



IRAQI
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية

ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

Journal of Language Studies

Contents available at: <https://jls.tu.edu.iq/index.php/JLS>



Unlocking the Symbolic Tapestry: Exploring Symbolism in Ahmed Ardalan's *The Gardener of Baghdad*

Dr. Qusay Khalaf Hussein *
Anbar General Directorate of Education
Qusayhussein560@gmail.com

Received: 11\6\2024, Accepted: 28\7\2024, Online Published: 31/ 8 / 2024

ABSTRACT

Using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, this study article explores the symbolic aspects of Ahmed Ardalan's 2014 novel, *The Gardener of Baghdad*. The research seeks to reveal the several layers of meaning inside the text by examining the book using the ideas of signifier and signified, as well as denotative and connotative meanings. This analysis demonstrates how Ardalan's use of symbols enriches the storyline, mirroring profound cultural, historical, and emotional settings. The results demonstrate the intricate interaction of symbols in the book, providing a more profound comprehension of its themes and emotional intensity. This study examines how carefully Ahmed Ardalan uses symbolism in *The Gardener of Baghdad*, paying particular attention to the garden, the red rose, and the glorious city of Baghdad. Ardalan explores deep issues of love, grief, and culture via these symbols, weaving a story with a wealth of nuance and complexity. The garden is a haven and a symbol of optimism because it demonstrates that love can flourish even in the face of adversity. The red rose symbolizes the beauty and fragility of love, as well as the unescapable suffering that comes with losing someone. The portrayal of Baghdad as a historically

* **Corresponding Author:** Dr. Qusay Khalaf, **Email:** Qusayhussein560@gmail.com

Affiliation: Anbar General Directorate of Education - Iraq

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and culturally significant city embodies the people's tenacity and enduring spirit. This study reveals how these symbols are more than just literary devices—rather, they are crucial components that raise the novel's thematic depth. By unraveling this symbolic tapestry, the research provides a better understanding of Ardalan's reflection on the human condition, demonstrating the enduring significance of his writing.

Keywords: Ahmed Ardalan, Barthes, Semiotics, symbolism, the signifier and signified, denotative and connotative, *the Gardener of Baghdad*

تحليل النسيج الرمزي: دراسة الرمزية في رواية احمد اردلان " بستاني بغداد "

م. د. قصي خلف حسين
المديرة العامة لتربية الانبار

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الجوانب الرمزية في رواية احمد اردلان "بستاني بغداد" 2014 باستخدام النظرية السيميائية لرولان بارث. يلقي البحث الضوء على طبقات المعاني المختلفة داخل النص من خلال استخدام مفاهيم الدال والمدلول وكذلك المعاني الدلالية والضمنية. تبرهن هذه الدراسة كيف ان استخدام اردلان للرموز قد أثرى الدراسة وعكس جوانب ثقافية وتاريخية وعاطفية عميقة. تظهر نتائج البحث ان التداخل بين الرموز قد قدم فهما عميقا لأفكار الرواية وكثافة العاطفة فيها. يتناول هذا البحث استخدام اردلان الدقيق للرمزية مشيرا الى بعض الرموز المعينة كالحديقة والوردة الحمراء ومدينة بغداد العريقة. ويستكشف اردلان عمق القضايا المتعلقة بالحب والحزن والثقافة من خلال هذه الرموز، بقصة مليئة بالتعقيد ووفرة الفروق الدقيقة. تعتبر الحديقة في رواية اردلان ملاذا امانا وترمز الى التفاؤل لأنها تشير الى ان الحب يمكن له ان يزدهر حتى في قلب المحن والشدائد. الوردة الحمراء لها مدلولها في جمالية الحب ورقته ناهيك عن المعاناة التي لا مفر منها والمرتبطة بفقدان شخص ما. كما وتظهر الرواية مدينة بغداد كمدينة ذات أهمية ومكانة تاريخية وثقافية ومنها يستمد الشعب روح المثابرة والعزيمة. كما ويكشف هذا البحث ان هذه الرموز ليست مجرد أدوات أدبية يستخدمها كاتب ما، بقدر ما هي وسائل أساسية تظهر عمق الأفكار وتنوعها في الرواية. يقدم البحث فهما شاملا لتأملات ورؤى احمد اردلان لجوهر الإنسانية من خلال الرمزية التي استخدمها مما يجعل روايته ذات أهمية دائمة.

الكلمات الدالة: احمد اردلان، بارث، الرمزية، السيميائية، الدال والمدلول، المعنى الدلالي والضمني، بستاني بغداد.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ahmed Ardalan is a contemporary writer, best known for his book *The Gardener of Baghdad*. Ardalan, hailing from Baghdad, Iraq, dependably explores themes of identity, human experience, and culture in his ingenious endeavors. His works merge fictional components with historical and cultural discernment, giving readers an unparalleled perspective on Iraqi culture. Ahmed Ardalan's *The Gardener of Baghdad* is a captivating tale that immerses readers in the heart of Baghdad, skillfully intertwining elements of history, culture, and humanity's indomitable spirit. Ardalan skillfully weaves together a rich array of people and emotions, inviting readers to delve into themes of love, loss, and unwavering hope within the context of Iraq's tumultuous past and present. Ardalan adeptly crafts a narrative that transcends boundaries, providing readers with a glimpse into the universal human experience while simultaneously emphasizing the magnificence and resilience of one of the planet's most ancient cities.

Ardalan's *The Gardener of Baghdad* is brimming with symbolism and intricately crafted plotlines that portray the lives of the city's inhabitants, shaped by the city's long history and ongoing battles. This research aims to analyse the most prominent symbols of the novel based on Roland Barthes's semiotic theory. The research sheds light on important concepts in Barthes theory, most notably the signifier and the signified, in addition to the connotative and denotative meanings. The paper explains the most prominent symbols in Ahmed Ardalan's novel using the theoretical framework of semiotics in general and Roland Barthes's perspective in particular, clarifying the different layers of meaning. The research aims to underscore how *The Gardener of Baghdad* presents a broad social, historical, and political product, offering readers and critics alike a solid foundation for an accurate understanding of the novel.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The uniqueness of Ardalan's *The Gardener of Baghdad* is evident due to its limited number of reviews. In their paper "*Love and War in Ahmad Ardalan's The Gardener of Baghdad*" (2023), Ahmad and Shakir examine the issue of love and war in the book. This research uses postcolonialism as a theoretical framework to examine the concepts of love and compassion against the backdrop of war. This study has specifically examined the dynamics of political disputes and armed conflicts, as well as the direct consequences they have on civilian populations. The previous research focuses on the characters' suffering, specifically Ali's experience as a result of his romantic relationship with a British lady. As a result, society treated him harshly and forced him to flee his home city, Baghdad, to avoid the scrutiny of both Iraqi and British authorities (Ahmad and Shakir 2023, p. 366). It asserts that wars and conflicts have a profound impact on the emotional and physical well-being of individuals. However, it argues that with the power of love and compassion, individuals may endure and overcome the devastating effects of war. This study will provide a new perspective on the analysis of the symbols employed by the writer, based on the principles of semiotic theory, particularly the concepts put forth by Roland Barthes.

3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The name "semiotics" comes from the Greek word *semeiotikos*, which means "the study of signs" and serves as the foundation for semiotics theory. Semiotics, as defined by Hartmann and Stork (1972), "is the systematic study of both language and non-linguistic signs." Eco (1976) defines a sign as a phrase, word, thought, voice, or visual image that fulfils the purpose of conveying meaning. Essentially, a sign "is anything that can be used to represent something else – in other words, anything that has the ability to convey meaning." (Muhammad, 2022) In semiotics, the distinction between signifiers and signified is essential to understanding meaning. A signifier refers to an image that represents or symbolises anything, or a visual representation of words, letters, or something unrelated to its immediate context. Conversely, the signified refers to the logical component of the concept, which may exist in either the physical or conceptual realm. Thus, there is no need to consider the signified as tangible. Saussure, as stated in Sebeok (2001), provided a definition of signs as entities comprised of physical items, such as gestures, letters, and postures, which serve as signifiers. These signifiers suggest images or conceptions that are referred to as signified. Saussure used the word "semiology" to denote the scientific study of signals. According to Barthes (1957), semiology is the scientific study of ideas in their form, with a specific emphasis on meanings rather than substance. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the interconnectedness of form and ideology as a "historical" explanation. Barthes defines semiology as the relationship between the signifier and the signified, which together create the sign, all within a single process.

De Saussure defined the linguistic sign as "not a thing or name, but a concept and a sound image." (Ferdinand de Saussure, 1915) The sign has a significant position within the conceptual domain and is part of a collection of interrelated ideas. Barthes described semiotic signals as "function signs," emphasizing their dual role as both instruments and conveyors of meaning, and emphasizing their connection to their environment. Barthes illustrated this concept by emphasizing the common encounter with numerous semiotic systems in our daily lives. For instance, food fulfils the purpose of nourishment, clothes offer protection, and even though they function as signs.

Consequently, Roland Barthes did not get significant advantages from de Saussure's understanding of the sign and its primary constituents (the signifier and the signified). According to him, the semiological sign consists of a signifier and a signified. The signifier, regardless of whether it takes the form of sounds, objects, or pictures, has a tangible material essence. His understanding of the signifier builds upon de Saussure's explanation, but with some points of disagreement. Moreover, it is not feasible to disentangle it from the signifier, meaning they possess an inherent association quality. Conversely, the signified is not a tangible being but rather a cognitive representation of things and external reality; denotation imparts it with a psychological and conceptual essence.

Barthes has varying degrees of significance. Denotation is the primary level of signification, representing the enduring meaning of a word, free from any personal

judgements. It refers to a sign's literal or apparent meaning. Regardless of cultural, ideological, or societal influences, everyone perceives denotation in the context of visual images. Roland Barthes argued that the literal message has analogical characteristics and takes precedence over connotation in the process of signification. At this level of signification, we consider the sign to be the primary meaning, unaffected by context and personal interpretations, such as the connotative representation of a dawn.

The concept of connotation refers to the many associations and implications that a word or phrase has beyond its literal meaning. It highlights the idea that words may have several interpretations and layers of significance. Prior to exploring connotation from the Barthesian viewpoint, it is crucial to grasp its definition: "Connotation is an idea a word suggests in addition to its main meaning" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2001). Words, phrases, and pictures have meanings that go beyond their literal definitions. These additional meanings, known as connotations, might be subjective, specific to an individual, or universally understood (J.A. Cuddon, 1998). Roland Barthes used the word 'connotation' to explain how signs work: 'it describes the interaction that occurs when the sign meets the feelings or emotions of the users and the values of their culture' (John Fisk 1998).

The Barthesian method fails to recognize the coherence of interpretations because it necessitates a meticulous examination to reveal several interpretations, each of which has an unlimited array of implications. As a result, the text becomes an important linguistic entity. According to Barthes, "connotation relies upon the prior existence of denotation; it always works in the borrowed territory of the denoted" (Harry Jamieson 2007). According to Barthes, connotation involves more than just reproducing a message, whether it be in language or visuals. It also involves the mental processes necessary for interpreting hidden meanings.

The Greek verb "Symbollein," meaning "to put together," is the source of the term "symbolism." Symbolism is the practice of using symbols to represent concepts, emotions, and ideas. Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* offers a concise and efficient overview of symbolism. This book makes a necessary distinction between sign and symbol, with the latter described as "an object which refers to another object but which demands attention also in its own right, as a presentation." (Van Rees, 1984) One cannot overstate the significance of literary devices in any work of art. They help authors communicate their ideas and improve their writing. Furthermore, they aid in emphasizing key themes in a given text. (Deckard and Lazarus, 2015, p. 17). Similarly, literary methods serve to enhance the depth of a narrative and establish a strong connection between readers and the themes and characters. It is crucial to acknowledge that these devices provide a vast array of possibilities in the field of literature. Particular methods function at an intellectual level. Conversely, certain devices have a significant impact on emotions. (Ibid, P.17) Authors have a wide range of literary methods at their disposal, which are very significant in writing. Symbolism is a literary technique that writers may use, among other ways. According to Park (47), symbolism refers to "a literary device that entails the use of symbols to represent something far beyond its literal meaning. The symbols, in this case, include words, people, marks, abstract ideas, and locations." (Park, 2016, P. 47)

Human communities use symbols to convey their unique philosophies, social structures, and cultural characteristics. A symbol “is any image or thing that stands for something else. It could be as simple as a letter, which is a symbol for a given sound or set of sounds.” (Hamad, 2020) Symbols continue to be present in the modern world and should be analysed to determine their diverse connotations. (AbdulRidha, 2021) They possess a multitude of meanings that are contingent upon an individual's cultural heritage. Cultural learning acquires the significance of a symbol, not the symbol itself. Heinrich Zimmer provides a concise overview of symbolism's essence and enduring significance:

Concepts and words are symbols, just as visions, rituals, and images are; so too are the manners and customs of daily life. Through all of these, a transcendent reality is mirrored. There are so many metaphors reflecting and implying something which, though thus variously expressed, is ineffable, though thus rendered multiform, remains inscrutable. Symbols hold the mind to truth but are not themselves the truth, hence it is delusory to borrow them. Each civilization, every age, must bring forth its own.” (Zimmer, 2013, P. 122)

Symbolism has been crucial in shaping modernist literature, providing authors with a powerful tool for expressing complex concepts and emotions. In the realm of literary criticism, exploring the depths of symbolism in modernist literature has been a stimulating and fulfilling pursuit. This research aims to explore the intricate symbolism found in modernist writing, specifically focusing on the work of Iraqi author Ahmed Ardalan and his book *The Gardener of Baghdad*. By studying Ardalan's novel, we may obtain a clearer grasp of how symbolism works to portray significant and often elusive topics (Jackson, 2023).

Ardalan's novel, *The Gardener of Baghdad*, relies heavily on symbolism to enhance the plot and provide deeper meaning to it. Ardalan employs subtle imagery and metaphorical elements to delve into the tale, enabling readers to examine themes of identity, endurance, and the everlasting human spirit in more depth. Each sign in Baghdad, whether it be the gardens or the scars of battle, functions as a metaphor, guiding readers through the complex landscape of the individuals' lives and the city's history. This introduction examines how symbolism enhances the narrative of *The Gardener of Baghdad*, elevating it beyond a mere tale to a deep exploration of the human experience and the perpetual quest for significance in a tumultuous and unpredictable world.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Symbols in *The Gardener of Baghdad*

1. **The garden and the gardener:** The garden symbolizes hope, aesthetics, and the capacity for growth in the face of challenges. The story portrays the protagonist's strong desire to achieve something significant and find solace in the natural world. From the beginning, the garden has consistently symbolized optimism for Ali, the main character of the narrative. Ali successfully created an impressive garden filled with a variety of flowers, using his expertise in agriculture and receiving assistance from Mr. Radi and

Mrs. Laila. As a result, the garden became a topic of conversation among the residents of Baghdad:

The small garden ended at the river, and I had a small wooden boat yard there so I could take a ride in my small boat whenever I felt compelled to. In the front was a nursery, cultivated for growing roses, tulips, jasmine, and other flowers. The flowerbed stretched from the main entrance to the corners, where palms and citrus trees grew in neat arrangements. There was a small sitting area positioned in front of a beautiful fountain, with two angels playing music in the center of it all. All of this was surrounded by a quaint fence, and the place was a heaven all its own. (p. 17)

Semiotics critics like De Saussure and Roland Barthes view language as a system of signs. A signifier, the physical form of a word or picture, and a signified, the abstract notion it symbolises, compose every sign. According to Roland Barthes, each word has both a denotative and a connotative meaning. Each symbol in the narrative inherently has two implications, "we purpose to call these semiological signs, whose origin is utilitarian and functional; sign functions" (Roland Barthes 1968). Thus, the garden in the novel serves as a signifier, specifically referring to the garden's physical location in the story. However, as a signifier, it could also represent tranquility, rebirth, cultural legacy, and heaven. The garden has the denotative meaning of an area of land that has been developed and is used for growing plants and flowers. The garden's connotative meaning: In the cultural framework of Baghdad and the greater Middle Eastern heritage, gardens represent paradise, serenity, and the abundance of nature in the midst of dry weather. The garden may also symbolise fortitude and optimism, since cultivating a garden in a demanding setting takes commitment and attentiveness.

Ali, the main character and the one responsible for tending the garden, symbolizes perseverance, resolve, and the capacity of mankind to revitalize. His journey epitomizes the pursuit of purpose and significance in life, particularly when confronted with challenges. He journeys from a challenging rural environment to Baghdad, where his place of residence is unknown, as an orphan who has experienced the loss of both his father and mother. Nevertheless, he succeeded and attained widespread fame. Due to his unwavering determination and perseverance, he ultimately achieves the status of the most skilled horticulturist in Baghdad, and his garden evolves into a revered sanctuary for the city's elite social circles:

It was Ali who designed the Baghdad Pact square, the most beautiful patch of land in all of Baghdad. People used to sit there just to enjoy the colors of its flowers. As I heard from many, Ali was also a gardener for the royal family, and many said he was the best gardener and landscaper that Iraq had ever known. (p. 112)

Barthes examines the characters themselves as symbolic entities. For example, Ali, the gardener, may represent the role of a carer or a creator, reflecting the ideals of nurturing and development. An analysis of this character may reveal the underlying symbolism and significance they represent, going beyond their literal function in the narrative.

2. The red rose: In the opening of the tale, we learn that this flower symbolizes Ahmed Ardalan's bond with his city of Baghdad, as indicated in the writer's introductory passage at the start of the book. In Baghdad, the red rose symbolizes love, being, and aristocracy, 'This novel speaks about a flower... The true red rose in my life, the rose that represents existence, beauty and class, Baghdad.' (p.2)

Red roses are also symbolic of love, vitality, strength, and vigor. It is a prominent idea in the narrative. From the beginning, it symbolized Ali's deep connection with his beloved Mary and the natural world, acting as a sacred representation of their love. The crimson rose symbolized Ali and Mary's love journey, as well as the many obstacles they encountered, 'On my way out, I looked at a beautiful red rose and was about to cut it, but then I turned to Mary. "This is your garden, so perhaps I should ask your permission before I cut this rose?" (p.40) The red rose manifested in the subconscious of Ali's character. Despite experiencing significant traumas that had long-lasting effects on his well-being and resulted in memory impairment, Ali's recollection of his love for Mary was deeply ingrained as he reflected on their last meeting at the conclusion of the story. The narrative starts with the red rose, serving as a symbol of Ali's profound bond with Baghdad and Mary, and culminates with the red rose, signifying Ali's homecoming to Baghdad and his joyous reunion with Mary in the company of his friends.

Ali stood and with a smile on his face declared, "Excuse me, friends, but I have to find a red rose quickly. I have a feeling someone has been waiting for it for a long, long time," he said before he walked away. (p. 137)

3. Baghdad: The extensive historical background of Baghdad epitomizes harmony and serenity. The author emphasized the juxtaposition of two contrasting circumstances that Baghdad, a historic city with a prestigious legacy, encountered. The first portrayal illustrated the grim reality of the story by introducing Adnan, the bookstore proprietor, who wants to sell his business and escape from Iraq due to the increasingly precarious conditions in Baghdad, which have deteriorated in terms of safety:

It wasn't all that out of the ordinary and was part of everyday life in conflict-torn, modern-day Baghdad. It was so common, in fact, that people were more surprised when the electricity stayed on than they were when it went off. Electricity was a rare luxury, a shy, occasionally visiting guest who only dropped by for a quick greeting and was always quick to leave again. (p. 22)

This city, which has a long history, suddenly turned into an eerie presence that deeply affected its residents due to the war's immediate impact. The conflict had a profound influence on society, psychology, politics, and even religion. Ardalan briefly explains that the instability, anxiety, and conflict in Baghdad after the 2003 war have caused many to refrain from doing the morning prayer, a Muslim religious practice, due to concerns about their safety, "ever since the end of the war, people had avoided the Fajir prayer for security reasons, but those who'd suffered hard lives couldn't have cared less and insisted on following their religious customs in spite of all the turmoil and hardship." (p. 43)

The second depiction of Baghdad represents a deep yearning for its rich historical heritage. In this context, Ardalan argues that the longing for Baghdad's previous era serves just as a means of evading the current dire circumstances it confronts.

Adnan tried to picture how Baghdad must have looked to Ali's eyes, more than fifty years ago. He imagined it would have been more safer, more alive back then, when people could walk the streets and enjoy one another and the view. (p. 22)

Ardalan illustrates the harsh and merciless conditions that prevailed in Baghdad after the year 2003. The city, once a renowned tourist attraction attracting visitors from across the globe, has now transformed into a deserted city as its inhabitants have evacuated. Total darkness envelopes the city, with only a limited supply of energy available for a few hours. Furthermore, visible signs of death and destruction are spread throughout the area. Ardalan highlights the historical fact that Baghdad was periodically a battleground for political and international powers, as well as a place where many historical events occurred that shaped the city and its residents. Throughout its history, this city has undergone significant transformations, alternating between being a hub of intellectual pursuits and a breeding ground for conflicts, turmoil, mortality, and destruction. Baghdad came to represent culture, life, nostalgia, and death all at the same time.

4.2 Themes Explored through Symbolism:

- 1. Love:** *The Gardener of Baghdad* is fundamentally a love story. Love serves as the driving force behind the protagonist's actions and choices throughout the narrative, significantly impacting both his journey and the overall tale. The biography discovered in Adnan's bookstore vividly portrays the profound love between Ali and Mary. Their romance triumphed over several formidable barriers, including social, political, racial, and religious hurdles, thanks to Ali's unwavering will to pursue it. Ali admits:

Mary and I were from entirely different worlds, cultures, and status. Even the simplest of things would be complicated for us. I wouldn't be able to get into the compound without an invitation. In that way, even in my own country, I was an outsider. (P. 61)

This enchanting and peculiar love story starts when Mary visits Ali's garden. The reciprocal admiration between them becomes apparent, and Ali excitedly anticipates any chance to see Mary. Ali is cognizant of the fact that his prospects for a successful relationship with Mary are modest, considering that she is an English girl and her father has a prestigious position as a general in the British Royal Mission to Iraq. Conversely, Ali hails from a family of peasants and has a distinct cultural heritage. Ali has received numerous indications that proceeding with this link would breach all established boundaries. Despite Mr. Radhi's unwavering support for Ali and his fatherly role, he is straightforward and candid with him, cautioning him against becoming involved in his relationship with Mary:

That's what scares me, Ali. You are a stubborn, very determined person, and while this has helped you achieve your dreams in business, it might also lead you into bigger conflicts from all sides. You and this Mary are from entirely different worlds, something you are too young to understand and powerless to face. Life isn't fair, Ali. As much as we want it to, equality has never and never will exist. If you go forward with pursuing this girl, the path will be hard for you. They are foreigners, and they will not be here forever. (p. 29)

In contrast, Mary does not worry about the extent of the disparities between her and Ali. Her father greatly influences her, even though she shares the same feelings of love for Ali. He is a formidable military figure who intends to arrange a marriage between her and his assistant, Charles, despite her lack of passion for him. Despite being in love with Ali, she first feels apprehensive about this arrangement. This is apparent in her heartfelt confession to him, "Ali, if you promise me that you'll never hurt me, shout at me, or leave me alone— if you'll promise that you'll always love me—I-I will be yours. A tear rolled down her left cheek as the last words left her mouth." (P. 52)

During each encounter between Ali and Mary, the red rose symbolizes their sacred love. From the beginning of the novel, their romantic narrative revolves around an exquisite garden teeming with a diverse array of flowers and roses, with the red rose assuming a distinct significance in their relationship. The red rose represents affection, faithfulness, attractiveness, and optimism.

On my way out, I looked at a beautiful red rose and was about to cut it, but then I turned to Mary. "This is your garden, so perhaps I should ask your permission before I cut this rose?" She nodded. I cut the flower gently from its stem and gave it to her. When our hands touched a bit as she took it, she blushed. "I couldn't see this beautiful rose anywhere but in your hands. Have a nice day, Mary," I said softly as I made my way out. (P. 40)

Ali was resolute in his decision to go to England and see Mary, despite her father, General Thompson, sending her back to England and ending their romantic relationship. Mr. Radhi assisted him in finding her address. Ali wanted to place a red rose among them at their first meeting as a symbol of fidelity and hopefulness, "I cut a beautiful red rose and carefully placed it in my right-side pocket, and five minutes later, James and I were on our way to Southfields." (P. 76)

The red rose is a recurring symbol that appears frequently throughout the novel. After sustaining injuries during the riots and escaping from jail, Ali suffers from amnesia. In the final part of the story, the red rose becomes significant because it triggers a memory when Ali sees Mary and her child in a scene that reminds him of something. His recollection of the red rose is akin to a process of memory retrieval, as the red rose has always symbolized the sacred bond between him and Mary. It now functions as a tool and therapeutic aid to help him rediscover his memory, love, and the anticipation of their eventual reunion.

Ali stood and with a smile on his face declared, "Excuse me, friends, but I have to find a red rose quickly. I have a feeling someone has been waiting for it for a long, long time," he said before he walked away. (P. 137)

2. Loss: Several characters experience loss in the novel. The narrative seems to envelop each character with a sense of deprivation. Each character in the narrative has encountered the feeling of loss, which undeniably had an impact on the events that unfolded. For example, Ali, the protagonist of the tale, matures as an orphan and promptly encounters the death of his mother. Ali recounts how his mother, overwhelmed by the loss of his father, deteriorates swiftly and succumbs to illness shortly thereafter, profoundly affecting the whole family.

The shock hit us hard. My mother was hurt the most, as she was an orphan herself and had no brothers or sisters. My father was her everything, so she was devastated. She'd finally found someone to love in life, but he was taken away from her in a heartbeat. Before that, she'd always worn the most beautiful smile, but I never saw it again after that day. (P. 8)

The loss and early deaths of both his mother and father affect Ali's upbringing, preventing him from having a typical childhood. Ali tells his cousin Mustafa, "After all, we were the oldest of the children, both a ripe, old age of ten. I always told Mustafa we had a short-lived childhood, and we were men before our time." (P. 9)

Mr. Radi and Mrs. Laila provide Ali with emotional and psychological assistance once he travels to Baghdad. They were a wonderful way for Ali to make up for the loss of his mother and father. However, Ali also serves as a symbol of recompense for them, as they recently lost their son, who shared Ali's name and age.

You're the same age as my son would have been, and you are like a son to us." he then held me tight to him and continued, "You are our Ali, but to the rest, you will be The Gardener of Baghdad! Let's have some cake and tea and enjoy this delightful evening and the full moon, shall we?" (P. 21)

Mr. Thompson Mary's father is a prominent British military leader with vast networks and significant influence. As a result, Mr. Radhi and his wife, Laila, align themselves with Ali and provide unwavering support, despite the challenges in their relationship and the many cautions Ali receives from various individuals, including Mr. Radhi. They know Baghdad's poor conditions may put them in danger.

Mary, too, has had a challenging and unpleasant childhood. The death of her mother during her childhood, coupled with her father's frequent absence resulting from his influential political and military connections, had a profound impact on her. During her childhood, she often relocated from one military camp to another, living under close surveillance inside military barracks, resulting in a less-than-ideal upbringing. Her sole sources of comfort were Mrs. Naseema and Mr. Dalton. It is apparent that Mary and Ali have the same background. When their mothers die, they are left without maternal guidance. However, they encounter faithful companions who lend an ear, provide

assistance, and compensate for the void in their upbringing. Mary's father's extensive connections and frequent absences from military responsibilities also result in his loss.

It was obvious that she cared greatly for Naseema and Mr. Dalton, and she praised them for always being there for her. Much like me, Mary was a broken soul, a person who longed for the care she'd missed out on when she'd lost her mother at an early age to death and had lost her father to his military commitments. It was somewhat similar to my story, so we were connected in that way, and I understood how she felt. In fact, I could almost feel every word she said rather than just hearing them. (P. 57)

Ali and Mary's love flourished in northern Iraq, where they discovered refuge and liberation from cultural, racial, and political limitations. This occurrence would not have transpired in the absence of Kaka Hawazin and his family. Ali and Mary were unable to experience the same degree of dedication, affection, and stability in Baghdad as they experienced with Kaka Hawazin's family. In addition, Kaka Hawazin identifies Ali as the only surviving son of his late son, Serwan. Ali provides solace to Kaka Hawazin once again, after the tragic loss of his son., 'Serwan, his only son, had died several years earlier, leaving behind a widow and an infant.' (P. 93)

Although Baghdad has seen a loss of security, love, and tranquility, Kaka Hawazin's home serves as an ideal environment where social, political, and ethnic divisions have disappeared. Ali and Mary begin to feel a strong connection with the Kaka Hawazin family. Ali contributed to the field work, while Mary acquired skills in cooking and managing other domestic tasks. Additionally, they both acquired proficiency in the Kurdish language. This exceptional Kurdish family's empathy, benevolence, and collaboration directly contributed to the positive outcomes mentioned here for Ali and Mary.

They were helpful in everything and made sure we were comfortable and had everything we needed. We made it a point to learn a little Kurdish each day, and in time, I grew to love working with the livestock. My wife even learned to knit, with Sayran and Madam Fatema's patient teaching, and she was becoming a better cook by the day. (P. 96)

3. Culture: Culture may be described as the wide range of activities, beliefs, traditions, and values that shape the identities and interactions of the characters in a story. The narrative encompasses the societal norms, historical context, and familial connections that influence the main character's journey and the challenges he faces in safeguarding his cultural legacy amid worldwide changes. Ahmed Ardalan's novel, *The Gardener of Baghdad*, has several symbols that represent cultural elements, including those related to identity, such as clothing:

If I was going to travel abroad, I wanted to make a solid impression on those I met. When I asked Mr. Radhi for help, he sent me to his tailor. I had several suits made and chose a Faisaliya hat to accompany them, a special hat worn by Iraqis

and specifically by Baghdadis. I learned that the hat got its name from the first king, Faisal, who desired a hat with a uniquely Iraqi identity. (P. 25)

Ali wants Mr. Radhi's advice to cultivate an independent personality and exert influence over others, particularly in the realm of picking his wardrobe. Clothing serves as a mirror of an individual's character and distinctiveness. The Al-Faisaliya hat is a significant cultural symbol in this context, as it embodies a distinct Iraqi national identity. Baghdadis wear it as a cultural emblem and a meaningful reflection of their culture. Ali wears this hat undoubtedly to foster social connection with the people of Baghdadi society and to cultivate a feeling of national identity and cultural pride, especially in the presence of British and other individuals in Baghdad.

Ali's decision to see Mary in Britain prompts Mr. Radi to suggest a visit to the British Museum in London. Mr. Radi emphasizes that Ali would have a far deeper understanding of Iraq's history there than he would have in Iraq. Ali faithfully carries out Mr. Radi's instructions, and this is his impression:

When I got to the museum, I was stunned to discover what a great civilization Mesopotamia was, what a fascinating place I'd grown up in. There were sculptures from the Sumerian, Babylonian, and the Assyrian era, and some were amazingly intact. They were beautiful and absolutely mesmerizing, and I carefully examined every one and read all of the information about them. (P. 72)

Ali's visit to the British Museum in London has great significance, as it serves as a reflection of Iraq's profound historical and cultural heritage. While studying the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, who embody Iraq's profound historical and cultural heritage, Ali expresses his regret at the lack of preservation of Iraq's history and cultural wealth in museums located outside the country. It would have been better if the Iraqis had kept their history inside Iraq. However, they have neglected their Iraqi heritage and forfeited their cultural history, which serves as a valuable source of information for the global community. Due to the many wars and occupations, it has seen over the years, Iraq has transformed from a popular destination for students worldwide to an unsuitable place to reside., "but I also felt sad. Most of the people back home had forgotten our origins. They had forgotten the achievements we had made throughout history and how we'd suffered under different occupations for centuries." (P. 72)

Ali's trip to London provides a fresh cultural outlook. While aboard the train, Ali experiences severe bigotry based on his cultural heritage, leading other youngsters to mock him with comments about his skin color and association with a culture he considers less developed and refined compared to British society.

A group of teenagers several seats away harassed and insulted me, calling me rude, bigoted names like "camel jockey" and "dark face." Clearly, they didn't appreciate people of darker complexions, especially those from the Middle East. (P. 73)

Derogatory terms like "dark face" and "camel jockey," which implied that Ali belonged to a less advanced race compared to the British, subjected Ali to racial

prejudice. They use these expressions to ridicule Ali, diminish his value, and incite animosity against him. This verbal interaction takes place once again at Mr. Thompson's residence. One of Mr. Thompson's neighbors confronts Ali with a question that appears to denigrate and undermine Ali's civilization and culture.

I was blatantly insulted on two occasions by one of the guests. Right after dinner, one of the Thompsons' neighbors, asked, "Aren't you simply ecstatic being here, Omar, in real civilization, rather than that dreadful, dry, sticky desert you come from, where everything reeks of camel dung and is covered with sand and grit?" (P. 82)

Ali used the pseudonym Omar to conceal his true identity, intending to surprise Mary and safeguard himself in the event of an unforeseen emergency. He was abused by another guest yet again, "Tell me, Omar, what is it like to travel by bus and car and airplane rather than horse or camel or whatever other smelly creatures you have to ride back home?" Ali is shocked by the British perception of his society. He perceives his culture as being similar to that of the British. He starts advocating for his culture and the historical significance of the old Arab civilization, seeing himself as a member of an advanced society. He tells a tourist about the Arabs' groundbreaking invention of the wheel, which took place in a time when darkness enveloped the rest of the world.

I responded in a very calm, dignified, mature manner, using far fewer and far kinder words than I secretly wanted to. "We have cars in Baghdad," I said. "As a matter of fact, I have two." I then kindly and intelligently reminded him that Arabs had invented the wheel, and when most of the human beings in the world were still living in caves, we had palaces. (P. 83)

Ali's advocacy for his culture and the ancient history of his civilization exemplifies his immense self-assurance. He takes pride in the fact that his culture is just as significant, if not more so, than British civilization, and has been in existence for thousands of years.

5. CONCLUSION

In *The Gardener of Baghdad*, Ahmed Ardalan expertly integrates a multitude of symbolism to investigate the central themes of love, loss, and culture, resulting in a narrative that will reverberate with readers. This study uses semiotic theory as a theoretical framework, drawing on Roland Barthes' perspectives, specifically his use of the concepts of signifier, signified, denotative meaning, and connotative meaning. The investigation examines the garden's principal symbols, Baghdad, and the red rose, as well as their association with the dominant themes. The garden in Ardalan's narrative serves as a multi-layered symbol of renewal and refuge. It validates a location where love flourishes amid war, a sanctuary that stands in unadulterated contrast to the devastation that surrounds it. This garden emblem emphasizes the concept of love, illustrating its capacity to flourish in the most stimulating circumstances, thereby fostering a sense of tranquility and optimism. The red rose is a potent symbol of love and passion, as well as sacrifice and mourning. In Ardalan's narrative, the red rose symbolizes the ephemeral qualities of love, including its beauty and fragility, as well as the inevitable suffering that

accompanies it. This duality, which mirrors the human experience of love, transforms the red rose into a potent symbol that intensifies the narrative's emotional impact. Ardalan's novel depicts Baghdad as a symbol of cultural legacy and historical continuity, in addition to a physical location. Ardalan delves into the topic of culture by depicting Baghdad as a city that is both immersed in tradition and history, as well as characterized by change and upheaval. The city is a testament to the resilience and character of its residents in the face of adversity and devastation. By dissecting its symbolic tapestry, this investigation has illuminated the manner in which Ardalan uses symbols to enhance the thematic depth of "*The Gardener of Baghdad*." The red rose, Baghdad, and the garden are not only literary techniques, but they are also indispensable elements that enrich the narrative and facilitate readers' identification with the characters' experiences and the broader cultural context. The research findings show that using semiotic theory, especially Roland Barthes' ideas and point of view, as well as looking at the novel's most important symbols, has made the deep cultural, political, or historical meanings that Ahmed Ardalan wanted to send even clearer. Ahmed Ardalan skillfully veiled these ideas in a sense of mystery and symbolism, making the novel a valuable resource for reading, research, and exploration. As a result, Ardalan's novel is a timeless and poignant literary work. Readers can understand the eternal force of love, the inevitableness of loss, and the resiliency of cultural identity through the prism of these symbols.

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