

A Structural Approach to *The Arabian Nights*

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Abstract

This paper introduces a structural study of *The Arabian Nights*, Book III. The structural approach used by Vladimir Propp on the Russian folktales along with Tzvetan Todorov's ideas on the literature of the fantastic will be applied here. The researcher argues that structural reading of the chosen ten stories is fruitful because structuralism focuses on multiple texts, seeking how these texts unify themselves into a coherent system. This approach enables readers to study the text as a manifestation of an abstract structure. The paper will concentrate on three different aspects: character types, narrative technique and setting (elements of place). First, the researcher classifies characters according to their contribution to the action. Propp's theory of the function of the dramatist personae will be adopted in this respect. The researcher will discuss thirteen different functions. Then, the same characters will be classified according to their conformity to reality into historical, imaginative, and fairy characters. The role of the fairy characters in *The Arabian Nights* will be highlighted and in this respect Vladimir's theory of the fantastic will be used to study the significance of the supernatural elements in the target texts. Next, the narrative techniques in *The Arabian Nights* will be discussed in details with a special emphasis on the frame story technique. Finally, the paper shall discuss the features of place in the tales and show their distinctive yet common elements. Thus the study of character types, narrative technique and setting in *The Arabian Nights* allows the reader to understand the common forms which develop into a meaningful system that distinguish these stories

Key words: Structural approach, functions of dramatist personae, fairy characters, the fantastic, frame story.

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One Thousand and One Night is a collection of Middle Eastern and Indian stories and folk tales compiled in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age. It is also called *The Arabian Nights* and it is of uncertain date and authorship. Its tales of Aladdin, Ali Baba, and Sindbad the Sailor have almost become part of Western folklore. In this paper I argue that a structural approach which enables us to read and compare multiple texts at the same time and which is applied on ten stories from *The Arabian Nights*, Book III, introduces a new reading of three major aspects: character types, narrative technique and setting (elements of place). However, sometimes the researcher refers to more other stories that enrich the discussion. The researcher shall use the structural approach applied by Vladimir Propp on the Russian folktales along with Tzvetan Todorov's ideas on the literature of the fantastic. First, the characters of *The Arabian Nights* will be classified according to their contribution to the action. Propp's theory of the function of the dramatist personae will be adopted in this respect. On the other hand, the same characters will be classified according to their conformity to reality into historical, imaginative, and fairy characters. While discussing the role of the fairy characters in *The Arabian Nights*, Vladimir's theory of the fantastic will be used to study the significance of the supernatural elements in the target texts. Next, the narrative techniques in *The Arabian Nights* will be analyzed. Finally, the paper shall discuss the features of place in the tales and show their distinctive yet common elements.

Structural criticism relates literary texts to a larger structure which may be particular genre, a range of intertextual connections, a model of universal narrative structure, or a system of recurrent patterns or motifs (Barry, 40). Thus, structural reading focuses on multiple texts, seeking how these texts unify themselves into a coherent system. This approach enables readers to study the text as a manifestation of an abstract structure. The goal of structuralism is “not a description of a particular work, the designation of its meaning, but establishment of general laws of which this particular text is the product” (Todorov, 133). Structural analysis uncovers “the connection that exists between a system of forms and a system of meanings” (Genette, 136). Thus the study of character types, narrative technique and setting in *The Arabian Nights* allows the reader to understand the common forms which develop into a meaningful system that distinguish these stories. By applying a structural approach to the selected stories of *The Arabian Nights* this paper studies the properties that distinguish the book as a whole. This study aims at reconstituting the unit of the work and its principle of coherence which almost no critic, to the best of my knowledge, has done before.

Most works on *The Arabian Nights* address the historical reception of the book in research from the nineteenth century onward (Ali, 1980, Caracciolo, 1968, 1988), its historical context (Makdisi and Nussbaum, 2008), its origins and evolution (Aliakbari, 2014), the history of the title (Goitein, 1958), its circulation among booksellers in twelfth- century Cairo (Abbott, 1949, Goitein, 1958, Grotzfeld, 1985; 1996-7, Mahdi, 1995), the sources used by French translators who introduced the text to the West, as well as influence of great literature on the tales (Marzolph, 2006, Grunebaum, 1942) , the genre of romance in the tales (Heath, 1987-1988), interpretations of single stories from the collection (Allen, 1984, Bencheikh, 1997, Cooperson, 1994, Hamori, 1971, Mahdi, 1984, Molan, 1987), the nature of sexual politics surrounding the character of Sheherazade and the repercussion of *The Arabian Nights* in modern Arabic Literature (Malti-Douglas, 1997). A distinctive study of story- telling technique is introduced by David Pinault (1992). Many comparative studies discuss the influence of *The Arabian Nights* on

English literature (Al-Olaqi, 2012), Iranian culture (Marzolph, 2005, 2006), literature on general (Ghazoul, 1996), and ancient medieval European literature (Tuczay, 2005). This paper introduces a new point of view different from the ones discussed in the previous works.

The Arabian Nights includes a large number of characters. The tales usually begin by introducing us to a specific situation in which the hero is presented to us along with other members of his family. Usually there is a reference to his status and his profession. However, each character in the tale has a certain function. Propp defines function as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action (Propp, 21). Each character has a sphere of action that generates the thirty-one functions which Propp has spotted in the Russian folk tales. This paper shall discuss thirteen different functions that the researcher found in the target text and will show that this limited number of functions is a fundamental component of the tales.

After the initial situation is depicted, the tale takes the following sequence of thirteen functions which are all defined by Propp;

1. Absentation. A member of a family leaves the security of the home environment. This may be the hero or some other member of the family that the hero will later need to rescue. This division of the cohesive family injects initial tension into storyline. The hero may also be introduced here, often being shown as an ordinary person. In *The Arabian Nights*, as in the Russian folk tales, this act of absentation is voluntary; however, sometimes the absence of the character is unwilling because it is caused by the death of the character concerned. The character who performs this action either belongs to the older generation or to the younger one. For instance, in "The Fisherman and the Ifrit", the king leaves his kingdom to discover the secret of the lake and the colorful fish. However, in "The Son of the King of Kings", the young prince leaves for hunting; a journey in which he gets lost then he is kidnapped by a goblin. In "King Yonan and Wise Royan", the king is poisoned and finally he is unwillingly absent from the scene.

2. Interdiction. An interdiction is addressed to the hero ('don't go there', 'don't do this'). In *The Arabian Nights*, the characters are prevented from doing something either directly or indirectly. In "The Porter of Baghdad" tale, the porter receives the following instructions, "Bring your cage and follow me" (36); "Don't ask about something that does not concern you or you shall hear what will make you angry" (38). Ja'afar, the minister, suggests to the Calif Haroon al-Rasheed saying, "Don't get in, Calif. Those people are drunk" (40) and later the Calif says, "Find a trick so we may get in" (40).

3. Violation. An act by which the function of interdiction is violated. This is followed by the introduction of a new character, usually the villain. In "The Second Qalandar" tale, the king's daughter warns the Qalandar not to break the talisman or he shall provoke the Jinn. But the Qalandar disobeys the order and the Jinn appears who latter on tortures the king's daughter and kills her. Then, he casts a spell on the Qalandar and turns him to a monkey. Or when wise Royan warns the king not to listen to his wicked minister; nevertheless, the king ignores the advice and this costs him his life.

4. Reconnaissance. The villain takes an attempt at reconnaissance (either villain tries to find the children or jewels etc.; or intended victim questions the villain). The villain (often in disguise) makes an active attempt at seeking information, for example searching for something valuable or trying to actively capture someone. He may speak with a member of the family who innocently divulges information. He may also seek to meet the hero, perhaps knowing already the hero is special in some way. In *The Arabian Nights*, one of the characters usually tries to

obtain some information about a specific matter such as when the villain attempts to find the location of certain characters, children or precious objects. In the previous tale, "The Second Qalandar", the Jinn takes the form of an old man and comes to the city to look for the Qalandar whose identity was not first revealed to him. The Jinn, in addition, tries to draw some information from his beloved whom he keeps asking, "You daughter of a bitch, who is your lover?" (52).

5. Trickery. The villain attempts to deceive the victim to take possession of the victim or the victim's belongings (the villain is usually disguised, and tries to win confidence of the victim). The villain now presses further, often using information gained in seeking to deceive the hero or the victim in some way. Furthermore, the villain may persuade the victim that he is actually a friend and thereby gaining collaboration. The villain may, as well, use magical means of deception. The Jinn deceives the fisherman to get him out of the bottle while the earlier intends to kill him. A goblin takes the form of an obedient maid to deceive the son of the king of kings. She wants to serve him on dinner for her children.

6. Complicity. The victim submits to deception consequently and unwittingly helps his enemy. The trickery of the villain now works and the hero or victim naively acts in a way that helps the villain. This may range from providing the villain with something (perhaps a map or magical weapon) to actively working against good people (perhaps the villain has persuaded the hero that these other people are actually bad). In *The Arabian Nights*, we find various examples such as the hero who scratches the Goblin's lantern ; thus, submitting to the Villain's (the Ifrit's) begging. The hero sometimes acts in a mechanical manner and employs magic against his beloved ones. In "The Three Jesters" tale, the female Jinn transforms two of her sisters to black dogs. The wicked wife of the prince in "The Enchanted Prince" casts a spell on her husband and transforms his lower part to a stone.

7. Villainy. The villain causes harm or injury to a member of the family or to other characters (by abduction, theft of magical agent, spoiling crops). He may plunder in other forms, causing a disappearance, expelling someone, substituting a child etc., committing murder, imprisoning or detaining someone, threatening forced marriage, or providing nightly torments. In *The Arabian Nights*, the Ifrit kidnaps a princess to take her as a wife; on the other hand, a Goblin kidnaps a prince whom she has fallen in love with. Sometimes the villain causes a bad injury to other characters. A kind princess uses her magical powers to defeat the Ifrit. The latter is defeated but the princess is burnt to death. The villain may cause other characters to disappear suddenly. A wicked brother seduces his sister and takes her down to a large grave where he sleeps with her and both then disappear. The villain exiles other character. For example, an uncle exiles his nephew after killing his brother to inherit his kingdom. In addition, the villain may torment his victim. A wicked wife torments her husband for the sake of her lover.

8. Lack of something. One of the members of the family either lacks something or desires to have something. In other words, a sense of lack is identified. For example in the hero's family or within a community, something is identified as lost or something becomes desirable for some reason, such as a magical object that will save people in some way. Ala'a Deen lacks wealth and travels to get it. A king lacks knowledge and travels to acquire it.

9. Departure. This is a special characteristic of the tales of *The Arabian Nights* where the hero leaves home to have an adventure that causes development of actions and introduces another character to the scene. During this departure, the hero is tested, interrogated, and even attacked. This paves the way for his reception of a magical agent or a helper and here comes the function of the Donor. The donor asks the hero to solve a riddle so he would be freed of his

prison. The hero is sometimes offered assistance by a good Ifrit who helps him to fly from one country to another. The donor helps the hero by offering knowledge about a missing person or about the way to defeat a wicked Jinn.

10. The Hero's reaction. The hero reacts to the actions of the donor or helper by withstanding or failing the test, solving a riddle, freeing a captive, reconciling disputants, performing service or using adversary's powers against him. While following his plan, the hero sometimes performs another service and helps other characters who have been just introduced to the action. In all the tales, the hero's reaction is a general feature.

11. Provision or receipt of a magical agent. The hero acquires use of a magical agent (directly transferred, located purchased, prepared, spontaneously appears, eaten/drank, help offered by other characters). In *The Arabian Nights*, The hero is often assisted by a winged horse or a flying creature or a carpet. In "The Three Sisters", one of the sisters is rescued from drowning by the help of a huge flying snake. King Yonan is healed by the magical herbs provided by the wise Royan. The Ifrit takes a handful of sand and utters some magical words then throws them on the enchanted hero to help him restore his human form.

12. Struggle. The hero and the villain join in a direct combat. The villain is usually stronger because he uses magical powers against his victims. If the hero is not provided with magical powers by the donor, he wins over the villain by his human wit.

13. Victory. The villain is usually defeated either in a combat or by a trick played on him by the hero. Sometimes the villain is killed while asleep or banished. The hero, for instance, defeats the Ifrit by telling him that he does not believe the latter was imprisoned inside a small lantern or a small bottle. So, the Ifrit proves it by getting inside the lantern one more time; thus, imprisoning himself again.

14. The Return. The hero usually returns after achieving victory, bringing his lost brother or the kidnapped princess back home. The hero sometimes returns after making wealth or solving a riddle.

These are the most obvious functions which recur in the chosen tales of *The Arabian Nights*. Though Propp discusses thirty-one functions, many of them must be ignored because they appear in a small number of *The Arabian Tales* that they cannot be taken as general yet distinguishing features. However, Propp's functions do not cover all the features of the characters in *The Arabian Nights*. So, the following points should be considered in relation to the concerned characters.

First, in *The Arabian Nights*, many characters are nameless especially the central characters who are the source of the main action in the tale. For example, we are not told the names of the porter of Baghdad, the three sisters, the enchanted prince or his wife, the Barber of Baghdad or the Merchant of Baghdad. This may reflect the author's wish not to give some of his characters any historical or geographical background. Or this could be for political reasons as the author uses political allegory making his characters stand indirectly for specific political figures. One last assumption is to endow his characters and his tales with a universal dimension.

Secondly, the majority of the characters in *The Arabian Nights* have a high political or social status. We have kings, Suldans, princes, princesses and so on. Probably, it was thought by the commoners to whom these stories were addressed that those characters were the luckiest. Nevertheless, the heroes of some tales belong to lower classes. In this case, the author makes it clear that class distinction is not rigid by making upper class characters fall in love with lower class characters. For example, a common hero achieves victory and wins the heart of the

daughter of the king after saving her life. A Suldan marries the daughter of a fisherman, or a prince marries a girl of a lower status.

Thirdly, most of the characters, except for the villain who is the main source of conflict, are kind-hearted. The good characters are usually larger in number than the bad characters.

Fourthly, characters are usually depicted as enjoying having sex and look for it especially women. In *The Arabian Nights*, we never find violent sexual scenes or an action of rape. However, on the other hand, nothing in the tales show the outcome of sexual relations. In other words, we never read about women getting pregnant or giving birth to babies. Children are not introduced as substantial characters in the tales. Furthermore, unmarried characters are the ones who are engaged in forbidden sexual relations. In this context, marriage is not introduced as a sacred union. Generally speaking, sex seems to be part of the world of fantasy which means that the characters' behavior is not to be judged by the usual moral standards. Nonetheless, this provokes readers' condemnation rather than their approval. A wife who cheats on her husband and sleeps with her black slave or a brother who has an incestuous relation with his sister definitely deserve the reader's resentment. In addition nudity is a major action in many tales; it is associated with the pleasure of sexual intercourse and the pains of physical torture. All characters who are whipped are stripped of their clothes.

Finally, new characters are usually suddenly introduced into the course of action. For example, the heroine of "The Porter of Baghdad" hits the floor three times and all of a sudden a door is opened and seven slaves carrying swords appear out of the blue. Those slaves are not part of the life of the hero and we, the readers, know very little about them. Goblins and Ifrits appear suddenly from small bottles or lanterns or from nowhere. A wall splits into two and a beautiful girl appears to add much to the mystery of the tale. The donor is encountered accidentally while the magical helper is introduced as a gift. Yet, it is worth noting that actions are deeply interrelated that the introduction of any new character, even if it is unexpected, can be accepted. It is also true that new characters are sometimes introduced through the narration of the story by other characters. That is to say, *The Arabian Nights* is a tale within a tale. Shahrazad, the wife of King Shahryar, is the general narrator of the tales but each of her characters tells his or her own tale and consequently introduces new characters. For instance, "The Black Slave and the Apple" is narrated by Shahrazad who introduces to us the first person narrator Ja'afar al-Barmaki who, in his turn, tells the story of Noor al-Deen and Shams al-Deen. Then, the story of their son and daughter is narrated in another tale of "Sit al-Hussin" or "The Lady of Beauty". This aspect of narrative technique will be discussed in details on the following pages.

On the other hand, Propp's justification of the ways through which characters are introduced into the course of action can be partially applied to the tales of *The Arabian Nights*. According to Propp, each category of characters has its own form of appearance as it employs certain means to introduce new characters. For example, Propp finds that in the Russian folktales the villain appears twice. First, he makes an appearance from the outside or from nowhere (as in *The Arabian Nights*) then disappears. Secondly, the villain appears when he is sought by other characters which is not very frequent in *The Arabian Tales*. Furthermore, characters of *The Arabian Nights* may be classified according to their conformity to reality. In this respect, they either represent actual figures in history or they are absolutely imaginary or fairy characters. Some historical or religious figures are Calif Haroon al-Rasheed and his minister Ja'afar al-Barmaki, Salah al-Deen, the graet Muslim conqueror, the King of Persia, the famous Muslim poet Abu-Nawas, the minister al-Fazl and Prophet Solomon. The other imaginary characters are too many such as Sit al-Hussin, Badr al-Budoor, Sinbad the Sailor and Shah Bandar al-Tujjar

(the chief of all merchants). Fairy characters are the Ifrits, the goblins, flying horses and flying snakes. Characters that represent real figures in history are portrayed with much respect and appreciation. For instance, Haroon aL-Rashid, the Muslim Calif is depicted as a respectable, caring, just and powerful ruler. This seems to be justified as the popular mentality had this idea about him and his reign; a fact that the author found difficult to contradict. Fairy characters add a mythical dimension to the tales. They are there to create complications and to enrich the text with fantasy flavor. In the simple mentality of the original readers of *The Arabian Nights*, the Ifrit is a symbol of power, speed, pride and massive ability to destroy and construct. These fairy characters introduced in the tales are of two types: active and passive. The active fairy characters either use their supernatural powers to hurt certain characters or to help and rescue others. The other passive ones are usually controlled in a mechanical way where they simply do nothing except obeying orders. For instance, the Brassy man (a fairy character) drives the magical boat (which carries the Third Qalandar), and the flying horse flies just to move the hero from one place to another.

The existence of beings more powerful than man is a characteristic of the literature of the fantastic. In his book *The Fantastic*, Todorov shows how the supernatural elements may be divided into two groups. The first group is that of metamorphosis. The best example is to be found in "The Second Qalandar" tale in which a man is transformed into a monkey and a monkey into a man. During the duel scene, a series of metamorphoses takes place: the Jenn becomes a lion then the prince cuts him into two halves with a sword. The lion's head turns into a huge scorpion and the princess becomes a serpent "engaging in a bitter combat with the scorpion, which not having the advantage, took the form of an eagle and gave pursuit" (34). Then a black and white cat appears, pursued by a black wolf. The cat turns into a worm and makes its way into a pomegranate, which swells to the size of a pumpkin. Then the pomegranate explodes; the wolf, now transformed into a cock, begins swallowing the pomegranate seeds. One falls into the water and turns into a fish. At the end, both characters require their human form.

The second group of the fantastic is based on the existence of supernatural beings, such as the Jinn and the princess-sorceress, and their power over human destiny. Both can transform themselves and others to different creatures. These beings who have power over human destiny symbolize dreams of power as Todorov suggests. But they are also an incarnation of imaginary causality for what might also be called chance, fortune or accident (though luck and chance are excluded from the universe of the fantastic). So, the wicked Jinn who interrupts the amorous frolic in "The Qalandar's Tale" is no more than the hero's bad luck. It is worth mentioning that Todorov divides the supernatural phenomena into four types:

1. The hyperbolic marvelous where the phenomenon is supernatural only by virtue of its dimensions, which are superior to those that are familiar to us. Sinbad the Sailor declares that he has seen a fish one-hundred and even two-hundred long and a great serpent that could swallow an elephant. However, this might be only a manner of speaking in which we may say that 'fear has big eyes'.

2. The second type of the marvelous is the exotic. The supernatural elements in this context are reported to the readers but not presented as actual figures or characters and the setting associated with them is equally described by the hero. For example, in his second voyage, Sinbad describes the Roc, a bird so tremendous that it conceals the sun. The bird for sure does not exist in contemporary Zoology but characters who describe him are far from this certainty.

3. The third type is the instrumental marvelous in which the technological developments are not realized in the period described, but they are possible. In the "Prince Ahmad" tale, the

marvelous elements are the flying carpet, an apple that has healing powers, a pipe used to view things from a long distance. Nowadays we have a helicopter, antibiotics and binoculars.

4. The fourth type is the scientific marvelous which is known today as science fiction. Here the supernatural is explained in a rational manner but according to laws that science nowadays refuses. Different stories in *The Arabian Nights* feature early science fiction elements (Irwin, 2005). Several examples I am going to refer to here are quoted from the whole book of *The Arabian Nights* and not from Book III specifically. One example is "The Adventure of Bulukiya", where the protagonist Bulukiya's quest for the herb of immortality leads him to explore the seas, journey to Paradise and to Hell, and travels across the cosmos to different worlds much larger than his own world, anticipating elements of galactic science fiction (209). Along the way, he encounters societies of Jinni, mermaids, talking serpents, talking trees, and other forms of life. In "Abu al-Husn and His Slave girl Tawaddud", the heroine Tawaddud gives an important lecture on the mansions of the Moon, and the benevolent and sinister aspects of the planets. In another tale, "Abdullah the Fisherman and Abdullah the Merman", the protagonist Abdullah the Fisherman gains the ability to breathe underwater and discovers an underwater society that is portrayed as an inverted reflection of society. That underwater society follows a form of primitive communism where concepts like money and clothing do not exist. Other tales depict Amazon societies dominated by women, lost ancient technologies, advanced ancient civilizations that went astray, and catastrophes which overwhelmed them. "The City of Brass" features a group of archeological expedition (Hamori, 1971) across the Sahara to find an ancient lost city and attempt to recover a brass vessel that Solomon once used to trap a jinn and, along the way encounters a mummified queen, petrified inhabitants, lifelike humanoid robots and automata, seductive marionettes dancing without strings, and a brass horseman robot who directs the party towards the ancient city, which has now become a ghost town (Hamori, 1971; Pinault, 1992). "The ebony Horse" features a flying mechanical horse controlled using keys that could fly into outer space and toward the sun. Some modern interpretations see this horse as a robot (Pinault, 1992). The titular ebony horse can fly the distance of one year in a single day, and is used as a vehicle by the Prince of Persia, Qamar al-Aqmar, in his adventures across Persia, Arabia and Byzantium. The "Third Qalandar's Tale" also features a robot in the form of an uncanny boatman.

However, it is worth mentioning that the several elements of the Arabian mythology and Persian mythology are now common in modern fantasy, such as genies, bahamuts, magic carpets, magic lamps, etc. when L. Frank Baum proposed writing a fairy tale that banished stereotypical elements, he included the jinn as well as the dwarf and the fairy as stereotypes to go (Thurber, 1984).

The narrative techniques of *The Arabian Nights* is the second part of our discussion that deserves a closer look. What is common throughout all the stories is the initial frame story of King Shahrayar and his wife Shahrazad and the framing device incorporated through the tales themselves. The stories proceed from this original tale; some are framed within this tale, while others begin and end of their own accord. All the tales are narrated by Shahrazad who usually begins with her famous sentence, "I was told, O auspicious King, that..." or "I was told- but Allah sees further!- that..." (1) then she goes on describing the hero of her story in what Propp calls "the initial situation". Then, she leaves the floor to the characters to tell their stories through a monologue and a dialogue at the same time. The following example from Shahrazad's four-hundred and eighty ninth night's tale ("The Tale of Abu Khir and Abu Sir") reflects the narrative technique used by her:

"I was told... O auspicious King, that...The Captain asked after his friend, and Abu Sir replied that the dyer was sea-sick...Then the Captain said,"That will soon Pass" (5).

Shahrazad uses three different narrative techniques here. First, the first person narration as she uses the pronoun "I". Secondly, the second person narration as she implies using the pronoun "you" in her phrase "O auspicious King" and the reference here is to King Shahrayar who represents the audience. Finally, the third person narration as all characters (Abu Khir and Abu Sir are only one example among many) are referred to in the third person by Shahrazad. However, Shahrazad, the main narrator of the tales never uses typical opening phrases found in Arabic literature to which the tales were translated, such as "Once upon a time", "They claim that". She always says, "I was told that...". It was Shahrazad's purpose to keep the King interested in her tales so that he would not kill her as he did with his previous wives. Consequently, the use of this opening phrase provides her with authority and power that have stimulated the King's curiosity and kept him awake till the morning then he would fall asleep all day long. It is worth mentioning that the classical Arabic phrase used by Shahrazad is best translated into "I was told that..." and not "It is related" as some translators did.

On the other hand the use of the monologue is very frequent in the tales. The best examples to be quoted here are the porter to himself, "This is a very good morning" (36), Haron al-Rashid to himself, "I shall punish her tomorrow" (51), the king to himself, "My Lord, they are too young!" (56), the Qalandar to himself, "What happened to my father? (56). The use of the monologue attracts the listener who is expected to respond to some questions that require an answer or to be interested in some statements that foretell future events.

We have seen earlier how one tale leads to many other tales. There is usually a major tale out of which all the other tales spring. Shahrazad's narration always concludes with the end of the major tale and not the minor tale. For example, the "Tale of Abu-Khir and Abu Sir" is the major one that leads to many other tales: "The Three Wishes Tale", "The Boy and the Rubber's Tale", and "There is White and White Tale". In addition, the tale of "The Diwan of Jovial and Indecent Folk" includes other minor tales as "The Historic Fort's Tale", "The Two Jesters' Tale" and "A Woman's Trick's Tale". The story of "The Three Apples" enframes the story of "Nur al-din and Shams al-Din". In other words, a character in Shahrazad's tale will begin telling other characters a story of his own, and that story may have another one told within it, resulting in a richly layered narrative texture. Ulrich Marzolph suggests that the tales of *The Arabian Nights* definitely introduce an early example of the "story within a story" technique. However, in *The Arabian Nights*, a story is most commonly introduced through subtle means, particularly as an answer to questions raised in a previous tale (Marzolph, 2004).

As for setting, the representation of place is interesting. The tales usually take place in a large and tremendous setting. Ifrits fly freely from one place to another. They sink down into the bottom of the sea or to the underground where they construct their kingdoms. However, a closer look at the geography of the places described in most of the tales shows that the majority of the tales are situated within the borders of Baghdad or al-Basra. But the world of these tales surpasses these two cities to Alexandria, Cairo, Damascus, Oman, Yamane, Greece, Lands of Ajam (non-Arabs), India and Sind. Usually Baghdad is the only city that is described in details and shown as a prosperous commercial city where different goods from many countries are sold there. We read about fruits from different parts of the world: apples from Bilad al-Sham (the Greater Syria Region), peaches from Oman, lemon from Egypt, and so on. So we notice that the author of the tales always refers to countries of al-Mashrik al-Arabi (the Arabian Orient); not of

Al-Maghrib al-Arabi (the western part of the Arab world). Even the described voyages never move to the west but always to the east starting from Dijla River (known in the tales as the Sea of Dijla).

Sometimes we encounter other places that we have never heard of such as the Islands of al-Salama (Islands of Safety) or some mythical spots such as Qaf Mountain, or a city that a character reaches without giving us its name. We hear heroes speaking about mysterious places: "I traveled till I reached my uncle's city" (85), "I walked from the cavern till I reached a city inhabited by good people" (61). Furthermore, we rarely read a tale that does not include a voyage as part of its events. The sea is a very important element here specially that many of the cities were established near the waters of a sea, a river or a lake. We usually read about a hero getting ready for a voyage as part of his adventure to solve a mystery or to bring a princess back home, or to get money. This is followed by a description of the ships, the sailors, the captain and the adventure itself. On the other hand, we encounter a struggle between a hero and a Jinn or an Ifrit on the ship. Sometimes we read about a hero being rescued from drowning by a Jinn or an Ifrit. The mythical places, if I may call them so, are what distinguish the tales of Sharazad. These imaginary places such as the Mountain of Magnet, or the Metamorphosed City, or Qaf Mountain in "The Porter of Baghdad" reflect the vivid imagination of the author. The Mountain of Magnet does not exist in reality; however, its description adds a lot to its mystery. It has a great dome inside which the enchanted prince was imprisoned. It is a damned place that Ifrits use to destroy ships that are pulled towards it because of its magnetic power. We also read about the Metamorphosed City that was damned because its citizens indulged in pleasures. They were punished by a thunderbolt that transformed everything to black stones. Qaf Mountain is another mythical place that was known as a symbol of great distances in popular Arabic folktales in general. Only skillful magicians or powerful Ifrits can reach it because it can hardly be found by humans. It is worth mentioning the Qaf Mountain is mentioned in the Holy Quran (Qaf Surat 50: 1) which the Islamic interpreters of the Qur'an and Islamic philosophers describe as the unseen huge mountain, made of emerald and surrounds the earth. They say that it is inhabited by Jinni and since the belief in the unseen that is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an is part of a Muslim's belief, all Muslims believe in its existence. In addition, the princess in the fourteenth night's tale describes her magical ability to move the city of her father behind the Qaf Mountain: "I can move the stones of your city behind the Mountain of Qaf" (69). In "The Three Sisters Tale", one of the sisters talk about the female Jinn who appears only if a lock of the latter's hair is burnt: "She gave me a lock of hair and said if you want me to come, burn this lock and I shall come even if I were behind the Qaf Mountain" (197). This suggests that the mountain is far away in an unknown world.

To conclude, this structural study of character types and functions, the elements of the fantasy, setting and narrative technique in *The Arabian Nights* allows the reader to understand the common forms and the properties that distinguish the book as a whole and constitute a meaningful system that is a clear feature of the stories. As much as this study aims at reconstituting the unit of the work and its principle of coherence it also means to open new horizons for further discussion. A deeper reading of more stories would definitely generate more fruitful criticism.

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