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Attention engineering in ibn Arabshah's "fruit of the caliphs and the amusement of the courtiers" chapter four as a model

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Abstract

Narrative occupies a prominent position in classical Arabic literature, and Arab writers produced a wide range of narrative genres. Among the most important is the tale, which is fundamentally based on attracting and influencing the recipient by controlling the course of narration through mechanisms and techniques capable of sustaining interaction and attention between the narrative text and its recipient. Ibn Arabshah's book "Fruit of the Caliphs and the Amusement of the Courtiers" provides a rich narrative model of such techniques. The author employs the worlds of animals, jinn, and other beings to convey messages containing reflections and philosophical insights that may assist the ruler in managing political affairs wisely. This research paper seeks to uncover the narrative structures and mechanisms employed by Ibn Arabshah to attract the recipient and communicate his messages effectively, thereby ensuring interaction and pleasure through breaking the monotony of narration by means of various techniques.

Keywords: recipient; narration; Fruit of the Caliphs and the Amusement of the Courtiers; Ibn Arabshah; narrative techniques.

Introduction

Narrative genres multiplied in classical Arabic literature across its various periods. In the pre-Islamic era, storytelling was among the most prominent narrative forms for transmitting the Arabs' news, battles and days, biographical tales, anecdotes, and other accounts. With the advent of Islam, religious narratives appeared in the Holy Qur'an and Prophetic Hadith, carrying lessons and admonition for their recipients. Classical narrative then developed, particularly during the Abbasid period and thereafter, establishing many of the basic features of contemporary narrative. These included maqamat, dream narratives, the tales of One Thousand and One Nights, and animal tales. The latter are among the most significant



narrative genres because they possess an aesthetic literary character as narrative texts and a symbolic character through the use of animals and other figures as a means of conveying ideas and experiences. They also have an educational and philosophical dimension.

Among the most prominent of these narrative texts is Ibn Arabshah's "Fruit of the Caliphs and the Amusement of the Courtiers," through which he sought to convey numerous educational messages to princes and caliphs. The author primarily focused on the recipient because of the recipient's importance, employing symbols and techniques capable of influencing and attracting attention through new and effective approaches to politics and governance.

1. Attention Engineering

Numerous studies in the humanities and social sciences have addressed attention from both functional and neurological perspectives. Attention is defined as "the period during which an individual can focus on a particular object or stimulus rather than other unnecessary subjects—performing a process of selecting stimuli—provided that they are retained for the time necessary to be processed and transmitted to the higher mental centers." It is therefore a mental activity and a cognitive state of readiness on the part of the recipient toward a particular subject (Al-Waqfi, 2009, p. 82).

The meaning of attention in literature and criticism does not differ substantially from these meanings. It constitutes a perceptual framework concerned with how a literary text is employed and organized to shape the recipient's awareness through multiple techniques capable of producing signification and meaning through the recipient's interpretations.

2. A Brief Biography of the Author Ibn Arabshah

He is Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abd Allah ibn Ibrahim, Abu Muhammad Shihab al-Din, known as Ibn Arabshah (Ibn Arab Shah), a historian and traveler who also engaged in literature. He was born in Damascus in 791 AH/1389 CE. He left the Levant for Samarkand with his family after Timur's invasion and spent most of his life traveling between countries. He undertook numerous journeys and died in Cairo in 854 AH/1450 CE (Al-Zirikli, 1986, p. 228).

It was said of him that he "mastered speech in the three languages: Persian, Turkish, and Arabic," and traveled through the lands of Dasht and Saray, then came to Crimea and crossed the Roman Sea to the Ottoman kingdom, where he stayed for about ten years and served the sultan in the chancery (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, p. 13).

He produced numerous Arabic works and translations, including (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, pp. 13–14):

- "The Wonders of Destiny in the History of Timur."
- "The Utmost Desire in the Languages of the Turks, Persians, and Arabs."
- "The Pure Composition on the Biography of the Righteous King Jaqmaq."

- "The Glory of Biographies in the Dynasties of the Turks and Tatars."
- He translated from Persian into Turkish the book "The Collection of Tales and Narratives."
- In Arabic, he wrote "The Unique Necklace on Divine Unity."

3. "Fruit of the Caliphs and the Amusement of the Courtiers"

"Fruit of the Caliphs and the Amusement of the Courtiers" is considered one of the symbolic narrative works written through the voices of animals. It represents an extension of the famous "Kalila wa Dimna." Ibn Arabshah confirms that he had consulted earlier works written through animal voices. He explains that he composed his book as "a recreation for people of literary culture and a lesson for those possessing understanding among kings, deputies, princes, and chamberlains," and organized it into ten chapters. The first addresses the necessity of political writing for kings and advising them, while the subsequent chapters present various political values and institutions through dialogues among animals dealing with issues such as consultation and justice. Writing through the voices of animals carries political meanings that go beyond the explicit content of the discourse to the surrounding circumstances that encourage this indirect form of political engagement. The book was thus directed toward people in positions of authority by presenting tales capable of offering guidance and meanings that could assist a king in managing the affairs of his kingdom (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, pp. 7–8).

The title of the book consists of two parts. The first, "Fruit of the Caliphs," indicates that the book is directed toward the ruler in order to advise, guide, and reform him politically, to remove injustice and spread justice among people. The second, "The Amusement of the Courtiers," addresses refined readers, men of letters, and the general reading public, creating an atmosphere of purposeful joy, useful amusement, and pleasant conversation through an engaging narrative of symbolic animal tales based on the duality of speaking and listening, or transmission and reception. This makes the book one of the most important narrative works to give considerable attention to the recipient as an element in the narrative process. A literary work does not achieve its full significance unless it produces the intended effect in the recipient, which is precisely what Ibn Arabshah sought to achieve through his book (Al-Ghazali, 2001, p. 22).

Ibn Arabshah divided his book into ten major chapters:

- Chapter One: On the Arab king whose circumstances led to the composition of this book; it contains eight subsidiary tales.
- Chapter Two: On the counsels of the Persian king distinguished from his peers by virtue and wisdom; it contains ten subsidiary tales.
- Chapter Three: On the wisdom of the Turkish king with his ascetic brother-in-law, the shaykh of ascetics; it contains two subsidiary tales.

- Chapter Four: On the discussions between the human world and the demon Jan al-Jinn; it contains eleven subsidiary tales.
- Chapter Five: On the anecdotes of the king of beasts, his companion the prince of foxes, and the chief of hyenas; it contains ten subsidiary tales.
- Chapter Six: On the anecdotes of the eastern goat and the African dog; it contains eighteen subsidiary tales.
- Chapter Seven: On the battle between Abu al-Abtal al-Ribal and Abu Daghfal, the sultan of elephants; it contains eight subsidiary tales.
- Chapter Eight: On the wisdom of the ascetic lion and the examples of the wandering camel; it contains seven subsidiary tales.
- Chapter Nine: On the king of birds, the eagle, and the two partridges saved from the eagle; it contains eight subsidiary tales.
- Chapter Ten: On dealing with enemies and companions and governing subjects and loved ones; it contains anecdotes, reports, histories of good and evil people, and fourteen subsidiary tales.

4. Foundations for Attracting the Recipient's Attention in the Book

"Fruit of the Caliphs and the Amusement of the Courtiers" attaches great importance to its primary recipient, namely the kings, who constitute the principal reason for its composition. In this regard, Ibn Arabshah states: "This book was composed in a beautiful manner especially for kings and princes, holders of justice, leaders, masters, and nobles, so that they may reflect on the lessons of experience and the qualities of justice, conduct, and good morals attributed to beings that neither reason nor understanding." The primary purpose of composing the book was therefore to offer advice and guidance to its first recipients—kings, princes, and ministers. The author sought to take the recipient into account by presenting advice through animals (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, p. 7).

4.1. Narrative Embedding

Narrative embedding may be defined as "interrupting the course of the first tale and postponing its ending, while multiplying fiction by embedding one tale within another." This generates a relationship between the initial tale, known as the frame tale, and the second tale, known as the subsidiary or embedded tale. This narrative feature produces a narrator and an addressee for each story: in the primary tale, both remain outside the embedded story, whereas in the second tale they become part of it. This attracts the attention of the third recipient—the reader—and reinforces suspense (Kharab, 2019, p. 180).

Ibn Arabshah employed narrative embedding to preserve the recipient's attention and arouse curiosity. This is evident in Chapter Four, entitled "On the Discussions between the Human World and the Demon Jan al-Jinn." The principal purpose of this chapter is to present an

intellectual debate between the human being and the demon concerning a range of philosophical issues. The chapter consists of a frame tale and subsidiary tales. The presence of narrative embedding in "Fruit of the Caliphs and the Amusement of the Courtiers" can be summarized as follows:

The major frame tale of the book: It concerns an Arab king who had five sons. Conflict arises among four of the brothers over succession to power, revealing their ambitions for the caliphate and authority. Hasib, the most distinguished of the king's sons, however, is known for his excellence and sound judgment and adopts a different position from his brothers: he abandons rule and authority and turns toward wisdom and contemplation. He plays a major role in the tales of the book.

The frame tale of Chapter Four: The chapter begins with the speech of the book's principal narrator, Shaykh Abu al-Mahasin, as an opening scene in which the king expresses admiration for the tales narrated by the wise Hasib in the preceding chapter: "When the wise Hasib, noble in virtue and lineage, had completed the tale of what he had embroidered from what he had woven and fashioned, and what the tailor of his judgment had cut..." His brother the king then thanked him for his words and bestowed generosity upon him (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, p. 147).

The narrative then moves to the frame tale of Chapter Four, "The Devil's Departure from Baghdad": "O master, I have been informed that someone emerged from Baghdad, issuing from fire of a flame, and descended into the realms of disgrace..." The wise Hasib concludes the frame tale with an ending that permits entry into new subsidiary tales: "I have also been informed, O mighty king, that in that place he encountered one of its eminent scholars... just as happened to the learned man of humanity with the devil of demons and Jan al-Jinn in bygone times..." The great king then says: "Tell us about it, O noble Hasib," thereby opening the way to the first subsidiary tale and moving the recipient from one narrative system to another while preserving attention (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, pp. 147–148).

The first subsidiary tale: The devout scholar in the Levant with the prince of the jinn. The narrator begins by speaking of the devout scholar who spread righteousness throughout the land and followed the Sunnah and the community, filling the world with knowledge and good works. This prompted the demons to complain to their king, the Devil: "O shaykh of deception and cousin of Satan, you have stripped the schools and abolished their whispers... the mosques have been filled with every worshipper and prostrator... we no longer have authority over the children of Adam..." The king and his ministers meet to find a solution to the ascetic man. The tale ends with the Devil and his retinue realizing that confronting this worshipper would lead to an unfavorable outcome, and the narrator provides the example of the "worshipper of the Children of Israel," which becomes the second subsidiary tale of the chapter (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, p. 150).

Ibn Arabshah continues the chapter in this manner, so that the end of one subsidiary tale becomes the beginning of the next. This technique helped attract the reader's attention

through narration within narration, compelling the recipient to interact with the tales and move among them while maintaining concentration in order to perceive the different meanings contained within each story.

4.2. Multiplicity of Narrative Voices

This is one of the most prominent techniques employed by Ibn Arabshah in his book, where multiple voices narrate the events of the tales.

The external narrator: This is the principal narrator of the frame or mother tale of the book, "Shaykh Abu al-Mahasin," whom Arabshah positioned as the official speaker in the book. He is comparable to Shahrazad in "One Thousand and One Nights" and the sage Bidpai in "Kalila wa Dimna."

The internal narrator: This is the wise Hasib, a central character in the book's frame tale because he is one of the deceased king's sons. He serves as the principal narrator of the subsidiary tales. Thus, Hasib is an internal narrator in the frame tale and an external narrator in the subsidiary narrative, while each subsidiary tale contains its own internal narrator.

The multiplicity of voices within the narrative text affects the recipient by turning the recipient into a participant in the production of meaning rather than merely a listener or reader. It consequently constitutes a technique that helps attract attention and strengthen the recipient's presence in the creative process.

4.3. Generic Interpenetration

The theory of generic interpenetration is among the theories addressed by both classical and modern criticism. It means that several literary genres overlap within a single narrative text, turning it into a broad field for analysis and interpretation. This is abundantly present in "Fruit of the Caliphs and the Amusement of the Courtiers," where Ibn Arabshah combines the tale, poetry, wisdom, and other forms. This can be observed in numerous passages of Chapter Four.

4.3.1. Poetry: Ibn Arabshah incorporated several poetic verses into the subsidiary tales of Chapter Four. For example, he says: "He exerted effort and diligence to the extent of what the hand could reach, and stood firm in demonstrating courage, as the poet, Sallam al-Khasir, said in the record of the courageous..." (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, p. 152). He also says elsewhere: "We have a flask of aged wine that I had saved for your lodging and prepared for one like you. I have nothing else; if you wish, we shall bring it and drink wine in search of joy, for it is the substance of happiness, as it has been said..." (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, p. 211).

The incorporation of poetry into the narrative text affects both the text and the recipient. It breaks the monotony of narration as the writer moves smoothly from prose to verse, producing a sudden shift for the recipient that renews attention and stimulates interpretive

participation. The transition from the narrative mode to poetry also breaks the recipient's horizon of expectations.

4.3.2. Proverbs and Wisdom Sayings

Proverbs and wisdom sayings feature prominently in "Fruit of the Caliphs and the Amusement of the Courtiers." The author employed them to influence the primary recipient—kings and caliphs—because proverbs held a significant place in the minds of the ancient Arabs and were associated with admonition and extracting lessons. Among the examples is the introduction to the book, where Ibn Arabshah included numerous proverbs intended to influence his addressees. He cites: "The Arabs said in their proverbs: The wall said to the peg, 'Why do you suffer?' It replied, 'Ask the one who drives me in, and tell the one behind me to leave me behind.' They also said: More generous than a lion." He further recounts the famous anecdote of the rabbit, the fox, and the lizard, whose statements subsequently became proverbial, and concludes with the proverb: "He who provokes the scorpion with the snake" (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, p. 28).

The author himself explains why he introduces proverbs and how they affect the recipient: "This matter is widespread and famous, known among people and not denied. To enumerate it is difficult and to exhaust it impossible. The most appropriate method is to illustrate, compare, and infer the many from the few, so that the listener may sometimes unravel and at other times contemplate, moving from the hidden to the manifest and, by reflecting upon its meanings, progressing from the lower to the higher." Thus, proverbs in the narrative text do not serve merely an aesthetic function; they present the recipient with a condensed vision and experience that provides concentrated meaning. Moreover, proverbs possess a persuasive style and argumentative force over the recipient, giving the tale a realistic and credible dimension (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, p. 29).

As for wisdom sayings, Ibn Arabshah employed them extensively in Chapter Four and in its various subsidiary tales. He states: "The sages and people of experience have said, those who have suffered the calamities of time and been tested by its wonders and strange events: when a person confronts an adversary and is unable to resist him in litigation and dispute, he should demolish that mountain with the magnet of deception and the pickaxes of stratagem, seeking the help of people of valor and those possessing strength and determination, and thereby cure that affliction even if they are enemies rather than friends." This wisdom appears in the sixth subsidiary tale, "The Boastful Farmer's Knowledge Compared with the Physician's Knowledge of Sound Judgment," and emphasizes that the most effective way to overcome a resistant enemy is profound thought, great intellect, and subtle strategy (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, pp. 170–171).

Elsewhere he says: "One of the sages said: Experience is sufficient as discipline, and the changing of days is an admonition; and they said: Experience is the mirror of the mind." This wisdom occurs in the final subsidiary tale of Chapter Four, "The Sage and the Wife of the

Governor," and is mentioned to discuss the status of the rational person and his composure and sound judgment among his people (Ibn Arabshah, 2001, p. 211).

The use of wisdom in the various tales of Chapter Four thus exerted a persuasive and intellectual effect on the recipient. It compels the recipient to contemplate deep meanings and connect them with personal experiences in order to derive a lesson.

Ibn Arabshah employed numerous other mechanisms in his book, including the mechanism of the illogical, the marvelous and defamiliarization of reality, prolepsis and analepsis, and others.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ibn Arabshah's "Fruit of the Caliphs and the Amusement of the Courtiers" reveals a clear awareness of narrative techniques capable of exerting a significant influence on the recipient and sustaining attention for an extended period. The author did not merely narrate events in a sequential and coherent manner; he also added touches that created a space for interaction and pleasure between the text and the recipient.

The techniques of "narrative embedding," "multiplicity of narrative voices," and "generic interpenetration" constitute fundamental factors in breaking the monotony of narration and diversifying the paths of storytelling in order to preserve the recipient's attention. They contributed to achieving aesthetic pleasure and went beyond it to fulfill the book's principal purpose: guiding its recipients—rulers and princes—to derive lessons from the tales presented.

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