the circle to convey and illustrate such scenarios, emphasizing the circle's lack of corners as places of refuge.

Conclusion

- The narrative of "Masā'at Kātib al-Qiṣṣah al-Qaṣīrah" is drawn from the complex and new interpersonal dynamics of the COVID-19 era, utilizing a vocabulary of symbols and isolated expressions that mirror contemporary lifestyles. This method introduces a fresh perspective on the functions of fictional literature, proposing "post-COVID literature" as a potential field for future investigation.
- The novel vividly contrasts two worlds: the static, unchanging realm (depicted by the square) and the fluid, dynamic realm (symbolized by the circle). It delves into themes of isolation, portraying individuals separated from each other and coping with the challenges of contemporary apartment living, where neighbors are "far away, yet so close." Initially confined within the limits of a square, this existence gradually transitions into a more circular reality.
- Nasrallah, by focusing on the symbolic importance of the square and circle, adeptly harnesses the profound semantic potential these figures possess, successfully weaving his intended themes into the fabric of the narrative. Accordingly, the discourse in the novel about the square aligns with concepts of immobility, earthly connections, and convergence, subtly evolving into ideas of tranquility.

Keywords: Sign, meaning, novel, square, circle.

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