

# The Novelist Iman Mutar Al-Sultani's Critical Approach

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The critical approach of the critic Dr. Iman Mattar Al-Sultani relies on the narrative semiotics approach, especially Grimas theory. This approach is clearly reflected in her book "The tale in the letters of ikhwan alsafa". Chapter one is devoted to the functional structure using dichotomies between sender and addressee, subject and object, and auxiliary and opponent. The critic honestly tried to discover the process of narration in those stories. Chapter two is devoted to the study of the structure of continuation and separation, temporal and spatial structures, including aspects of narrative techniques in general. Chapter three is devoted to the functions dealt with by Grimas. She then moved to the interpretation of the texts by describing the approach as an introduction to that interpretation. She found a field for multiple readings including interpretive reading, ideological reading, aesthetic reading, and cultural reading. As for her successive research, she adopted the theory of reading. In "the reader in the contemporary Arab novel", she analyses the novel "The Coming Man" by Dr. Abdul Hadi Al-Fartousi adopting a number of readings of the novel, including psychological and social readings. She comes to the conclusion that the narration has expressed the era of dictatorship in Iraq, with prisons in the novel identical to what is seen in the Iraqi reality, and there is a large correspondence between the character of Ibrahim Al-Sunobari in "the coming man" and the dictator of Iraq.

**Key words:** *Narrative semiotics, Grimas theory, structure of continuation and separation, the reader in the Arabic novel, the novel of the coming man.*

## Introduction

Text functions with its openness for cultural and social structures. Several contemporary critical trends have emerged, including structural, semiotic, interpretative, deconstructive, and aesthetics of reception. The language of critical discourse in the last decade of the last century until the present day has exceeded that naive, informative, constructive language that



describes more than it explains having no semantic depth. It has become a modernist language accompanied by a diverse and advanced conceptual system, which is reflected in the methods of critics, their treatments, and their readings of the discourse system. Conscious and responsible critical writing is that which enriches cultural space, deepens creative dialogue, establishes critical perspectives of knowledge and cultural infrastructure and constitutes a theoretical reference of basic monetary practice.

### ***The Problem of Study***

A lot of critical studies in the field of story and novel have moved away from their natural course in applying the functions of Vladimir Propp to the novel and the story. As a result, many functions have not been achieved. The present study is an attempt to shed light on this problem by applying the functions of Vladimir Propp to the characters of a novel and its events in “ikhwan Al-Safa” and other novels.

### ***The Objectives of Study***

The attempt in the present study is to read the selected texts with several reading methods, including semiotic, interpretative, aesthetic, cultural, ideological, and dialogue reading based on literary, horizontal or cultural references according to the viewing angle and according to the culture of each reader. The attempt is also to reveal the roots of these narratives. The present study indicates that a portion is involved in returning to one root, the Babylonian myth (epometomy), taking advantage of its influence on the semantic structure.

### ***The Hypotheses of Study***

The present study tackles the semiotic signs found in the selected narratives. It also identifies the prominent western semioticians who supported this modern approach; Roland Barth, Gerard Genette, Charles Peirce, and others.

### ***The Value of Study***

The present study is of great value as it reveals the mechanisms and references adopted by interpretative, semiotic, cultural, aesthetic, and other readings by revealing stylistic features and characteristics that distinguish each reading mentioning prominent figures, applying those readings to the selected texts, and showing the similarities and differences.



### ***The Procedures of Study***

The present study analyses the selected texts according to modern critical approaches; the narrower semiotic approach; Grimas theory, and examines the prominent features of these theories, and decodes the symbols of the texts.

### ***Previous Studies***

Morphology of myth, Vladimir Propp, 1928.

Narrative Semiotics, Saeed Benkrad, 2001.

Interpretation of the narrative text in the light of sociology of the literary text, Abd al-Hadi al-Fartousi, 2007.

The Structure of the Narrative Text from the Perspective of Literary Criticism, Hameed Al-Hamdawi, 1993.

The reader and the text, Siza Qassem, 2002.

### **Narrative Semiotics: Grimas Theory**

The semiotic approach is one of the modern approaches that works on the positioning system and deals with the text in its internal form, (Al-Asadi, 2009) and hence, codes reveal the indications and functions. The modern approach relies on semiotics to reveal those signs. So, semiotics is the study of signs derived from a Greek root which means the sign. It is the study of codes; systems that enable human beings to understand some events or units as signs bearing meaning, (Robert, 1994). It should be noticed that the roots of the narrative semiotics are due to the school of the Russian formalists, especially Vladimir Propp whose the book “Morphology of the myth” was published in 1928. He concludes that functions are the basic constituent parts of myth and are the fixed elements in them and not the characters. Propp refers to the function as the event that a character performs in terms of its significance in the general development of the story. Propp notes that these functions are logically and aesthetically interlinked. So, “morphology of myth” is the nucleus of narrative semiotics, (Al-Fartousi, 2007).

The true birth of narrative semiotics is in 1966 by Gerald Julian Grimas with his famous book “Structural Significance”, and other books (ibid). Among those who had a role in supporting this modern approach are Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, Todorov in Paris, and Charles Peirce in philosophy. They coined useful terms; significance and value by De Saussure, and icon, indicator, and symbol by Peirce (Robert Shoals, 1994).



The modern approach relies on semiotics to reveal these signs. Some scholars believe that the semiotic sign does not exist on its own, but it rather has to do with another unit or other units that form a system (ibid).

Codes are determined by a type of signs that are the keys to text. The text is a group of signs that illuminate for the reader as a semantic structure, (individual or collective), within the textual structure produced, and within the framework of specific cultural and social structures (Yektan, 1989). Writers deal with such kinds of signs to identify the relationship between the recipient and the text because social laws impose a kind of coded communication through signs. Codes have unique creative characteristics. They are subject to renewal, change, and transformation, even if they remain within their context (Pumpkin, 1989).

Code is the context-specific language (Ravindran, 2002). The text that lacks the code is a dead text. Hence, codes are used to avoid the death of the text.

Bart defines codes as “forces that make sense” (Siza, 2002). Signs bear more than one connotation. The recipient does not feel pleasure except if the text in his/her hands invites him/her to discover and unravel the mystery. When the attempt is to Decipher codes, a text parallel to the real text is built. So, a text parallel to the text that is difficult to understand is created.

Signs derive from verbs and names. So, symbols that are charged with meanings and ideas are extracted through the multiple reading contexts of the text. The role of sign emerges because it is the maker of meanings. It is not possible to reveal a sign except by knowing its effectiveness and its impact in the text. So, the link between signs and the knowledge of their linguistic levels can be linked literarily (Benkrad, 2001). Stories tell their themes from their titles. They are early views of the birth of the event. Evidence for what is alive and beats in the folds of characters and events is understood from them. The effectiveness of signs is through; the semiotics of the title, the personal mark, the city as a sign, the intertextuality as a sign, and literary fabrication as a sign.

### ***Characteristics of Grimas Theory***

1. The Grimas theory differs from other theories in the narrative domain, especially the basis of the problem of meaning. And so, the approach to a text has no meaning except within the limits of its presentation of the meaning as a goal for any analysis. Thus, recognising the meaning and determining its size is inseparable from the mechanisms producing it. As such, the analysis does not reflect meaning intuitively without specifying the process of its growth and death (ibid).

2. The Grimas theory is characterised by its comprehensiveness in perception and analysis which does not mean abrogating history. It is governed, as is any cognitive effect, by human time, which does not mean the abolition of other theories, but it means its ability to engage with other theories that share with it at least one subject of study.
3. Its ability to embrace speeches other than narrative discourse, i.e. legal texts, social phenomena, political discourse, etc. This richness is due to the epistemological foundation upon which this theory is based. This means that it is not limited to discursive speeches such as novel, theatre, and folk tale. As such, a new view of the same theory must be adopted (Benkrad, 2001).

### ***The Grimas Approach in his Narrative Semiotics***

The method of analysing the text adopted by Grimas is based on contradictory dichotomies in the discourse. Grimas drew it from Saussure's binaries. Saussure's main principle is his view of the phenomena as he calls for including these phenomena in a series of bilateral dichotomies to reveal their relationships that determine their nature, (Al-Sultani, 2009). Therefore, Grimas theory relies on the concept of continuity and development of the methods of Probe and Sorio in this regard, (Al-Fartousi, 2007). The concept of the narrative character is achieved by Grimas at two levels:

1. The two factor level: The character takes an abstract concept that expresses a specific role. These roles are limited to six, corresponding to three dualities; subject and object, sender and addressee, and auxiliary and opposition (Al-Hamdani, 1993).
2. The actors level: The character takes an embodied image that plays one or more roles. The role may be embodied in a monkey or a group of people. It may also be something or an abstract idea such as the idea of eternity or history (Al-Fartusi, 2009).

The relationship in the first dichotomy between the subject and the object is based on desire, as the subject is always willing to continue with or separate from the object. Whereas, the relationship between the sender and the addressee in the second dichotomy is based on two patterns; a higher lower relationship or whole part relationship represented by the sender and the addressee in both cases (Al-Sultani, 2009).

It is worth noting that the addressee has two concepts. The first concept concerns the beneficiary, regardless of the identity. It may be the sender, the subject, or etc. The second concept concerns the subject when it is related to the sender by virtue of a previous relation (Al-Fartusi, 2009).

The two parties in the third dichotomy are organised in the context of the relationship between the subject and the object. The auxiliary seeks to provide assistance to the subject in

order to reach the object. Whereas, the opponent seeks to hinder the subject from reaching the object.

Dr. Iman Al-Sultani clearly shows this approach in her book “The tale in the letters of ikhwan alsafa”. Chapter one is devoted to the functional structure using dichotomies between sender and addressee, subject and object, and auxiliary and opponent. She honestly tried to discover the process of narration in those stories.

### ***The Sender and the Addressee***

Dr. Iman Al-Sultani has indicated that the relationship between the sender and the addressee takes the form of a message between them that may be linguistic or non-linguistic. This is what is called ‘the contract’ (Al-Sultani, 2009).

### ***The Subject and the Object***

Grimas is the discoverer of the famous actinization. The actor system is focused on the kinematic value of things since value and things can only be acquired through a greater degree of transformation and transmission between the poles of a movement. The actor system in any type of story is a maker of values through the transition process, which in turn, works to reproduce meanings, (Al-Asadi, 2009). So, this group forms the backbone of the model. Within this relationship, the essence is determined only by entering into a relationship with a subject. In the absence of an objective essence (possible or updated), it is not possible to talk about an actor. The issue can only be determined in relation to it (ibid). Therefore, the essence factor is one of the important factors in the structure of the actors because it embodies kinetic roles that flow from influential actions that lead to far-reaching goals and objectives. It is necessary to distinguish between the actor, the one already existing and the group of actors who are linked by the unity of functional conduct.

Dr. Al-Sultani applied the relationship of the subject to its object on the story of ‘the blind and the seat’. She believes that the relationship of the subject to its object is determined by the credibility of the subject in saying and action and the ways of communicating the subject with action and the conflict of the actors in obtaining desire (Al-Sultani, 2009). Therefore, actors have an active sign as their movement is evident with the movement of actions. In the system of actors, open spaces have open reachable codes. Whereas, closed places are mandated to reveal them. So, the significance of each title carries a sign or code.

### ***Auxiliary and Opponent***

The two actors are clearly shown in the letters of Ikhwan Al-Safa, especially in the tales of the prophets when Almighty Allah helps prophets in their tribulations and their misfortune.

Whereas, Satan is an enemy and an anti-prophet (ibid). The conflict between good and evil is the dominant feature in the tales. Therefore, there are many assistants and opponents on both sides. Dr. Iman Al-Sultani talks about the forms of the opponent in her book “The tale ..”. She states that women occupy a secondary role in the narration and often represent the role of the opponent. Perhaps, this has to do with what is dominant at that time in that women are in lower ranks than men. In most of the stories in which they are mentioned, they are the subject of discord and corruption in most of the stories. Rather, the matter goes beyond the stories of animals in the letters. Female monkeys in one of the stories represent the role of sedition between man and male monkeys on the one hand, and the human group on the other.

Dr. Iman concludes that the auxiliary and opponent are already in place in all kinds of narration. They have functions and tasks that they perform. They are found in various forms that help the events of the narration to grow and relate. She sees that all factors perform the same function and relate to other elements of the narration; in time, place and function in the general construction of the story.

### **The Temporal and Spatial Structures**

It is a mistake in systematic studies to separate space and time, so the process of merging between them must be adopted because each of them constitutes a container for the other. This means that time and space merge together with the conscious critic into one structure (Al-Asadi, 2009).

Dr. Iman Al-Sultani believes that studying time in the tales of Ikhwan Al-Safa is through its advanced relationships. Signs of time appear in the text, and since place is under the influence of time, it becomes a sign of prosperity or decline, urbanisation or backwardness, and remains silent in the end of the storytelling.

Dr. Iman Al-Sultani sees that the Sufi view has a clear impact on the tales. In the biological time, the emotional time that violates the familiar times appears. In the imaginary and the theatrical place, the place appears filled with the Sufi view.

### **The reader in the contemporary Arab novel in Iraq; Abd Al-Hadi Al-Fartousi's “The coming man: as a model**

The important things in this novel can be summarized as follows:

1. Dr. Iman Al-Sultani has found multiple readings of the novel “The Coming Man”, including Projective, Commentary, and Conversational reading (Al-Fartosi, 2010).
2. “The Coming Man” is one of the novels that received a large number of readings, which also contributed to the process of its production and enrichment.

3. This pluralism is because this novel dates back to metaphysics; behind the novel; science fiction novels. So, it is full of multiple and varied connotations. Its readers are renewed and their readings are also renewed and diversified by the diversity of their literary, ideological, and philosophical cultures (Al-Sultani, 2010).
4. Projective reading is adopted by most readers of “The coming man” because the novel has many symbols at the level of characters and events. So, its readers found an outlet for expressing political and social concern during the dark period of time of the defunct rule and the oppression of the rulers and dictatorship that people suffered from. Its author says that the novel is written in the era of dictatorship and the whole place is an image of the Iraqi space. The author treats the names of the characters as semiotic signs.
5. The novel and beyond the novel in the contemporary Iraqi novel; AbdulHadi Al-Fartousi’s “The hollow earth” as a model.

### ***The Important Things in this Novel Can be Summarised as Follows***

1. Dr. Iman Al-Sultani believes that beyond the novel can be explained by the complex imaginative visions that the writer possesses about life. Then, these visions are reflected in the text in forms in which the real mixes with the unreal and the unexpected (Al-Sultani, 2010).
2. Dr. Al-Sultani believes that sender and addressee, subject and object, and auxiliary and opponent vary in appearance from a dichotomy to another. The subject object dichotomy comes first followed by the auxiliary opponent dichotomy. Whereas, the sender addressee dichotomy comes in the partial events that make up the story and the relationship between them is a compulsory contract.
3. Dr. Iman Al-Sultani, believes that the hero did not turn into an actor until the moment he left the surface of the earth to its core. It has demonstrated complete management in selection and high efficiency in delivery.
4. Dr. Iman Al-Sultani, believes that place in the novel takes a symbolic dimension. It may be real, fictional, strange, or unfamiliar.
5. The miraculous place in “The Hollow Earth” is a place that belongs to the various spaces that are difficult to determine historical or realistic reference to. The author's imagination plays an important role in the recipient entering the unknown world that is full of excitement at times and with dismay at other times.

### **Results**

1. The text exists only with the presence of reading. The interpretation begins when the reader controls the text. There are various readings: poetic, semiotic, and aesthetic reading. The reading is authorised, and it is a necessary precondition for all literary interpretation processes.

2. Reading became popular with experts, commentators and strategists. Whereas, evaluation became a negative or positive criterion of reading by extrapolating reality, monitoring a phenomenon, analysing a situation, addressing a crisis, or dismantling a problem.
3. Reading sweeps the space of discourse that the word lives its life in, and its meaning widens in the scope of its deliberative field and its violation of linguistic positions through metaphors.
- 4 Readers are as various as readings. So, the reader is no longer a consuming party to the meaning of the text and the intention of the author, but has become an active component in the process of producing meaning.
5. Modern critical studies have sought to move from unity to multiplicity and from centralisation of view to comprehensiveness, from action to interaction, from eternal meaning to multiple meanings, and to fertility of interpretation. The transition from caring for the author's intention to allocate consideration of the work of the text and its constituent elements shifts to focus on exchanges of reality and reception with the aesthetic of the receiving. Paving roads began to devote the greatest presence of the reader and the issue of interpretation.
6. The function of literary work is represented in the relationship between the text and the reader.
7. The meaning of the text is not shaped by itself, but it rather is formed by the moment of reading through the participation of the model or implicit reader.
8. The task of interpretation is to explode the potential semantic energies embedded in the text and not the corresponding meaning.

## **Conclusion**

1. Dr. Iman Al-Sultani, is characterised by her ability to analyse texts according to modern critical approaches for relying on the narrative semiotics approach, especially Grimas theory. She applied this approach accurately and honestly to her book "The tale in the letters of Ikhwan Al-Safa". She adopts the sender and addressee, subject object and auxiliary and opponent dichotomies. She tried to reveal the process of narration in those stories applying the functions of Grimas.
2. Dr. Iman Al-Sultani uses the method of interpreting texts by describing the approach as an introduction to that interpretation. She found a field of multiple readings in the text; interpretive, ideological, cultural sympathetic and aesthetic reading.
3. Dr. Iman Al-Sultani deals with interpretation through a combination of different interpretative trends according to theories of linguistic communication; author, context, text, methods, contact and reader.
4. Through dichotomies, Grimas sought to organise semantics as these dichotomies form the whole human semantics, the real meaning of the text and also form the textual structure. The tales of Ikhwan Al-Safa include many dichotomies.



5. Beliefs, ideas, doctrines, and ideologies are all derived from reading the tales.



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