

## Manifestations of Passions in Najib Al-Kilani's Novel *Al-Yawm Al Maw'ūd* (*The Promised Day*)

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### Abstract

This research examines Najib Al-Kilani's novel "The Promised Day" through the lens of the Semiotics of Passions, an approach that prioritizes the psychological and emotional states of the narrative subject as a fundamental driver of narrative action and the constitution of meaning. The study's central problem lies in monitoring the formation of passions within the fictional discourse and analyzing the emotional trajectories that shifted the characters from "states of the soul" (such as courage, anticipation, and certainty) to "states of things" (such as resistance, steadfastness, and liberation). The research employs a procedural semiotic methodology to analyze textual thresholds and the narrative body, utilizing Greimas and Fontanille's models of "disposition" and the "euphoric/dysphoric" duality. The study concludes that passions in the novel are not merely emotional descriptions but are "modal actuators" that shaped the significance of "The Promised Day" as a moment of ultimate connection with supreme values (freedom and religiosity). Al-Kilani demonstrated that narrative victory is an inevitable result of the triumph of "euphoric passions" over the "passions of greed and arrogance" that characterized the occupier's camp.

**Keywords:** Semiotics of Passions, Najib Al-Kilani, The Promised Day, Disposition, Narrative Action, Resistance, Being of Meaning.

### - Introduction

The Semiotics of Passions constitutes one of the most fertile and consequential

epistemological extensions of contemporary semiotic theory, marking a decisive turning point in the discipline's understanding of meaning production. Emerging as a response to the perceived limitations of classical structural narratology, this theoretical orientation has succeeded in displacing the analytical focus from what Greimas termed the "semiotics of action"—that is, the study of observable transformations, functional roles, and narrative programs—to what may be more accurately described as a "semiotics of psychic states." In doing so, it restores analytical centrality to the sensitive, experiencing human subject, whose emotions, inclinations, tensions, and inner conflicts are no longer treated as secondary or ornamental, but as constitutive dimensions of discourse itself. The subject is thus no longer reduced to a mere actant executing pre-established narrative functions; rather, it is apprehended as an affective entity whose internal states actively participate in the generation, modulation, and orientation of meaning.

Within this perspective, the foundational contributions of Algirdas J. Greimas and Jacques Fontanille prove decisive. Their work opens semiotic inquiry onto the domain of affectivity, arguing that passions are not spontaneous or purely psychological phenomena external to discourse, but structured semiotic configurations governed by identifiable modes of emergence, intensity, modulation, and valuation. Consequently, semiotic analysis no longer confines itself to recording what a character does, the sequence of events, or the

logic of narrative causality; instead, it interrogates how a character feels, how these feelings are discursively organized, and how they influence both the subject's comportment and the overall narrative trajectory (Shawi 519). From this vantage point, passion is understood not as a fleeting emotion or an episodic reaction, but as a durable semiotic construct—one that contributes decisively to the production of meaning and to the articulation of the subject's mode of being within discourse. As Al-Dahi aptly observes, contemporary semiotics has increasingly attached importance to passion and psychic states as a means of affirming the existence of the subject, articulating its emotional investments, and clarifying its axiological and positional orientations within the textual universe (Al-Dahi 1).

It is within this rich theoretical horizon that Najib Al-Kilani's novel *Al-Yawm Al-Maw'ūd* (The Promised Day) emerges as a particularly compelling and productive narrative corpus. The novel does not merely recount a historical episode related to the Egyptian people's struggle against the Crusader campaigns, nor does it restrict itself to the conventions of epic or historical narration. Rather, it offers a complex narrative texture in which historical events are inseparably intertwined with affective experience. As Kharoubi and Mokhtari aptly describe it, the text constitutes "a vivid, pulsating image of resistance that carries within it encrypted messages" (1095), messages that operate not only at the level of ideological discourse but also, and more profoundly, at the level of passion. The novel thus transcends the limits of referential narration to delve into the depths of the struggling self, tracing its oscillations between hope and despair, certainty and doubt, heroic resolve and profoundly human trembling. In this sense, *The Promised Day* may be read as a genuine semiotic laboratory in which the manifestations of passion are continuously staged, tested, intensified, and transformed.

The problematics of the present study are grounded in an effort to probe these affective depths and to elucidate the

mechanisms through which passion becomes a driving force within the narrative. Central to this inquiry are questions such as: How are passions discursively constructed within *The Promised Day*? Through what semiotic procedures does Al-Kilani transform psychological affects—such as hope, anticipation, fear, anger, and righteous indignation—into effective forces capable of guiding acts of resistance and sustaining collective struggle? Beyond mere description, the study seeks to uncover the dialectical relationship between "passion" and "value," demonstrating how affective investments are aligned with ethical, religious, and national values within the narrative structure. Ultimately, it argues that the triumph of virtuous passions—those oriented toward sacrifice, faith, perseverance, and justice—constitutes a fundamental semiotic condition for the production of the text's ultimate meaning. This process culminates symbolically and narratively in the realization of the "Promised Day," not merely as a historical event, but as the semiotic fulfillment of a long trajectory of affective endurance, moral commitment, and collective aspiration.

#### **- The Concept of Passion: Between Linguistic Usage and Semiotic Regulation**

Any semiotic inquiry into passion necessarily begins with a rigorous conceptual clarification that distinguishes between its diffuse meanings in everyday language and its precise status as an analytical category within semiotic theory. In common linguistic usage, passion is typically associated with subjective inclination, emotional intensity, or temporary psychological fluctuation. It is often perceived as spontaneous, unstable, and closely tied to personal temperament or individual whim. Within this horizon, passion appears as an internal experience that precedes language and resists systematic description, thus remaining largely confined to the domain of psychology or moral discourse.

In contrast, semiotic regulation fundamentally redefines passion by relocating it from the realm of raw affect to that of structured meaning. Here, passion is no longer treated as a purely “psychological phenomenon” but rather as a “unit of semantic construction” produced, organized, and regulated by discourse itself. Semiotics does not ask whether a subject truly feels a given emotion in a psychological sense; instead, it examines how passion is encoded, narrated, and made intelligible through signs. Passion, therefore, becomes an effect of discourse—one that is governed by narrative logic, axiological systems, and modal configurations.

From a semantic perspective, passion is defined as “a change in the state of the subject resulting from its relationship with the object of desire” (Al-Dahi 2). This definition underscores the relational nature of passion: it does not exist in isolation but emerges from the interaction between a subject and an object invested with value. Passion is thus inseparable from valuation, since it presupposes that the object is desirable, feared, revered, or rejected. In this sense, passion is not simply felt; it is constructed through language as a value-laden state that reflects the subject’s position within the narrative universe. The semiotician’s task, therefore, is to analyze how discourse assigns meaning to passion, how it intensifies or attenuates it, and how it integrates it into broader semantic networks.

From a syntactic and narrative perspective, passion occupies a decisive position within the logic of action. Before the actant (Subject) engages in action, it undergoes a phase of affective modulation: it “desires,” “hopes,” “fears,” “hesitates,” or “anticipates.” Passion thus precedes and conditions action, functioning as the modality that orients the subject toward or away from its narrative program. Accordingly, the semiotics of passions does not limit itself to describing what happens in the narrative; rather, it interrogates the “modes of being” that precede action and render it meaningful. Passion becomes a structural determinant of the subject’s

trajectory within the text, shaping both its decisions and its ethical or axiological positioning (Shawi 521).

### – Roots and Pioneers: The Contributions of Greimas and Fontanille

The emergence of the semiotics of passions as a distinct theoretical framework is inseparable from the groundbreaking work of Algirdas J. Greimas and Jacques Fontanille, particularly their seminal 1991 publication *Semiotics of Passions: From States of Things to States of Soul*. This work represents a pivotal moment in the evolution of semiotic theory, as it marks a deliberate departure from earlier models that privileged action, performance, and transformation of states of affairs. Prior to this intervention, semiotics was predominantly concerned with what subjects do—how they acquire competence, execute programs, and achieve or fail in their quests.

Greimas and Fontanille, however, introduced a methodological and epistemological shift by restoring analytical centrality to the sensitive subject, that is, the subject as an affective being capable of experiencing tension, expectation, suffering, and fulfillment. As Al-Fawaz and Al-Ghayti observe, this shift entailed “restoring due consideration to the sensitive subject” (69), thereby expanding semiotics beyond the domain of external action into the interiority of discourse. The narrative subject was no longer conceived solely as an operator of functions but also as a bearer of states of soul.

This reconceptualization transformed affect from a marginal or residual category into a legitimate scientific object. Greimas and Fontanille demonstrated that passions are not irrational residues escaping structural analysis, but organized semiotic configurations governed by identifiable rules. The focus thus shifted toward the “mode of being of the subject,” emphasizing how affective states structure perception, evaluation, and decision-making within the narrative. In this framework, a crucial distinction is established

between the acting subject, which strives toward a goal, and the affected subject, which inhabits a state of tension or expectancy. Importantly, the authors argue that it is passion that grants action its meaning and value; without affective investment, action would remain mechanically functional and semantically impoverished (Shawi 525).

- **Procedural Mechanisms:  
Disposition and the  
Euphoric/Dysphoric Binary**

The analytical rigor of the semiotics of passions is ensured by a set of procedural mechanisms that allow affective phenomena to be systematically described within discourse. Among these mechanisms, the concept of disposition (*Dispositions*) occupies a central position. Disposition is understood as “a presupposed state of human existence” that precedes the actual emergence of a specific passion. It functions as a latent condition or psychological readiness that predisposes the subject to experience affect in a particular way (Al-Dahi 3). Disposition does not yet constitute passion proper; rather, it establishes the conditions under which passion may arise, intensify, or dissipate.

According to Fontanille, disposition involves “preparing the subject to receive the affective event,” which explains why certain narrative subjects appear to exist in a persistent state of anticipation, anxiety, vigilance, or hope even before a decisive event occurs. This preparatory phase is essential, as it situates passion within a temporal continuum rather than treating it as an abrupt emotional eruption. Through disposition, the narrative constructs a horizon of expectation that renders subsequent affective transformations both intelligible and meaningful.

Complementing this mechanism is the euphoric/dysphoric binary (*Euphorique/Dysphorique*), which serves as a fundamental tool for classifying affective orientations. In semiotic terms, passions are never neutral; they are always inscribed within

an axiological system that evaluates the subject’s relationship to its object. Euphoric passions correspond to states of harmony, proximity, and fulfillment, in which the subject experiences alignment with its object or values. Such states include hope, courage, confidence, and joy. Dysphoric passions, by contrast, reflect dissonance, separation, or loss, manifesting as fear, sorrow, despair, or collapse.

This binary structure governs the transformational dynamics of the novelistic text, as the narrative subject continually oscillates between euphoric and dysphoric states depending on its success or failure in realizing its narrative program (Al-Fawaz and Al-Ghayti 72). The analytical power of this framework lies in its capacity to trace the tension between these opposing poles and to demonstrate how psychological strain is converted into narrative energy. Through this process, passion emerges as a driving force that not only reflects the subject’s inner state but also actively reshapes the course of events and the overall meaning of the text.

❖ **Narrative Thresholds and the  
Emergence of Affect  
A Semiotic Study of  
Reception Spaces**

Textual thresholds in Najib Al-Kilani’s novelistic corpus go beyond their decorative or merely referential function to become anticipatory *dispositional structures* that govern the reader’s grasp of meaning prior to entering the main text. We are thus confronted with what Gérard Genette terms the “gray zone,” a space that exercises a form of *semiotic seduction*, through which the recipient is charged with preliminary affective states.

- **The Semiotics of the Title and the  
Dedication: The Dialectic of  
Anticipation and Ontological  
Certainty**

The title *Al-Yawm Al-Maw‘ūd* (*The Promised Day*) operates as a condensed *affective nucleus*. From a semio-linguistic perspective, the term “day” refers to a determinate temporal entity; however, its qualification as “promised” shifts it from

ordinary physical time to *semiotic time*, laden with sacrality and expectation. This title generates in the reader what may be termed the *passion of anticipation* (expectation), a tensional state that combines the foretelling of victory with apprehension about possible obstacles. As Kharoubi and Mokhtari note, the title here performs a function of “enigmatic illumination,” linking the reader’s sensibility to the prospect of historical redemption (1098).

The dedication, for its part, transfers passion from the public sphere to a deeper affective register. Al-Kilani writes: “I dedicate this story to the memory of those who sacrificed their lives in Mansoura, Damietta, and Fareskour... to those who believed that falsehood may prevail for a while but will inevitably fade, whereas truth possesses a lasting dominion” (Al-Kilani 5). This text is not a mere protocolary tribute; rather, it constitutes a *dispositional procedure* grounded in the binary of *sacrifice/justice*. Semiotically, Al-Kilani establishes here an *actualization of value*: grief for the martyrs (a dysphoric passion) is immediately absorbed and transcended by certainty in the triumph of truth (a euphoric passion). This affective opposition at the level of the threshold places the reader in a state of *emotional readiness for struggle* even before the dramatic conflict of the novel unfolds.

- **The Cover and the Preface: The Semiotics of the Sensible and the Production of Anticipation**

Through its iconic (visual) manifestations, the cover evokes scenes of conflict, thereby arousing *passions of tension* associated with confrontation with the “Other/occupier.” The preface, in turn, functions as an *affective pact* that forges a link between the historical (the Crusader campaigns) and the affective (resistance). Mohamed Al-Dahi argues that the semiotics of the sensible here reconfigures the psychological suffering produced by occupation, transforming it into *anticipatory energy* (2). Within the preface, the Egyptian people are represented as a *sensitive subject* caught in a struggle between the passion of *fear of dispossession* and that of *self-dignity*.

This threshold-level linkage establishes a *system of anticipation* through which the reader’s sympathy is affectively directed to align with the positions of the resisting characters even before engaging with their actions in the narrative.

❖ **Manifestations of Passions in the Narrative Text (Procedural Semiotic Analysis)**

In *Al-Yawm Al-Maw‘ūd* (*The Promised Day*), discourse departs from conventional historical narration to chart a veritable “geography of souls.” The semiotic hero in Al-Kilani’s work is not merely a hero of *action* but equally a hero of *passion*, insofar as passion becomes the *modal* driving force behind every narrative transformation.

- **Passions of Resistance: From Disposition to Modal Action**

*Courage* in the novel is represented as an existential condition that transcends mere physical daring to become a *modal stance*. This manifestation is evident in the Sheikh’s directive discourse:

“We, my son, do not fight for a person, nor do we battle for a transient purpose... We fight for God, for the homeland, and for the dignity that can only be reclaimed through blood” (Al-Kilani 48).

A semiotic analysis of this passage reveals that Al-Kilani forges a link between *passion* and *obligation* (modality of obligation). Courage here is not an affective choice but the outcome of the subject’s connection with objects of supreme value (God/homeland). This connection generates what Rawiya Shawi terms an “overwhelming desire for change” (528), whereby the distance between psychological state (faith) and practical action (combat) is effectively collapsed. The hero thus shifts from being a *subject affected* by injustice to a *subject acting*

in the name of truth, through the affective mediator of *sacred anger*.

- **Passions of Tension: The Dialectic of the Actualized Subject and the Realized Subject**

In moments of crisis, Al-Kilani does not portray his protagonists as mute automatons but as human subjects traversed by passions of tension. This is evident in his depiction of moments of doubt and affective anxiety:

“He was trembling—not from fear of death, but from fear of losing the hope for which he had lived... Would fate betray us at the decisive moment?” (Al-Kilani 112).

This passage constitutes a genuine laboratory for an *affective crisis of disposition*. We observe here a separation between *fear of physical annihilation* and *fear of losing the object of value/hope*. Semiotically, this reflects an *actualized subject* (*sujet actualisé*): a subject endowed with the desire to act yet afflicted by a disturbance at the level of modality—namely, anxiety about the unknown. This affective trembling is precisely what later endows victory with its semantic value; without this dysphoric tension (fear), the euphoric passion of triumph would lack profound semiotic significance.

- **The Semiotics of the Other: The Euphoric/Dysphoric Binary and Affective Blindness**

Passions in the novel are distributed according to a *semiotic square* that positions the *national subject* in opposition to the *occupying subject*. Al-Kilani describes Louis IX's camp as follows:

“Arrogance filled their chests, and insolence appeared in their gazes... They dreamed of the treasures of the East and saw these people as nothing more than slaves” (Al-Kilani 156).

Here we encounter a manifestation of *dysphoric passions*—namely arrogance and

greed. From the perspective of the semiotics of passions, arrogance engenders a state of *perceptual disjunction*, rendering the occupying subject incapable of perceiving the *force of passion* animating the opponent. This affective blindness paves the way for narrative defeat. Whereas the Egyptians possess *passions of connection*—to land and values—the Crusaders embody *passions of appropriation*—of treasure and possession. The conflict is thus, at its core, a struggle between passions that construct being and passions that merely seek to own.

- **The Impact of Passions on the Ontology of Meaning (Semantic and Axiological Depth)**

In *Al-Yawm Al-Maw'ūd* (*The Promised Day*), the function of passions does not remain confined to a superficial psychological description of characters; rather, it extends to become the core element and primary driving force behind the production of *deep meaning* in the text. Meaning in Najib Al-Kilani's fiction is not generated through the mere accumulation of discrete events, but through a *semiotics of the sensible* that renders affect an ontological bridge toward higher values.

- **The Affective Trajectory and the Production of Meaning: The Dialectic of Pain and Hope**

The flowing *dispositional trajectories* within the text contribute to transforming the novel from a simple historical chronicle of the Crusader campaign into a vibrant human discourse. The convergence of the passions of *anticipation*, *hope*, and *legitimate anger* produces what may be termed *semantic tension*—a tension that draws the reader into affective participation in the experience of resistance. Semiotically, meaning emerges from the womb of psychological suffering: the more the intensity of *dysphoric passions* generated by the occupier's brutality escalates, the greater the semantic value of the *euphoric passions* embodied in certainty of victory.

It is this opposition that renders *The Promised Day* a semantic nucleus symbolizing ultimate deliverance (Kharoubi and Mokhtari 1098). This semantic eruption is realized at the novel's climax, when passion shifts from a state of anxious waiting to one of resounding fulfillment:

"And the dawn of the Promised Day broke forth... and cries rose from every side: God is Greatest... God is Greatest... We have been liberated!" (Al-Kilani 240).

Analytically, the utterance "God is Greatest" functions not merely as a religious slogan but as a *semiotic operation* that signals the end of psychological tension and the beginning of a time of *complete conjunction* with the object of value (freedom). The text's deep meaning thus reaches completion through the transformation of *collective passion* from oppression to liberation, demonstrating that meaning in the novel is contingent upon the subject's capacity to mobilize its passions in order to transform reality.

#### - The Affirmation of Freedom and Religiosity: Passion as an Ideological Stance

Al-Kilani's creative acumen is evident in his ability to fuse *religious* and *national* passions into a single matrix that consolidates the values of freedom. Religiosity in the novel does not appear as a rigid ritual practice, but rather as an *existential passion of reassurance* that grants the subject the ability to transcend the instinct of survival in confronting death. The characters' affects evolve from instinctive emotional responses into firm *ideological stances*, wherein the experience of freedom is linked to a passion of *pride* and an absolute rejection of all forms of dispossession.

This organic interweaving of affect (fear/love) and value (religion/homeland) is what endows the text with its academic and aesthetic legitimacy. The *euphoric passions* rooted in Islamic reference thus become the strategic guarantor of the continuity of

resistant action (Shawi 530). This fusion is clearly discernible in the consciousness of the protagonist Marzouq, where the passion of love converges with the passion of jihad:

"He felt that his love for Yasmine was not a separate chapter from his love for the land... Her dignity was the dignity of the homeland, and the loss of one meant the loss of the other" (Al-Kilani 185).

Semiotically, this passage confirms that passions in *The Promised Day* are what shape the *ontology of meaning*: woman, homeland, and religion coalesce into a single *object of value* within the consciousness of the affected subject. Freedom, in Al-Kilani's vision, thus ceases to be a merely political objective attained through battles and becomes instead an existential and affective condition realized at the moment when the sensitive subject's passions align with its absolute values. The study ultimately concludes that the semiotics of passions in this novel restores due recognition to the resisting human being as a *feeling subject* prior to being an *acting subject*.

#### - Conclusion

In concluding this semiotic approach to Najib Al-Kilani's novel *Al-Yawm Al-Maw'ūd* (*The Promised Day*), a number of central findings may be articulated, demonstrating the effectiveness of the affective dimension in the construction of the narrative text:

- **First**, the study has shown that passion in the novel functions as an active *modality* rather than as a mere external description. Every act of struggle undertaken by the protagonists is preceded by a profound state of *disposition*, whereby "faith in truth" is transformed from a static emotional condition into a *modal obligation* that propels the subject toward sacrifice. This is clearly exemplified in the Sheikh's discourse, which links dignity to bloodshed (Al-Kilani 48).

- **Second**, the semiotic analysis has revealed a *dynamic of tension* within the text. Al-Kilani's hero is not portrayed as a rigidly idealized being but as a subject who undergoes *dispositional crises* and existential tremors (p. 112). These affective ruptures are precisely what endow the text with its humanity and deepen the meaning of "victory" as a form of psychological equilibrium before it becomes a tangible battlefield gain.
- **Third**, the novel succeeds in constructing a contrastive axiological system through the *semiotic square of passions*. It places passions of connection (certainty, hope, sacrifice) in opposition to passions of disjunction (arrogance, greed, insolence) that characterize the occupying camp (p. 156). This affective opposition renders *The Promised Day* the inevitable outcome of the triumph of spiritual values over material ones.
- **Fourth**, it becomes evident that *meaning* in Al-Kilani's fiction is generated only through the realm of the *sensible*. The final cry, "God is Greatest" (p. 240), is not merely an announcement of the end of war, but a declaration of the completion of the subject's *affective trajectory*, through which harmony with identity and faith is restored.

#### - Recommendations

In light of these findings, the study recommends rereading Islamic and historical literature from a modern semiotic perspective—one that does not remain confined to ideology but penetrates the *semiotics of bodies and souls*. It further calls upon researchers to intensify studies on the *semiotics of passions* in contemporary Arabic narrative, given this approach's capacity to uncover what remains unspoken in the psychological states of subjects experiencing existential or resistance-driven crises similar to those depicted by Al-Kilani in this epic work.

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