

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.