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*Poetic Stanzas* and *Magic Statements* in Palestinian Fairytales:

Formalistic and Structural Approaches

PhD dissertation abstract

**By: Maysoon Shibi**

**ID: 302814793**

**Supervisor: Prof. Jeries Khoury**

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# **Abstract**

The present study is basically concerned with Palestinian fairytales in general, and in the *poetic stanzas* within these fairytales in specific. It is a structural analysis generally, that included the reference to four different literary thinkers: Propp, Jakobson, Shklovsky and Ibn al-Khaṭīb. The usage of the theoretical material of these four thinkers had led us to come out with three hypotheses, which are considered the pillars of this study: (1) ***Poetic Stanzas* appear in *Palestinian fairytales* because of a dramatic event**; (2) **The *poetic stanza* has the most static structure within the Palestinian fairytales**; (3) **In poetry, *difference* may mean magic.** Overall, the study is divided into four major parts: (1)"Fairytales"; (2) "*Poetic Stanzas* and *Magic Statements* in Palestinian Fairytales"; (3) "Methodology"; (4) "*Poetic Stanzas* and *Magic Statements* in Palestinian Fairytales- Formalistic and Structural Approaches". The first three parts are theoretical, and present the basic terminology and the methodology of the research. As for the fourth part, it is the application part, where we discussed and supported our hypotheses.

**In the first part**, "Fairytales", we started by giving definitions of the term *folklore* in general, and gave an overall summary of it basic characteristics. Then, we moved to define folktales in general, and bring up a review of its definitions in the Arab culture. Moreover, a brief introductory of the term *fairytale* was given, followed by an emphasis on its international definitions. Then, we moved to talk about more genres of the fantastic, and how they are called, also in an international context. Consequently, we brought up a *figure* on how we see fairytales in the context of other types of folktales generally. We concluded that fairytales constitute a part of the supernatural or the fantastic, and they are built with and within the elements of the fantastic: the do not just include them. In addition, we presented the characteristics of fairytales, and listed the most frequent ones. We also discussed its themes and functions, and ended this part of the study by presenting a review of other names of the *fairytale* globally.

**The second part** of the study is called "*Poetic Stanzas* and *Magic Statements* in Palestinian Fairytales". In this part, we started with defining the term "poetic stanzas", as it is the major term of the research. This is a term that we chose in order to refer to the short poems that are found within the prosaic texts of the folktales in general, a literary phenomenon that is called *prosimetrum*. In addition, we defined the term *magic statements*, which is also a basic term in this study, and refers to a type of the *poetic stanzas* that have magical effects on the event or the consequences of the plot of the fairytale.

Then, we gave a brief introduction concerning the origins of Arabic poetry, and how it has been always connected to magic through *saj*῾ (=rhymed prose) in general, and *sajʿ al-kuhhān* (=rhyme dprose of the soothsayers) in particular. Moreover, we made the connection between this genre of rhymed prose and poets in general in classical times and how poets were considered to be magicians because of their *magical powers* to make things appear as they are not, hence they were considered to have demons for their poetic inspirations. Then we moved on to *Al-Siḥr al-bayānī* (=magic of "indirect utterances") in *Al-Maqūlāt al-siḥriyya* (=magic statements) and talked about its origins. In this section, we tried to connect the term *muḥākāh* (=mimeses) in Arabic, to an ancient hieroglyph word, *ḥeka* (connotes *magic*), which have the almost the same pronunciation. Consequently, and to connect everything together, we gave an introductory section on the *poetic stanzas* and *magic statements* in Palestinian Fairytales, and tried to figure out the role of *al-siḥr al-bayānī* in the Arabian fairytales in general, as it is presented in the sources. At the end of this part, we concluded that the power that is represented in the *magical powers* of poets or poetry is basically the power of the *words*, something that has been discussed overtime in all cultures and religions of the world.

**In the third part**, "Methodology", we presented the methods that we followed during the discussion of the hypothesis, a methodology that is basically *structural*. First of all, we presented the origins and definitions of the *formalism* school, and gave an overview of its basic terminology and principles; basically the emphasis of this school on the *literariness* of the literary texts, one of the basic methods of this study. Furthermore, we discussed the term *semiotics*, and started doing so by addressing *structuralism* and its basic principles. Then, we moved to the terminology and principles of *semiotics* itself, and discussed the theory of signs with reference to De Saussure and Pierce. In addition, we addressed Jakobson and his basic terminology, with an emphasis on *context*, *message* and *metaphor*; three of the basic terms used in the research, especially to support our third hypothesis.

To make the part of the methodology more specific, we then moved to discuss the four basic literary figures we relied on during the discussion of the corpus. First, Propp's *morphology of the fairytale*, and his division of the functions of the *dramatis personae*. Second, Jakobson's *poetics*, and his discussion of the *differentia specifica* and thepoetic language of poetry. Third, Ibn al-Khaṭīb's magic and poetry, and how he connects them together, and considers poetry to be a tool of fulfilling *magic*. Lastly, fourth, Shklovsky's *defamiliarization*, and the way he differentiates art as a literary technique that praises the *unfamiliar*.

To prepare for the last part of the study, we ended the last section with introducing general folk literature in the studies of modern literary theory, with a reference to the historical background of such studies. Then, we focused on folk literature from formalistic and structural perspectives. Consequently, we talked about Arabic folk literature in the light of formalism and semiotics, in order to make the presentation more relevant to our research. Eventually, we have been more specific with emphasizing the formalism and semiotic approaches in the study of Palestinian fairytales. In conclusion, a more cohesive section is presented, with an emphasis on poetry and semiotics, and the connection between the two in general. More specifically, *prosimetrum* is defined as a literary term, and the way it is connected to our research- an appropriate note that connects to the next and final part of the research.

**Finally, in the fourth part**, "*Poetic Stanzas* and *Magic Statement*s in Palestinian Fairytales- Formalistic and Structural Approaches", we present and discuss the three hypotheses of the research. **The first hypothesis, "*Poetic Stanzas* appear in Palestinian fairytales because of a dramatic event"**, turned to be correct. The Palestinian fairytales do use *poetic stanzas* when a *dramatic event* occurs. Not only that, but there are a lot of types of such events, that we concluded through a reading of the corpus of the research. For this hypothesis, we used 50 fairytale texts. Out of our reading, we assigned 5 different types of dramatic events, some of which have sub-types:

1. **The hero asks for help by employing a symbolic *poetic stanza***.
2. A direct hint: the way the hero asks for help is linguistically simple and direct.
3. An indirect hint: the way the hero asks for help is linguistically complex and indirect, and it is much more symbolic.
4. **A magical agent tries to help the hero**.
5. **Exposing the villain:**
6. The same *poetic stanza* that is meant to help the hero.
7. The villain exposes himself or herself.
8. The hero tries to expose the villain.
9. Asking the villain to reveal himself or herself or itself.
10. **A password:**
11. A normal password
12. A late reverse password
13. **Getting emotional** (the hero is upset, annoyed, disturbed, uncomfortable or happy)

**As for the second hypothesis, "The *poetic stanza* has the most static structure within the Palestinian fairytales"**, we found out that it is also correct. For this hypothesis, we used 21 texts of 5 fairytales. In other words, and to figure out whether the hypothesis is correct or not, we looked for different versions of 5 specific fairytales. Consequently, we discussed the differences and similarities between the different versions of each fairytale, in terms of the events that happen before the appearance of the *poetic stanza*, textual structures, the usage of specific words and the usage of poetic meter. We concluded that the most static structural unit within the prosaic text of the fairytale is the *poetic stanza*.

The reason why we decided to discuss only the events that occur before the appearance of the *poetic stanza* in the text of the fairytale is the fact that they proved to be the reason why it appears in the first place. Usually, we saw that the events after do not change anything, and do not help in creating new *poetic stanzas* afterward. Thus, in the context of our research, we found that only the events beforehand matter to the discussion of the status of the structure of the *poetic stanza*.

In addition, and one of the basic sections of this discussion was the scansion of and tracking the *poetic stanzas*, which helped us sometimes finding the original *poetic stanza* of the general fairytale. Most of the times it was either *al-rajaz*, *al-mutadārak*, *al-ramal* or a syllabic meter, something that characterizes the meters of the Palestinian folk poetry in general, as the first two meters are used side by side to everyday language. Furthermore, in some cases, there were additions of words or expressions that broke the meter. Such additions are used for more educative, decorative or enthusiastic reasons. Sometimes, deleting them helped us discover the original meter of the *poetic stanzas*.

In some extra methods that we used to support our discussion of the second hypothesis, we referred to two main points: the availability of the hybrid text and the children's version. An example of the first point is the fact that the hybrid text of "The Green Bird" that we read, supports the static structure of the *poetic stanzas* in the mentioned Palestinian fairytales. This is obviously because it preserved the *poetic stanzas* discussed in the research. In addition, perhaps the reason why the text did not preserve the *poetic stanzas* of the second fairytale that is "hybridized" in the text is the fact that the tale holds the name of the first fairytale, "The Green Bird". Moreover, in a different context of the research, the tale of the green bird does not seem to be originally Palestinian. Apparently, it is a version of the Grimm's fairytale "The Juniper Tree". Although the tales differ at some points, the *poetic stanzas* in both texts are almost the same. Both versions repeat the same poetic lines mentioning the mother (step-mother) as a killer, the father as the one who ate the flesh of his own son, the compassionate sister who buried her brother's bone, etc. not only that, but in Goethe's *Faust* this *poetic stanza* repeats, this time even more similar to the Palestinian version with a similar reference to where the bones were hidden. This finding definitely supports the second hypothesis of the research in the general sense of worldwide fairytales. Perhaps this is a sign that *poetic stanzas* do not even change when the fairytales are transferred between different cultures of the world, something that requires a whole different research.

As for the second point, the fact that the *poetic stanzas* do not change in the children's versions of the fairytales discussed, proves that their structures are mostly stable or static, and do not change easily. In a way, they also represent folk poetry, which can hardly be adapted textually. Adapting the folk poetry to a more formal form (in the case of children's literature) will only *deconstruct* their poetics, or the fact that they are poetry.

**The third hypothesis, "In poetry, *difference* may mean magic"**, proved to be correct too. For this hypothesis, we used 37 texts. Basically, we concluded that the basic *magical tool* in language is *repetition*. This was concluded after the analysis of the *magic statements* in the fairytales, according to some specific types of repetition. First of all we chose to analyze the repetition of sounds, and see the way they are repeated, and if their repetition means something. Accordingly, we chose to follow two types of rhymes: (1) the familiar rhyme, which is a rhyme that is repeated in different fairytales, accordingly with the repetition of the *magic statements* because they are famous, such as *shubbēk lubbēk*. (2) The distinct rhyme, which is distinctive for a specific fairytale, and does not repeat in other fairytales, except if it is a version of it.

We found out that rhyme was one basic term through this analysis, because it is the most obvious characteristic in such statements. When there were such repetitions of sound and rhymes, the magical event was enhanced, hence supporting the idea of the power of language. Moreover , we referred to the religious context, something that cannot be missed during such a discussion, because religious texts have these rhymes and repetitive sounds that make things do *happen*. In this context, we gave examples from the fairytales, such as prayers and incantations, that helped in producing supernatural or *magical* effects.

Then, we moved on to discuss the literal repetition, which is found as repetition of words, segment of words and consonants or vowels. In all three cases, we saw that whenever the same word, segment of a word, a consonant, or a vowel is repeated, the supernatural event or occurrence takes place. Consequently, leading us to the general conclusion which proves that the *different* use of language, such as using *repetition*, results in magical occurrences. This is because the enhancement is put on the message, as Jakobson claims, and not on the context. Hence, it is not really the context that matters, but the message itself, and the way it is said: in the form of the words and the structure of its sounds, and not its meaning.

The contribution of our research lies within the fact that the studies in the general field of Palestinian fairytales lack for a research in such *poetic stanzas*. If found, they are minor and do not expand their analysis in the general structural method. Therefore, we see that this research will constitute a basic study in the field of literature from different and multiple perspectives, such as Arabic literature, folk literature, structural analysis, Palestinian literature or folk literature, and more specifically Palestinian fairytales, a field that have been barely studied so far.

Eventually, we may provide some ideas or hints to new research in the field of the Palestinian fairytales:

1. **The way reference change for some characters**:

Sometimes, a fairytale would start with a *khityār* or a *ʿajūz*. With the running of the events, the storyteller will refer to them as *ghūl* or *mārid*, without explaining why. Thus, we cannot know if the character is originally an old man/woman or an evil supernatural entity. In addition, we cannot know why this thing happens in the process of storytelling.

1. **The son is always a *shāṭir***:

Most of the women storytellers will refer to the heroes as *al-shāṭir Ḥasan* or *al-shāṭir Muḥammad*. Surprisingly enough, a *ghūl* also considers her son to be a *shāṭir*. In one of the fairytales, a *ghūl* calls her son *shāṭir Ḥasan*.

1. Combining the two points above, we can say that the *ghūl* is apparently a representation for a specific human, because no matter what is the nature or type of the entities, the son will always be a *shāṭir* for his mother.
2. **The gestures of the storytellers:**

The gestures that the storytellers/narrators use during their narration are omitted from the children's version, a point that could be studied broadly. As compared to the children's version, the original collections of folktales refer to such gestures generally.

To conclude, we may say that because of the lack of literary studies in Palestinian fairytales in general, and in the *poetic stanzas* in them in particular, we chose to study the *structure* of such *poetic stanzas* formalistically and structurally. Consequently, the findings of our research suggest three major conclusions. First, the *poetic stanzas* appear in the Palestinian fairytales because of the occurrence of dramatic events. Second, the structure of the *poetic stanza* is the most static textual structure in the prosaic text of the Palestinian fairytale. Third, the poetic language of poetry, used in the *poetic stanzas* and *magic statements*, is the reason why supernatural events takes place in the Palestinian fairytale. However, the research covers just a small part in the field of the Palestinian fairytales in general. Hence, further studies will generate a great contribution to the field. Such studies may focus on the following points: a deeper enquiry into the origin of these *poetic stanzas*; a comparison study between the structures of *poetic stanzas* in fairytales from different Arab countries; a comparison study between the structures of *poetic stanzas* in fairytales from all around the world; the function of the prosaic texts without the *poetic stanzas* in the Palestinian fairytales; and so on.