

## الإنسان والمكان في رواية « كانت السماء زرقاء » للكاتب إسماعيل فهد إسماعيل

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### الملخص

في رواية « كانت السماء زرقاء » لإسماعيل فهد إسماعيل، تعد العلاقة بين الإنسان والمكان من أهم الأمور التي تبني القصة ومستوياتها الموضوعية. يتناول السرد كيف يتجذر الناس في بيئتهم، وكيف تؤثر الأماكن بدورها على حياة الشخصيات، وقراراتها، وحالاتها النفسية. تتعمق الرواية في العواقب النفسية والعاطفية، لتغيير المشهد على هوية ونظرة البطل للعالم. باستخدام التاريخ الشخصي الممزوج بالبيئة الاجتماعية والسياسية الأكبر، يفحص إسماعيل بطريقة نموذجية الطريقة التي يعمل بها المكان، كخلفية حرفية ومجازية لتجارب الشخصيات. تكشف هذه الرواية ببطء كيف تعكس علاقة الشخصيات ببيئتها موضوعات أكبر من الذاكرة والانتماء والخسارة – وتقدم تعليقات عميقة عن الدور الذي يؤديه المكان في تشكيل الحياة البشرية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإنسان، المكان، رواية « كانت السماء زرقاء »، إسماعيل فهد إسماعيل.

## Man and Place in Ismail Fahd Ismail's *The Sky Was Blue*

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### **Abstract**

In Ismail Fahd Ismail's novel *The Sky Was Blue*, the relation between man and place is one of the most important things that build up the story and its thematic levels. The narration deals with how people are rooted in their environment and how places, in turn, influence the lives, decisions, and psychological states of the characters. The novel delves into the psychological and emotional consequences of a changing landscape on the identity and worldview of the protagonist. Using personal history intermixed with the larger socio-political environment, Ismail examines in exemplary fashion the way place functions as both a literal and metaphorical background to the characters' experiences. This novel slowly reveals how the relation of the characters to their environment mirrors bigger themes of memory, belonging, and loss—offering deep comments on the role that place plays in shaping human life.

**Keywords:** Man, place, the novel *The Sky Was Blue*, Ismail Fahd Ismail.

## **1. Introduction**

Ismail Fahd Ismail is one of the foremost Kuwaiti authors exploring the depths of humanity. His novel *The Sky Was Blue* illustrates a similarly strong connection of individual and community through an exceptional portrayal of the human experience. This novel also demonstrates the interconnectedness of humanity to the space in which they live; thus illustrating this relationship of "man and space."

The novel is framed within the ever-changing political, social and emotional framework which allows for the space that surrounds the characters to be not merely backdrops to the action of the story but a living presence that creates and sometimes determines the direction the characters take. Here, place is no longer a passive location but is alive, actively shaping and sometimes determining character development. Through both the crowded streets and the very isolated corners of the private lives of the characters, Ismail uses setting to illustrate both the internal struggles of the protagonists as well as their hopes and dreams.

The "Man and Place" thematic exploration in *The Sky Was Blue* deals with the psyches and emotions of the characters and their internal landscapes. The places in which the characters live are charged with memories and experiences from the past, thus creating both a personal and collective significance to these spaces. The novel depicts and traces the relationship between these familiar and unfamiliar places and how each of them is inextricably tied to the identity of the characters and their continual struggle against the obstacles and boundaries imposed upon them from outside themselves. In this way, Ismail creates a subtly profound commentary upon the nature of the human experience and the relationship between people and the spaces they occupy and the way in which spaces define and redefine people.

This research will focus on how the character's lives in *The Sky Was Blue* are affected by where they are located and how place acts as a continuum that connects their feelings, identities, and struggles. This study will also examine the significance of place in the novel and its wider implications with respect to the nature of humanity, sense of self, and history throughout time in an increasingly dynamic environment.

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## **The Sky Was Blue by Ismail Fahd Ismail**

The Sky Was Blue (Arabic: *Kānat al-Samā' Zaraqā'*) is one of Ismail Fahd Ismail's deepest works and represents a major contribution to contemporary Arabic literature by an author who delves into the meaning of being human. In *The Sky Was Blue*, interestingly enough, Ismail demonstrates that memory, identity, and the complicated relationships people have with their environment are central to what is considered contemporary Arabic literature. In this regard, Ismail intertwines setting with character development, resulting in a depth of narrative that encompasses far more than merely external descriptions of places.

### **1. Plot Summary**

At the heart of *The Sky Was Blue* lies the journey of an unnamed main character who struggles to come to terms with both his culture and identity while experiencing personal and societal obstacles set against a changing social and political backdrop. The story is set in Kuwait during an era of change, which is reflected through the broken, fractured, and complicated nature of contemporary life in terms of the way that the events occur in chronological order.

As the protagonist reflects on his past, on his relationships, and on the places he has lived, he finds himself facing a deep emotional crisis and an even more profound identity crisis. His internal journey is represented through parallel experiences in the physical environments he finds himself in—whether they are urbanised settings or private residential ones. All of these places are powerful symbols of both what is happening in the protagonist's life and how those external environments affect him; therefore, these environments account for the most significant changes in the protagonist throughout the novel.

### **2. Themes**

#### **2.1 Man and Place**

A key theme in *The Sky Was Blue* is how people are shaped by the environment where they live. The relationship between the main character and the environment is an active one. The environments that he lives in (home, city, street) reflect who he is and the chaos of his mind. The environments of his life change with the experiences and choices he makes.

For example, the feelings of alienation and dislocation found in the protagonist are manifestations of the changes occurring in Kuwaiti society (ex. rapid urbanization, shifts in social values, and political unrest) and correlate with the protagonist's internal conflict. The novel suggests that people cannot be separated from their environments—that the way the individual and their environment affect each other can be not very obvious but can be just as influential and strong.

## **2.2 Memory and Identity**

A second theme that is prevalent in the novel is that of memory and its relationship with identity. He (the main character) carries the burden of the past and constantly replays moments from his past in order to comprehend the present. For this character, memory and place are interconnected. Ismail demonstrates how memories are dynamic and ever-evolving entities; as a result, they often blur the boundary between what is real and what is viewed as real. As a result, the identity of this character is not a static entity but rather one that is fluid and continually evolving in response to the past and the places that shaped them.

Memory is collective in the novel and embodies a collective Kuwaiti memory that shows the socio-historical context of the period of rapid change experienced by the country. The novel contrasts the past with its more traditional values and lifestyle with the present state, which is characterized by rapid urbanization, globalization, and the challenges posed by modernization. The theme of the struggle of the main character to reconcile these two differing versions of the past and present illustrates the difficulty of constructing one's identity.

## **2.3 Alienation and Displacement**

An essential theme of this novel focuses on the alienation of the protagonist from his surroundings. Even though this novel is not necessarily a political critique, there are many indications that the protagonist feels displaced due to everything uprooting his entire life. Due to the changes that have happened throughout history—most notably in the modern era—the protagonist feels he has lost a connection with himself and a connection with his world. Many people can identify with the alienation presented in this novel as we live in an ever-evolving world. (Cultural, political, personal, all of these examples are included in this novel.)

The alienation is not just an isolated incident within the protagonist but rather is represented by society as a whole as they struggle to come to grips with modernity. The protagonist's journey eventually becomes the representation of how we grow to find our way back home to ourselves and how we attempt to build connections within our community in a world that is increasingly becoming disjointed and full of uncertainty.

#### **2.4 The Impact of Political and Social Change**

Although the protagonist's individual journey dominates the narrative, the story is equally driven by political and social changes associated with Kuwait during this period of time. It vividly portrays the discordance between tradition and modernity, old cultural practices, and new globalised pressures associated with economic development. Subtly interwoven into this narrative are the vast advancements in Kuwait's urban infrastructure, the transformation of women's roles in Kuwaiti society from traditional (i.e., restricted) to progressive (i.e., empowered), and an economic transformation occurring across the Gulf states.

Through Ismail's portrayal of the disorienting effects of this economic transformation on those who are either directly or indirectly affected, various themes are raised about the consequences of achieving economic success, and the subsequent effects on the psyche and traditional values of a society.

### **3. Narrative Style and Structure**

Ismail's *The Sky Was Blue* is more reflective and introspective than most works; it allows readers to gain insight into the complexities of the protagonist's inner world through its use of a stream of consciousness style. The narrative is also fragmented; the reader watches the events of the story move back and forth between the past and present, and between dreams and reality, while the protagonist struggles with his own sense of identity. The fragmented nature of the narrative mirrors the fragmented nature of the protagonist's memories and personal identity.

There are many symbols used throughout the story; the sky is a major one. Throughout the story, the sky is a constantly changing color and appearance and it represents the protagonist's evolving emotional state. The protagonist longs to gain clarity and understanding, and to find freedom in life; the sky serves as a representation of the limitless possibilities of life, and of the uncertainty of what will happen next.

#### **4. Character Development**

This character is a deep thinker who develops throughout his experiences in these places he belongs in the culture and history he cannot fully reach. He seeks clarity while being trapped between two opposing sides; the past versus the future. His journey from confusion to clarity does not provide him with understanding, but it has become a lifetime journey of self-discovery.

Other key characters help to develop this theme as well, although they represent a lesser degree of complexity than the main character. Additionally, these dynamic supporting characters display many aspects of the entire society around them. Further, these character types represent the main character's internal struggle between what he desires as an individual and what his society demands.

The Sky Was Blue is an engaging analysis of human existence under conditions of dramatic change within society. The novel allows the author to build his personal yet universal story about the struggle between the past and the present, between one's self and the surroundings based on man's interaction with his place. So many themes like memory, identity, alienation, and change can be found in this novel, which gives the novel a special quality, allowing it to stand out from other stories about life in modern times. The ingenious way of portraying the environment as a character emphasizes its importance for human existence.

#### **Man and Place in The Sky Was Blue by Ismail Fahd Ismail**

Ismail Fahd Ismail's The Sky Was Blue offers a very vivid and profound exploration of the very complex interplay between man and his environment. It is not merely a backdrop against which the action unfolds but rather a powerful factor that influences the lives of people, their behavior, and even the mental state of the protagonists. In this respect, place becomes an integral part of both the story itself and the journey of the characters.

##### **1. Place as a Reflection of Identity**

Place is not just the physical context in which the lives of characters are led in the novels by Ismail but also becomes the personal experience of the character's inner self and emotions. One immediately understands the place as it reflects both the history of the individual as well as society. The emotions associated with such a landscape in the context of the narrative are portrayed, where memories, dreams and the reality of the individual and society are brought out. This is an indication of Ismail's realization of the connection between identity formation and place, be it the city, community and domestic spaces.

The feeling of the protagonist's belonging, alienation and nostalgia towards the spaces reveal the character of his relationship with such spaces. It is clear that the streets and buildings which the characters move around in their course are not empty and have meaning associated with the idea of identity and situation. Every space has its own meaning for the individuals irrespective of whether they belong to their own space, public space, foreign space or any other space. There is always a constant battle between the known and the unknown

## **2. Place as a Political and Social Entity**

However, besides symbolizing the inner lives of the characters, the use of place in *The Sky Was Blue* can be viewed as a political and social commentary as well. The setting of the novel is at a period characterized by a great deal of change socially and politically. In this regard, the places described in the novel can be considered as a result of what is going on in the bigger picture of history. It should be noted that the protagonist is affected considerably by the changes in the political environment, social standards, and historical happenings going on around him. The environment is an active player which interacts with the experience of the protagonist.

It follows that the issues arising from changes in the societal structure fill up the places the protagonist moves around in. There are complications regarding matters of social identity, struggle in class politics, and the formation of national identity. Consequently, the connection between man and the land he walks through gets tainted with a feeling of displacement because it is extremely difficult to belong in a changing environment.

## **3. Emotional and Psychological Impact of Place**

The novel also explores the impact that place can have on people emotionally and psychologically. It means that the places are not only neutral elements but that they can affect the emotional state of people as well. Moreover, they can be the reflection of the internal conflicts that take place within the character. The locations, with which the protagonist feels some connection, are associated with nostalgia, homesickness, alienation, and fear. They are associated with the loss of love, trauma and the desire for finding a place of belonging. In this way, the physical space is a representation of a mental environment and mirrors the emotional turmoil within the protagonist. Thus, by juxtaposing such places as home, city, and nature, we can understand why the characters act the way they do.

Thus, for example, a place like home may remind someone of all the losses, which he or she had in the past. A location that is strange to someone can evoke feelings of fear and alienation, while at the same time, it shows new opportunities for self-discovery to another person. By talking about places and emotions, Ismail emphasizes the importance of physical environments

## **4. Place as a Symbol of Memory and Loss**

Perhaps one of the most touching themes that emerge from reading *The Sky Was Blue* is that of the relationship between place and the sense of

memory and loss. It is hard to tell how many characters from the book are undergoing the experience of a yearning for something left behind, be it the people they knew before or some places forever closed to them and impossible to recognize. In most cases, such yearning has much to do with the feeling of loss of the past or history, as the meaningful places either change or cease to exist.

Thus, in the present context, places can hardly be considered static, since just like characters, they have their own trajectory of development. Loss of a place, whether it is a physical place or rather the concept of social place, may well be seen as another way for characters to evolve. Dynamics of place and memory evoke reflections about the way in which people form emotional relationships with certain places and how these emotions influence their self-perception.

### **5. The Transformative Power of Place**

To summarize, the message conveyed by *The Sky Was Blue* can be described as follows: place is a powerful agent that possesses transformational qualities. Ismail suggests that places, whether familiar or new, can influence people and change them. In particular, the main character of *The Sky Was Blue* explores different physical, emotional, and psychological spaces and, thus, gains insight into himself, discovering his place in this world. Hence, place is not simply an attribute to the lives of characters, but rather the factor that can influence their development and future choices. As for the environments, they seem to act like catalysts in terms of the problems faced by the characters. For example, places make characters rethink some aspects of their lives and raise questions regarding their identities. In this way, the environment is not only the physical space, but also the space where transformations occur.

### **Conclusion**

In *The Sky Was Blue*, Ismail Fahd Ismail deftly deals with the most intricate relationship of all, that of man to place. In the world of this novel, place does not remain static, for it actively transforms the character's identity, emotions, and destinies. This transformation can be seen through the lens of nostalgia for places of the past, political changes that affect a place, and the emotional-psychic imprint left on the characters by the structures surrounding them. The characters learn more than they ever did before, simply from their interaction with place and time. In the end, the reader is left to reflect on how people's places shape and revitalize them, as well as how they help create and reshape the spaces they inhabit.

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