

## An Interpretive Semiotic Analysis of Colour in “The Night Circus”: Cultural and Moral Connotations

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### Summary:

The current research paper explores the semiotic values of colour in the novel *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern, and (black, white, and red) are the major colours that are investigated in the context of cultural and moral meanings. Basing on the works of Kress and van Leeuwen (2002) on visual grammar and Barthes on semiotic framework, the study explores the functions of colours not just as an aesthetic quality and signifier system that depicts overlay symbolic meanings within the story. This paper uses a qualitative, interpretive approach to explore the way in which certain colours convey some of the central themes including identity, duality, love, power, and sacrifice. As shown in the analysis, the black and white, which is traditionally related to contrast and balance is reorganized in the novel to question binary moral assumptions and as whereas red is used as a symbol of passion, vitality and danger. The results are relevant to the literature semiotics as they indicate that the visual aspects like colour can influence the emotional and cultural interpretation of literary texts by the readers. This paper provides an idea concerning the semiotic possibility of colour as a device of narrative creation and symbolic multifariousness in contemporary fiction.

### 1- INTRODUCTION

Colour can be used as visual code system. It is very significant in meaning making of literature. Besides the descriptive role, colour can be a sign that is culturally and ethically charged by conveying a certain image of the characters, settings, and events to the readers. Colour symbolism in the narrative fiction can be very subtle and the moral judgments, cultural values and psychological states are hinted at, without being directly stated. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2002) note, colour is a semiotic modality, which has its grammar and allows building hierarchical relationships, interconnections, and emotional impacts.

In her novel *The Night Circus* (2011), Erin Morgenstern does not use colour as a superficial way to ornament the story but it is very much a part of the symbolic structure of the tale. The novel takes place in a magic, monochromatic circus, which seemingly out of the blue, is using a small palette of colours that is dominated with black, white and red. Worn by the reveurs, who are the fans of the circus, Red is a contrast to the black and white of which the visual identity of the organization is composed. The restricted colour palette is introduced by emphasizing the cultural and moral meaning behind each colour, and is therefore in need of a semiotic analysis.

These colours and the interplay of colour portray much greater thematic issues of the novel: the conflict between illusion and reality, the simultaneous presence of life and death, and the ethical uncertainty of competition and sacrifice. Pastoreau (2008) holds that Western cultural traditions assign passion and energy and threat to red, mystery, strength and sorrow to black, and innocence, restraint, and barrenness to white. However, in *The Night Circus*, these typical associations can be re-thought, reversed and refined with additional meanings.

This paper analyses the role of these three colours as moral and cultural indicators in the novel based on the theory of myths by Barthes (1972) and the area of social semiotics by Kress and van Leeuwen. The research aims to express the role of colour in generating meaning and involvement of the reader through the description of the novel, pattern of story narration, and symbolic anti-theses.

Through this analysis, the paper seeks to contribute to the field of literary semiotics by demonstrating the interpretive richness of colour as a narrative device and its role in shaping moral and cultural discourse in contemporary fantasy literature.

## 2- THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Semiotics and Colour as a Visual Mode

Social semiotics reconceptualizes meaning-making as a multimodal, culturally situated activity: signs do not carry fixed meanings but are produced and negotiated in social practices (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Within this approach, colour is treated as a fully-fledged semiotic mode with a 'grammar' of choices (distribution, brightness, saturation, and hue) that sign-makers deploy to construct meaning and guide interpretation. Colour's affordances, such as contrast, emphasis, and unity, work systematically to achieve social and ideological implications in visual texts,

according to Kress and van Leeuwen's work, which places colour alongside other semiotic resources (image, layout, and language).

Literary semiotics continues to be influenced by Roland Barthes' explanation of connotation and myth, which holds that once a sign is interpreted beyond its denotative level, it engages in second-order meaning-formation (myth) that normalizes cultural values (Barthes, 1972). Barthes' insistence that cultural meanings are layered and ideological helps explain why colours in fiction often function simultaneously as descriptive details and as carriers of cultural mythologies (e.g., 'innocence' for white; 'danger' for red).

## 2.2 Cultural and Historical Perspectives on Colour

Colour meanings are not universal; rather, they are historically varied and culturally generated, according to historical and cultural studies. Black has represented mourning, sartorial elegance, clerical authority, and rebellion in various eras. Michel Pastoureau's historical studies of single colours, such as *Black: A History*, show how the social meanings of colours change over time, emphasizing the need to analyze colour within cultural-historical contexts rather than as fixed symbols. Similar to this, John Gage's extensive history of colour in Western civilization places a strong emphasis on how colours are viewed in literature and visual culture through practice, symbolism, and advancements in colour technology and aesthetics.

Psychological and semiotic investigations of colour (e.g., Eva Heller; surveys in colour semiotics literature) complement historical work by documenting recurrent affective associations (warmth, arousal, calm) and the role of saturation/brightness in emotional response. These findings are helpful in connecting narrative descriptions of colour to likely reader responses. In summary, the psychological and cultural-historical literatures collectively imply that writers can both exploit and challenge well-known colour associations to elicit emotional and ideological responses.

## 2.3 Colour in Literary and Multimodal Studies

Within literary studies, colour has been studied as a motif and as a structural device that contributes to world-building, symbolism, and tonal modulation (Gage, 1999). Literary description should be viewed as a location of multimodal meaning-making, according to recent multimodal and visual culture scholarship. This is because authors use language to create visual designs that work similarly to visual

images and can be examined using the same semiotic techniques (Kress & van Leeuwen; Machin). Affective orientation, focalization, and narrative point of view are all influenced by hue, contrast, and distribution in textual description, according to colour-focused semiotics.

#### 2.4 Scholarship on 'The Night Circus' and the Gap in Colour-Focused Analysis

Critical work on Erin Morgenstern's 'The Night Circus' has tended to address its magical-realism techniques, non-linear narration, world-building, and fan cultures (studies and theses consider its enchantment, fandom of the rêveurs, and visual emphasis), but systematic semiotic analyses that foreground colour as a multimodal, socially situated sign are comparatively rare. Several theses and journal pieces describe the novel's striking black-and-white palette and the rêveurs' red scarves as motifs, yet they often stop short of applying recent social semiotic or visual grammar frameworks to explain how colour functions ideologically and morally across the text. This gap justifies a focused study that combines Kress & van Leeuwen's visual grammar with cultural-historical colour studies to interpret black, white, and red in the novel.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Social Semiotics and the Grammar of Colour

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2002, 2006) social semiotic approach, which views colour as a semiotic mode with its own "grammar," is the main source of inspiration for this study. According to this concept, meaning-making is a socially situated process in which sign-makers intentionally use semiotic resources like hue, saturation, value (lightness), purity, and modulation in order to achieve communicative goals. Kress and van Leeuwen outline some of the very important roles that colour plays in visual communication, including:

- 1-Differentiation, specifying against each other elements or groups.
- 2-Association: joining the elements of the association with a common colour.
- 3-Emphasis: using contrast to direct attention.
- 4-Aesthetic unity: creating harmony with the use of consistent colours.

These ideas apply to literature as well, as writers "paint with words" through descriptions of colours to organize perception, to imply connections and to elicit feelings. Morgenstern's constant use of a black-white-red colour-scheme in *The Night Circus* lends itself to exploration using this paradigm because it displays aspects of both aesthetic unity and difference (circus vs. reveurs).

### 3.2 Barthes Mythologies, Second Order Signification

Roland Barthes' (1972) theory of connotation and myth adds a second level of interpretation into the analysis. For Barthes, denotative meaning (literal colour description) works alongside connotative meaning (cultural associations) and second order signification (myth). In a similar way, the description of the black of the circus tents goes beyond material description. It evokes meaning shared culturally that positions the circus as a liminal and otherworldly Cornelia Sandu Thompson space

### 3.3 Cultural-Historical Colour Studies

According to Pastoureaux's (2008) colour meanings are historically and culturally contingent. In the nineteenth century the approximate period evoked in 'The Night Circus' black & white clothing carried specific social codings: black could signify bourgeois elegance or artistic rebellion; white often suggested social purity or ceremonial formality; red signaled vitality but also impropriety, depending on context. These historical perspectives help give a more profound semiotic meaning of the text by applying the cultural imagination of the late Victorian and Edwardian palette by Morgenstern.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

The qualitative research design used in this study is the interpretive, grounded in the lite rare semiotics. The aim is to interpret the cultural and moral implications of the use of colour allusions in the story structure of The Night Circus, not the frequency of their use. Symbolic meaning is most effectively studied through qualitative research, where the focus is on the in-depth understanding but not quantification as Creswell (2014) notes.

### 4.2 Data Source

The Night Circus by Erin Morgenstern (2011) is used as the primary source of information, with particular focus made on the parts, which talk about or evoke the imagery of the colours red, white, and black. Semiotics, colour symbolism, and Victorian cultural history peer-reviewed academic sources as well as critical reviews of the book are all examples of secondary data. These sources provide the contextual background on which accurate cultural interpretation can occur.

#### 4.3 Sampling Strategy

Since this research paper is interpretive in nature, the purposive sampling technique was employed to extract the text passages that directly or indirectly mention the three colours of focus. The text must satisfy the following requirements in order to be included:

- \_ the text should show some possibility of cultural or moral significance other than mere description.
- \_ the colour should play a vital role in the description of a scene, object, costume or a symbolic event.

#### 4.4 Analytical Framework

The analysis consists of three steps:

1-Descriptive Identification: Listing and summarizing the all the pertinent colour reference in the novel.

2-Semiotic Coding: The grammar of colour developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2002) was used to recognize the functional roles (differentiation, association, emphasis, and aesthetic unity).

3-Cultural-Moral Interpretation: Citing the idea of connotation and myth by Barthes (1972), we can apply it to find more meaningful information about the painting, which is backed by history (Pastoureau, 2008; Gage, 1999).

#### 4.5 Data Analysis

##### 4.5.1 Descriptive Role of Black in the Novel

The visual environment of the black experience of the Night Circus creates its aesthetics and atmosphere of the emotional environment. Morgenstern also makes use of black frequently, as a hint of beauty as well as mystery. There is one extraordinary paragraph which tells about:

“Black velvet curtains sway in the breeze, their folds swallowing the flicker of candlelight” (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 42).

The combination of touch saturation velvet and visual blackness is used to support black as a sense-blocker (capable of absorbing as much as it reveals) and as a symbolic blocker (capable of concealing as much as it reveals).

One more scene allows to perceive the interaction of black and the liminality of the circus:

“The blackness of the sky above the circus feels heavier, deeper, as though it belongs to another world entirely” (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 103).

In this case, black turns cosmic and other worldly, which identifies the circus as a place of passage between realities.

### 1. Functional Analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen)

In a social semiotic approach, black in the novel does the following:

- Differentiation: Black establishes the visual identity of the circus in contrast to the colourful extravagance of Victorian fairs. The black monochrome aesthetic is anchored on black. Morgenstern writes:

"The tents were striped black and white, like a great chessboard set up under the night sky" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 42).

In this case, black does not simply act as a decorative element but a calculated decision that makes the circus stand out of the historical ones.

- Framing: Black is commonly used as a visual frame through which magic acts are projected making them that more striking. For instance:

"Against the black-draped stage, the sparks from the illusion danced like fireflies in the night" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 87).

This exploitation of black increases the element of spectacle and moments of enchanter have an opportunity to visually explode on its shores.

- Salience/Emphasis: The black attracts attention through the use of contrast and implies mystery. One example is:

"Black velvet curtains sway in the breeze, their folds swallowing the flicker of candlelight" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 42).

The enjoyable artistry of the interplay among texture and darkened eventuality spot black's absorptive quality it hides as-not-as-as revelation.

- Vector: Black has a vector that leads the reader's eye to the themes of secrecy, danger and otherworldliness. The narrative notes:

"The blackness of the sky above the circus feels heavier, deeper, as though it belongs to another world entirely" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 103).

This deep sky functions to offer up a visual vector to a place beyond reality, thus functioning to reinforce the circus as a circulating liminal space.

### 2-Cultural Connotations:

In late 19th century Western culture, black was a complex signifier that bore meaning at once of elegance and sophistication and of mourning and mortality (Pastoureau, 2008). This duality is reflected in the use of black presently by Morgenstern. For example: "She moves like liquid shadow, every gesture swallowed

in black, her form barely distinct from the air around her" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 211).

The performer's colour black represents a sense of both attraction and danger, and disappearance, summation of the circus's seductiveness and danger.

Mythic Layer (Second-Order Signification by Barthes)

On the level of the myth, black is the morality play of the central magical competition. It becomes the secret and power of binding visual language. Consider: "The black ink on the competition's binding contract glistened as though it was still wet, the words themselves seeming to breathe" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 134).

Through Barthes' framework, the black ink as a sign in itself does not just mean legality, but a living symbol of a shadowy pact, a mythic representation of power hidden in beauty.

#### 4. Interpretive Summary

Black becomes the visual and symbolic cornerstone of the identity of the circus in The Night Circus. Functionally, it frames the mystical happening, focuses the attention on the element of mystery, and separates the circus from its historical context. On a cultural level, it links sophistication and death and on a mythic level, it's a symbol of danger, concealment and the unspoken price of enchantment. Within the monochrome palette of the novel, however, black is both a visual constant and a theme anchor, maintaining the atmosphere of elegance racked with uncertainty.

##### 4.5.2 Descriptive Role of White in the Novel

White is the opposite of black for circus's signature palette and is an important part of the atmosphere of The Night Circus. Morgenstern has used white throughout to represent purity, illumination and otherworldliness. For example:

"The white stripes of the tents gleam under the moonlight, bright enough to seem almost translucent" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 7).

What's more, white isn't static - it plays light and creates a luminous, ethereal presence in preference to the depth of the black.

In another scene white assumes a tactile quality:

"Snow falls over the circus, each flake luminous in the lamplight, settling like whispers upon the tents" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 243).

This image blends the materiality of the snow with conventional softness of the colour-white, and reinforces its association with delicacy and quiet enchantment. 1-1-Functional Analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen)

Through a social semiotic perspective, white in the novel plays the following roles:

- **Differentiation:** White is used to define elements in the circus visual environment especially when used with black. The iconic "striped black and white tents" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 42) to set the circus apart from the more colourful Victorian fairs so as to create a unique and balanced monochrome identity. This marvelous juxtaposition underlines the uniqueness of the circus in the riot of Victorian entertainment. The iconic description:

"The tents were striped black and white, like a great chessboard set up under the night sky" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 42),

Clearly identifies the white as a key part of the unique identity for the circus and distinguishes it from the colourful Victorian fairs, a balanced contrast of colour

- **Framing:** Less often used than black to surround frames, white sometimes does use to frame characters or moments in an attempt to give them some aura of purity or illumination. For example, Morgenstern describes a performer: "She wore a dress of shimmering white, glowing softly in the dim light, as if untouched by the darkness around her" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 176). This use of white implies unconsciously her as a figure of innocence in the context of mystery.

"A woman dressed all in white moved through the crowd, her pale dress glowing faintly in the dim light, as though untouched by the darkness around her" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 176).

This image has a great visual effect in setting the character apart creating a frame of innocence and ethereal presence in the shadows.

- **Salience/Emphasis:** The writer of white places emphasis on times of clarity and hope. When describing the magical clocks in the circus, the narrative notes, "The white hands of the clock moved with perfect precision, a beacon of order in the midst of chaos" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 92). This depiction involves the use of white to highlight the purity and control and the use creates a visual concentration point against the magical disorder of the rest of the picture.

"The white hands of the grand clock moved steadily and without falter, a beacon of order in a world of magic and chaos" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 92).

In the case of this is a white placed in emphasis as a symbol of precision and stability in the unpredictable circus environment.

- Vector: White is used to concentrate the reader's eyes on concepts of balance and transcendence. For example, imagery of white light breaking through the darkness is a feature of the main moments of revelation: "A soft white glow spilled across the tent's interior, chasing shadows back into the corners" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 150), guiding attention and symbolizing hope and renewal. The novel states:

"A soft white glow filled the tent's interior, pushing back the darkness and lending the scene an air of calm and possibility" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 150).

This draws attention to the role of whites in the ideals of hope and rebirth.

## 2- Cultural Connotations

White in Western culture of the late 19th-century is frequently associated with purity, innocence and spiritual illumination (Pastoureau, 2008). In *The Night Circus* the colour white exhibits these meanings and is used to stand for the ideal of balance in opposition to the mystery of black. As the narrator describes:

"The circus's black and white tents stood side by side like pillars of light and shadow, a perfect balance of opposing forces" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 42).

"The white pathways glisten like frozen rivers, guiding visitors deeper into the labyrinth" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 92).

The whiteness of the pathways, they both are a guide, maybe a warning -for beauty into unknown spaces.

## 3- Mythic Layer (Second Order Signification according to Barthes)

On the mythic level, white in *The Night Circus* is too important to stop at its literal level, so it's used to represent the seductive surface of innocence that covers deeper conflicts. Consider:

"Beneath the white lace of her gloves, her hands are scarred, though the fabric hides them well" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 198).

Here, white lace emerges as a wearing the veil of imperfection - implying that purity in the circus is as much a form as reality.

## 4. Interpretive Summary

In *The Night Circus*, white is a rich semiotic signifier that complements black. While it may not have the same amount of explicit visual functions, its cultural and symbolic use as purity, hope, and balance is very important. White enriches the

novel's exploration of the dualities and the reader's emotional and symbolic experience of the circus.

#### 4.5.3 Descriptive Role of Red in the Novel

Unlike black and white, which occupy the majority of the circus aesthetics, red occurs sparingly, creating an immediate striking effect and becoming symbolic. Red often conveys human connection, passion or upsetting the monochrome order. One of the most representative descriptions is as follows:

"A splash of red stands out among the black and white, the shade of ripe apples and fresh blood" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 119).

Here, red acts as interruption -- attempts to interrupt the visual harmony and to settle the eye and the mind on something alive and vital.

Another example links red directly with emotion and allegiance:

"The red scarf around her neck marks her as one of us, a reveur" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 172).

The scarf here becomes a badge of identity as belonging to the devoted followers of the circus.

#### 1- Functional Analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen)

Through a social semiotic perspective, red in the novel performs the following roles:

- Differentiation: Red is used sparingly in the monochrome circus, so it is a good visual differentiator wherever it occurs. Against the prevalent palette of black and white, red is a flare that instantly attracts the eyes. For instance:

"A single red scarf fluttered in the breeze, a lone thread of colour amidst the sea of black and white" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 103).

The contrast here is striking in its value as a signal - of both attraction and discomfort within the circus aesthetic so carefully controlled by the audience.

- Framing: The colour red is often used to frame emotional or pivotal moments in a narrative, which gives them a sense of intensity and urgency. Writing of a performer, Morgenstern writes:

"Her lips were painted the colour of fresh blood, the only vivid note against her pale face, as though marking her every word with significance" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 156).

The red here enhances and visualises the dramatic and symbolic weight of the character's speech

- Saliency/Emphasis: Red reinforces passion, vitality and danger which creates focal points of any scene where the stakes are high. At one performance, the story tells:

"The fire blazed in brilliant shades of red and gold, its heat pulsing in rhythm with the crowd's heartbeat" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 220).

This highlights visceral and almost hypnotic energy that red has to bring to the circus environment.

- Vector: Red is used to draw the reader's attention to the themes of passion, sacrifice and warning. For example:

"A trail of red rose petals marked the path, each one a drop of colour leading deeper into the tent's heart" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 189).

This creates a visual vector, which leads the audience towards the emotional heart of the scene, while offering a suggestion of beauty bound up with danger.

## 2. Cultural Connotations

In the late 19th century Western culture, the hue of red had multiple associations feelings of love and lust, vitality and power and the ever-present of danger (Pastoureau, 2008). In *The Night Circus*, red takes on these connotations in addition to serving as a reminder that beauty is often accompanied by a price. Morgenstern uses it to punctuate moments of heightened emotion or risk:

"The crimson banner rippled above the crowd, a signal of festivities that might just as easily turn to chaos" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 145).

Here, red is symbolic. It sums up the precarious situation of the circus that can at once be a source of delight and also a source of risk.

## 3-Mythic Layer (Second-Order Signification according to Barthes)

On the mythic level, red in *The Night Circus* is more than a colour, it is the heart-beat symbol that circus, life as well as the price one pays to make it so. For one picture, here is an especially illustrative of this dynamic:

"The red ink on the binding contract seemed to shimmer, as though it had been written in something far more precious--and far more dangerous--than ink" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 134).

Through Barthes eyes, red passes from a literal pigment. It supplants

It is turned into a cultural myth of sacrifice in which beauty and commitment are overshadowed by risk.

#### 4-Interpretive Summary

In *The Night Circus*, red is one of the most complex semiotic signifiers in the novel: a rare and powerful visual accent in a predominantly monochromatic world. Functionally, it differentiates, frames and focuses attention on important elements in the narrative and culturally, it channels the dual energies of love and danger. On the mythic level that means the lifeblood of the circus itself - its magic inescapable from its dangers. The limited use of red in the novel only intensifies the power of this colour to ensure that every single time it appears there is an elevated symbolic resonance or emotional power.

#### 5-Discussion of the results

The semiotic analysis of black, white and red in *The Night Circus* prove that colour is an important narrative device and not only provides aesthetic to the text both graphically, but thematically and affectively. Through the combining application of the social semiotic approach of Kress and van Leeuwen and the second-order signification of Barthes, the study shows that colour works as a descriptive feature, while at the same time it functions as a symbolic system through which multiple layers of meaning are articulated.

##### 1- Black and White: Beyond Binary Opposition:

Although black and white are conventionally understood as a moral binary (i.e. the sign of good vs. evil, or of light vs. darkness) is reconfigured in the novel as a relationship of balance and interdependence. Thereby questioning the cultural assumptions towards the polarity of colours. Writing in the novel the juxtaposition of the black tents & white pathways transcends moral hierarchy and front both colour as mutually reinforcing forces constructing a liminal, enchanting and mysterious environment. This can be described as an exemplification of what Kress and van Leeuwen call colour as an of semiotic mode to be communicated to the perception, while at the same time, addressing the concept of myth as created by Barthes in his deconstruction of the traditional concept of moral dualism.

##### 2- Red: Disturbance, Passion and Human Presence:

The introduction of red in a world of very monotone works as a sort of semiotic disruption. Its rarity within the text gives it a greater effect in its visual and emotional impact, making it a signifier of life, love, danger and mortality. The red scarves of the revelers are the way that they can recognize each other and create a visual community defined by a special interest in circus. On a mythic level red stands for

the "pulse" of human being in an otherwise controlled and artificial environment. This would come together with Barthes theory of connotation where red moves beyond the boundaries of description and is weighted by culture and the significance of emotional importance.

### 3- Cultural Resonances and the Dynamics of Reception in Readers

Pastoureau's (2008, 2016) cultural histories of colour demonstrate that black, white and red are just some of the most symbolically charged colours in the Western tradition. In *The Night Circus*, Morgenstern toys with these associations made in our culture but recontextualizes them. Black is not just the colour of secrecy or death (it becomes a canvass for mystery and depth). White is not only purity it can conceal as much as does Red is not only love (it is risk, vitality and sometimes sacrifice). And through the subversion of congealed associations, the novel encourages its readers to actively re-interpret the semiotic codes, such that the readers would interact with the text in more profound manners.

These findings stand for the importance of colour as a mode of semiotics in literature, especially in the case of literature where visually a central element to the creation of their worlds is. Literary analysis has been language-based rather than visually based. *The Night Circus* shows that colour can function as "secondary language," which is used to communicate mood, ideology, and thematic depth. This bears out recent calls in the context of multimodal studies made to emphasize literature not as a verbal art but as basically a multimodal experience.

All together, the use of black, white, and red as a symbolic triad is used to create the structure of the reader's journey of emotions and interpretations. While the monochrome palette gives a magical environment, while the Intermittent bursts of red gives the environment humanity and urgency. Together, these colours meet to make an intricate semiotic system that goes against cultural conventions and opens up the possibilities of colour symbolism in modern fiction.

### 6. Conclusion

This research paper has discussed the interpretive semiotic functions of black, white and red in the context of *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern using a fusion of the Social semiotics and Van Leeuwen's theory on social semiotics and Barthes' theory on second-order signification as analytical frameworks. The analysis shows that colour is not just the element of decoration, but that this technique of the art is actively involved in the creation of the narrative meaning and the atmosphere of

emotions, and also in the reader's reaction. Black and white are core elements in the visual identity of the circus, transcending the traditional polarised black-outs/whites-in/ good over evil about mysterious, revelations, hiding and balancing. red reinforce as a signifier of power and rarity, random appearances blurs order of traditional consequent monochrome, sans red add elements of passion, vitality, risk and mortality.

The combination of these different colours create a complex visual grammar. From a cultural perspective, the work is consistent with what Pastoureau has learned from the symbolic uses of colour throughout history, while highlighting the ways in which the literary settings distort and highlight the associations. Semiotic analysis reinforces the belief that colour is a mode of meaning that functions separately from verbal discourse, and therefore deserves to be analyzed on par with verbal discourse. Overall, *The Night Circus* is a good example of the power that colour can have as a semiotic and narrating system. The combination of the black, white and red gives us an emotionally rich and immersive environment that alters the cultural definition of colour symbology.

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## التحليل السيميائي التفسيري للألوان في رواية السيرك الليلي: الدلالات الثقافية والأخلاقية

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الكلمات المفتاحية: سيميائية الألوان، الرمزية الأدبية، الدلالة السردية

### الملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة المعاني السيميائية للألوان في رواية إيرين مورغنسترن السيرك الليلي، مع التركيز على الدلالات الثقافية والأخلاقية لثلاثة ألوان رئيسية هي: الأسود، الأبيض، والأحمر. واستنادًا إلى قواعد النحو البصري لكريس وفان ليفون (2002) وإطار رولان بارت السيميائي، تبحث الدراسة في كيفية توظيف الألوان ليس بوصفها عناصر جمالية فحسب، بل كنظام دلالي ينقل معاني رمزية متعددة داخل النص السردية. وباعتماد منهجية نوعية تفسيرية، تحلل الدراسة كيفية تعبير الألوان عن موضوعات محورية مثل الهوية، والثنائية، والحب، والقوة، والتضحية. وتُظهر النتائج أن اللونين الأسود والأبيض، المرتبطين تقليديًا بالتعارض والتوازن، يُعاد توظيفهما في الرواية لتحدي الافتراضات الأخلاقية الثنائية. في حين يظهر اللون الأحمر رمزًا للشغف والحيوية والخطر. وتسهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء السيميائية الأدبية من خلال إبراز دور العناصر البصرية في تشكيل التفسيرات الثقافية والعاطفية للنصوص الأدبية.