

Pictorial Symmetry in Literature in Some Poems of Mahmoud Darwish: A Review

Doaa Tameer Hameed

College of Administration and Economics, University of Al-Hamdaniya, Nineveh, Iraq.

Corresponding author: doaa21@uohamdaniya.edu.iq

Submitted: 01/03/2025.

Accepted: 13/03/2025.

Published: 14/03/2025

Abstract

In literary terms, symmetry can be defined as structural symmetry of poetry, prose, and drama, and thematic symmetry. Based on interdisciplinary insights from art theory, psychology, and semiotics, it illustrates the device of symmetry as a trope for balance, two-foldness, and transformation. Structural symmetry (like parallel plots or mirrored stanzas) makes a work coherent and beautiful in form, whereas thematic symmetry embodies complementary opposites such as good and evil or life and death. The findings conclude that not only is symmetry cognitively and symbolically significant, but it may also be an important contributor to the understanding of the aesthetic and intellectual characteristics of literary texts. Pictorial Symmetry Idea: Researching the literature on pictorial symmetry including pictorial poems, and pictorials that combine text with images to convey symbolic meaning.

Keywords: Pictorial Symmetry; Structural symmetry; Thematic symmetry; Symmetry cognitively: Symbolically significant.

1. Introduction

Symmetry has captivated writers, artists, and scholars for centuries, reflecting natural phenomenon but also a deep-seated concept that has emerged from human creativity. Whether it be the flawless bilateral symmetry of a butterfly's wings or the complex geometric patterns of Islamic art, symmetry is often connected with balance, harmony, and order. Its most commonly referenced roots lie in the realms of visual arts and mathematics, but symmetry is also prominent in literature both in structure as well as theme. In its literary role, symmetry is more functional than ornamental; an effective means to structure stories, stir emotions, and communicate nuanced ideas. This paper deals with pictorial symmetry in literature when represented, represented, and used through literary arrays other than literal [1,2].

Pictorial symmetry, or the balance and proportion of illustrations within a pictorial art. In literature, it is usually metaphorical and relates to the composition of wording, ideas, and structure in order to achieve a reflective or symmetrical design [3]. For example, a poem might use symmetrical stanzas to mirror its themes in duality, while a novel may have parallel plots that are structurally and thematically similar [4].

These are not random realities, but one of the many choices writers manipulate to create beauty and meaning. Symmetry, as Rudolf Arnheim (1954) indicated in *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, is a basic perceptual principle of humanity—one that influences how we view and relate to the creations of an artist. Not just limited to visual art, similar principles can be applied to literature, providing cues for the reader regarding understanding and emotions [5].

For these symmetries of existence, there is a multi-disciplinary approach across arts theory, psychological and semiotic exploration, literary criticism. Symmetry theory has long been linked to beauty and order in art practice and theory, for classical artists (eg: da Vinci and Michelangelo) So the psychology of symmetry goes beyond just eye-catching forms; it helps us understand that humans are naturally attracted to patterns and balance in the natural world. Symmetry as a sign has been examined, for example by Umberto Eco [6] in *A Theory of Semiotics* [7]. Such perspectives offer important lenses for approaching symmetry as a literary phenomenon, with which we are primarily concerned here, since it often acts as a link between form and content [7].

Symmetry has long been discussed in literature (see one of the earliest influential works on its importance by Aristotle), particularly balance and proportion. Aristotle argued in his *Poetics* that plot should be a tightly constructed thing, with a beginning, middle, and end — everything in a work should bear some relation to the plot. Such symmetry of narrative has been repeated countless times by writers and critics since—for example, E.M. Forster (1927) in *Aspects of the Novel*, Northrop Frye (1957) in *Anatomy of Criticism*. Forster, for example, mentions symmetrical patterns in novels, like matching character developments and corresponding events, that breed a feeling of harmony and reverberation. In contrast, Frye delves into the symbolic role symmetry plays, encapsulating ideas of duality, equilibrium, and metamorphosis [8,9].

For example, in poetry, it is usually realized through rhyme schemes, meter, and stanzas. [10]in *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse*, says that poets make use of symmetry as an "artistic device "to achieve musical quality and connotation. The sonnet is 14 Lines in a perfect semblance of balance with its format of rhyme. In the same character, each villanelle and pantoum is built on repeated lines and refrains to create a balanced circle. These forms also fascinate the reader visually as well and deepen the themes and feelings explored in the poem. As an example, consider the symmetrical pairing of poems in William Blake *Songs of Innocence and Experience* accentuating the duality of human nature [11].

Symmetry in prose is more difficult to describe, but it is still important. To illustrate the use of symmetrical narrative structures within a novel; perhaps the best example is Gabriel García Márquez's famous book, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The story is cyclical, with its looping motifs and sequences developing a sense of duplicity and continuity. Just as with *Hamlet*, the symmetry between characters and warring principles — Hamlet and Laertes, the play-within-a-play — highlights the themes of duality and echoes [12], in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, argues that it is the very symmetrical structures that make up what one may call the critical issue of Shakespearean human nature/morality.

The symmetry in literature not only pertains to structure but also to themes. Symmetrical imagery and motifs often represent duality, balance, and harmony. For example, the *Divine Comedy* by Dante forms a journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, each realm reflecting a different quality of the human soul. This symmetry reinforces the theme

of balancing and redeeming the spirit in the poem. And William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience refers to the way in which the paired symmetry of poems like "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" demonstrates how human nature holds equal parts innocence and experience, good and evil [13]. Commenting on the thematic symmetry that Simmons describes, it is precisely that symmetry that Simmons identifies as the mark of good literature; balancing complexity that arises from the subtlety of moral ambiguity and high-level narrative stakes.

2. Theoretical Framework

Familiar primarily from visual arts and mathematics, the concept also bears great relevance for literature. Simply put, symmetry means balance, proportion, and harmony, achieved through repetition, mirroring and equivalence. Symmetry exploits various literary levels — structural, thematic and symbolic — as a guide for narrative organization, a source of evocation, and a mechanism for engagement. Implicating drawing theoretizations from across art theory, psychology, semiotics, and literary criticism, this theoretical framework provides a way to theorize symmetry in literary texts.

3. An analysis of symmetry in works of art or literature

Symmetry as an aesthetic principle stems from visual arts, as it is often regarded as a measure of beauty, order and perfection [5]. Visual Perception: The nature of the human perception is organised by the symmetry, as stated by Rudolf Arnheim in his book in Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye. Well, Arnheim would say this is particularly the case with literature, where of course a symmetry is more metaphorical than visual. For instance, balanced stanzas within a poem or parallel plots in a novel can elicit the kind of balance and symmetry often found in painting or sculpture. In the move of these aesthetic principles from visual art to literature, we see the cross-disciplinary nature of symmetry as an idea.

Symmetry in literature is more than just structural balance; it is a kind of symbolism [14]. stress for example—as D. D. Ouspensky shows in The Structure of the Artistic Text—symmetry is the principle of making sense by antithesis and likeness; Symmetrical structure in literature, per Lotman, typically emphasizes oppositional constructs like good and evil, life and death, innocence and experience. This duality is both powerfully oppositional to each other as well as birthing the human experience itself. As an example, the paired symmetry of poems in William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience emphasizes the need for opposing forces in the human mind to coexist.

Symmetry, as it relates to the structure of literature, is the intentional arrangement of a text in balanced, mirrored, or repetitive patterns. Such structural symmetry can take many shapes; parallel plots, mirrored character arcs, or cyclical narratives, for example. Beyond its ornamental function, it is also a way to reaffirm themes, to offer coherence, and to invite readers to participate. For example, writers have long used structural symmetry to create a detection of harmony, duality, or inevitability in classical and contemporary literature [15].

For example, symmetry in poems is often represented by the use of rhyme schemes, meter, and stanzaic forms. Take the sonnet form, for instance, where the symmetry lies in balanced quatrains and a final couplet. Various comments on closure and outline in John Hollander's (1975), Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form. Largely because the villanelle and pantoum feature repeating lines with their refrains, they have a circular, symmetrical effect [16].

In prose, symmetry often serves to structure narratives. Similarly, Gabriel García Márquez makes use of cyclical structures in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as events and themes recur across generations in a way that mirrors each other. Gérard Genette (1980) *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Similarly, in drama, Shakespeare employs mirrored character dynamics (e.g., Hamlet and Laertes, the play-within-a-play, etc.) in *Hamlet* to amplify themes of reflection and duality [17,18].

Perhaps literary symmetry manifests itself in a number of different ways, however — in that sense it is a device that wielded by authors to influence and guide meaning, feeling and overall sense of aesthetic unity conjured from within the text. Poesy Symmetry Symmetry in Prose Ladies and gentlemen, [19,20,21]

3.1. The Psychological Relevance of Symmetry

Symmetry is pleasing to the human brain as we like patterns, balance, and order from a psychological perspective. In *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain*, Semir Zeki (1999) explains that it is easier for the brain to decode symmetrical forms, making them naturally attractive. That symmetry seems to give us a sense of closure, finding it reflected in literature as well. Conversely, asymmetry can manipulate readers to be awkward and strange, skewering their expectations and pushing them to grapple with the text more deeply. The back-and-forth of symmetry and asymmetry is a prominent characteristic of many literary pieces from the corresponding alternating lines of a sonnet to fragmented narratives in modernist novels [21, 22].

3.2. Semiotics and Symmetry

As a signifier in semiotics, symmetry communicates meaning through its configuration. In *A Theory of Semiotics*, Umberto Eco (1976) maintains one of the reasons that writers create symmetry in their texts is because choosing symmetry communicates something to the readers (174). In contrast, a symmetrical narrative structure might indicate balance and harmony, while an asymmetrical structure might imply chaos or disruption. From this semiotic point of view, one of the most interesting areas of literature is a point of convergence for form and content, which is the symmetry [6,23].

3.3. A Balanced Approach in Literary Criticism

But literary critics have long held that symmetry is essential for storytelling. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle called for the parts of a well-formed plot to be proportionate to one another, with each part moving the work toward its essential unity [24]. The notion of narrative symmetry is found in modern critics like E.M. Forster (1927) and Northrop Frye (1957). Forster, writing in *Aspects of the Novel*, notes the role of symmetry in novels, parallel character trajectories, mirrored events, bringing unity and echo. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye examines the ways symmetry acts as a kind of figurative code, suggesting symbolically the dichotomies of life, and more, between sameness and difference and equality and hierarchy as a transformative process of duality and balance [25,3].

4. Symmetry as a Thematic Device

In literature, such symmetry often goes beyond structure and serves the story as a thematic device representing balance, duality, or harmony. There are three kinds of thematic symmetry: binary oppositions, cyclical themes, and mirrored symbolism.

Binary oppositions: Symmetries often stand for opposites: good and evil, life and death, innocence and experience. For example, William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* contains faced poems about opposite states of the human condition illustrating each pole's interdependence [26].

Cyclical Themes: Symmetry also manifests in cyclical narratives, where ideas repeat to underscore permanence or inevitability. The tripartite structure of *The Divine Comedy* illustrates spiritual symmetry with Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise [27].

Mimetic Motifs: Symmetric patterns may reflect repeating motifs or mirrored imagery; T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* famously features shattered symbols mirroring the dualism of destruction and renewal [27].

Through thematic symmetry, authors underscore layers of meaning, a reflection on the interplay of oppositional elements in life and the cyclical nature of existence.

5. Perspectives on symmetry in literature across disciplines

The interdisciplinary aspects of symmetry in literature—especially those that feed from psychology, semiotics and art theory—fall in the followed splinters. These points of view show us how symmetry is functioning not just as a literary feature, but as a mental and also symbolic phenomenon.

On a psychological level symmetry attracts the human brain that loves order and equilibrium. According to V.S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein (1999), the process of noticing and interpreting a symmetrical form result in pleasure due to the decreased cognitive load on the human brain, which renders it all the easier to make sense of. In literature, symmetrical structures and themes can cause the phenomenon of closure and harmony by forming a cycle as in the case of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* [22].

Symmetry serves a certain meaning in semiotics and signifying in a way to in detail explain the structuralism- that how the parallelism and repetition in the language creates a pattern that reinforce meaning. The term symmetry is often associated with balance, duality, or transformation [29].

The relationship between literary symmetry is also part of art theory. Symmetry in visual art, reflects universal rules of beauty and harmony. Similar principles are reflected in literature [30].

6. Imagery Symmetry in Some Poems by Mahmoud Darwish: An Application

One of the greatest and most famous modern poets, Mahmoud Darwish, relied heavily on recurring imagery symmetry in his poems. In fact, this method of repeating or resembling poetic images to deliver his concepts and emotions, specifically his concepts and emotions about lands, identities, exile and resistance. The imagery symmetry in his poetry

illustrates the integrity of the poetic text and aesthetic-geometrical focuses of coronate emotional-intellectual power on the reader.

Imagery Symmetry in Mahmoud Darwish's Poems Excerpts

6.1. The Poem "Mural":

In Mural, which also deals with death and life, the thematic images of death, rebirth and immortality are matched in their repetition. Motifs like the tree, the bird, and the shadow return to evoke the sentiment that life goes on after death.

• Imagery Symmetry:

o The Tree Image:

But a woman said, This is your name, and went away into her whiteness.

Hold onto this, as it is your name!

Argue with no one over a letter ... and get on with your shadow.'

In this case, the tree and the shadow refer to life and existence, a motif which goes on in the other parts of the poem as a notion of continuity.

o The Bird Image:

The bird roosting atop the world, I am.

Singing to resurrect life.

The songbird reappears as a motif of liberty and perpetual life, imagery parallelism that reinforces the text's structural coherence.

6.2. Poem "I Yearn For My Mother's Bread":

In such a poem which contains the motifs of longing with that of attachment to home and mother, we have an imagery symmetry in the image of mother, bread and coffee, all symbols of warmth and belonging.

• Imagery Symmetry:

o The Mother Image:

"I miss the loaves that my mom used to make,

And my mother's coffee,

And my mother's touch."

The motif of the mother will be repeated in other parts of the poem — the mother as a symbol of long desire and the most basic link of connection to the homeland.

o Bread and coffee images:

"And I love my life because,

If I die,

Then, I will be ashamed of the tears of mother of me.

Bread and coffee grant simple life and family warmth, reappearing to consolidate this nostalgia feeling.

6.3. The Poem "On This Earth":

The poem "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas There is an imagery symmetry in this famous poem, which, while celebrating the beauty of life through sufferings.

• Imagery Symmetry:

o Nature Images:

There is what [on this earth] deserves to be alive,

The hesitation of April,

The smell of bread at dawn,

A woman's opinion of love,

Grass growing on a stone,

Mothers balancing on a string of reeds."

There is a repetition in imagery (April, grass, bread) rooted in nature: a yearning for hope and the beauty of living.

o The Mother Image:

On this earth, the Lady of the Earth,

Mother of beginnings, mother of endings.

The mother as a symbol of local and earth reappears and keeps the whole text together.

6.4. The Poem A Lover From Palestine:

This poem, in which the poet finds his way back to his homeland Palestine, the symmetry is powerful, when images were used such as olive trees land and blood.

• Imagery Symmetry:

o The Land Image:

You're eyes are a thorn in my heart,

They do harm to my heart... and I am working from them.

The land keeps coming back as a sort of representation for identity and belonging.

o The Olive Tree Image:

"And I know that I sing

For planting olive trees in its soil.'

And the olive tree is recurrent as a symbol of peace and roots to the land.

o The Blood Image:

"And I know that my blood

Has become an olive tree."

Olive trees intertwined with blood; a symbol of sacrifice and belonging;

6.5. Sghayyar, Sarhan Drinks Coffee in the Cafeteria, 1968

This poem, surviving from the disposition of an alienated estrangement, echoes an imagery symmetry of coffee, dust, and the window.

• Imagery Symmetry:

o The Coffee Image:

"Sarhan drinks his coffee In the cafeteria."

The coffee returns as a symbol of the mundanity and the alienation of everyday life.

o The Dust Image:

"And the dust on the window

Records the names of those who have walked past.

Now dust repeatedly appears as a symbol of time and memory.

7. Conclusions

A Balance of Symmetry in Literature While there can be different forms of both structural and thematic symmetry (or its opposite, asymmetry, for that matter), it can be a powerful tool to help authors craft balance, build meaning, and keep readers engaged. Using examples from poetry, prose, and drama, this paper describes how symmetry functions via concepts drawn from art theory, psychology, and semiotics. It conveys duality, harmony, and transformation, AND it caters to the human brain's natural affinity for repetitiveness. We thus investigate how symmetry not only has aesthetic and structural relevance across genres but even culture, but offers a way of thinking across all disciplines. This is what we saw in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, which did not in any way mean a mere reintroduction of images, but rather a retooling, an artistic instrument that embodied the depth of his poetic experience. By this symmetry, Darwish is able to build strings of coherent texts expressing key themes of homeland, identity, and resistance, while also deeply impacting the consciousness of the reader and providing the following:

- **Making it More Artistic:** The symmetrical imagery connects all the lines of the text and the readers flow through the text understanding again and again \longleftrightarrow The imagery repeats the same idea throughout.
- **Repetition Or Similarity Of Images:** The use of repetitive or similar images intensifies the impact of the text on the reader and brings attention to the emotions that the poet wants to express.
- **Beauty:** Imagery symmetry adds a rhythm to the images and a pattern to the concepts of the text making it more beautiful and powerful.
- **Psychological Effect:** Demonstration of images repeatedly has a great psychological effect that most of the time reinforces the presence of the idea or emotion in the reader body (mind).

References

1. Hollander, John. "The Poetics of Symmetry." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1977, pp. 273–294.
2. Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. Oxford University Press, 1967.
3. Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton University Press, 1957.
4. Levin, Harry. "The Symmetry of Joyce's *Ulysses*." *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1953, pp. 201–212.
5. Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. University of California Press, 1954.
6. Eco, Umberto. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Indiana University Press, 1976.
7. Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. Oxford University Press, 1967.
8. Viana, V., Nagy, D., Xavier, J., Neiva, A., Ginoulhiac, M., Mateus, L. & Varela, P. (Eds.). (2022). *Symmetry: Art and Science | 12th SISSymmetry Congress [Special Issue]*. *Symmetry: Art and Science*. International Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Symmetry. 338-345.
9. Yermolaieva, V. (2024). *Symmetry-Asymmetry in Semiosphere of Culture: The Case of Authenticity/Inauthenticity Opposition*. In: Tragel, E.M. (eds) *Explorations in Dynamic Semiosis. Theory and History in the Human and Social Sciences*. Springer, Cham.
10. Fuss, D. (1993). *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms That Shaped Them*. Routledge.
11. Hollander, J. (2001). *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (3rd ed.). Yale University Press.
12. Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998).
13. Jose, C. P. (2015). "Skinning" The Lamb" and "The Tyger". *English Language and Literature Studies*, 5(2), 87.
14. Walter, H. G. (2022). *Devoted to the Truth: Four Brilliant Investigators*. Peter Lang Verlag.
15. chardson, B. (2021). *A Poetics of Plot for the Twenty-First Century: Theorizing Unruly Narratives*. Ohio State University Press.
16. Wesling, Donald. "Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form." (1976): 141-146.
17. Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Cornell University Press.
18. Mambrol, N. (2020). Analysis of Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. *Literary Theory and Criticism*.
19. Fabb, N. (2009). Symmetric and asymmetric relations, and the aesthetics of form in poetic language. *European English Messenger*, 18(1), 50-59.
20. Romanska, Magda. "Drametrics: what dramaturgs should learn from mathematicians." *The Routledge companion to dramaturgy*. Routledge, 2014. 438-447.
21. Zeki, S., & Bartels, A. (1999). Toward a theory of visual consciousness. *Consciousness and cognition*, 8(2), 225-259.
22. Ramachandran, V.S., and Hirstein, William. "The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience." *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 6, no. 6-7, 1999, pp. 15–51 .
23. Hameed, D. T. (2024). The poetic deviation in the poetic collection (*Qabas al-Ilham*) By the poet Abdul Hassan Khudair Obaid Al-Muhyawy. *Sumer University Journal for humanity science*, (Special issue 3), 307-324.
24. Diehl, N. (2009). Imagining de re and the symmetry thesis of narration. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 67(1), 15-24.
25. Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel* (1927).
26. Van Lieshout, J. (1994). *Within and without eternity: the dynamics of interaction in William Blake's myth and poetry* (Vol. 92). Rodopi.
27. McDougal, Stuart Y., ed. *Dante among the Moderns*. UNC Press Books, 2012.
28. Geary, Matthew Kevin. *TS Eliot and the mother: ambivalence, allegory and form*. Diss. University of Birmingham, 2016.

29. Dunleavy, Dennis. "Visual semiotics theory: Introduction to the science of signs." Handbook of visual communication. Routledge, 2020. 155-170.
30. Sherman, Aleksandra, and Derek Anderson. "How art contributes to scientific knowledge." Philosophical Psychology (2023): 1-21.