

The Effectiveness of Applying Greimas's Semiotic Approach to the Art of Maqāmāt: Majma' al-Baḥrayn by al-Yāzījī as a Case Study

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Greimas; structural semiotics; maqāmāt; Nāṣif al-Yāzījī; actantial model; narrative semiotics; Arabic literature; comparative narratology.

Abstract

Although maqāmāt have been extensively examined from linguistic, rhetorical, and literary perspectives, the applicability of Greimas's structural semiotic framework to this classical Arabic narrative genre remains insufficiently explored. This study investigates the effectiveness of Greimas's semiotic approach in interpreting the narrative and semantic architecture of Majma' al-Baḥrayn by Nāṣif al-Yāzījī, with particular emphasis on the construction and transformation of the protagonist. Employing a qualitative interpretive design grounded in structural semiotics, the research analyzes a selected maqāma through Greimas's analytical model, including narrative trajectories, the actantial model, thematic and modal roles, and deep semantic structures. The analysis demonstrates that the protagonist functions as a dynamic semiotic actor whose continuous transformations generate multiple layers of meaning extending beyond the narrative surface. Narrative functions such as departure, deception, confrontation, and revelation are shown to operate not merely as plot mechanisms but as symbolic devices reflecting broader intellectual, social, and cultural concerns of the Arab Renaissance. Furthermore, the study reveals that the actantial relationships between subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent are systematically reorganized throughout the narrative, producing a coherent deep semantic structure centered on the dialectics of knowledge and ignorance, poverty and dignity, and appearance and reality. These findings confirm the analytical suitability of Greimas's model for classical Arabic narrative texts while demonstrating its capacity to uncover ideological and cultural meanings that remain inaccessible through conventional literary analysis. The study contributes to comparative narratology and Arabic literary criticism by extending the application of contemporary semiotic theory to the maqāma tradition and providing a transferable analytical framework for future research on classical Arabic prose.

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Introduction

The *maqāma* constitutes a semantic system governed by various patterns and figurative images that form a stage of constant transformation of the semantic system. It is subject to a tightly coherent and consistent narrative structure. Our choice to study al-Yāzījī's *maqāmāt* stems from the aim of situating these texts within the framework according to which they are constructed, in order to identify their specificity and reveal how the artistic components interact in accordance with the system in which they are embedded,

as well as the syntactic rules that govern them and that are subject to a temporal process, which is likely to make these characteristics a point of departure for the emergence of meaning, and the extent to which the semiotic approach can be effectively applied to a specific literary text through its dialogue with and questioning of that text, and consequently enriching the field of literary criticism with a study that opens onto two distinct domains: the world of the *maqāma* and the world of interpretation upon which the semiotic approach is founded—especially since al-Yāzījī's *Maqāmāt* have not received sufficient critical attention in terms of applying Greimas's method.

Some critics have focused on the narrative and aesthetic aspects of Al-Yaziji's *Maqamat* from the perspective of semantic semiotics, which examines the various connotations of symbols and narrative elements. This is similar to the approach presented in a master's thesis entitled "*Structure and Semantics: A Semiotic Study in the Maqamat of Nasif Al-Yaziji*," at Badji Mokhtar-Annaba University. Furthermore, there is a study titled "*The Interaction of Discursive Structures in the Maqamat of Nasif Al-Yaziji*," published in the *Tawasol* journal at Badji Mokhtar-Annaba University. This study investigates the multiple discursive structures—social, historical, political, religious, and cultural—that contributed to the formation of Al-Yaziji's *Maqamat*, interacting to produce their ideological impact.

Conversely, our study specialized in examining the effectiveness of applying a Western approach—specifically, Greimas's methodology—to an Arabic literary text. We achieved this by following methodological steps that begin with the narrative trajectory, the actantial structure, and thematic/modal roles, ultimately concluding with the deep structure.

Therefore, we have chosen to study the character of the hero from a semiotic perspective in order to uncover the nature of the relationship that binds this character to reality, and the way in which each influences the other at the level of vision, as well as the resulting transformation that persists with the continuity of their interaction. This is carried out through an analysis of the discursive and narrative structures built on the basis of transformation, whereby we trace the process of producing meaning through implication and signification, in light of the accumulation of symbols and the multiplicity of shifts. This is an attempt to answer the following problematic questions: To what extent is the semiotic approach capable of revealing the meanings accompanying the permanent transformation of al-Yāzījī's characters? To what extent were these characters able to express themselves and their reality? How did the theme of transformation affect the determination of the narrative trajectory and, consequently, semantic implication?

1. The Limits of the Literary Text: *Maqāma* and Narrative

The *maqāma* narrates events that took place in a past time, and the narrative feature places the *maqāma* within the realm of narrative arts due to its inclusion of the most important narrative elements. The *maqāma* usually recounts a literary tale or an adventure whose basis is beggary and the accumulation of money (Murtad, 1980, p. 363). Narrativity is realized in discourse through the presence of the following elements: an act or event that is narratable, an agent or actant who assumes a role in the action, as well as time and place (Yaktin, 1997, p. 19). The inclusion of these elements in the structure of the *maqāma* subjects it to the requirements of narrativity, which justifies the narrative character governing its manifestation as a system of coherent structures, or, as Joseph Courtes expresses it, a "relational network" (Courtes, 2007, p. 21) in which discursive and semantic structures intersect. It consists of a sequence of events in which the actants are living beings, either acting or acted upon (Courtes, 2007, p. 161). Thus, the *maqāma* is a system composed of narrative structures, including characters, times, and places.

ʿAbd al-Malik Murtāḍ considers that the story is in fact not merely an event and a style (...) but rather consists of other components more important than style and event, such as plot, characters, and complication, all of which are present in the *maqāma* (Murtad, 1980, p. 478). Similarly, Muṣṭafā al-Shakkaʿa traces the origins of the story back to Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī in his invention of the *maqāma*. He states that the merit of Badīʿ al-Zamān did not stop at this refined form of thought and composition; rather, he added a new wealth to Arabic writing through the *maqāmāt* he created, as he attempted for the first time in the history of Arabic to write the short story or tale (...) and invented a refined genre, namely the art of the short story (al-Shakaa, 1954, p. 09). Victor al-Kakk also considers it one of the narrative arts, as it contains all the elements of the short story, including movement, psychological and social analysis, and dialogue (Harb, 1992, p. 53). The presence of narrative elements, the coherence of roles, and the availability of both external and internal dialogue confer narrativity upon the *maqāma* text. On this basis, we can define textual limits for the studied text by considering it a narrative structure that is amenable to analysis according to Greimas's method.

2. Character from a Semiological Perspective

The interest of semioticians in the analysis of characters stems from what Russian Formalists had previously established in this field. Greimas relied in his studies on the work carried out by Propp in his analysis of the Russian folktale, as well as on Souriau in his study

of theatre. He focused on the content of actions and the functions performed by characters, maintaining that the description and classification of characters are not based on who they are, but rather on what they do (Barthe, 1977, p. 34-35). Reducing the character to an action or a function grants it specific features and traits that contribute to the construction of meaning within the text, as it is, according to Philippe Hamon, a semantic unit that is amenable to analysis and description (Hamon, 1977, p. 125).

Greimas grounded his conception of the character, the establishment of its features, and the highlighting of its relationships on the semantic dimension. He structured his studies on two levels: the level of surface structure, where narrative programs, the actantial model, thematic roles, and imagery are examined; and the level of deep structure.

On this basis, the character is presented from a semiotic perspective as being subject to a system that governs its manifestation within the narrative text, through which its functions, traits, and characteristics are determined. Its features only become clear after the act of reading, at which point it acquires semantic dimensions that refer to the reality in which it emerged and which it undertook to express. The character thus represents a constructive manifestation with semantic dimensions; however, it cannot be apprehended without invoking the cultural context. Youri Lotman considered the character to be closely linked to reality, since, according to him, it is the product of the world it expresses. Therefore, the recipient cannot perceive this character or uncover its secrets except through the cultural stock they possess (Benkrad, 2003, p. 60). This is accompanied by the emergence of minimal semantic units that infuse it with vitality and spirit and fill the “semiotic blank” created by the character (Boutayeb, 1999, p. 47), thereby forming the axis around which events revolve through its relationships with the other components of the narrative text and its interaction with them.

Our aim in providing this concise presentation of the concept of character is to reveal the harmonious interaction between the *maqāma* character and the semiotic perspective. This is due to the richness and fertility of this character, and its abundance of indicators and symbols that make it a broad space for interpretation in accordance with the permanent transformation that characterizes the hero's figure. This transformation is reflected in the narrative trajectory, the actantial models, and the thematic roles.

3. Transformation of the Narrative Trajectory

The *maqāmāt* consist of a composite of several sequences, each sequence in turn being composed of a series of functions that frame each *maqāma* as an independent narrative structure. Given that al-Yāziji's *maqāmāt* are characterized by abundance, diversity, complexity, and interweaving, we chose to select from among his *maqāmāt* the *Maqāma of Estrangement (al-Ghurba)* for analysis. We follow a technique of reduction and summarization of the narrative sentences that we consider representative of each basic event, attempting to reveal the transformation occurring at the level of the *maqāma*'s narrative trajectories, as well as the meaning that undergoes change in turn, thereby endowing the *maqāma* with dynamism and semantic transformation.

Our analysis of the narrative trajectory of the *Ghazziya Maqāma* is based on the overall construction of the narrative structure, which consists of an introduction and a conclusion of the subject. However, all the paragraphs are governed by a common general element, namely the unity of movement, the unity of the hero, and the narrator (Abdel-Hamid, p. 58). The narrative trajectories are interspersed with a set of functions: the function of departure or journey, the function of trickery, the function of deception, the function of threat, and the function of confrontation. The acting subject possesses the competence to accomplish the action in order to connect with the object of desire. The occurrence of lack drives the hero to perform narrative functions with the aim of eliminating this lack (solution), which usually takes the form of retribution or reward, namely obtaining money, departure, and separation.

In the *Ghazziya Maqāma*, the hero Maymūn ibn Khozām experiences a state of lack due to his need for money, which prompts him to set out on a journey to Ghazza Hāshim in Palestine. The narration then continues until the meeting of the hero and the narrator in the judge's council. At that moment, the function of deception occurs, as “al-Ḥizāmī” claims that his servant has killed a dear friend of his. The servant colludes with the hero “al-Khozāmī,” thereby contributing to the success of the plan. He proposes before the judge to pay the blood money to the victim's family, proceeds to collect money from those present, and hands it over to the hero, imploring them to support him in his need. Thus, the desire of both the servant and the hero is fulfilled. The hero subsequently performs the function of departure after receiving the money and connecting with the object of value.

This arouses suspicion in the narrator, who sets out following his trail in an attempt to uncover the secret. He performs the function of threat, eventually succeeding in accomplishing the function of revealing the secret, which consists in the fact that the “dear victim” to the hero is nothing but a book that the servant had left in the corner of the room, which was torn apart by a mouse. After the revelation of the secret, the hero assigns the narrator the task of carrying the torn book to the judge. The narrator carries out the task, delighting the judge with the novelty of the matter and spending an enjoyable time with him. The solution is ultimately achieved, as

both the hero al-Khozāmī and the narrator connect with the object of value and eliminate the state of need represented by obtaining money and revealing the secret.

Other functions also occur in this *maqāma*, due to the nature of the *maqāma*, which relies on symbolism to reach potential meaning. The book functions as a symbol of knowledge, to which the Arabs have turned their backs, neglecting its role in the flourishing of civilization. This results in a state of lack of knowledge

Table 1. Transformation of Narrative Functions and Narrative Trajectories in al-Yāzījī's Ghazziya Maqāma According to Greimas's Semiotic Framework

Segment	Types of Functions	Functions	Summary of Narrative Sentences
1	- Disruption - Transformation - Solution	- Occurrence of lack - Departure - Deception - Collusion - Success - Reward (elimination of lack)	- Al-Khozāmī's need for money. - The hero's departure to Ghazza Hāshim. - Al-Khozāmī claims that a friend has been killed by his servant. - The servant colludes with the hero and proposes paying the blood money to the hero. - The plan succeeds, and the servant collects money from the audience. - The hero receives the money as the blood money of the alleged victim.
2	- Disruption - Transformation - Solution	- Occurrence of lack – Departure - Threat - Revelation of the secret - Assignment of a task - Reward	- The narrator Suhayl becomes suspicious of the hero - The narrator sets out following the hero. - The narrator insists on knowing the secret from the hero. - The hero reveals the truth about the victim, which turns out to be a book. - The hero assigns the narrator the task of carrying the book to the town judge. - Suhayl spends an enjoyable time with the judge.
3	- Disruption - Transformation - Solution	- Occurrence of lack - Threat - Confrontation - Assignment of a task - Reward	- The Arabs' declining interest in knowledge. - The spread of ignorance and the deterioration of the Arabic language. - The hero devises a stratagem to express the prevailing conditions - The hero assigns the narrator the task of conveying his message to society. - The judge accepts the case, admires the hero's initiative, and expresses concern for the future of the Arabs.
4	- Disruption - Transformation - Solution	- Occurrence of lack - Threat - Deception - Assignment of a task - Reward	- The death of the friend. - Requesting retaliation before the judge. - Proposing the payment of blood money instead of retaliation. - Collecting money from the audience. - The hero's acquisition of the blood money of the alleged victim

and the community's failure to give it due attention. The hero deliberately fabricates a story in order to expose the miserable conditions experienced by Arab society through confrontation, revealing the secret to the judge, who represents the organic representative of the nation and who watches over its needs, while the narrator acts as a narrative mediator between them.

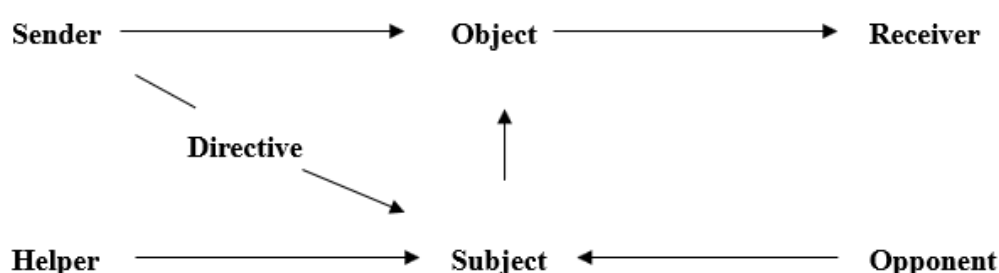
At this level, it becomes possible to reveal the locus of transformation that occurs in the narrative trajectory through the transformation of functions in the *maqāma* into other functions derived from the movement of narration and the object of value (knowledge / money). The function of deception shifts from being merely a means of obtaining money to becoming a semiotic sign expressing the

tragic conditions of the Arab homeland. Likewise, the function of departure is transformed from mere exploration and mutual pursuit between the hero and the narrator into an attempt to probe the boundaries of the Arab homeland in order to reveal its points of weakness and present this image through multiple methods derived from a specific employment of narrative techniques, as illustrated in the following table:

4. Actantial Structure

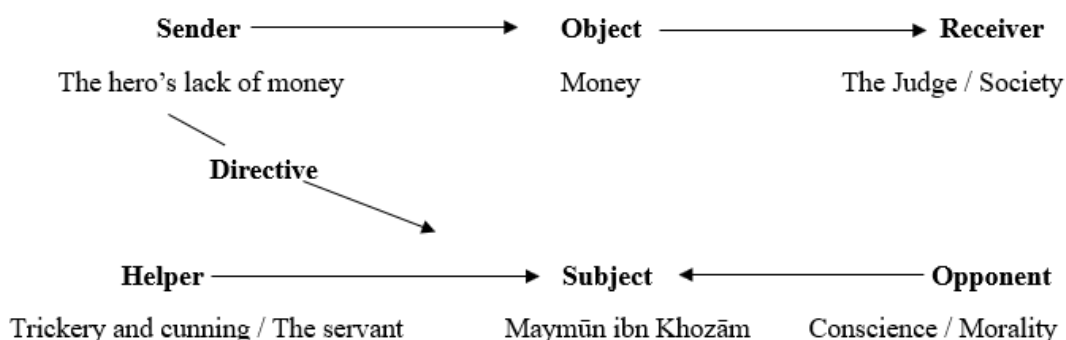
Tracing the development of events through the narrative trajectory, and observing the transformations and the transition of its actants from a state of relative stability to a state of disturbance and transformation, and then to solution—which represents final stability—has enabled us to determine the actantial structure. This structure constitutes a system of relations distributed according to binaries represented by: Subject / Object, Sender / Receiver, Helper / Opponent (A.J. Greimas, 1986, pp. 176-179). These elements organize the actantial model proposed by Greimas, which can be represented as follows:

Figure 1. Greimas's Canonical Actantial Model Used for the Semiotic Analysis of Narrative Structure



The narrative trajectory provides actantial structures that can be represented through the following diagrams:

Figure 2. Actantial Model of the Ghazziya Maqāma Based on Greimas's Semiotic Framework



The actantial models of the *Ghazziya Maqāma* point to the theme of transformation within the structure of the first actant, namely the Sender (the need for money), which frames most *maqāmāt*. Its role is essentially summarized in motivating the Subject (al-Khozāmī) to perform multiple roles and to wear different masks. This makes the process of identifying him dependent on a set of other roles and on the combination of partial structures in order to arrive at the overall semantic structure.

As for the Receiver, it is usually represented by society, which symbolizes the reader of the writer's era and constitutes the intended recipient of the message that the author seeks to convey in his texts. It is the source through which the social situation is made known. The author assigns it the role of the giver who provides money to the servant, as stated in the following passage: "He immediately began to move among the group, chanting as he went (...) and continued to recite verses within the limits of his breath, softening his tone in supplication. He then returned to the shaykh with a certain amount and said: this is what fate has allotted" (Al-Yāzījī, 1880, p. 376377 ٧).

Through this, the author seeks to present an image of society and to reveal its weaknesses. It is both the negative and the giver at the same time, for society is solely responsible for shaping individuals; it elevates the value of a person or lowers it to the lowest ranks based on the standards it sets and the laws it enacts. These in turn define the cultural and intellectual systems and underpin the social structure

of the community. Society placed the hero at the margin of the social image, while those in power (the judge and the wealthy) occupy the top of the social hierarchy. Therefore, the hero seeks to obtain money from the source that denied it to him.

The character of al-Khozāmī (the acting Subject) represents a human model that reflects the transformation of the cultural system of society and the writer's vision of his era. This is manifested through the multiple roles he performs within a single *maqāma* and the different masks he wears each time, which equip him with the competence to act. In the *Ghazziya Maqāma*, he is the poor man driven by need to invent cunning strategies as a means of obtaining money. Even if trickery acts as a veil concealing the truth, it is later revealed, linking the hero to his object of desire—that is, obtaining money without legitimate work.

The hero relies on his mental capacities—intelligence, cunning, and craft—enhanced by knowledge, learning, and eloquence. This also includes the Helper (Rajab and Layla). In the *Ghazziya Maqāma*, as defined by Diagram 1, the Helper represents the hero's mental and intellectual qualifications. The hero, having found an alternative to retaliation by paying the blood money, states: *"If the shaykh wishes dīya or punishment, or subjects me to severe torment, I obey his reproach and comply with his demand. The shaykh said: As this was due to a mistake, he ordered the release of a faithful servant and the payment of dīya to the family. But should it be in sand or shawl? How can the share be divided? I pursue it according to what is proper and adjust to what is difficult"* (Al-Yāzījī, 1880, p. 376).

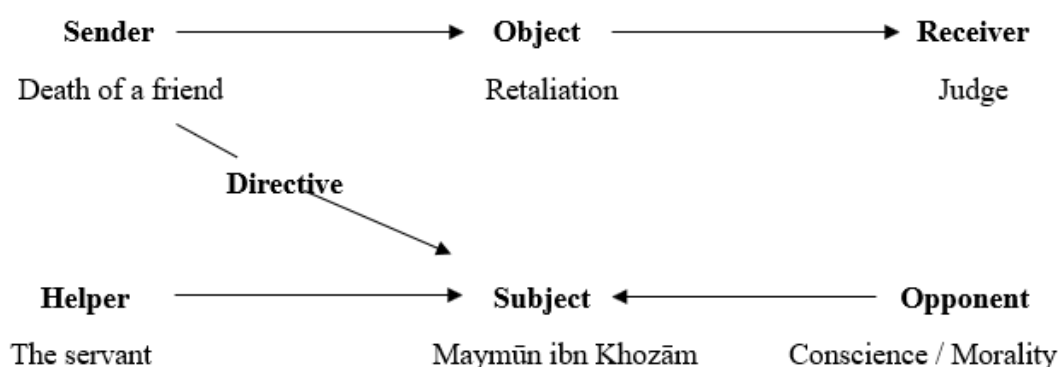
In addition, Rajab, whom al-Khozāmī employed to act as the killer who tore the book, is described as follows:

"We heard commotion and noise; we turned to that servant, and behold, the thief was clinging to Rajab, saying 'God support the judge and save the wisdom of the past...'" (Al-Yāzījī, 1880, p. 375), continuing:

"This fool tore it in every part and left me astonished. The man became alarmed and wept, saying: By God's knowledge, I was diligent in my task, yet I am warned against the fault of the Atlas. All my hearing, sight, and mind were accountable for this" (Al-Yāzījī, 1880, p. 376).

The first Opponent of the hero is the narrator Suhayl, who follows the hero wherever he travels, reproaching him for his actions. Both the Helper and the Opponent are related to the acting Subject through the competence relation: the Helper constantly strives to realize the act of accomplishment, whereas the Opponent attempts to create a separation between the Subject and the object of desire.

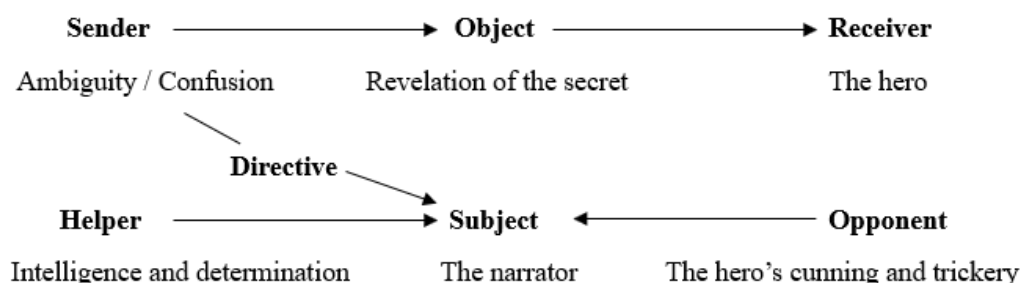
Figure 3. Actantial Configuration of the Hero's Revenge Narrative in the Ghazziya Maqāma



The hero assumes multiple roles for the purpose of revenge, which in this *maqāma* takes the form of creating an intermediary story that symbolizes another object, as will become clear in the following analysis. The servant (Rajab) kills the hero's friend—the Sender in the second diagram—and this acts as the trigger that drives the hero to seek revenge for his friend. This defines the identity of the Receiver, who is the Judge, representing another human model. The hero deliberately highlights this character as a representative of the political reality of the Arab world. The Judge performs no active function in the narrative; his presence is formal and ceremonial, observing silently, much like authority figures who limit themselves to intervening in trivial matters related to wealth accumulation.

The acting Subject (the hero) appears as a protector of his friend's honor, striving to exact revenge and achieve retribution. Through his desire, he connects with the object of value, which is retaliation. In the *Ghazziya Maqāma*, the revenge plot functions as a veil behind which the hero conceals the true meaning, which emerges through other objects that serve as symbols expressing his vision. The theme of retaliation serves as a narrative prelude to entering the realm of truth, which is realized when the hero receives the money collected by Rajab. The Helper and Opponent are represented by Rajab, and Conscience / Morality, respectively.

Figure 4. Actantial Configuration of the Narrator's Quest for the Revelation of the Secret in the Ghazziya Maqāma

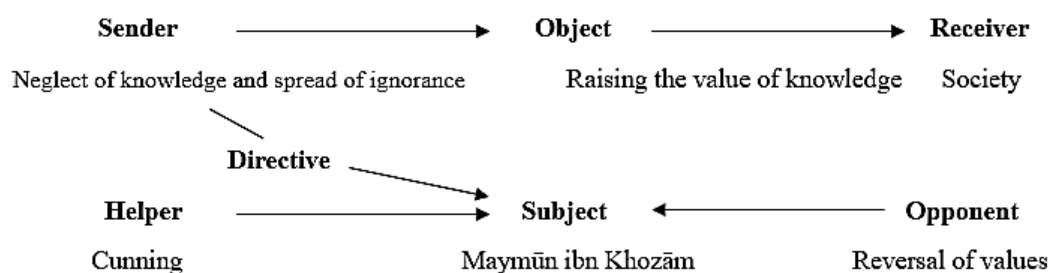


Since transformation is the essential characteristic upon which the *Ghazziya Maqāma* is based, the Sender in this diagram becomes ambiguity and semantic confusion, which drives the narrator to leave in search of the truth and uncover the secret that troubled him and deprived him of the pleasure of remaining in the city. The Receiver in turn transforms into the hero himself, who holds the details of this truth. The Object becomes an obsession or preoccupation of the narrative.

The narrator is tormented wherever he goes, as he attempts to uncover the secret. He says: "So the elder turned to his back and said, 'A fugitive is not blamed for what is behind him.' Suhayl said: When he left, I followed him to where there was no expectation, and I said, 'Alas, I shall neither release you nor shall you know your victim'" (Al-Yāzījī, 1880, p. 377). In the end, the true identity of the victim becomes clear, as the hero reveals it: "He is a book thrown by this devil in one of the corners of this khān; the mouse tore it to shreds, and covered it with filth and dirt, leaving me to wail over it with successive sighs and weep with tearful eyes of gratitude" (Al-Yāzījī, 1880, p. 378).

The book represents a symbolic object, which constitutes the core concern of the hero, as he wished to convey his perception to the recipient regarding the scientific and social reality of Arab society, using cunning as an artistic medium. Similarly, the narrator Suhayl is also a transforming subject, driven by curiosity to engage with the object of value by uncovering the truth concealed behind the symbols. The aide is represented by the narrator's intelligence and attentiveness to his surroundings, his ability to analyze events and relate them to the circumstances of reality, and his insistence on revealing the secret, which has become a narrative necessity accompanying the hero, who resorts to disguise and equips himself with cunning and deception to achieve his goal.

Figure 5. Actantial Configuration of the Hero's Knowledge-Restoration Narrative in the Ghazziya Maqāma



After the revelation of the victim's secret, the sender is transformed into ignorance and neglect of knowledge, which represented the true incentive driving the hero to invent all the stories in order to convey his message to the reader of the Renaissance era. Accordingly,

the recipient is identified as society, which represents the second party in the equation of knowledge and ignorance. Ignorance had dominated the minds of the members of Arab society prior to the Renaissance due to political, social, and religious circumstances. The subject, represented by raising the value of knowledge in a society dominated by ignorance, was grounded in the author's awareness of the issues of his time, as expressed by the narrator:

"I narrated that oppressive story, and the book within it, like dry fodder, was devoured by the animals; he commented on it in the margin:

'This victim guided by its fire,
I came to the judge to take its revenge,
From the hotel's quarters or its neighborhood,
He recommended we bury it in his house'" (Al-Yāzījī, 1880, p. 378).

The victim / book was recommended to be buried in the judge's house in Ghazza Hāshim, symbolizing the hero's desire to plant knowledge in the Arab lands. Instead of letting knowledge die, be buried, and forgotten, the Arabs should cultivate it in their lands to rise again and erase the darkness of ignorance that had overshadowed the Arab world prior to the Renaissance.

The variation of Sender patterns in the *maqāma* is linked to the diversity of value objects. Their manifestation in different models indicates a variety at the level of deep meaning. We observe the centrality and pivotal role of the Subject, which makes it a source for the emergence of meaning, especially the theme of transformation that characterizes this Subject in its relations with the other actants. Moreover, the Subject's connection to or separation from the object of value is significant, as the transition of the Subject from a state of potentiality to a state of action forms the basis for the hierarchical organization of narrative actions in the *maqāma*.

The acting Subject is embodied primarily in the hero al-Khozāmī, who appears each time with a different mask and performs multiple roles within a single *maqāma*. The multiplicity of a single character, following the initial rules of deception between the narrator and the hero, constitutes the thematic subject of the *maqāma* (Ismail, 2007, p. 158). Although the *Ghazziya Maqāma* is relatively short, it contains multiple subjects, resulting in a richness of symbols and signs. The hero Maymūn ibn Khozām employs diverse strategies to achieve his goal, managing to connect with the object of value, acquiring money at the end of the *maqāma*, and revealing the nature of the Arab society, which is deficient in knowledge, as well as the ignorance, greed, and naivety of the people, making them vulnerable to fraud and deception.

5. Actantial Roles

Actantial roles are reductions of descriptive or functional units, considered as helpers that represent possible virtual expressions (Courtes, 2007, p. 153). The actor performs a primary actantial role in addition to secondary roles, adopting a figurative trajectory. During this process, the semantic component is defined through several secondary roles of a social, psychological, or socio-psychological and moral nature, from which appropriate behaviors emerge (Courtes, 2007, p. 152).

Since our focus is limited to the analysis of the main character in the narrative, namely the hero al-Khozāmī, we report only the actantial roles of this character based on the studied narrative text, not as presented in the *maqāmāt* as a whole. Al-Khozāmī is characterized by moral traits, which can be grasped through brief surface descriptions by the narrator, portraying him as a cunning deceiver who tricks people and chooses deceit as a means to achieve his goals. In the text, he appears as greedy, driven by money, relying on disguise and concealment. He bases his functions and roles on his eloquence and rhetoric, enabling him to win the hearts of people to the extent that listeners believe his words as unquestionable truth.

The hero also performs the role of the loyal friend avenging the slain companion, seeking justice for the sake of conscience and fidelity to the victim. However, the most significant role in the *maqāma*, which constitutes the narrative core, is that of the promoter of knowledge and learning amid the ignorance and illiteracy that marked the Arabs at the time of the Renaissance. This highlights that knowledge is the guiding light leading the Arab nation toward glory, freedom, progress, liberation, and civilization, safeguarding the world from error and the arrogance of time. Knowledge is the weapon that must be possessed to face the challenges of the future.

The presence of the traveler role recurs continuously in the narrative and is based on a set of governing rules, perhaps the most important of which is estrangement. This theme constitutes the second framing role upon which the hero, the expatriate traveler, relies. This is exemplified in the following excerpt from the *maqāma*:

“Suhayl ibn ‘Abbād narrated: We departed from the capitals, intending to reach Ghazza Hāshim. We harnessed the camels and the horses, and we reached the outskirts, until we entered it after the time ... between the two prayers, our faces showing traces of travel and fatigue. We took rest there, each finding a place to sleep” (Al-Yāzījī, 1880, p. 374).

The departure of the narrator Suhayl to an unknown destination represents the most mysterious event in the story. Estrangement implies traveling to unfamiliar places and enduring the hardships of the journey, which signals a compelling desire to explore the unknown and uncover the truth. It may also reflect the author’s will to retrieve a memory or fulfill a dream through the journey.

The actantial roles performed by the hero vary according to the significance of the issue addressed by the author. However, we observe a contradiction at the level of secondary roles: the deceiver who tricks people for money; the loyal and devoted friend upset by the tearing of the book due to neglect; the scholar concerned for his homeland, advocating for knowledge; and the promoter of the book, which people had forgotten as essential for progress and civilization.

6. Deep Structure

The *maqāma* relies on complex narrative systems, embedding a story within a story and a subject within a subject. The author applied this principle in the *Ghazziya Maqāma*, which includes multiple stories: the story of the slain friend; the story of the narrator, who labored to solve the mystery of the slain friend; the story of the victim (the book), which introduced the Arabs to a scientific renaissance that al-Yāzījī sought to convey artistically to the reader; and the story of the need for money, which served as the framing narrative.

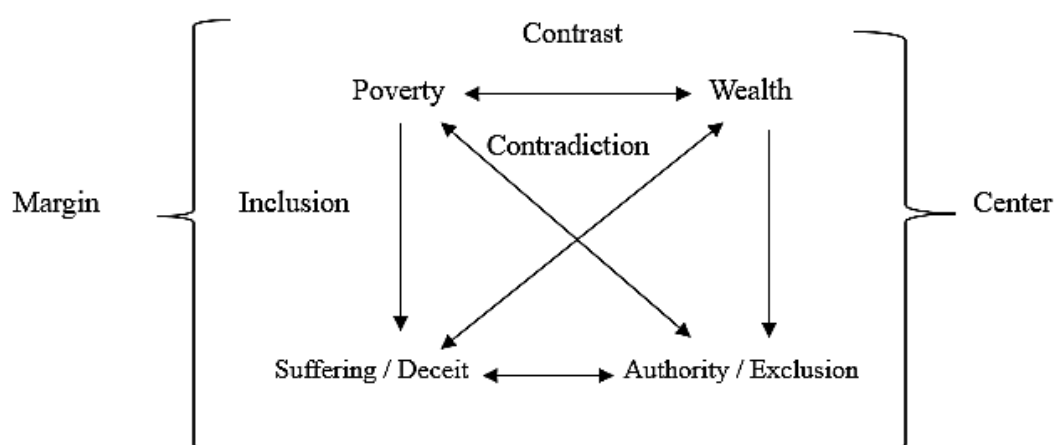
Analysis of the narrative trajectory and the actantial model allowed us to examine the semantic structure, relying on the network of semantic poles framing the *Ghazziya Maqāma*. These can be represented through relations of opposition, contrast, and inclusion (Malek, 2000, p. 14) as follows:

Poverty (margin) → Elimination of poverty (center)

Ignorance (backwardness) → Knowledge (civilization)

If deceit formed the basis of the *maqāma*, the hero would not achieve wealth, as deceit is inherently linked to poverty. The need motivates the central character to develop new methods to secure livelihood. This social condition and cultural framework were expressed through multiple means, allowing the *maqāmāt* of al-Yāzījī to capture diverse aspects of Arab social and cultural life, including the poverty and marginalization experienced by certain minorities, such as scholars and peasants in Lebanon.

Figure 6. Deep Semantic Structure of the Ghazziya Maqāma Based on Greimas’s Semiotic Square



Al-Khozāmī relies on the attribute of knowledge in performing his heroic role, which constitutes a fundamental element in the narrative. At the same time, it represents a turning point in the semantic trajectory of the *maqāma*, as it appears in the text closely associated with the attribute of poverty.

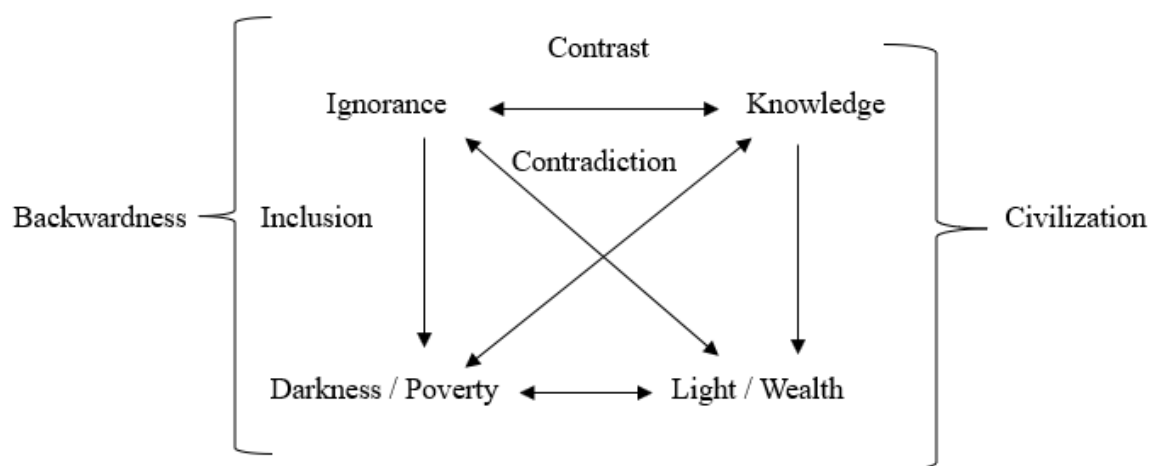
The theme of knowledge constitutes a foundational structure framing the *Ghazziya Maqāma*. Knowledge represents the defining characteristic of the era. While the Abbasid period was a golden age in which the Arab world reached the pinnacle of urban, scientific, literary, and intellectual development, al-Yāzījī’s *maqāmāt* were able to program their artistic features to express the distinctive qualities

of this era, leaving their mark on how to convey all of this. Renaissance thinkers understood that knowledge is the most effective means of cultivating awareness of human existence in a society that differentiates between Turk and Arab, Muslim and Christian, poor and feudal. Knowledge is the path for the Arab nation toward unity and the means to achieve peace. This is reflected in the widespread intellectual movements throughout the Arab world that glorify knowledge.

This intimate relationship between the hero and the book illustrates this point. The book is described as follows:

“It was finely structured, subtle in meaning, elegant in form, concise in transmission, light in content and delivery; witty, clever, far from folly, wise; it accompanied me night and day, enriched me beyond what could be forged or borrowed; it served me morning and evening without a drop of water, giving help without expense; it obeyed my commands, returned when called, folded and unfolded on request; when narrated, it remained discreet, when opened, attentive; always bright-faced, open-handed, eloquent of speech. I took it as a companion and sought no other rival.” (Al-Yāzījī, 1880, p. 375).

Figure 7. Deep Semantic Structure of the Knowledge–Ignorance Dialectic in the Ghazziya Maqāma Based on Greimas's Semiotic Square



Results and Discussion

- Al-Maqamat are considered narrative arts that relied on a system of narrative structures, represented by characters, time, place, events, and plot.
- The character in Al-Maqamat was distinguished by being presented according to a system of symbols and connotations. This was determined through its artistic manifestations, functions, characteristics, and interaction with the other components of the text, making it an interpretative space that opened up to reality and reflected the details of life.
- The analysis of the shifts in narrative trajectories—particularly regarding functions—revealed the multiplicity of semiotic connotations that accompanied this transformation. This includes the transition of the function of “need” from a lack of money to a lack of knowledge, the shift of the “deception” function from a mere means of earning money to a semiotic sign expressing the deteriorating conditions in the Arab world, and the shift of the “departure” function into a means of exploring the boundaries of the Arab world.
- Through our application of Greimas's actantial model, we identified the characteristic of the sender, represented by the constant need for money or the call to revive knowledge. This motivated the subject (the hero) to undertake multiple roles to achieve heroic deeds.
- The receiver is divided between the judge—representing the political reality and a power concerned only with accumulating wealth and fulfilling personal agendas—and society, which symbolizes the Renaissance era.
- The object centers around (money and knowledge), reflecting the class struggle that characterized the era and ignorance as the primary threat to Arab society.
- The helper is embodied by the characters of the boy and his daughter, who assisted the hero in his roles, alongside the hero's own mental and scientific qualifications.
- The opponent is represented by the conscience or morals that prevented the hero from connecting with their object of value.

Conclusion

Our analysis of the *Ghazziya Maqāma* demonstrates the feasibility of studying the hero of the *maqāma* from a semiotic perspective based on Greimas' methodology. This approach relies on narrative trajectories, the actantial structure, secondary roles, and deep structure. It enabled us to uncover the uniqueness of this character in terms of its richness in symbols and signs, as well as its embodiment of the task of expressing lived reality.

This analysis begins with the experience of lack, represented by the poverty and marginalization endured by some oppressed minorities, including the poor and scholars. It continues with the ignorance and backwardness that characterized the Arabs prior to the Renaissance, and culminates in the elimination of lack through the hero's acquisition of money via deceit. Furthermore, it reveals social reality through the transformative actions of the hero, which are intertwined with the changes of time and circumstances.

Declarations

Author Contributions

Dr. Lakehal Aicha conceived the research, designed the study, conducted the textual and semiotic analysis, interpreted the findings, prepared the figures and tables, wrote the original manuscript, and approved the final version for publication.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable. This study is based exclusively on the analysis of published literary texts and did not involve human participants, animals, or identifiable personal data.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are derived from publicly available primary and secondary literary sources cited in the reference list. No new datasets were generated.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Approval

This study complies with internationally accepted standards of research integrity and publication ethics. As it is based solely on textual and literary analysis, ethical approval was not required.

Consent for Publication

The author has read and approved the final manuscript and agrees to its publication.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The author declares that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used to generate the scholarly content, interpretation, analysis, or conclusions presented in this manuscript. Any language-editing assistance, if used, did not affect the intellectual content, scientific interpretation, or authorship of the work.

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