

## The Scenic Image and the Construction of Meaning in the Poetry of May Muzaffar

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the use of cinematic media in contemporary Arabic poetry and the effort to establish bridges of communication with it. It investigates how the modern poet adopts cinematic techniques as a means of expressing personal or collective emotional experiences. The aim is to break free from the constraints of inherited language, transforming the image into a lively, dynamic tableau imbued with motion and vision. This approach enhances meaning, enriches the poetic experience, and adds a visual and cinematic dimension that aligns poetry with modern narrative methods and visual arts, effectively advancing it toward modernization.

**Keywords:** Scenic Image, Semantic Structure, Dialogue, Poetic Vision, Scene Construction

### INTRODUCTION

The scenic image is considered a stylistic technique and a fundamental element of artistic construction in literary discourse. Its movement is based on visible pictorial details, conveying visions through rapid images that condense the poetic scene. In light of the text's openness to neighboring arts, the scene in the world of narrative encompasses everything presented to attract attention in any form of narrative literature. A scene-based poem is defined as: *"a poem in which the event unfolds in a sequential, temporally balanced order, relying on the narrator's perspective through a condensed stylistic structure. With a brief linguistic space, it refrains from departing from the dramatic action, allowing the event to stabilize within a unified spatiotemporal frame that experiences no transformation or variation, so that the text's dramatic movement remains organized within the miniature spatiotemporal unit, depicting a fully constructed dramatic event."*

From this concept, poetry has inclined toward stylistic liberation and departure from traditional forms, embracing a new form influenced by cinematic art, focusing on a specific element within this art: the *scene*. A scene is defined as: *"a collection of images, with each image being an integral part of the scene as well as one of its basic structural rules. What unites the images is the achievement of the scene's features, providing connections between them as an essential element, with time being one of these aspects, for instance."*

It is worth noting that the scenic image in poetry represents: *"an active and dynamic interaction among meanings, whereby poetic language in its semantic and symbolic layers constructs the image through interaction with narrative elements and cinematic activity."* In detail, the scenic image is outwardly linked to the literary image but is essentially a descriptive process capable of employing multiple elements of textual construction, whether literary or drawn from other arts, transforming the image into a new form of creativity in which narrative intertwines with poetic structure. This involves the interaction of narrative elements—time, place, characters, emotions, and events—presented in a descriptive scene where the components of the image are in motion.

Leon Sarmelian defines the poetic scene as: *"a specific action—a single event occurring in a defined time and place, lasting during a period in which there is no change of location or interruption in the continuity of time."*

Through the scenic image, the poet paints an artistic tableau before the reader's eyes, encompassing speed, cinematic brilliance, realistic events, and a depiction grounded in time and place. Dialogue between characters serves as a means of expression when presenting key events, all framed according to the lens of the camera.

The poet relies on scenic depiction to convey feelings and emotions in an artistic and striking manner. This can be illustrated on three levels, which will be examined according to their presence in the poet's collections.

### The Aesthetic of the Descriptive Scene

When constructing a scene, the poet relies on certain cinematic imaging determinants in continuous movement across different angles, presenting a descriptive tableau of sounds and visuals upon which the entire scene is based. The description seeks to show elements related to setting the stage, defining the framework of action, and presenting the physical appearance of the characters. The lens directs the light onto the shot within the scene, performing a *"sequential scan of the world confronting the viewer, with corresponding reactions of the described objects. The viewer moves from one object to another, from one character to another, attempting to incorporate everything within their field of vision into the depicted scene. In reality, the movement of the author's perspective (the viewer) resembles the motion of a camera in a film that provides a sequential sweep of a given scene."*

Following this approach, the descriptive scene is exemplified in the poem *"Assassination"*, which states:

*"May I have your permission...  
I extend my hand to water containing my revival,  
I disperse the inks from my blood,  
Erasing what clung to the walls of my innermost being,  
And may I have your permission...  
I silence the fluttering bird that circles my window each morning...  
It mocks the faint light in my eyes,  
It ridicules the scattered roses on the balconies,  
It scorns my songs...  
I bargain with it, and it exposes me,  
I feed it the waters of fear,  
I strip it of its throat,  
I glue its fiery feathers,  
So that then my hands may pass into your palms—  
Two broken birds in a dwelling without ground."*

In this text, the description encompasses the depicted segment, giving it a scenic character that generates a sense of connection among the components of the scene and with the reader/viewer receiving the depiction. This is achieved through multiple effects, each performing a specific function based on the type of determinant employed in constructing the scene.

The text constructs a dynamic scene operating on two levels:

**Internal level:** representing denial, purification, and psychological conflict.

**External symbolic level:** exemplified by the bird, whose recurring appearance evolves through the poem.

The repeated plea *"May I have your permission"* reveals a desire for rebirth, as indicated by *"I extend my hand to water containing my revival"*, where water symbolizes life and renewal. The language evokes existential feelings and states. The request *"I disperse the inks from my blood"* functions as a dense symbolic expression—inks may represent memories embodied in the spirit, accompanied by the desire to disperse or erase past burdens. The poem then shifts the camera toward an intense internal description: *"Erasing what clung to the walls of my innermost being"*, emphasizing the poet's wish for dissolution. The image conveys the deep attachment of these memories to body and soul, forming part of the poet's internal structure.

Subsequently, a kinetic and auditory scene emerges with *"I silence the fluttering bird that circles my window each morning"*, an external scene where the bird represents a memory haunting her every dawn, disrupting attempts at forgetting. The aesthetic representation of the bird, however, conveys opposition:

*"It mocks the faint light in my eyes,  
It ridicules the scattered roses on the balconies,  
It scorns my songs,  
I bargain with it, and it exposes me"*

This reflects concealed internal mockery, intensifying feelings of sorrow and despair. Light represents hope, roses symbolize love and beauty, but the bird behaves in a critical and derisive manner, shattering the dream of hope and recovery suggested at the beginning (*water, revival*). This provokes counter-violence from the self, which does not liberate but completes the cycle of torment:

*"I feed it the waters of fear,  
I strip it of its throat,  
I glue its fiery feathers"*

The poet demonstrates a keen ability to manipulate the narrative trajectory through illusion and subversion of expectation. Violence soon dominates the text in a magnificent scenic cohesion, expressing the harshest forms of inner pain. The desire to purge and suppress memory culminates in watering with fear rather than life, immobilizing the being, stripping its throat, removing feathers, and nullifying its capacity to fly. The final shot conveys a silent expression as the camera focuses on intertwined hands:

*"So that then my hands may pass into your palms—  
Two broken birds in a dwelling without ground"*

This scene ties the act of seeking permission to the desire for connection and union, ending in a fragile, broken unity, symbolizing loss, disorientation, and the absence of stability sought by the self.

Through this hierarchical description, the text creates temporal and spatial dimensions perceptible to the reader/viewer, through the sequence of locations (internal/psychological, window, balcony, dwelling) and time (*every morning*), with movement flowing from internal/self to external, evolving into violence and finally surrender. The camera's operation and the staged shots in the poetic text indicate a linguistic texture supporting the semantic structure.

Similarly, in the poem "*A New Day*":

*"I start the day with a cup of bitter coffee... I listen:  
The news bulletin, no new war...  
I start the day happy,  
Before searching for a fleeting face in the newspaper,  
Then I encounter you with the specters, distant from the fields of words.  
It manifests for a moment... then departs,  
As I close my eyelids over my eyes,  
Half of them sleep, half reminisce,  
Thus I touch the edges of my day,  
A courtyard conceals your meanings, tinted glass,  
And on your palms lies the bird with plucked wings...  
Stonelike.  
A voice rises from me... then fades or resists,  
So I gather the sound into the bottom of a bottle,  
I open the door and throw it far away,  
A free bird is exiled  
From space to space."*

### **Descriptive Scene Imagery**

Through descriptive imagery, poetic scenes are constructed from fragmented shots that are interconnected through their scenic relevance to present a coherent visual. In other words, the poet presents to the reader/viewer the salient perceptions of a place or anything that might suggest it. The text provides a rich descriptive visual, where personal emotions intertwine with sensory and visual images, narrating a personal account of the speaker's experience in a sequential manner, as seen throughout *Nabaar Jadid* [A New Day].

The narrative depicts a series of internal thoughts and events that unfold as the day progresses, presented as observational notes, for instance:

*"I start the day with a cup of bitter coffee... I listen / the news bulletin, no new war... I start the day happy."*

The opening shot is a realistic morning scene, carrying the bitter taste of coffee as a symbol of a heavy internal mood, combined with a sense of the repetitive anguish represented by war. This visual scene (coffee, news, war) is laden with psychological connotations, conveying the bitterness of accustomed realities.

As the day progresses, the scene moves into moments of searching:

"I look for a fleeting face in the newspaper... then I encounter you with the specters."

Here, reality shifts into metaphorical and subconscious space; the "face" is not a present person but represents longing or exiled hope. The newspaper, as the medium of search, is cold and ineffective. This interplay of presence and absence evokes an internal sensory movement:

"A moment emerges... then departs / when I close my eyelids / half of them slumber, half recall."

The scene is framed through the poet's "camera," focusing on the eyes as a dual lens capturing nostalgia. The contrast between "slumber" (surrender) and "recall" (memory struggle) forms the psychological center of the poem.

The camera then moves to transitional moments or marginal times of the day:

"I touch the edges of my day / a glass conceals your meanings, changing colors."

This is a descriptive scene of empty time, where the day itself is fragile and devoid of meaning. The other's presence is hidden, and the sought-after face is concealed (the shifting glass), reflecting ambiguity and instability in perception. These visual images highlight the emergence and fading of memories, allowing the reader to sense the absence of meaning within emotional erosion.

Temporal elements such as the day, daily repetition, and the news as recurring markers form, alongside spatial elements, the core structure of the narrative scene, providing temporal context for the action:

"The bird sleeps with broken wings, petrified."

Here, time within the memory pauses. Subsequently, the act of opening the door and throwing the bird outside introduces temporal release:

"...abandons it from space to space."

This temporal liberation leads to disorientation. The descriptive scene relies on both moving and stationary phenomena, where cinematic equivalents—decor, lighting, audio-visual ambiance, secondary and background actions—communicate meaning just as actors and actions do.

Cinematic shots—both internal and external (bitter coffee, news bulletin, specter, eyes, glass, the bird)—engage multiple senses: sight, hearing ("the voice rises"), and touch (hands), all creating a complex sensory landscape that conveys loss, absence, and desperate attempts born of pain.

### **Narrative Scene Aesthetics**

Poetic narrative scenes focus on presenting the story of the text through sequential cinematic shots of coherent events, aligned with the poem's rhythm and consistent with its reality. The narrative adheres to logical temporal sequencing, although the nature of the poem allows for temporal leaps while providing scenes with dramatic purposes that guide the reader toward anticipation and imagination.

The poet constructs the narrative event according to a logical system that respects temporal order, as observed in the poem *Al-Tabannul* [Transformation], which opens with:

"Everything changed... everything..."

### **The Aesthetic of the Narrative Scene in Collective Experience**

In the poem:

*"In the wind, the cooing of pigeons stirs...  
The morning leaves no trace of the caravan.  
The women's conversations have become eulogies,  
Men have lost all worth.  
I have lost the sparkle of features in my voice,  
I have lost my color under a descending sun.  
Was there ever a lover among us  
Whose palms touched wounds in the temples, hiding?  
Was there ever a poet among us  
Who would not commit suicide?  
Speech fell silent; its steps faltered.  
I immersed my fingers in the oil of letters,  
They petrified,  
And the ground beneath me waited."*

Within the poetic text, a narrative scene is constructed relying on dramatic sequencing to depict a collective emotional state through overlapping scenes, each supporting the other. The structure of the scene begins with the fractured present and moves toward a lost past. The opening phrase *“Everything changed... everything”* serves as a narrative explosion, establishing a temporal framework of profound transformation. The narration does not start from the initial event but from what follows the catastrophe, with the narrator (the poet) attempting to grasp its consequences.

This transformation is accompanied by sensory disintegration as part of the collapse of the world:

*“In the wind, the cooing of pigeons stirs the morning no longer / The caravan leaves no trace”*

This portrays sensory stagnation, the cessation of movement and time. The absence of sound creates a sensory void and emphasizes the suffocation of past time and its departure. The transformation is collective, not individual:

*“The women’s conversations have become eulogies / Men have lost all worth”*

This depicts a communal ruin in a scene that follows a reverse chronological logic. Dialogues, typically signs of life, here signify mourning; men have lost identity and status, indicating the collapse of societal rules and the onset of collective grief.

The poet then depicts the struggle of the self amid this collapse, showing that it is not an independent entity but part of the crumbling narrative:

*“I have lost the sparkle of features in my voice / I have lost my color under a descending sun”*

Here, the self aligns with the collective scene, with the loss of voice and color symbolizing the disappearance of identity and hope. The descending sun suggests the passage of time and an internal spiritual sunset. In another moment, the poet questions the meaning of the past:

*“Was there ever a lover among us / Was there ever a poet among us who would not commit suicide?”*

These rhetorical questions arise from the depths of emotional memory, not seeking answers but revealing the depth of the wound. The narrative scene concludes with complete stillness and petrification:

*“Speech fell silent; its steps faltered / I immersed my fingers in the oil of letters / They petrified / And the ground beneath me waited”*

This ending marks a transition to nothingness, expressing the peak of breakdown, surpassing language itself. *“The oil of letters”* is a striking metaphor suggesting that words have become suffocating, inert material. The scene captures a static, tension-filled moment, meticulously portraying the complete paralysis of a reality yet to unfold.

The poet achieves narrative coherence in the scene through its structural elements—characters, spaces, times, events, and dramatic plot—defining the climax of the conflict and a convincing resolution.

Similarly, in the poem *“The News”*:

*“An hour told me of his death,  
I hung up the phone.  
I rose... walked... ate.  
I continued reading something in today’s newspaper,  
I understood half...  
I threw it away,  
And my chest filled with smoke.  
So I sat by the window, staring.  
The announcement of death did not spoil my day...  
The morning repeated slowly... dragging clouds expelled by the wind  
And the windows of all the neighbors  
Still sank in silence.”*

The narrative scene here is constructed to track the movement of each moment within the text and the character’s actions, conveying an event with coherence and continuity. This cinematic portrayal aligns with the sequential unfolding of the developing narrative. Notably, the title *“The News”* signals the scene’s narrative perspective, immersing the reader in the atmosphere before the content of the news is revealed.

The poem follows a kinetic pattern, traceable through the “camera” movement as it observes the events:

*“An hour told me of his death / I hung up the phone / I rose... walked... ate”*

The central shocking event—the news of death—is presented in a succinct, unemotional manner. The superficial movement of the narrator’s daily routine contrasts sharply with the gravity of the news, reflecting the initial numbness of shock. The scene continues with sequential shots, combining internal and external imagery:

*“I continued reading something I did not understand half / I threw it away / And my chest filled with smoke”*

Here, smoke metaphorically conveys suppressed grief and suffocation, marking the onset of internal tension and the rift between the external world and the self. The camera follows the character’s movements within the text as the event gradually intensifies:

*"So I sat by the window, staring / The announcement of death did not spoil my day"*

The window serves as a lens for observation, contemplation, and detachment from reality. The poet does not depict the external world beyond the window; instead, the self enters a silent moment of watching the unknown. The character thus represents an independent focal point, navigating a turbulent inner world, perpetually oscillating between internal and external conflict.

The "camera" conveys the scene through the act of staring, accompanied by temporal slowdown and emptiness:

*"The morning repeated slowly... dragging clouds expelled by the wind / And the windows of all the neighbors / Still sank in silence"*

The poet presents the scene deliberately slowly, emphasizing detail and using descriptive techniques to frame the setting. The heaviness of the day disrupts chronological realism, producing a cinematic tableau as clouds and wind follow the narrative flow. The lens then widens to capture the silent, closed windows of neighbors, as if they share the narrator's silence:

*"Still sank in silence"*

The grief remains unspoken, and death persists within the confines of silence, which, paradoxically, reveals more than words. The text demonstrates a high level of craftsmanship, blending narrative and poetic elements. By employing a fully embodied narrative scene, the reader experiences its moments as if participating directly. The poet skillfully employs visual (stillness, window, morning, neighbors' windows) and auditory effects (heavy silence, collective muteness, imagined wind) to convey the event through sound and image, creating a subtle emotional atmosphere that mirrors the internal tension following the reception of the news.

### **The Aesthetics of the Dialogic Scene**

Before analyzing the texts according to the mechanism of scenic depiction, it is necessary to clarify the concept of the dialogic scene. The dialogic scene represents a textual unit interspersed with various dialogic tools, which may appear as monologues or dialogues between two or more participants. Dialogue can be internal or external. One of the most effective functions of dialogue within a text is revealing the character portrayed in the scene, whether the character speaks about themselves or others speak about them. Additionally, dialogue drives the narrative forward and presents essential information to the reader.

Dialogue is considered one of the principal components on which dramatic works are built, as it allows freedom in events, their development, and the stimulation of the scene. It is defined as a declared or implicit conversation between two or more parties, through which internal feelings or ideas are expressed, reflecting reality and conveying experiences in an artistic and impactful manner. Dialogue, much like its role in cinema, serves as a crucial expressive tool. Although lyricism dominates in poetry, this does not negate its dramatic tendency. A poem must approach the dramatic spirit, conveying the conflict and tension experienced by the modern poet through the entanglement of their intellectual life. Dialogue, therefore, becomes the poet's tool to express ideas and current events. Characters operate within an impactful dialogue that is attentive to aesthetic values and semantic concentration. The language of dialogue is not ordinary conversational language; rather, it is condensed, intended to express characters and transmit the experience to the reader, making the reader an active participant in the creative process.

A representative example of a poetic text demonstrating cinematic influence and the effectiveness of dialogue is *Al-'Uboor min Ard ila Ard* [Crossing from Land to Land]:

"You said to me: Rise!  
I thirst for a vineyard of vines,  
And I long to dip my hands  
In the water of the sun.  
Cold pierces my bones...  
Cover me...  
And let the ivy protect me,  
For the face of dawn is of unknown place."

A careful reading of the text reveals that the poet presents a visually charged scene through a functional interweaving of dialogue between two voices, achieving a concentrated scenic action. This concentration aims to deliver the maximum amount of information or evoke the highest emotional impact through minimal words.

The interlocutors exhibit a contrast in their responses: the initial prompt "Rise!" appears simple on the surface but initiates dramatic tension, calling for engagement and participation. In contrast, the speaker (the poetic self) responds with a voice marked by tension and emotional burden, expressed through imagery of thirst, cold, and the desire for protection. The dialogue constructs a scene that is both visually and emotionally rich, combining natural

and symbolic elements to convey the psychological state of the speaker and the existential and emotional distance between the participants.

### Dialogic Scenes and Symbolic Interaction

In the poem:

*"Partially refusing / I am thirsty for a vineyard / I long to immerse my palms in the water of the sun"*

the scene is set in an undefined space, yet it is charged with symbolic nature. This poetic formulation strengthens the dialogic aspect while highlighting the relationship between the two parties. The dialogue reveals the speaker's psychological state of tension and pain:

*"Cold that scorches my bones"*

Here, the camera metaphorically zooms in on her weary features and distant gaze. The interplay of light and shadow, through the contrast between warmth and cold, burning and freezing, reflects a disturbed emotional state, exposing vulnerability. The final plea signals withdrawal:

*"Cover me / let the ivy protect me / for the dawn is of unknown station"*

The call for protection is directed at elements of nature rather than a human, symbolizing emotional and existential detachment and a loss of trust. The speaker revisits her earlier call (*"Rise"*), finding no response, confronting suffering and seeking solitude. The scene closes in ambiguity, reinforcing existential anxiety. The dawn, symbolic of new beginnings, is unknown and undefined, transforming previous expressions into a state of persistent uncertainty.

The dialogic scene as a whole is not based on equitable exchange but dramatizes a contrast: one side seeks life, movement, and awakening, while the other retreats into confusion, avoiding direct contact. The temporal structure (*the face of dawn*) guides a cinematic pacing that emphasizes narrative unfolding without haste, blending poetic symbolism with visual narrative.

Similarly, in *"Secret Dialogue"*:

*"The narrator said:  
A star burns its kingdom,  
Secret stars laugh... and from the laughter, sounds fall.  
The wind notices,  
Whispering into the star's ear,  
It becomes angry,  
Burns all the stars,  
The universe goes out; only the beetle remains.  
A beetle... burrowed into the earth and descended,  
Feeling its way in the darkness.  
It called her from underground... 'Come closer.'  
She recoiled,  
Screamed: 'Who are you, and what do you want?'  
'Do not fear,' said the voice... 'I am the tightness in the heart... come,  
We shall sing to terror,'  
She flees."*

The poet employs dialogue structurally to communicate emotional experience effectively. From the title (*"Secret Dialogue"*), the reader anticipates an intense dialogic scene rich with narrative elements. The dialogue and movement convey symbolic characterization, revealing the inner dynamics of the scene. The central event—the star's burning and anger—is conveyed through a third-person narrator, in a temporally ambiguous nocturnal setting.

The camera's perspective moves from a panoramic aerial view (*"Secret stars laugh... sounds fall"*) to detailed interaction, combining auditory elements (wind, whispers, sounds) to create a cinematic-psychological scene. The wind becomes an active agent, driving the narrative as a character itself, while the narrator's limited presence maintains dramatic tension.

The action escalates:

*"The universe goes out; only the beetle remains / A beetle burrowed in the earth and descended / Feeling its way in the darkness"*

The camera shifts downward to follow the beetle, focusing on the underground space where the dialogic exchange unfolds. The interaction between the beetle and the unseen voice is a strange, frightening dramatic scene, reflecting the vulnerability of the character in darkness, and the voice represents internal distress. This creates a contemplative space for the reader/viewer, inviting interpretation. The dramatic climax is delivered through the enigmatic voice:

*"I am the tightness in the heart... come / We shall sing to terror"*

Short, sudden sentences heighten tension, and the voice's unidentified identity intensifies its symbolic weight as the embodiment of internal pain. The dialogic scene functions as a mirror reflecting the natural and symbolic essence of the character, allowing them to speak in their own voice without mediation from the narrator. This produces a dynamic interactive scene that deepens the semantic focus and concentrates the poetic vision.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the poet May Muzaffar, through the technique of the poetic scene, succeeds in expressing her will and intention. The poems employ creative dialogic and narrative styles that make the reader an active participant rather than a passive observer. Scene construction here is not merely decorative; it functions as an artistic and semantic mechanism, contributing to the structural and interpretive depth of the poetic text.

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