



Article

Gendered Narratives in Children's Literature: Analyzing Femininity and Power

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ABSTRACT

Children's literature plays a crucial role in shaping young minds by constructing and representing gender roles and expectations. In classic stories, the male protagonists are usually active, adventurous, and solvers of problems, whereas the female roles are supporting, nurturing, and waiting to be rescued. This study seeks to examine images of femininity and power relations in society dealt with in children's literature through its female characters' levels of agency, power, and children-related roles. The data of the study involves selected excerpts from the classic children's literature "Sindbad, the Sailor's Seven Voyages" written anonymously in (1835) in "The Arabian Nights' Entertainments" by Philadelphia/Thomas Wardle. Connell's (1987) model of power and gender is adopted for the analysis where nine excerpts are randomly selected from the seven voyages stories of Sindbad. Each excerpt is given, then the effects of themes like authority, financial inequality, and social norms on both family and society are reflected along with discussion for each analysis. It is concluded that the traditional children's literature often reinforces patriarchal norms, particularly in the portrayal of femininity and power dynamics. Female characters are often marginalised and used as tools to maintain male authority, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting female agency. Hence, the findings imply that Sindbad the Sailor's story reflects a world shaped by patriarchal power, with women showing little economic power, not much authority, and being stuck in roles based on traditional gender norms. The conclusion proves the given hypothesis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature plays a crucial role in shaping a child's mind and emotions, as it directly and indirectly influences their responses and achieves desired goals. Regmi (2024: 65) defines children's literature "as a genre encompasses a wide range of works including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books, stories (fairy tales, fables and others), poems and other primarily orally transmitted materials intended for and used by children and young people". The first one who considered children's literature as a genre in its own right is Perry Nodelman (Regmi, 2024: 66). The child's mind is malleable and can be shaped as

desired, making it a blank page for educators and writers to write about. Parents and educators play a significant role in shaping a child's behavior and actions, and children's literature is closely linked to the family (Baregish, 1996:43; Yoon, 2020; Bell and O'Sullivan, 2005).

In the current study, this genre, as a kind of discourse, is approached discursively. According to Fairclough (1989: 36), "discourse is a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other". Gill (2000: 172) writes that discourse analysis includes a range of approaches to studying texts, each approach is rooted in different theoretical traditions

and disciplinary contexts. In addition, discourse analysis is an effective tool for investigating how language is used, illuminating how power and authority are exercised and policies are communicated (Widdowson, 1995 in Hussein et al, 2024:126; also Hussein et al, 2025; Abdurrahman et al, 2023; see also Estaifo et al, 2023). This approach allows researchers to explore the ways in which language shapes and reflects social realities, power dynamics, and institutional practices. Hence, studying children's literature from a discourse analysis perspective opens the way to analyzing gender, power and social norms in such genre (see also Nel and Christensen, 2021).

Traditionally, children literature conveys messages that are affected by social norms and culture, especially those related to gender and power. According to Beall (1993: 144), gender is both culturally and individually constructed: "cultures distinguish between two or more genders and organize beliefs and activities according to these categories. Individuals are influenced by the existence of these categories and their perceptions of the world are organized according to them". As for power and authority, they are basic culturally inbuilt themes in children literature. Baker and Ellece (2010: 99) states that power is the ability to control environment, lives of oneself and those of others.

In children literature, there is a clear focus on creating different criteria for distinguishing between masculinity and femininity. Masculinity is often associated with traits like strength, violence, and aggression, often equated with nature or 'nature' in sexual contexts. In contrast, femininity is characterized by beauty, non-violence, emotional softness, and obedience, often aligned with 'culture'. Masculinity is often associated with competitiveness, protectiveness, power, independence, and analytical thinking, while femininity is associated with self-effacement, caring, vulnerability, powerlessness, dependence, passivity, and qualitative thinking. These schemata reflect enduring societal norms and the ongoing struggle to redefine gender roles and attributes (Stephens, 1996: 18 - 19).

Therefore, children's literature is particularly effective in constructing and representing gender roles and expectations. Historically, classic stories have frequently depicted male characters

as embodying traits of activity, adventure, and problem-solving prowess, while female characters are often relegated to roles characterized by passivity, nurturing instincts, and a need for rescue (Crisp and Hiller, 2011: 20-25).

Recent research continues to highlight the persistence of these patterns; studies analyzing contemporary children's picture books confirm the prevalence of gender stereotypes, where male characters are overrepresented and portrayed as dominant and active, while female characters remain marginalized or confined to traditional roles such as caregivers or princesses (Qiu and Yoke, 2024). Such portrayals reflect and reinforce societal biases, potentially limiting children's understanding of gender possibilities. However, there is a growing trend in contemporary literature to challenge these established norms. Narratives featuring strong, independent female protagonists or sensitive, empathetic male characters are increasingly common, offering alternative models that can broaden children's perspectives and encourage the acceptance of a wider spectrum of behaviors and interests beyond rigid gender lines.

The representation of domestic units and the language used within children's literature further contribute to the formation of gender understanding (Stephens, 1992: 67-69; Lehr, 2001: 45-48). While conventional plots often center on nuclear families with clearly defined, traditional roles, modern stories increasingly feature diverse family structures. Yet, the subtle, and sometimes overt, ways gender stereotypes are perpetuated remain a concern. For instance, descriptions often emphasize female beauty versus male strength or intelligence. Large-scale analyses of contemporary children's books reveal that they contain significant linguistic gender bias; many words commonly used are judged by adults as distinctly masculine or feminine, often aligning with established stereotypes.

Semantic analyses show clusters of words associated with femininity relating to emotions and interpersonal interactions, while masculine-associated clusters relate more to tools, professions, and physical actions. This suggests that children's books serve as an early and potentially powerful, albeit often inadvertent, vehicle for transmitting gendered associations and stereotypes (Lewis et al., 2021). The responsibility, therefore, falls upon

educators, authors, and publishers to critically evaluate and consciously select or create stories that challenge the status quo, offering more equitable and representative portrayals to help dismantle narrow, stereotypical views of gender among young readers (Qiu and Yoke, 2024). For other critical discourse, see (Kid, 2016; Anand and Hsu 2020; Chung et al, 2024; Ogungbemi, 2024; Smith, 2025; Xiang, 2025;

Despite the acknowledged influence of these narratives and ongoing research highlighting the issue (e.g., Lewis et al., 2021; Qiu and Yoke, 2024), a critical examination of the specific gendered storytelling technique, particularly concerning the complex interplay of femininity and power within diverse cultural contexts, remains necessary. This study addresses this gap by analyzing narratives of femininity and power within a specific example of non-Western children's literature, focusing on their implications for gender equity and the reinforcement or challenging of societal structures.

The research aims to answer the following questions: (i) What are the specific constructions of femininity and power in the selected children's literature (Sindbad the Sailor), with particular focus on female characters' agency and authority? (ii) How do these narratives challenge or reinforce traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures, considering the cultural and societal influences that shape them, and what is their potential impact on young readers' perceptions of gender and power? To answer those questions, the study adopts Connell's (1987) model, which focuses on the relationship between separation of labor (economic difference), structures of power (authority and control), and structure of sentiment (norms). This model provides a clear sociological view for exploring how traditional gender roles and social norms are dealt within the narrative understudy. Applying such model allows for an exploration of how these dimensions form the characters' experiences and the underlying societal messages in Sindbad's tales. It facilitates an analysis of power imbalances, social class implications, and the ways the narrative supports or contests dominant masculine.

The study hypothesizes that this example of conventional children's literature, rooted in a specific cultural and historical context, reflects traditional notions of femininity, often depicting women in ways that align with patriarchal standards,

portraying them as subordinate or instrumental to male characters. Both the dynamics of power and the depiction of femininity within literature are understood as socially constructed values that significantly influence, and are influenced by, the prevailing gender relations within a society. This study tries to fill a gap in literature by utilizing a rigorous theoretical framework to examine gender and power in a non-Western children's literature Sindbad's story through the perspective of femininity. It seeks to analyze female agency, economic and social power dichotomies, and the patriarchal society within the given adventure narrative. Such studies focus on non-Western cultural stories that have been traditionally ignored in gender studies like western ones. Unlike other literary works that reinforce patriarchy (Qiu and Yoke, 2024; Lewis et al., 2021), this study aims at providing a more clear understanding of such traditional literature. Findings are expected to make clear how such literature relates the values of their cultures while reinforcing dominantly accepted notions in such societies.

II. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach to investigate the constructions of femininity and power within the selected children's literature, specifically "The Story of Sindbad the Sailor and his Seven Voyages" as found within common English translations of *The Arabian Nights* (or *One Thousand and One Nights*). The study design focuses on interpreting the narrative through the theoretical lens of Raewyn Connell's (1987) model of gender and power to address the research questions regarding female characters' agency, authority, and the reinforcement or challenge of patriarchal structures.

The model consists of three parts that combine to examine how (financial inequality, authority and Structure of the social norms) shape the characters' lives and societal message. Mbonu et al (2010: 3-5) discuss those three parts as follows: First, financial inequality suggests that women frequently depend on their husbands for money. Women's low financial position makes them even more helpless than men. Second, authority, accordingly, means that women are always marginalized in one way or another. Either as a cause or as a consequence of the power difference, men have a dominant attitude. Finally, the structure of the social norms

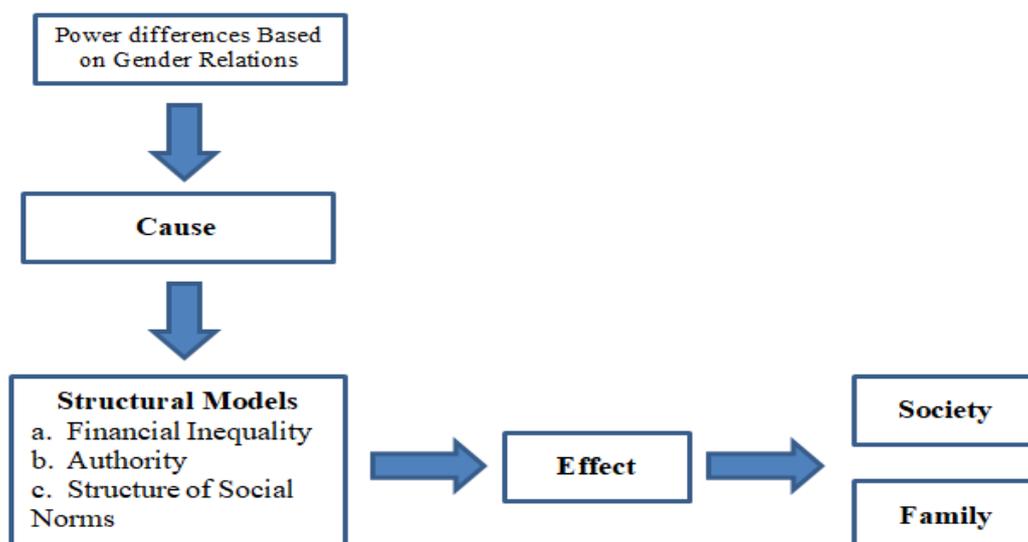


Figure 1. Connell's (1987) Three Parts Structural Model

recommends men to go to work and therefore they are not expected to stay by the bedside. Most men need to continue providing for their families even when their wives are sick; in contrast, most married women are housewives, so they are likely to stay in the wards with their sick husbands. The figure below summarizes the interplay of these three dimensions in shaping gender roles and power dynamics within the text.

As a sample for children's literature, the data to be analyzed in this study are selected tales from the Arabian Nights, especially the story of Sindbad, the Sailor which includes his Seven Voyages tales. Each voyage represents a tale in itself. Sindbad's voyages serve as a case study for examining how issues related to gender and power are interlaced with culture and how these discourses reinforce or deviate from sociocratic paradigms. The analytical procedure involves several stages. Initially, the full narrative of the seven voyages is read thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the plot, characters, and recurring themes. Subsequently, the text is systematically examined to identify all instances featuring female characters, descriptions of gender roles, and representations of power relations (including economic status, authority figures, and social expectations). These relevant sections and excerpts are coded according to the three key dimensions of Connell's (1987) model: the division of labor (including financial inequality and economic dependence), structures of authority (examining decision-making power, control in relationships, and institutional dominance), and

the structure of social norms (analyzing cultural expectations, gendered ideologies, and emotional relationships).

Data analysis is conducted through an interpretive qualitative process. Nine excerpts are analyzed through studying the effect of gender, authority and social norms on the familial level and on the social level to identify patterns in the portrayal of femininity and masculinity, the scope of agency afford to female characters, and the ways in which power is distributed and exercised along gender lines within the narrative. The analysis focuses on how specific events, character dialogues, descriptions, and plot developments align with or illustrate the concepts within Connell's (1987) model. The analysis aims to connect the textual evidence directly to the research questions, evaluating how the Sindbad tales construct, reinforce, or potentially challenge traditional gender roles and patriarchal values within their specific cultural and historical context. The analysis seeks to provide a detailed, theoretically grounded reading of the text, moving beyond surface-level descriptions to explore the underlying structural dynamics of gender and power as represented in this classic work of children's literature.

III. RESULTS

The result of the data analysis are presented below:

Financial Inequality

The following are examples of financial

inequality and its effect on family and society:

Excerpt (1)

“ My father left me a considerable estate, the best part of which I spent in debauchery during my youth; but I perceived my error, and reflected that riches were perishable, and quickly consumed by such ill managers as myself.” (Voy.1, p. 208)

Effect:

- On Family: Family instability
- On Society : Societal expectations

Cause: Careless inheritance

Sindbad’s financial struggles impact his family’s economic stability, requiring patriarchal male intervention. His carelessness with his inheritance puts his family at risk, leading to reckless financial decisions. Sindbad’s actions are influenced by the patriarchal system, which disproportionately burdens men and vulnerable women. The narrative critiques this system, highlighting its instability and cyclical nature. The relationship between financial privilege, patriarchal responsibility, and social expectations shapes gender dynamics. Sindbad’s misusing of his inherited wealth demonstrates the unpredictable nature of financial balance in patriarchal societies, where wealth is linked to social status and respect.

Excerpt (2)

“I began to gather together the largest diamonds that I could see, and put them into the leathern bag in which I used to carry my provisions” (Voy.2, p. 217)

Effect:

- On Family: Family reliance
- On Society : Wealth idolization

Cause: Patriarchal provision

The patriarchal nature of society places men as primary providers for the family, leading to financial stability through their diamond acquisition. Sindbad’s diamond acquisition supports the family, which is economically reliant on him. This excerpt mirrors the modern society where wealth and success are the ultimate goals. Sindbad’s calculated response to wealth accumulation, driven by instinctive recognition of its value, highlights societal expectations that reward risk-taking for financial gain. The use of a provisions bag to store precious gems further emphasizes the prioritization of material wealth over basic security. The story symbolizes success in wealth and society, reflecting the traditional

gendered division where men are the primary providers of money to the family. The analysis highlights the interplay between adventure, gender roles, and capitalism in children’s literature, and how it impacts attitudes on success, responsibility, and gendered roles in historical and present-day contexts.

Excerpt (3)

“The blacks gave us that herb at first on purpose to deprive us of our senses, that we might not be aware of the sad destiny prepared for us; and they gave us rice on purpose to fatten us; for, being cannibals, their design was to eat us as soon as we grew fat.” (Voy.4, p. 228)

Effect:

- On Family: Emotional/physical sufferin
- On Society : Societal imbalance

Cause: Economic disparity

Sindbad and his companions were exploited by cannibals, highlighting the societal imbalance of power and inequality. The cannibals, driven by extreme social and economic disparity, resort to ruthless measures for survival, often resulting in violence. The trauma inflicted on Sindbad and his companions mirrors the plight of those in economically unstable societies, where survival often comes at the cost of dignity and safety. The passage critiques societal failures and the urgent need for equitable structures to prevent cycles of violence and despair. The cannibals used drugs to fatten their victims, highlighting the financial inequality and lack of job opportunities in patriarchal societies.

Authority

The following are examples of authority and its effect on family and society:

Excerpt (4)

“The giant failed not to come back, and supped once more upon one of our companions; after which he slept, and snored till day, and then went out, and left us as formerly”. (Voy.3, p. 222)

Effect:

- On Family: Family instability
- On Society : Fear, violence

Cause: Power imbalance

The excerpt critiques the brutal hierarchy in Sindbad’s Third Voyage, highlighting the power imbalance and fear that drives the giant’s systematic killing of Sindbad’s companions. The unchallenged authority of the giant deepens systemic instability

and emotional shattered families, perpetuating a class divide. The lack of equitable governance and collective resistance further exacerbates the oppression, highlighting the devastation of families and social cohesion in societies that normalize such oppression. The excerpt shows how strongly the giant is controlling Sindbad and his companions, destroying family patterns and increasing emotional and economic suffering. Women and children become more subject to poverty and ill-treatment. The giant's region of terror imitates the Sultan's region, where he exercises power of authority to achieve unjust and violence among his people, making them live fear all the time.

Excerpt (5)

"The old man perceiving the effects which this drink had upon me, and that I carried him with more ease than I did before, made a sign to me to give him some of it" (Voy.5, p. 240)

Effect:

- On Family: Family well-being
- On Society : Powerless exploitation

Cause: Systemic oppression

The excerpt critiques the old man's control over Sindbad, highlighting the societal expectation of men to endure hardship for their roles. It also highlights the issue of authority figures exploiting individuals for their own benefit, often at the cost of their families' well-being. The excerpt highlights the hierarchical order where power is concentrated among the few, with marginalized individuals paying the price through exploitation and lost autonomy. The old man's manipulation of Sindbad's altered state is a powerful example of exploitation, as he exploits it for his own benefit. The excerpt critiques exploitation, both personal and systemic, highlighting how seemingly innocuous gestures can reinforce oppression and imbalance. The text highlights the societal expectation of men to endure hardship for their roles as providers and protectors.

Excerpt (6)

"The caliph, said he, has sent me to tell you, that he must speak with you. I followed the officer to the palace, where being presented to the caliph, I saluted him, by prostrating myself at his feet" (Voy.7, p. 250)

Effect:

- On Family: Family instability
- On Society : Centralized power

Cause: Unchecked authority

The excerpt from Sindbad's seventh voyage

highlights the oppressive nature of centralized authority in a family setting. The caliph's absolute power, despite his life-threatening task, disrupts Sindbad's family life, causing emotional distress and sacrificing personal freedom. This reflects a society where power is centralized in the hands of a few, with obedience to authority valued over individual autonomy. The caliph's absolute authority reinforces hierarchical relationships, with those in power holding significant control over others. Resistance to authority is enforced through social norms and expectations, with consequences for resistance. The passage highlights the cycle of subjugation and marginalization of the powerless, perpetuating a rigid hierarchy and a culture of enforced obedience.

Structure of Social Norms

The following are examples of the structure of social norms and its effect on family and society:

Excerpt (7)

"They assured me, that every night a noise of drums was heard there, whence the mariners fancied that it was the residence of Degial. I had a great mind to see this wonderful place, and in my way thither saw fishes of 100 and 200 cubits long, that occasion more fear than hurt; for they are so fearful, that they will fly upon the rattling of two sticks or boards. I saw likewise other fishes about a cubit in length, that had heads like owls" (Voy.2, p. 211)

Effect:

- On Family: Family migration
- On Society : Socioeconomic struggle

Cause: Patriarchal drive

Sindbad, a subset of explorers and thrill seekers, exacerbates socioeconomic struggles by forcing families to migrate for wealth and fame. This leads to instability and suffering, as Sindbad permanently leaves his home. His explorations challenge societal norms, such as the dominance of nature and the pursuit of riches. The text critiques a cultural view prioritizing wealth and discovery over familial stability, revealing a patriarchal drive to conquer nature and accumulate wealth. Sindbad's defiance of these fears destabilizes families and reinforces exploitative societal norms. The text highlights the tension between societal beliefs regarding monetary success and individual aspiration, with the masculinity drive for wealth and adventure expanding beyond immediate patriarchal values. This worldview exacerbates the threat of instability and the subjugation of nature and fortune.

Excerpt (8)

"I have a mind thou shouldst marry, replied he, that so thou mayst stay in my dominion, and think no more of thy own country" (Voy.4, p. 230 -231)

Effect:

On Family: Family bonds
On Society : Gender roles

Cause: King's manipulation

The king's manipulation of Sindbad through marriage disrupts his family's stability and reflects societal issues of patriarchal authority overriding individual autonomy. The king's use of women for control places a burden on families, forcing men like Sindbad to conform to societal expectations at the cost of their happiness and stability. This exemplifies how social norms in patriarchal societies maintain male authority and control over women, resulting in women being excluded from power positions and treated as bargaining chips. The king's use of a woman in marriage not only reflects the marginalization of women but also reinforces rigid gender roles that sustain male dominance, highlighting gender inequality and societal power structures. The excerpt criticizes a social order that puts control over freedom, keeping systemic inequality going.

Excerpt (9)

"The living husband is interred with the dead wife, and the living wife with the dead husband. Nothing can save me; everyone must submit to this law" (Voy.5, p. 231)

Effect:

On Family: Family disruption
On Society : Oppressive norms

Cause: Brutal tradition

The excerpt discusses the challenges of burying the dead living, highlighting the oppressive social norms and lack of self-esteem in society. Wives and husbands are forced to die together, and disrupting a family with living parents worsens survival chances. Social values can be abusive, creating emotional and financial turmoil for families without earning members and love. The excerpt highlights the systemic methodologies used to control the feeble, with the few at the top having all the resources to control the rest. This brutal burial ritual in Sindbad reflects a culture that uses tradition for power, causing emotional devastation, family instability, financial ruin, and psychological

trauma.

The qualitative textual analysis of Sindbad the Sailor's Seven Voyages, organized according to Connell's (1987) framework of gender and power, reveals patterns in the representation of femininity, agency, authority, and power dynamics related to female characters within the narrative. The analysis shows repeated patterns indicating substantial gender-based economic inequality, with feminine characters often presented in economically vulnerable positions or subjected to economic dependence upon masculine characters. Their economic agency is mostly restricted, and resources and wealth are mainly exercised and transferred between men. Female characters are often impliedly or explicitly treated as wealth or commodities, bought and transferred through men's actions, solidifying their inferior economic position. Self-contained economic action or influence over important resources by female characters was the exception rather than the rule among the voyages examined.

The analysis also shows that female characters are mostly portrayed in ways that stick to old-fashioned social norms, such as being passive, focused on home life, looking a certain way, and being defined by their relationships with men. These stories often push the idea that women should behave in a certain "feminine" way, playing symbolic roles tied to marriage, keeping the family line going, or acting as temptation. The emotional tone in these stories supports these traditional ideas, while the spotlight stays on male characters, with their adventures and heroism taking centre stage, pushing female experiences to the background and keeping men in the dominant role. Hence, the analysis reveals that Sindbad the Sailor's stories reflect a world shaped by patriarchal power, with women showing little economic power, not much authority, and being stuck in roles based on traditional gender norms.

IV. DISCUSSION

This examination viewed the intersection of power and femininity in The Seven Voyages of Sindbad through the lens of Connell's (1987) framework and, to an extent, it corroborates the initial hypothesis as it validates other research on gender biases in children's literature. The analysis reveals a distinct trend in the female character's attributes – they are largely passive or peripheral,

undermining authority, which assists in preserving the dominant socio-political constructs and ideology of the Arabian Nights. This is what other studies have pointed out too. For instance, Qiu and Yoke (2024) highlight that female characters continue to be portrayed as caregivers or princesses, passive, submissive, and dependent, whereas males are cast in active, dominant, and aggressive roles of fighters or rescuers. In modern children's literature, constructive femininity is excessively constrained within emotions and relationships, while masculinity is associated with tools, jobs, and action. These have also been highlighted by Lewis et al. (2021). The Sindbad tales incorporate that same trend of female passiveness with male action as movers of the plot.

Linking these findings directly to Connell's (1987) model of gender and power helps clarify how these dynamics play out in the stories. When it comes to financial inequality and the division of labor, the tales often show women in roles of economic dependence, or as objects to be traded or won by men. Their financial situation, or the lack of one, shapes their position in the story, usually putting them in vulnerable or submissive roles. This lines up with Connell's view that economic systems help reinforce gender-based power differences (Connell, 1987; Mbonu et al., 2010). While Sindbad gains wealth through his travels, women in the stories rarely have financial independence; their worth tends to revolve around marriage, inheritance controlled by men, or their place in a male-dominated household.

The theme of authority is just as clear. Male characters, especially Sindbad, are the ones making decisions and holding power. Even high-ranking female characters like princesses are often at the mercy of male decisions, whether it's a father, husband, or captor. Their choices are limited, and they're more often portrayed as people who need rescuing or are used to move the story forward, rather than characters who drive the story themselves. This supports Connell's (1987) point that power imbalances in society and relationships tend to push women to the margins and keep men in control. Female characters rarely challenge this setup in any meaningful way.

Social norms, especially emotional ties and cultural expectations, play a big role in shaping how femininity is portrayed. Female characters

are usually seen in relation to men, like being someone's daughter, wife, or potential partner. They're expected to be passive, nurturing, or attractive, fitting into traditional roles that focus on caregiving and keeping the peace within a male-dominated system, just as Connell (1987) and Mbonu et al. (2010) describe. The stories tend to support these norms by rewarding women who go along with them and punishing those who don't, which helps keep existing gender roles in place. The spotlight on male adventure and heroism pushes female voices to the background, reinforcing the idea that men's actions and goals are what really matter.

Comparing these insights to earlier research shows both familiar patterns and some added depth. The way traditional gender roles are reinforced lines up with findings from studies on classic literature (like Crisp & Hiller, 2011; Stephens, 1992). But the cultural setting of the Arabian Nights brings in its own unique elements, social customs and power dynamics that reflect that specific time and place. Unlike much of today's Western literature, which often tries to challenge gender stereotypes (Crisp & Hiller, 2011), the Sindbad stories mostly stick to the patriarchal norms of their origin. This analysis adds something new by applying Connell's sociological framework to a non-Western text, showing just how deeply rooted these power structures are in the storytelling itself.

What makes this important is the impact these tales can have, especially on kids. Stories like these are widely read and can subtly teach gender roles from a young age. Lewis et al. (2021) emphasize the significant role children's books play in shaping early gender ideas. They highlight the limited power and agency given to female characters in Sindbad's stories, emphasizing the need to question these classics' messages. They emphasize the importance of exposing children to stories that offer a broader, more balanced view, while acknowledging their cultural significance.

This study differs from many of the gender studies of children's literature now available since those are more often concerned with the relatively Western picture book corpus or with contemporary texts (as in Lewis et al., 2021; Qiu & Yoke, 2024). By putting the focus on a traditional, non-Western text such as Sindbad the Sailor from the Arabian Nights, it fills an obvious void in the literature.

It doesn't simply read stereotypes on the surface: It relies upon Connell's (1987) intricately woven framework of gender and power to unravel the structures behind the narrative layer: labour, authority, and social standards as the fundamentals of the narrative power dynamics.

While the findings echo the broader trend of traditional literature reinforcing patriarchal systems, what makes this work unique is how it shows Connell's model can be used to unpack those dynamics in a culturally and historically specific setting. It points out that female characters aren't just boxed in by obvious stereotypes, they're limited by the very structure of power that drives the story. This kind of analysis helps fill a gap in the research by showing how strong gender theory can be applied to older, non-Western tales that still shape the way gender roles are passed down to young readers (*cf.* MacRobert 2011; Ünal and Sevimli-Celik, 2024).

V. CONCLUSION

This study explores the role of classical children's literature, such as Sindbad's Voyages, in reinforcing patriarchal norms through gender representations. The study reveals that female characters are often marginalized or reduced to passive instruments supporting male authority, while male characters embody ideals of hegemonic masculinity through adventure, leadership, and economic dominance. This reinforces the research hypothesis that classical narratives mirror and perpetuate societal gender hierarchies, particularly in their portrayal of femininity as subordinate and masculinity as inherently powerful. The findings are important for many areas: theoretical, educational, publishing, cultural. They further advance feminist literary criticism by showing how adventure stories encode gender relations through distinct economic and heroic systems. They also demonstrate the need for teaching classical texts with more advanced literacy components and argue for diversifying children's literature more to include stories that

provide alternative representations of gender roles. Nonetheless, these are some limitations of the study, such as consideration of a single textual tradition, viewing the narrative primarily through the gender lens without overlapping class, race, and historical context, lacking attention to real children readers' perspectives and interpretations, and the Oriental narratives culturally specific elements not captured by the Western theory framework. More inclusive approaches may involve comparing gender portrayal across various cultural traditions, modern retellings, reader-response theories, intertextuality, and more dominant narratives under the One Thousand and One Nights framework. In conclusion, this study contributes to understanding how classical children's literature functions as a cultural apparatus for gender socialization.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors have read and followed the ethical requirements for publication in **Jurnal Arbitrer**. The current work does not involve human subjects, animal experiments, or any data collected from social media platforms.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Maha M. Al-GAILANY is verified the final draft of the data.

Abeer Khalaf HUSSEIN is conducted the research and wrote the manuscript.

Ali Hussein HAZEM is finalized the manuscript in a decent text.

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DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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