

The contemporary Arabic Novel and the juxtaposition arts in Samir Kacimi's Salalim Trolar

الرواية العربية المعاصرة وتجاوز الفنون - سلام ترولار لـ: سمير قسيمي أنموذجاً -

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ملخص:

وردت التقنية السينمائية في الروايات العربية المعاصرة بشكل لافت، حيث سعى أصحابها إلى توظيف أساليب سردية جديدة مستوحاة من فنّ السينما، وقد اتكّنوا في مشاريعهم الإبداعية على مجموعة من التقنيات السينمائية كالمونتاج واللفظة والكاميرا المتحركة وغيرها، مُدركين أنّ الرواية نصّ سرديّ قابل للتجديد والتأثير بتقنيات مستحدثة على مستوى الشكل والمضمون، وقابل أيضاً للتنوع في الأدوات والتقنيات التي يقدّم بها الروائي أفكاره ومنها التقنيات السينمائية التي تتجسّد عبر العملية الوصفية للمشاهد والشخصيات والوقائع السردية المتتالية.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى مقارنة مبدأ تجاوز الفنون في الرواية المعاصرة، من خلال رصد أهمّ التقنيات السينمائية الواردة في رواية (سلام ترولار لسمير قسيمي)، مع تحديد عناصر التقنية السينمائية وتبيين مواطن حضورها وكيفيات تجلّيها في الرواية ذاتها، وقد استندنا في بحثنا هذا على أدوات منهجية في مقدّماتها المنهج الوصفي بالإضافة إلى المقاربة البينوية والأسلوبية القائمتين كذلك على آليات الوصف والتحليل.

كلمات مفتاحية: تقنية، رواية، سينما، تصوير، تجاوز.

Abstract:

Cinematic techniques have prominently emerged in contemporary Arabic novels, as their authors endeavored to use narrative methods inspired by the art of cinema. They adopted a variety of cinematic techniques in their creative projects, such as editing, shot composition, mobile camera, and others. They realized that the novel is a narrative text capable of renewal and enrichment through innovative techniques in form and content, as well as adaptable in the tools and techniques through which the novelist introduces ideas, including cinematic techniques manifested in the description of scenes, characters, and successive narrative events.

This study aims to identify the principle of the juxtaposition of arts in contemporary novels by examining the key cinematic techniques found in Samir Kacimi's novel Salalim Trolar. It involves determining the elements of cinematic technique and illustrating their presence and manifestations within the novel. Our research is based on methodological tools, mainly the descriptive structuralist and stylistic approaches, which rely on the mechanisms of description and analysis.

Keywords:

Technique, Novel, Cinema, Imagery, Juxtaposition

1. Introduction:

The presence of cinematic techniques in contemporary novels has become a form of experimentation in structure and expression. Novels now borrow several cinematic techniques, enabling novelists to create innovative visual patterns under the guise of adventure and renewal, which are considered artistic necessities to align with developments in creative writing. While some authors have adapted their novels into films, novels have started incorporating narrative techniques from cinema. This incorporation explains the differing opinions among scholars about the impact and interaction between the art forms of novels and cinema.

In this research paper, we address the problem statement of how cinematic techniques, in all their visual and aesthetic dimensions, manifest in literary texts, utilizing Samir Kacimi's novel *Salalim Trolar* as a model. The focus is on identifying cinematic techniques in the novel, such as levels of montage and editing, types of cinematic shots, and shooting angles from all perspectives, encompassing background, foreground, and overhead.

We hypothesized that the principle of the juxtaposition of arts necessitates a creative energy that enables a single artistic work to draw from multiple art forms without compromising the specific features and aesthetic elements of the literary genre. Furthermore, a literary novel can benefit from certain stylistic and visual techniques specific to other arts, primarily cinema.

The study's objectives aim to determine the manifestations of cinematic techniques in the novel despite the vast differences between the two art forms. Moreover, they seek to clarify the value of novelistic experimentation, particularly in the juxtaposition of arts, and its impact on creating a wide imaginative scope for the novel that attracts readers and provides them with enjoyment and benefit.

1. The juxtaposition of arts between the novel and cinema:

Some contemporary novelists have aimed to blur the boundaries between art forms, blending imaginative and illusory literary visions with visual and scenic artistic visions, seeking to fulfill both enjoyment and utility simultaneously. This goal is pursued by all arts, and contemporary Arabic novels are not exempt from this endeavor. If the recipient seeks an exciting and enjoyable imaginative material that responds to their tastes, interests, and intellectual and artistic references, then the contemporary novel seeks to fulfill this goal by investing in some artistic techniques inspired by cinema, visual arts, and drama.

In line with what has been said, cinematic techniques are notably present in contemporary Arabic novels, with authors striving to use new narrative methods inspired by the art of cinema, such as montage, shots, and the moving camera. These authors recognize the role cinema plays alongside literature, especially the novel, in addressing human issues and portraying reality¹. Novelists demonstrate that "the field of the novel is open to innovation and modernity, which lie in form and content and in the tools that novelists employ to introduce their ideas and the techniques they use"². These include cinematic techniques that manifest through the descriptive process of scenes, characters, and successive narrative events.

3. The Presence of Cinematic Technique in the Novel "Salalim Trolar "

Several artistic factors have facilitated the incorporation of cinematic techniques in Salalim Trolar. Notable among these are the abundance and density of events, coupled with the rapid camera movements in the narrative scenes. Furthermore, the method of narration, where the author describes events from an external perspective as if a camera were capturing the scenes from a distance, contributes to this effect.

These components have made the novel suitable for adaptation into a successful film, particularly since its events transcend the boundaries of time and space to depict a shaky political and social reality marked by classism and disparities among its people. The author portrays individuals living in this chaotic reality through an engaging narrative style that mimics extraordinary and supernatural tales. This approach demonstrates a satirical narrative dimension that critiques societal flaws and exposes contradictions through stories inspired by the depths of Algerian society, which, according to the author, is still subjected to ideologies imported from across the Mediterranean, potentially promoting absurdity in managing that society.

3.1. Cinematic Editing Technique in the Novel "Salalim Trolar":

Cinematic montage is considered one of the most significant achievements in cinema. As noted, "montage represents the most important work of the director; it is his style, his method of writing, the way we stitch scenes together to create coherence"³. This technique is also highly prevalent in modern novels. It involves arranging film scenes to produce a series of coherent shots that contribute to the film's distinctiveness while also reflecting the director's intellectual profile, ideological stance, and unique perspective on reality and existence.

Montage is a crucial technique that bridges the gap between two influential arts: literature and cinema. Therefore, the process of montage in novels closely mirrors that in cinema, both in aesthetic artistry and shared mechanisms and techniques. These include:

3.1.1. The Shot: The shot is the focal point upon which cinematic editing is based, necessitating extreme precision during scene filming, particularly speed and shooting distance. Simply put, it is what the camera records in a single operation. Shots can be based on distance, area, and subject⁴. They come in different types, including long shots, close-ups, extreme close-ups, wide shots, extreme wide shots, and medium shots (in terms of distance). Furthermore, shots can be slow, very slow, fast, very fast, and static (in terms of movement). In the novel *Salalim Trolar*, the following shots correspond to these types:

- **Close-up Shot:** The person or scene is captured from a close angle, focusing on specific details such as facial expressions. For instance: "Her head was large with a broad forehead, and two small eyes almost without eyelashes. Her eyebrows were connected, resembling the wings of a bird"⁵. Hence, the author portrayed the character's face from a close angle, highlighting some intricate details that draw the image closer to the reader.
- **Extreme Close-up Shot:** It focuses on the closest and most detailed characteristics, avoiding the description of surrounding objects. It captures the precise expressions of the described object or person. For example: "He smiled again, and his eyes reflected his yellow color on his pupils. He thought they might be made of pure gold"⁶. In this example, the author highlighted some intricate expressions on the character's face, such as the color of the eyes and pupils, disregarding the details of the surrounding objects. This approach demonstrates the nature of the narrative work, which depends on detailed description and scrutiny of the characters' situations and emotions.
- **Long Shot:** The image of the scene or person is captured from a distant angle without camera movement. For instance: "He stared as soon as Olga let out a sudden cry of sorrow: 'Papa... Papa,' as she watched the Mahindra truck disappear from her sight"⁷, in this excerpt, the author captured the scene from a distant angle, emphasized by the phrase (disappear from her sight), at a point shared with the character Olga, describing the distance of the truck carrying her father.

▪ **Fast Shot:** This includes capturing a series of rapid movements that occur in a very short period. For instance: "The bags toppled behind the truck, and something fell out of one with a ringing sound as it hit the ground. Immediately, Issam Kashkasi rushed to pick it up, eager like a five-year-old child"⁸ In this excerpt, the presence of a series of shots taken according to fast movements happening in a very short time indicates the author's precise focus and ability to visualize and observe the details of the narrative scene in his novel.

▪ **Slow Shot:** Actions emerge to be slow, meaning they take much longer than fast shots. For instance: "As soon as they placed the bags behind the Mahindra truck, the driver started it. It moved slowly due to cars parked on both sides of the street and its sidewalks"⁹. The movement in this scene emerges to be very slow compared to the pace of time in previous situations and events, as the slowness of the movement here is linked to the nature of the situation and its context.

▪ **Medium Shot:** It captures the scene from a medium distance, neither too close nor too far, indicating some characteristics of the character or scene without capturing all its intricate details. For instance: "When he stood by her grave marker, he read her name on it, imagining that he would burst into tears. He read her birth and death dates, and that ridiculous phrase 'may she rest in peace,' as if there was a possibility that God would forgive her"¹⁰. Hence, the medium shot is not taken from a close or far distance but from a distance between the two, demonstrating some features of the character and some details of the situation without capturing all its details as in the wide or extreme close-up shots.

3.1.2. Fragmentation / Dissection:

Refers to the extraction of scenes from their natural place and designated space, and then reshaping, attaching, or transferring them to another place unfamiliar to them, in search of a new realism for things and places¹¹. It is worth noting that while traditional narrative time progresses in a sequential and consecutive direction, in contemporary narrative, it is fragmented and discontinuous in a disjointed manner. Accordingly, narrative time is the crucial component upon which the processes of fragmentation and composition depend. In contemporary narrative, it functions on two primary levels: the first relies on the principle of retrieval, indicating the shift of textual events from the present to the past, and the principle of anticipation, demonstrating the anticipation and projection of events that have not yet been completed. The second is based on the principles of summarization and deletion, which work to slow down the narrative scene, halting or slowing down the pace of narration through descriptive pauses or scenes that weaken the flow of time driving

events. These are techniques characteristic of cinematic scenes relying on the interplay of times, images, and rapid transitions between spatial spaces through a compositional channel where events are organized and harmonized. In the novel *Salalim Trolar*, the following models are encountered:

▪ **Flashback:** This involves pausing the flow of events to recall some of them from the past to the present in the form of a memory narrative. For instance: "It had happened months earlier that the elevator of the Pavololo building unexpectedly broke down. Since he lived on the top floor, he attempted in vain to persuade his neighbors of the necessity to repair the elevator. At that time, it was believed that the people were not concerned with anything other than being present and living happily, provided by a government that loved them"¹². Hence, we find a memory narrative of events that occurred in the past, recalled in the present.

▪ **Anticipation:** It is the anticipation of events that have not yet happened, through hints and implications that foresee future events that have not yet occurred. For instance: "Of course, we will carry out his will, and leave you this apartment, your monthly allowance will also be regularly delivered to you, other than that, nothing"¹³, in this passage, we find an anticipation or foresight of events that have not yet happened, expressed within a context semantically related to the scene or event.

▪ **Deletion:** It is the process of abandoning detailed narration of events that happened in previous time periods and suffice with demonstrating them explicitly or implicitly. For instance: "Two years passed after that, during which nothing significant occurred, except that he moved from a rural house, where he and his family had lived for years, to a two-bedroom flat in the city center"¹⁴, the writer here simply showed some events that happened in previous time periods, through expressions that indicate the density of events and their succession, such as "Two years passed" and "for years", as an attempt to maintain the logical sequence of events and avoid elaboration in mentioning them.

▪ **Pause:** It is when the narration is interrupted by the narrator's focus on describing details of events, characters, or scenes, which may take numerous pages of the novel. For instance: "The street was unusually lit, unlike the inner streets of the capital. Thus, there was... a hardware store closed"¹⁵, the writer within this descriptive pause, narrated the details of the event, where the narrative movement halted, to provide the reader with a comprehensive and detailed view of that event.

3.1.3. Arrangement:

When the narrator engages in processes of collecting, omitting, introducing, and delaying some narrative scenes, and combining them in specific artistic ways that offer the narrative text a cohesive structure to fulfill the desired aesthetic effect. Considering that the narrative text now depends on the composition of scenes, their fragmentation, and the rearrangement of their temporal rhythm, similar to a cinematic film. This arrangement and composition have specific connotations. While the composition in a cinematic film relied on the link between scenes, in a narrative text, it is based on linking and composing scenes, as well as arranging them¹⁶, Arrangement is the final stage of cinematic construction or editing after shooting different scenes and shots, where they are arranged according to the connotations of the cinematic text (the scenario), leaving an aesthetic effect on the viewer. The same applies to narrative scenes, which are compiled and organized within the narrative text or discourse, ensuring a logical arrangement, semantic sequence, and the desired aesthetic impact.

The distribution of scenes in the novel *Salalim Trolar*, and the fragmentation of shots across the seven chapters, keeps pace with its artistic connotations. The process of arrangement demonstrates a high level of creative skill from the writer, in addition to precision and awareness in choosing suitable semantic units for the novel's subject. Readers can perceive this through the compilation of scenes arranged according to their event sequences from beginning to end.

3.2. Camera's Eye: It is not less significant to highlight the importance of the camera technique/camera movement than the technique of cinematic editing/composition.

"For the novel intersects with cinematic technique, where the camera observes events in a neutral manner, deliberately capturing and introducing them as scenes without connection or commentary, in the form of narratives juxtaposed without logical linkage. Most of these narratives are represented through the form of cinematic scenes where the narrator plays the role of the camera"¹⁷.

Indicating that the narrator visualizes the scenes and introduces them from different angles, focusing on specific aspects or objects or features, hinting at meanings without explicitly stating them. This is done without commentary or dialogue, much like the camera's eye during the filming of cinematic scenes, putting the receiver in a position to connect between those scenes and to search for the voice of the photographer/narrator, in order to understand his intentions. The narrator captures scenes through the camera's eye, introducing them from different angles,

focusing on specific aspects, objects, or features that imply meanings without expressing them. This is done without commentary, just like the camera does during filming cinematic scenes. This puts the recipient in a position to connect these scenes and delve into the voice of the photographer/narrator, in order to understand his intentions. Samir Kacimi noticed the details of events in the novel *Salalim Trolar*, following them closely, then recorded them objectively or subjectively as follows:

▪ **Objective Camera:** The writer (narrator) captures the dramatic scene without commentary or expression of opinion, "After some effort, he settled himself, then dragged his bulky body and managed to reach his wheelchair, which he had placed beside the bed. He moved his wheelchair with a desire to leave his bedroom for the kitchen, to return from there with a bottle of cold water, without bothering to light the room or the corridor"¹⁸. Hence, the writer contented himself with the role of the neutral observer who watches the event without intervening to express his emotions or stance towards it.

▪ **Subjective Camera:** The writer (narrator) shares the emotions of the character and interacts with his feelings and situations, "With his transition, his writing habits changed; there was no longer a space for him to retreat to... In fact, he had to confront it, if it weren't for an unexpected illness and without prior thought, he decided to quit smoking"¹⁹. In this lengthy excerpt, we observe the writer's (narrator's) interaction with the character and his situations, noting his movements, tracking his transitions, and describing his feelings deeply.

3.3. Camera Angles:

These are the viewpoints from which the scene or image is captured. The angle from which the shot is taken demonstrates the director's stance towards the subject and identifies much of its meaning. Cinema books tell us that shooting a character from eye level puts the viewer on equal footing with the character, while a high angle, where the camera is directed downwards, makes us feel superior to the character or decreases his significance. Conversely, a low angle, where the camera is directed upwards, provides the viewer with a sense of the character's superiority and dominance over them. Camera angles are classified relied on how the angle or position of the camera is used in relation to the subject being photographed. Therefore, three primary angles can be identified in the novel "*Salalim Trolar*", through which the narrator captures scenes and observes events and characters from multiple and different perspectives:

▪ **The Back Angle:** It introduces an image of the scene or character from behind, as if capturing someone from their back or depicting them walking in a certain direction, as if the narrator stands behind them. For instance: "The driver continued to watch them with his eyes until they disappeared from his sight"²⁰, and similarly: "He left without looking back"²¹. The scenes show a silent view from a back angle, focusing on observing the movement while in a state of distance. The previous scenes and images captured from the back angles demonstrate that the narrator's eye is on the subject or character from the rear, merely observing their movements while maintaining a distance. There is no evident or explicit dialogue between the characters and the back angle represents a silent image. This type of camera angle shows specific connotations that may indicate the narrator's desire to monitor and track everything related to the movements of the characters within the text, even from behind, as if it were an eager eye keen on identifying the details of the events conducted by the characters, leading the reader, for a brief period, to imagine that the narrator is detached from the narrative, content with description alone without participating in the details of the narrative. As if the narrator merges with the camera, which focuses on capturing the back shots to demonstrate the level of vision and emphasize the dramatic function of the back angle.

• **The Front Angle:** The opposite of the back angle, where the narrator seeks to introduce an image from the front as if facing the described character. In this angle, the writer (narrator) captures the image from the front angle, i.e., the image facing them. For instance: "The face of a man in his mid-forties, as black as coal, with a broad nose and a narrow forehead, and wide cheeks. He seemed smiling in the picture, but there was something in his eyes that tainted that smile with a wilt that made the writer feels he was forced to smile"²². The writer (narrator) appears here in a position opposite to the described character, observing, contemplating and describing them. The front angle necessitates direct scrutiny of the described subject, therefore the narrator becomes the voice of the character being watched, seen, and contemplated. They delve directly into the consciousness of the character, describing with his voice, seeing with his eyes, and contemplating with his thoughts. Accordingly, the shot taken from a front angle is often a self-reflective shot where the narrator shares the feelings and sensations of his characters.

▪ **The High Angle:** The picture is taken from above, as if the narrator is hovering over the scene or the character, describing them from above. The high angle view tends to reduce the character or object "The perspective in this angle is from above. For instance: "This way, he managed to see the spot where his cigarette butt fell, and as he looked at it, another quirky question occurred to him: Where do all the cigarette butts I have thrown from my flat balcony go?²³" Hence, the writer (narrator) takes his shots from above, a perspective often indicated by filmmakers as the "bird's-eye view," which looks from above and includes the details of the object below.

4. Results:

- Based on this descriptive study, several key points can be drawn:
- Borrowing artistic components from cinema and incorporating them into novels introduces a form of experimentation sought at representing a new style of Arabic novel that interacts aesthetically with various literary and non-literary genres.
 - Contemporary novels approach artistic production similarly to cinema, with media operating on comparable semantic and formal levels.
 - The juxtaposition of arts promotes openness to ideas from creators across different artistic domains, enriching creative works in language and style and boosting their imaginative and visual capacities.

5. Conclusion:

Artistic depiction in contemporary novels increasingly mirrors cinematic techniques, such as scene assembly and arrangement, as well as narrative fragmentation and the intertwining of events, while maintaining a linear timeline that ensures the coherence and artistic unity of these events. The modern novel under study presents several diverse images and scenes intricately woven together in terms of time and place, creating the impression that the reader is watching a film with shots filmed, edited, and arranged according to the narrator's logic. This approach closely aligns with the principles of cinematic depiction.

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- ³ René Gilson, Jean Cocteau on the Cinema Screen, trans.: Fathi Al-Ashry, 2nd ed., Supreme Council of Culture, Cairo, 2000, p.82.
- ⁴ Bernard F. Dick, Anatomy of Film, trans.: Mohammed Mounir Al-Asbahi, 6th ed., Publications of the Ministry of Culture, General Organization for Cinema, Damascus, 2013, p.94/95.
- ⁵ Samir Kacimi, Salalim Trolar, 1st ed., Al-Barzakh Publications, Algeria, 2019, p.25.
- ⁶ Same source, p.47.
- ⁷ Same source, p.49.
- ⁸ Same source, p.47.
- ⁹ Same source, p.43.
- ¹⁰ Same source, p.57.
- ¹¹ See, Amri Banu Hashim, Experimentation in the Maghreb Novel (Betting on the Achievements of the World Novel), n.d., Dar Al-Aman, Morocco, 2015, p.174/175.
- ¹² Samir Kacimi, Salalim Trolar, p.28.
- ¹³ Same source, p.31.
- ¹⁴ Same source, p.58.
- ¹⁵ Same source, p.31.
- ¹⁶ See, Mahdi Salah Al-Juwaïdi, Visual Formation in the New Novelistic Text, p.199.
- ¹⁷ Amri Banu Hashim, Experimentation in the Maghreb Novel (Betting on the Achievements of the World Novel), p.182.
- ¹⁸ Samir Kacimi, Salalim Trolar, p.20.
- ¹⁹ Same source, p.58.
- ²⁰ Samir Kacimi, Salalim Trolar, p.30.
- ²¹ Same source, p.70.
- ²² Same source, p.70.
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