

**The Impact of The Arabian Nights
on Naguib Mahfouz's Literary Legacy
in his Novel Arabian Nights and Days**

by

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DOI: 10.21608/aakj.2025.404463.2147

Date received: 15/ 7/2025

Date of acceptance: 20/ 7/2025

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Abstract:

The renowned writer Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) draws upon the Arab heritage exemplified in the famous literary work *The Arabian Nights* to present us with an important novel, *Arabian Nights and Days*. Through his remarkable synthesis, Mahfouz's narrative structure successfully captures the intricate facets of the human psyche, illuminating profound metaphysical and philosophical questions that raise numerous issues, most notably the themes of "power and freedom." This study will employ Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist approach to uncover the fundamental and narrative structures that shape the characters within the novel, exploring how these characters evolve and examining the dialectical interaction between individual and collective identities within the societal framework. This paper investigates how Naguib Mahfouz utilizes narrative techniques derived from *The Arabian Nights* to critique power and morality in contemporary Egyptian society. It seeks to explore key thematic elements within the novel: how does the novel reflect collective action and existential inquiries? In what ways does Saussure's structuralism enhance our understanding of its underlying structures and character development? The findings of this study reveal the extent to which Mahfouz draws inspiration from the narrative techniques found in *The Arabian Nights*, creatively recontextualizing them to address complex contemporary themes through his profound philosophical and existential lens. These themes include the ethics of the individual, the collective, society, and political authority, among others. This is achieved through the reimagining of iconic traditional characters, such as "Scheherazade," who critiques contemporary issues of corruption and justice, ultimately leading to a philosophical and literary exploration of the duality of good and evil.

Keywords: Naguib Mahfouz, Arabian Nights and Days, Structuralism, fantasy, Narratives.

تأثير ألف ليلة وليلة على إرث نجيب محفوظ الأدبي في روايته ليالي ألف ليلة.

المخلص:

استحضّر الأديب الشهير نجيب محفوظ (١٩١١-٢٠٠٦) التراث العربي متمثلاً في العمل الأدبي الشهير *ألف ليلة وليلة*، ليقدم لنا رواية مهمة وهي رواية *ليالي ألف ليلة* وبعملية الدمج التي أجراها بعبقريته التركيبية نجحت روايته ببنيتها السردية في وصف أدق معالم النفس البشرية، لتسلط الضوء على تساؤلات ميتافيزيقية وفلسفية عميقة أثارت قضايا عديدة لعل أبرزها قضيتي "السلطة والحرية"، وسوف تعتمد هذه الدراسة على منهج دي سوسير "المنهج البنوي" للكشف عن البنى الأساسية والسردية التي تشكل شخصيات الرواية، واكتشاف كيفية تطور هذه الشخصيات، وصولاً إلى رصد التفاعل الجدلي بين الهويات الفردية والجماعية داخل المجتمع في نسق الرواية. تستكشف هذه الورقة كيف يستخدم نجيب محفوظ في روايته *ليالي ألف ليلة* تقنيات السرد المستمدة من *ألف ليلة وليلة* لنقد السلطة والأخلاق في المجتمع المصري المعاصر. كيف تعكس الرواية العمل الجماعي والاستفسارات الوجودية، وكيف يمكن أن تعزز بنية دي سوسير فهماً للهيكل الأساسية وتطور الشخصيات فيها؟ وقد تمثلت نتائج الدراسة في الكشف عن مدى استلزام نجيب محفوظ لتقنيات السرد التراثية الواردة في *ألف ليلة وليلة* وإعادة توظيفها بعبقرية أدبية إبداعية لإعادة الإنتاج والإسقاط على موضوعات معاصرة معقدة برؤيته الفلسفية والوجودية العميقة، مثل: أخلاقيات الفرد والجماعة والمجتمع والسلطة السياسية، وغير ذلك، وذلك من خلال إعادة إنتاج شخصيات تراثية مشهورة لتمثل نقد الواقع المعاصر، مثل شخصية: "شهرزاد" لتعبر بوجهة نظر نقدية عن قضايا الفساد والعدالة المعاصرة وصولاً إلى معالجة فلسفية وأدبية لثنائية الخير والشر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نجيب محفوظ، ألف ليلة وليلة، الهيكلية، الخيال.

Introduction

Naguib Mahfouz, a prominent Egyptian author, reimagines the classic *Arabian Nights* tales in his novel *Arabian Nights and Days*, incorporating contemporary themes and political commentary. His narrative style blends realism with magical realism and fantasy elements, providing a modern exploration of Egyptian society's power, corruption, and morality. Influenced by the *Arabian Nights*, Mahfouz infuses his work with personal experiences and observations, resulting in a nuanced and thought-provoking narrative. His writing is characterized by meticulous attention to detail, precise language, and a straightforward narrative approach, making his stories accessible to a wide audience. Mahfouz himself said: "I believe that in this novel I have expressed my major concerns by combining what can be called 'political realism' and 'metaphysical reflections' or 'Sufi reflections', if you will. *The Arabian Nights* was so adaptable that it allowed me to express this wide-ranging combination" (Mahfouz, 1994, p. 380).

Mahfouz's influence extends beyond the Arab world, with his works being translated into multiple languages, including English, and receiving international acclaim. As the first Arabic-language writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988, Mahfouz's recognition brought attention to Arabic literature. It challenged stereotypical views of Arabic culture in the Western world. Moreover, his narrative style, mixing realism with fantasy elements, left a lasting impact on Western literature, particularly within magical realism. Mahfouz's exploration of universal themes as humanity, morality, and politics has resonated with

Western audiences, further solidifying his influence on Western culture. He explains:

The Nobel Prize has given me, for the first time in my life, the feeling that my literature could be appreciated on an international level. The Arab world also won the Nobel with me. I believe that international doors have opened, and that from now on, literate people will consider Arab literature also. We deserve that recognition. (Luxner, 1988, p.2)

Mahfouz's literary contributions are significant, breaking down stereotypes about Arabic culture and influencing the Western literary canon. His use of symbolism and realism in depicting everyday life in Egypt, along with his engagement with social and political issues, has made his works enduring and universally resonant. Through his novels, Mahfouz delves into the human condition and the struggle against oppressive forces, offering relatable narratives that transcend cultural boundaries. Cooper writes:

Magical realism strives, with greater or lesser success, to capture the paradox of the unity of opposites; it contests polarities such as history versus magic, the pre-colonial past versus the post-industrial present and life versus death. Capturing such Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days: The Allegorical Sequel of The*

Arabian Nights boundaries between spaces
is to exist in a third space, in the fertile
interstices between these extremes of time
or space. (Cooper, 1998, p.1)

Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Arabian Nights and Days* exemplifies his professional style as a novelist, offering a rich portrayal of the life of Sheikh al-Jabal, a wealthy merchant bearing resemblance to the historical figure of Harun al-Rashid, the fifth Abbasid Caliph. Set in the Abbasid era, a period marked by significant scientific, cultural, and economic advancements, the novel is a work of historical fiction. Mahfouz's skill in creating complex and nuanced characters is evident in his portrayal of Sheikh al-Jabal, a multi-dimensional protagonist with a unique personality, history, and motivations. The author adeptly captures the inner conflicts of his character, particularly Sheikh al-Jabal's struggle to reconcile his pursuit of power and wealth with his moral and ethical responsibilities towards his subjects. "Through his fiction, Mahfouz creates realistic characters similar to the people of his society in order to observe socio-cultural anxiety, moral decline, and political corruption in contemporary Egypt. In so doing, he hopes to break with the traditional negative conventions towards modernity." (Abu Jweid, 2020, p.91)

Mahfouz's writing style is characterized by simplicity, clarity, and elegance, eschewing complex language in favor of understated descriptions and concise dialogue to convey the novel's themes and ideas. In *Arabian Nights and Days*, his writing reflects the rich cultural and intellectual heritage of the Abbasid era, embracing its emphasis on poetry, science, and

philosophy. Furthermore, Mahfouz's professional style is distinguished by his adept use of symbolism and allegory. Throughout the novel, he employs various symbols and motifs to enrich the overall meaning of the narrative. For instance, the recurring image of the moon serves as a significant symbol, representing the ever-changing nature of life and the cyclical course of history. Additionally, themes of power, corruption, and justice are explored through allegorical depictions of various characters and their actions. Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* stands as a testament to his exemplary work as a fiction writer, showcasing his unique style and mastery of the craft. His ability to create intricate characters, effectively utilize language, and employ symbolism and allegory to convey his themes underscores his significance as one of the most important and influential writers of the 20th century. His extensive body of work continues to captivate and engage readers worldwide. Boris Uspenskij asserts:

We must emphasize the general semiotic importance of framing. In this context, the concept of the beginning and the end acquires a special purpose, and its importance lies in shaping the cultural systems we believe to be representative and the ones with a semiotic vision of the world (or more precisely: systems that reveal a personal and social experience. (Uspenskij, 1999, p.149).

Naguib Mahfouz's stature as a literary luminary is widely acknowledged both locally and globally. Since the inception of his literary career and even following his Nobel Prize in Literature, discussions about him have been ceaseless across various media platforms. He is a prominent figure whose works incite debate and inspire in-depth analysis, research, and readership. Mahfouz's literary journey can be delineated into four distinct stages, commencing with his exploration of Pharaonic Egypt. During this phase, he delved into numerous issues, including monotheism and the nature of governance and rulership. Novels such as *Awlad Haratina* and *Zuqaq Al-Midaqq* exemplify Mahfouz's historical acumen and his use of symbolism to address contentious topics, particularly those about human cognition, the dynamics between rulers and their subjects, the nature of this relationship, and the influence of religious institutions on governance and the concept of monotheism in a polytheistic society. The surge of interest in Pharaonic civilization following the 1919 revolution, as a reaffirmation of Egyptian identity, likely influenced the writing of these novels, shedding light on the positive aspects of ancient Egyptian history. However, Mahfouz did not linger on these themes for an extended period.

Mahfouz's literary oeuvre is characterized by diversity and richness, both in terms of quantity and quality. This diversity renders Mahfouz's fictional world a realm replete with aesthetic and conceptual opulence, encompassing historical and realistic narratives, incorporating partial symbolism interwoven with the dominant tone of a realistic work and complete symbolism with manifold meanings. Furthermore, it is suggested that this world encompasses various schools and orientations, spanning critical

realism, existential realism, naturalism, surrealism, and absurdism, as if Mahfouz's world serves as a museum of all known literary trends and movements in storytelling. Notably, Mahfouz's literary journey celebrates ancient Arabic narrative forms while challenging the historical legacy of modern Arabic novels associated with the European short story model, evident in works such as *Al-Harafish* (1977), *Arabian Nights and Days* (1982), and *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma* (1983). Mahfouz adds, “*The Arabian Nights* has given me issues and motives to address, and hence came my *Arabian Nights and Days*” (Mahfouz, 1994, p. 378).

1- RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- [1] How does Naguib Mahfouz utilize narrative techniques from *The Arabian Nights* to craft *Arabian Nights and Days*, and what impact do these techniques have on the themes of power and morality in his novel?
- [2] In what ways does Mahfouz's reimagining of *The Arabian Nights* serve as a critique of contemporary Egyptian society, particularly regarding issues of power, corruption, and social justice?
- [3] How does *Arabian Nights and Days* reflect the theme of collective action, and what implications does this have for understanding the potential for societal change in Mahfouz's narrative?
- [4] What philosophical and metaphysical inquiries are present in *Arabian Nights and Days*, and how do they relate to Mahfouz's exploration of the human condition and existential questions?

[5] How can Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism be applied to analyze the underlying structures in *Arabian Nights and Days*, and what insights does this provide into Mahfouz's narrative representation and character development?

2- LITERATURE REVIEW

Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* stands as a significant contribution to Arabic literature, blending traditional narratives with contemporary themes and critical reflections on power, morality, and society. This literature review examines several significant works that explore themes related to Naguib Mahfouz's literature and its intersections with broader literary and thematic concerns. Each of these studies provides valuable insights into specific aspects of Mahfouz's writing, while also highlighting the distinct angle this paper will take. Revenge Theme in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Mahfouz's *The Thief and the Dogs* by Dulfqar Abdulrazzaq investigates the revenge in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Mahfouz's *The Thief and the Dogs*. It delves into the linguistic and social implications of revenge, presenting a comparative analysis of both works. *The Whisper of Madness in Najīb Mahfūz's Literary Works* by Clara Srouji-Shajrawi's paper explores the theme of madness in the works of Naguib Mahfouz, emphasizing how madness is often linked to irrationality and abnormal behavior. However, it also highlights the portrayal of mad characters as visionaries or saviors. This duality presents a nuanced understanding of madness in Mahfouz's literature. *The Fundamental Necessity of Interpretation - Literary Rewriting and Hermeneutics in Naguib Mahfouz's Arabian Nights and Days* by Yasmina Ksir's thesis discusses Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* as an adaptation

of the classic *Arabian Nights*. It examines the author's intent behind the rewriting process, particularly the hermeneutic imperative within the context of Islam. This work emphasizes the transformative nature of literary adaptation, rather than solely focusing on hermeneutics. Patients and Healers in “Zaabalawi” by Naguib Mahfouz and *A Strangeness in My Mind* by Orhan Pamuk compares the theme of spiritual healing in Mahfouz’s *Zaabalawi* and Pamuk’s *A Strangeness in My Mind*. It highlights the protagonist's journey toward finding a remedy for an incurable disease, emphasizing the allegorical nature of Mahfouz's storytelling. In summary, while the aforementioned studies contribute significantly to the discourse surrounding Naguib Mahfouz’s literature, the current paper will tackle the topic from a different angle. By exploring the moral, societal, and structural dimensions of themes. The current paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis that expands upon existing scholarship and offers new insights into Mahfouz's enduring legacy.

3- METHOD

The novel *Arabian Nights and Days*, the focal point of this analysis, establishes textual connections with the ancient *Arabian Nights*. While it is true, as Roger Allen suggests, that *The Arabian Nights* tales have become a popular refuge for modern writers in all literary genres, and have been adapted in various ways, this study does not center on textual relations within the ancient *Arabian Nights* stories or draw inspiration from their themes in the novel *Arabian Nights*. He adds, “What is beyond doubt is that, in the development of that literary genre known as the novel in Arabic, the name of Naguib Mahfouz is already

acknowledged and sanctioned as the central figure, the founding father of the mature form of the genre." (Allen, Al-Ahram Weekly, 2006, p.1).

Critics have already conducted studies on these aspects. Rather, the primary focus is on examining the novel's structure based on the linguistic traditions of Ferdinand de Saussure. In other words, this study seeks to unveil the system or structure underpinning the narrative representation, necessitating a brief theoretical background on structuralism. Structuralism emerged as a response to phenomenology: a philosophical movement rooted in the works of Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century. Phenomenology aims to transcend the dichotomy between self and object, consciousness and the world, by focusing on the phenomenological truth of objects as they appear to consciousness. According to this approach, the origin of meaning is found within the self or through descriptive analysis of our experiences, perceptions, and reception of the world.

In contrast, structuralism shifts the focus away from the self and interpretation, emphasizing the inherent meaning within language itself. This displacement of the self represents a new form of centrality, centered on language or structure. Structuralism seeks to identify the underlying structures that enable meaning, analyzing unconscious structures such as language, psychology, and society. In this framework, meaning is constructed through decoding underlying codes, treating the reader as a decoder of these codes.

The conflict between structuralism and phenomenology is evident in the idea of displacement and substitution: displacing

the self from its center and replacing it with the centrality of language, structure, or sound. While both approaches place "the subject" in brackets, they overlook the material and historical conditions of its production or reproduction, reducing the subject to a pure embodiment of consciousness or a closed set of rules. Eagleton notes that "structuralism has a problematic relationship with the individual self, effectively reducing the self to the function of an objective structure. Despite their opposition, both phenomenology and structuralism share a tendency to ignore the material and historical conditions of their subjects, focusing on consciousness or closed systems". He continues, "Structuralism is a calculated affront to common sense. It refuses the 'obvious' meaning of the story and seeks instead to isolate certain 'deep' structures within it, which are not apparent on the surface. It does not take the text at face value, but 'displaces' it into a quite different kind of object." (Eagleton, 1996, p.83).

The rise of structuralism in Western Europe in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was influenced by a perceived crisis in language. Language had become instrumentalized for science, commerce, advertising, and bureaucracy, posing challenges for artistic creation within a saturated mass culture driven by profit. Writing faced the dilemma of being both an artistic creation and a commodity in the open market, raising questions about shared collective beliefs, reinventing frameworks, and participating in a rational imperialistic faith. Eagleton's questions about the historical and material conditions for modern writing underscore the social crisis that has driven writing to retreat into itself. This retreat is characterized as a deep narcissistic act, troubled by the futility and complicity of being reduced to an unwanted commodity, yet striving to liberate itself

from the pollution of social meaning. Structuralism can be understood within the context of the crisis in language, encompassing diverse knowledge in the humanities. What unites these diverse fields is the application of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theories, or the extension of Saussurean linguistic theory to topics, knowledge, and activities beyond language.

4- DISCUSSION and FINDINGS

In the field of literary criticism and literary studies, structuralism was presented as a scientific approach, aiming to analyze literature through the lens of structural analysis. Tzvetan Todorov proposed that literary studies should be transformed into organized scientific knowledge, characterized by a set of interconnected concepts and methods designed to uncover underlying laws. According to Todorov, a critic conducting a structural study of literature or a scientific study to reveal hidden rules must adopt a similar approach to that of a linguist. The critic's responsibility is to focus on the formal structure of the work, rather than interpreting its message, akin to the linguist's task of establishing the formal structure that conveys meaning.

One of Naguib Mahfouz's most notable works is *Arabian Nights and Days*, a collection of stories that draws inspiration from the classic Arabic tales of *Arabian Nights*. In this critical analysis, we will explore the literary legacy of Naguib Mahfouz and the significance of *Arabian Nights and Days* in his body of work. Mahfouz's literary legacy is marked by his ability to capture the complexities of Egyptian society and the human condition. His works often explore themes of love, power, and morality, and he is known for his keen insight into the human psyche. *Arabian Nights and Days* is a unique addition to

Mahfouz's body of work, as it represents his reimagining of the classic Arabic tales of *Arabian Nights*. The collection consists of stories that are rich in symbolism and allegory, and they offer a glimpse into the cultural and historical landscape of Egypt. Mahfouz's retelling of these tales is a testament to his skill as a storyteller and his ability to breathe new life into traditional narratives.

One of the most striking aspects of *Arabian Nights and Days* is Mahfouz's use of language and imagery. His prose is lyrical and evocative, and he creates a vivid and immersive world for his readers. Through his storytelling, Mahfouz transports his audience to a realm where reality and fantasy intertwine, and he invites them to explore the depths of human emotion and experience. In addition to its literary merits, *Arabian Nights and Days* also serves as a commentary on the social and political climate of Egypt. Mahfouz infuses his stories with themes of power struggles, corruption, and the quest for justice, reflecting the tumultuous nature of Egyptian society. Through his characters and their experiences, Mahfouz sheds light on the complexities of human nature and the challenges of navigating a world filled with moral ambiguity. At the commencement of *Arabian Nights and Days*, which also serves as the conclusion of *The Arabian Nights*, the man in authority, Shahryar, announces that Shahrazad has been pardoned after three years of fear and hope. In a moment of hesitant optimism, he communicates to his Vizier "Dandan" the news, "After the Fajr [dawn] prayer, while dark clouds stand steadfast against the lively stream of light... it is my royal will that Shahrazad shall become my wife" (Mahfouz, 1982, pp.3–4).

Naguib Mahfouz has dissolved the boundaries between his text and *The Arabian Nights*, allowing his nights to merge and blend with *The Arabian Nights*. This perhaps contributes to the richness and abundance of meanings and implications, contrary to what a reader might initially assume upon discovering this extension and fusion. One of the advantages of this relationship is that Mahfouz does not explicitly reference the text of *The Arabian Nights* as a summoned text; instead, he leaves it to the reader to uncover the process of convergence between the two texts, defining the nature of their relationship. It is not a mere derivative imitation of the worlds of *The Arabian Nights*, but rather a relationship of extension that signifies a reality of transcendence, rooted in the affirmation of the independence of his subsequent text and the assertion of its dominance as a transcendent text, rather than a regurgitated one. Thus, the reader is enabled to search for meaning and interpretations of the extension that exists between the two texts.

Literary works imbued with a spirit of fantasy often embark on a creative adventure, seeking to unveil the unspoken through their encoding ability. This allows them to critique social, political, and religious issues without the constraints of realism, such as legal ramifications, taboos, and censorship. An example of such a text is Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days*, where the supernatural and jinn play a central role in the narrative discourse, leading to the development and escalation of narrative events. This narrative restores the political and social balance of the city, symbolized by justice and freedom, through the agency of a strong popular will. The text draws upon the world of the supernatural in *The Arabian Nights*, where the

supernatural elements are pivotal from the outset, influencing the actions of characters and shaping the plot. Al-Mousa states, "Mahfouz manages to embrace the manner and the style of the original folktale, taking advantage of the mythical and fantastic potentialities of the original". (Al-Mousa, 1993, p.145).

In Mahfouz's text, the miraculous elements rely on a duality of paradox between good and evil, faith and disbelief, injustice and justice, power and the people, tyranny and freedom. This is exemplified through the portrayal of two types of jinn, representing believers and the wicked. The fantasy elements serve as a metaphor for the human conscience, driving those who have succumbed to the tyranny of power. The ruler of Al-Hay/Al-Saluli, a symbol of power, becomes possessed by black magic, seeking to achieve goals that go against the protagonist's conscience. To combat the injustices perpetuated by the ruling class, the protagonist enlists the help of the merchant "San'an Al-Jamali" and the chief of police "Gamasa Al-Balti," believing that reform must begin from the top. However, the protagonist soon realizes that Qumqam, the believing jinn, has deviated from its goal and contributed to the killing of a young woman, leading to a realization that some entities are beyond redemption and must face punishment for their actions. The text serves as a commentary on the need for societal reform, emphasizing the importance of ethical conduct and the consequences of deviating from one's moral compass. Through the use of supernatural elements, Mahfouz's narrative highlights the complexities of power, corruption, and the struggle for justice in a society plagued by tyranny and injustice:

Whenever he found himself alone, he would ask, "Have I been kept in life by a miracle that I might work as a porter?" He would also wonder, "Why did Singam not desert me at the crucial moment, as Qumqam did with Sanaan al-Gamali?" Filled with perplexity, like a vessel open to the rain, he found his legs had brought him to the house of Sheikh Abdullah al-Balkhi. He kissed his hand and sat down cross-legged in front of him, saying, "I am a stranger."

"We are all strangers, "the sheikh interrupted him.

"Your name is like a flower that draws to it the wandering bees."

"Good actions are better than good words."

"But what are good actions? This is my difficulty."

"Did you not, on your coming, happen upon a man at his wit's end? "Where, master?" (Mahfouz, 1982, 64)

The passage depicts a character who is questioning his purpose in life and seeking guidance from Sheikh Abdullah al-Balkhi. The character expresses feelings of confusion and uncertainty, pondering the significance of his actions and the nature of good deeds. The sheik responds with philosophical and enigmatic statements, suggesting that everyone is a stranger in

the world and that actions speak louder than words. The exchange reflects themes of existentialism, moral introspection, and the search for meaning in life. The reference to other characters, such as Singam and Qumqam, may indicate a broader narrative context within the story.

To evade salvation from external unseen forces, "Qumqam" enlisted the support of the merchant "San'an Al-Jamali" and the chief of police "Gamasa Al-Balti" to combat the prevailing injustice, as the preserved text posits that reform should commence from the upper echelons of society. "Qumqam" initially sought the aid of the merchant "San'an Al-Jamali" to eliminate "Ali Al-Sululi", the governor of the neighborhood. However, "Qumqam" ultimately abandoned "San'an Al-Jamali" after assassinating Al-Sululi, subsequently freeing himself from the clutches of black magic and leaving him to face execution. This decision was made to transform "San'an Al-Jamali" into a hero and savior, a destiny he vehemently rejected, leading to the realization that he had deviated from his original goal and contributed to the tragic demise of the young woman, Sanan Al-Jamali (Basima), the tenth daughter, who was raped and killed, "Qumqam whispered scornfully, "O the suffering of mankind! All I did, said Singam apologetically, was to save Gamasa al-Bulti's soul from hellfire. We never once interfered in their lives with things turning out as we wanted. And to connive with them is more than we can bear." (Mahfouz, 1982, 74)

The narrative emphasizes the necessity for a hero, possessing the qualities of a popular and redeeming figure who can fulfill the destiny of humanity. This role is embodied by the

esteemed police officer Gamsa Al-Balti, who vacillates between good and evil, power, and the teachings of Sheikh Al-Balkhi's school. He exhibits the attributes of a redeemer and demonstrates the capacity to make crucial decisions. The Mahfouzian text illustrates the transformation of Gamsa Al-Balti into Abdullah Al-Hamal Al-Mujahid, who ultimately brings justice to the city of Shahriar.

The theme of the miraculous continues in the Mahfouzian text, serving as a symbolic instrument to expose the pervasive corruption within the Shahriar authority, which disregards the interests of the populace. The malevolent genies of disbelief and evil, Zarmbah and Sakhrabut, assume new forms, with Zarmbah transforming into a beautiful woman named "Anis Al-Jalees" who hosts social gatherings at the Dar Al-Hamra in the weapons market. Meanwhile, Sakhrabut becomes her subordinate, with officials from the head of Shahriar to various individuals following her lead. This transformation underscores the extent of corruption within the city, leading to its eventual downfall. The narrative underscores the struggle for justice and the complexities of power and corruption, employing supernatural elements to convey the societal challenges faced by the characters. Through these elements, the text highlights the need for ethical conduct and the consequences of deviating from one's moral compass in a society plagued by tyranny and injustice:

And she and her companion began making
love, and sparks flew from their embrace.
Qumqam and Singam disappeared, at
which Sakhrabut and Zarmabaha let out a
shout of triumph, and he said to her,

“You’ve been away from me an age. “I was playing a trick in a temple in India. And where were you? “I made a journey over the mountains. “On my return,” said Zarmabaha seductively, “I saw a girl whose beauty stunned me. It must be admitted...”I too saw a handsome young man. (Mahfouz, 1982, 84)

The Mahfouzian text uses the concept of the miraculous as a literary device to expose the pervasive corruption within the ruling authority of Shahriar, from the highest levels to the lowest, demonstrating a lack of concern for the welfare of the people. This indifference ultimately leads to the downfall of the authority, as the imp of infidelity and evil, Zarmbaha and Sakhrabot, assume new forms. Zarmbaha transforms into a charming woman named "Anis Al-Jalis", hosting social gatherings at Dar Al-Hamra in the arms market, while Sakhrabot becomes her subordinate. Various powerful individuals, from the head of Shahriar to other officials, follow her lead, reflecting the extent of corruption within the city.

The narrative emphasizes the consequences of this corruption, as the people of the market witness their leader pledging allegiance while naked, symbolizing the exposure of their moral bankruptcy. The Mahfouzian text avoids directly exposing the sinful authority to its people, out of fear for the stability of the homeland, choosing to prioritize the public interest over partial private interests. This reflects a sense of national duty and the preservation of stability for the people and

the homeland. Furthermore, the Mahfouzian text interacts with the *Arabian Nights and Days* through its inspiration for the character of "Anis Al-Jalis" and other characters such as "Al-Mu'in bin Sawi, Al-Fadl bin Khaqan, and Suleiman Al-Zaini". While drawing inspiration from the story of "Nur al-Din Ali and the maidservant Anis Al-Jalis" from *Arabian Nights and Days*, Mahfouz deviates from the original text to highlight the significance of his narrative. The beautiful maidservant Anis Al-Jalis, who was loved by Nur al-Din and returned to him at the end of the tale in the *Arabian Nights and Days*, is transformed into the imp of infidelity and evil in Mahfouz's interpretation. Similarly, King Muhammad bin Suleiman Al-Zaini of Basra and his appointed ministers are depicted as corrupt elements in the government of Shahriar. This interaction with *The Arabian Nights* serves to underscore the unique perspective and thematic depth of the Mahfouzian text, as it reinterprets and subverts the traditional narrative to convey its messages about corruption, power, and societal decay.

The role of what can be described as the dark fantasy elements, represented by Zarmbaha and Sarbout, in the Mahfouzian text goes beyond merely exposing power; it also influences the fate of the characters. In a departure from the traditional narrative, "Dunyazad", Scheherazade's sister in Mahfouz's rendition, finds herself in a fictitious marriage with Nur al-Din, the perfume seller, which culminates in real tragedy. The preserved text emphasizes the dominance of Shahryar in the narrative, as he becomes the catalyst for reuniting the two lovers and transforms "Dunyazad" from a pivotal figure in *Arabian Nights and Days* to a source of anxiety and tension for

Scheherazade and her family. This subversion underscores the primacy of Shahryar's role and the shifting dynamics within the narrative:

Nur al-Din—what a happy young man he was! He had gone from being a simple seller of perfumes, whose rank was no higher than that of Ugr, and who was perhaps less endowed than his son Aladdin in handsomeness and qualities, to being one of the notables and a son-in-law of the sultan, the husband of Dunyazad, sister of Shahrzad. Was not God capable of everything? (Mahfouz, 1982, p. 121)

Moreover, Mahfouz utilizes the imaginary wedding to underscore the penetration of occult forces into Shahryar's authority and security, reaching into his palace where Dunyazad, symbolizing honor and chastity, resides with her sister Scheherazade. These unseen forces not only breach the Sultan's palace but also infiltrate the religious factions represented by the Shiite and Kharijite mujahideen, who oppose the authority. This is exemplified by the bestowal of a "concealment cap" by the evil imp Sarboot and Zarmbaha to Fadel Sanaan, diverting him from a life of jihad to one of absurdity, leading to theft, nonsensical actions, murder, and other atrocities. The narrative demonstrates the influence of these forces on individuals, as Fadel strays from his original purpose and the people's cause, ultimately falling into the hands of Shabib Ramat Al-Sayyaf. In summary, the Mahfouzian text reimagines and subverts traditional elements of *Arabian Nights and Days*, emphasizing the dominance of

Shahryar's role, the influence of occult forces on the narrative, and the impact of these forces on the characters' fates, reflecting a complex and nuanced exploration of power, authority, and societal dynamics. Mahfouz's omniscient narrator, explains:

He [Sanaan al-Gamali] understood the secrets of her [Umm Saad's] fears that corresponded to his own, for if mention were made of the genie, he did not know what would happen to his reputation as a merchant on the morrow, nor to what the reputation of his daughter Husniya and his son Fadil would be exposed. The dream would bring about total ruin. Also, he was sure of nothing. (Mahfouz, 1982, p. 14)

Arabian Nights and Days is a compelling work by Naguib Mahfouz that exemplifies his thematic focus on collective action and the potential for societal change. Through his storytelling, Mahfouz consistently emphasizes the importance of communal engagement and the gradual shift away from individualism towards a more unified popular will. One of the central themes in the novel is the idea of collective empowerment and the capacity for a community to come together to effect meaningful change. Mahfouz portrays characters who are not solely driven by personal ambitions but are deeply intertwined with the social fabric of their surroundings. This emphasis on interconnectedness serves to underscore the notion that individual actions and decisions can have a profound impact on the wider community. Amyuni explains:

Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days*: The Allegorical Sequel of *The Arabian Nights* While Mahfouz is extremely gentle and peaceful as a human being, a constructive civil servant throughout his career, he can be a vehement iconoclast in his fiction. Indeed, he constantly attacks and breaks deeply-ingrained beliefs and traditions that have grown hollow, and he exposes with great courage double standards, unjust behavior, and corruption of all sorts. (Amyuni, 1999, p. 205)

Through various narrative threads, Mahfouz illustrates how converging diverse perspectives and experiences can lead to a shared vision for a better future. This emphasis on unity and collaboration underscores Mahfouz's belief in the potential for collective action to disrupt existing power structures and bring about positive change. Moreover, Mahfouz's portrayal of the popular will as a driving force for societal progress is particularly noteworthy in *The Arabian Nights*. He delves into the complexities of navigating political and social landscapes, demonstrating how the people's collective will can catalyze revolution and reform. According to Bešková, "The fact that the experiences of the three characters mirror one another can be understood in terms of the universal transformation and spiritual growth of an individual, while together they stand for the collective rebirth of society. (Bešková, 2021, p. 76)

Ultimately, *Arabian Nights and Days* eloquently reinforces Mahfouz's thematic exploration of collective action and the potential for free popular will to shape a more just and equitable society. By weaving together, a narrative that underscores the importance of communal agency and shared purpose, Mahfouz underscores the enduring relevance of mobilizing collective efforts towards meaningful societal change. *Arabian Nights and Days* stands as a poignant testament to Naguib Mahfouz's unwavering commitment to championing the power of collective action and the transformative potential of a unified popular will. Through his masterful storytelling, Mahfouz invites readers to contemplate the profound impact of communal engagement and the enduring legacy of collective movements in shaping the course of history. Glifford suggests that contemporary allegorical works serve as a communal representation of external realities that exist beyond the confines of the text:

Modern allegories substitute the individual consciousness for shared values and for belief in external hierarchies, and in doing so distance themselves from the material in which abstractions are best expressed: objective phenomena and literary and philosophical traditions. (Glifford, 1974, p.122)

The Mahfouzian texts seek to promote collective action and move away from individualism, aiming to establish a free popular will with the potential to effect change. Mahfouz drew inspiration from the metaphysical element of the "concealment cap" in the "Story of Hassan al-Basri" in *One Thousand and One*

Nights, where Hassan al-Basri uses it to rid his family of the evil queen Nour al-Huda. This cap, obtained from his son's deceased magician father, serves a noble purpose in the original story, aiming to eradicate evil. However, in the preserved text, Mahfouz repurposes this element to expose the Kharijites and Shia mujahideen who oppose Shahryar's authority, leading to a tragic outcome.

When these mujahideen, embodied by Fadel Sana'an, demand justice, the deputy of the king of death, Azrael, assumes a neutral position through the body of the teacher Sahloul, an auctioneer and antiques dealer, stating "God does what he wants." This can be interpreted as an implicit approval of retribution, signifying their neutrality from what God has granted them in terms of "mind and spirit" or "thought and religion." Despite this, they persist in meddling with the city of Shahririyā, justifying retribution, similar to other powerful individuals who have strayed from justice. This wise merchant embodies moderation between the secular and religious realms, enabling human destiny to fulfill its aspirations, as articulated by the phrase "From the king of dream, the king of tomorrow." In summary, Mahfouz's reimagining of the metaphysical element from the "Story of Hassan al-Basri" in *Arabian Nights and Days* serves to underscore the complex interplay between power, justice, and morality, reflecting a nuanced exploration of societal dynamics and the potential for collective action to effect change.

Arabian Nights and Days by Naguib Mahfouz can be seen as a thought-provoking reimagining of the metaphysical elements found in the "Story of Hassan al-Basri" in *The Arabian Nights*,

underscoring the intricate interplay between power, justice, and morality. In Mahfouz's novel, this reimagining serves as a vehicle for a nuanced exploration of societal dynamics and the transformative potential of collective action to bring about change. Mahfouz intricately weaves together elements of mysticism and moral complexity within the narrative, drawing upon the metaphysical nuances present in the "Story of Hassan al-Basri" to delve into the intricate layers of power and its influence on societal structures. Through the characters and their interactions, Mahfouz invites readers to contemplate the moral ambiguities that arise within a society shaped by power dynamics, thereby shedding light on the complexities inherent in the pursuit of justice and equity.

Furthermore, Mahfouz's exploration of collective action within *Arabian Nights and Days* provides a compelling framework for understanding the potential for societal change. By aligning the metaphysical elements with the broader societal dynamics depicted in the novel, Mahfouz emphasizes the transformative power of organized movements and the enduring resonance of communal agency in reshaping existing power structures. In essence, Mahfouz's reimagining of the metaphysical element from the "Story of Hassan al-Basri" serves as a vehicle for a richly textured exploration of power, justice, and morality within the context of societal dynamics. Through this lens, he presents a nuanced perspective on the potential for collective action to effect meaningful change, thereby underscoring the enduring relevance of his thematic focus on communal engagement and the pursuit of a more just and equitable society. According to Bešková, "The author's desire to

break away from any fixed literary norms led him to draw inspiration also from the vast repository of Arabic popular heritage, namely from the collection of the *Thousand and One Nights*.” (Bešková, 2021, p.43)

Through these tales, Mahfouz offers a nuanced exploration of societal dynamics and the potential for collective action to effect change. Each story in the collection serves as a microcosm of the broader Egyptian society, shedding light on the intricacies of human behavior, the quest for justice, and the challenges of navigating a world filled with moral ambiguity. One of the central themes that permeates *Arabian Nights and Days* is the nature of power and its impact on individuals and society as a whole. Throughout the stories, Mahfouz examines the different manifestations of power, from political authority to social influence, and how it shapes the lives of the characters. In doing so, he underscores the inherent complexities and moral dilemmas that arise when power dynamics come into play.

The stories in *Arabian Nights and Days* also serve as a poignant commentary on the quest for justice in a society rife with inequality and corruption. Mahfouz skillfully weaves together narratives that depict the struggles of individuals who are marginalized or oppressed, highlighting the pervasive injustices that exist within the social fabric. Whether it is a tale of a peasant seeking retribution for a wrong committed against them or a narrative of a ruler grappling with the responsibilities of governance, Mahfouz's stories underscore the universal yearning for fairness and equity. Furthermore, Mahfouz's exploration of morality in *Arabian Nights and Days* adds another layer of depth

to the collection. The characters in the stories are often confronted with moral dilemmas, and their decisions have far-reaching consequences that reverberate throughout the narratives. Mahfouz deftly navigates the complexities of human behavior, presenting characters who grapple with their ethical codes and societal expectations. Through these narratives, he prompts readers to reflect on the nature of morality and the challenges of upholding one's principles in a world fraught with moral ambiguity.

In addition to examining power, justice, and morality on an individual level, *Arabian Nights and Days* also delves into the potential for collective action to effect change within society. Mahfouz's stories often feature characters who band together to challenge oppressive systems or to seek redress for societal injustices. These narratives serve as a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of collective action and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Moreover, Mahfouz's storytelling in *Arabian Nights and Days* is characterized by its rich symbolism and allegory, which adds depth and complexity to the exploration of societal dynamics. The stories serve as a mirror reflecting the broader Egyptian society, offering insights into the cultural and historical landscape of the time. Mahfouz's use of imagery and metaphor creates a vivid and immersive world for readers, allowing them to engage with the complexities of human experience and societal structures.

Ultimately, *Arabian Nights and Days* serves as a testament to Naguib Mahfouz's skill as a storyteller and his deep understanding of the human condition. Through this collection,

he presents a thought-provoking exploration of power, justice, and morality, offering a nuanced portrayal of societal dynamics and the potential for collective action to effect change. The timeless themes and universal truths embedded within these stories continue to resonate with readers, cementing Mahfouz's status as a literary giant. Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* stands as a powerful testament to the complexities of human nature and the societal dynamics at play. Through this collection, Mahfouz captures the intricacies of power, justice, and morality, and offers a compelling exploration of the potential for collective action to effect change. His storytelling prowess and insightful commentary on the human experience solidify *Arabian Nights and Days* as a timeless work that continues to captivate and inspire readers around the world.

5- CONCLUSION

Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006), the esteemed Arab novelist, significantly reshaped the landscape of contemporary Arabic literature, particularly through his innovative work, *Arabian Nights and Days*. In this novel, Mahfouz draws upon the rich narrative techniques found in *The Arabian Nights*, particularly the storytelling traditions of Scheherazade, to explore complex themes of power, morality, and societal critique. By reimagining these classic tales, Mahfouz not only pays homage to their legacy but also critiques contemporary Egyptian society, highlighting issues of corruption, power dynamics, and social justice. Mahfouz's narrative intricately weaves elements of magic, jinn, and the duality of good and evil, creating a rich tapestry that reflects the moral complexities of human existence. The characters, including Sultan Shahryar and Princess Scheherazade,

navigate a world filled with political intrigue and ethical dilemmas, echoing the struggles faced by individuals in modern society. Through figures like Maarouf the cobbler, who rises to success, and Fadel Sanaan, whose failures illustrate the harsh realities of life, Mahfouz emphasizes the potential for collective action and societal change .

Philosophical and metaphysical inquiries permeate *Arabian Nights and Days*, as Mahfouz delves into existential questions about the human condition. His exploration of freedom, power, and the quest for justice resonates deeply, inviting readers to reflect on their own moral choices. By employing Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism, one can uncover the underlying structures that inform Mahfouz's character development and narrative representation, revealing how these elements enhance the thematic depth of the novel. In conclusion, *Arabian Nights and Days* stands as a testament to Mahfouz's literary genius, blending traditional narrative forms with contemporary issues. His sophisticated approach not only enriches our understanding of the human experience but also ensures that his work remains a vital source of inspiration and challenge for readers and scholars alike. Mahfouz's ability to articulate the complexities of existence through his narratives solidifies his place as a cornerstone of modern Arabic literature, encouraging ongoing discourse on the interplay between individual and collective identities within society.

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