

The Presence of the Fantastic Character in Children's Literature, Kamel Kilani's Sinbad the Sailor as a Model

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Abstract:

The marvelous character in *Sinbad the Sailor* by Kamel Kilani is a prominent figure in Arab children's literature, creating a vivid sense of enjoyment and imagination in young readers. The story aims to foster children's initiative, enhance their ability to face challenges, stimulate curiosity, develop creative imagination, and instill important educational values such as dedication, patience, courage, and a strong spirit of adventure. This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, carefully examining the concept of marvels in children's literature and systematically identifying their manifestations in the story. The findings show that the marvelous character successfully combines exciting adventures and entertaining elements while creatively portraying the conflict between good and evil. Its presence is not merely decorative or incidental; rather, it serves as an artistic and educational device, promoting moral refinement, engagement, admiration, and interactive involvement. The study highlights how the marvelous character contributes both to enjoyment and to the child's cognitive, emotional, and ethical development.

Keywords: Marvelous Character; Children's Literature; Kamel Kilani; Creative Imagination; Moral Education.

Introduction:

Children's literature is a distinct form of literary writing. It has its own rules and methods. These relate to language first. The language should match the child's vocabulary. Style also matters. It should suit the age group. The content must fit each stage of childhood. Questions of taste and narrative techniques are important as well. This applies to written stories and to oral storytelling.

Writing for children is not easy. In many cases, it is more demanding than writing for adults. The writer must pay attention to how children think and understand language. The goal is to communicate clearly. Ideas should not feel forced. In this sense, the writer often carries a human vision. The story presents values in a simple and natural way. It avoids complexity and does not overwhelm the child.

Methodology: This study follows a descriptive and analytical approach. It is based on observation, interpretation, and analysis. It looks at the child's interest in stories of the fantastic

and the supernatural. It also reflects how scholars study these characters. Their focus includes intellectual, emotional, social, and behavioral aspects.

Research Problem: This study asks a main question. How did Kamel Kilani use supernatural beings in the story? How did he move beyond simple excitement and make them part of Sinbad's growth? From this, other questions follow. Did Kilani succeed in shaping the fantastic character clearly? Did he follow the Arab narrative tradition? Or did he change it to suit the child reader? Another question is about style. How well did he use these characters in the narrative? Do they bring together imagination, enjoyment, and moral meaning?

Hypotheses: This study starts from a basic idea. The supernatural is not just fantasy. It carries symbolic meaning. It often reflects human struggles and challenges. The study also sees Sinbad the Sailor as a revival of Arab literary heritage. It draws on One Thousand and One Nights. At the same time, it helps the child connect with their cultural identity. This is important, especially in the presence of Western narratives. The story is also seen as educational. It presents moral values in a simple way. These values become part of the child's thinking. For this reason, the fantastic character is not just for decoration. It plays a real role in the story. It is part of a clear educational and narrative purpose.

Objectives: The story aims to achieve the following:

a. Educational and moral aim: The story promotes positive values. These include courage, patience, and a love of adventure. It encourages a positive attitude. It also teaches the child to take responsibility.

The story helps the child think before making decisions. It expands imagination. It also supports creativity and the ability to imagine new ideas.

b. Reflective dimension: The story introduces the child to new worlds. These include seas, islands, ships, and strange phenomena. It also offers a broader way of seeing the world. This reflects a modern outlook, and in some ways, a postmodern one.

c. Artistic aim: The story develops the child's language. It helps them learn new words and expressions. This enriches their overall linguistic ability. The story helps the child think before making decisions. It expands imagination. It also supports creativity and the ability to imagine new ideas.

Section One: The Early Emergence of Children's Literature

In ancient times, there was no clear concept of children's literature as we know it today. Children mainly engaged with oral and folk stories. These included myths, legends, and heroic tales.

One of the most influential works in shaping imagination, both in the East and the West, is One Thousand and One Nights. The story of Sinbad is often seen as Arabic in origin. However, it was influenced by Persian mythology. Even the name "Sinbad" comes from Persian, meaning "lord of the Sind River." In the stories, he appears as an adventurous sailor.

Researchers believe that children's literature developed in several stages. One important milestone is Mother Goose Tales by Charles Perrault (1628–1703). He first published it under a pseudonym. The book helped revive a wider literary movement in Europe. It drew on folk traditions and presented them in a way that children could understand.

Translation also played a major role. Antoine Galland's translation of One Thousand and One Nights became highly influential. It shaped children's literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Later, the field began to mature. This is clear in works like *Emile* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He focused on the child as a free and independent individual.

In the nineteenth century, more texts were written for children. These included the works of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen. Still, they were not yet fully recognized as part of a defined field of children's literature.

Texts written for children usually rely on clear and simple language. This helps the child understand the content more easily. They also use an accessible imaginative style. The content is often purposeful and layered. All these elements work together to engage the child's mind. They also encourage imagination and interaction with the text.

Children's literature is not very different from adult literature in its basic tools.

It still depends on language and imagination. It also draws from known literary forms such as myths and folktales. However, it is different in its focus. It speaks directly to the child. It encourages curiosity and a sense of adventure. At the same time, it respects the child's linguistic and aesthetic abilities (Al-Hiti, Hadi Numan. , p. 155). At first, children's literature was mainly oral. Grandmothers and mothers told stories to children. These stories were often entertaining and based on life experiences. They included songs, tales, jokes, and folktales.

They were usually told in simple, spoken language. It is also worth noting that the ancient Egyptians recorded some of the earliest known stories. This was done on papyrus around three thousand years BCE. Researchers have also found illustrated stories on the walls of pyramids and temples. This shows an early form of storytelling directed at younger audiences (Al-Jamal, 2016, p. 61).

Subsection One: The Concept of the Fantastic Character (Linguistically and Terminologically)

This section looks at the concept of the fantastic character, both in language and in critical usage. In *Lisan al-'Arab*, under the root (sh-kh-ṣ), the word "shakhs" refers to the visible form of a human or any other being. Its plural forms include *ashkhāṣ* and *shukhūṣ*. It can also mean the dark outline of a person seen from a distance. Any body that has shape and height can be described as a "shakhs." The term may also refer to movement, especially walking on foot (Ibn Manzur, 1997, pp. 45-46). In critical studies, however, the concept of "character" is not easy to define. It remains somewhat fluid. This is due to the many interpretations surrounding it. At the same time, it is a central element in any narrative structure. The term "character" is often linked to the Latin word *personality*, derived from *persona*. This originally meant the mask worn by an actor on stage. The mask allowed the actor to hide their real identity and perform a role. From this perspective, a character can be understood as someone who presents a constructed identity within a narrative (Fatteh, 2012, pp. 45-83).

As for the term "the fantastic," it comes from the idea of wonder. It refers to what surprises us, what feels unfamiliar, and what goes beyond the ordinary. The word "ajīb" (strange or wondrous) appears in the Qur'an in more than one

context. It is used, for example, in the story of Sarah, who expresses astonishment at giving birth in old age. It also appears in reference to disbelief in prophecy and resurrection. In both cases, the term points to something that exceeds human expectation and enters the realm of the extraordinary. It carries meanings of transformation, surprise, and deep wonder. (Alawi, 2005, p. 30)

This concept later found its way into Arabic dictionaries. Ibn Manzur, for instance, defines wonder as a reaction to something unfamiliar, something that lies outside habit and expectation. (Ibn Manzur, 1997, pp. 259-260)

In critical terms, the fantastic refers to the presence of supernatural events or unusual phenomena. It often involves a break from reality. This may appear through magical events or extraordinary beings.

The fantastic character itself can change over time. It does not remain fixed. It often draws on imagination, fear, and even hallucination. As a literary form, the fantastic has developed its own features. It is marked by the presence of the supernatural and the unfamiliar. This can be seen in many classical works, such as *The Devil in Love* by the French writer Jacques Cazotte. This novel is often linked to early Gothic fiction.

In many cases, the fantastic character is shaped by strange events and unclear visions. It does not always follow logic. Instead, it moves in a space where imagination and uncertainty dominate.

Subsection One: Defining Children's Stories and Their Types

A children's story is a prose form written for a specific age group. It is usually simple and easy to follow. It often combines imagination with elements of reality. Its main goal is educational. It aims to guide the child and help build a balanced personality shaped by moral values.

There are several types of children's stories, including the following:

a. Religious stories: Religious stories are among the most widely read in children's literature. They attract a large number of young readers. This is not surprising, especially in societies where religion plays a strong role in everyday life. In such contexts, this type of storytelling naturally holds a central place. (Amish, 2003, p. 42)

b. Animal stories: Animal stories are very popular with children. There is a natural connection between the child and the animal world. This connection is often based on feelings of familiarity and affection. Children enjoy imagining themselves in the place of animals. As noted by Hadi Nuoman al-Hiti, children easily identify with animals, form bonds with them, or even imagine controlling them (Al-Hiti, Hadi Numan, p. 179).

c. Historical stories: These stories deal with historical events and figures. They connect the present with the past. They do this by retelling events and presenting images from earlier times. In this way, they help the child understand continuity between past and present (Abu al-Maali, 1988, p. 61). As Yusuf Nofal suggests, we turn to the past to better understand the present and think about the future. (Youssef Hassan, 1999, p. 47)

d. Heroic and adventure stories: Heroic stories focus on a central character with exceptional qualities. These may include courage, honor, and a strong sense of duty. Such stories often carry a serious tone and may include mythical elements, like the Epic of Gilgamesh or the story of Antarah ibn Shaddad.

Adventure stories are slightly different. Their heroes are often ordinary people. They seek wealth or experience. They travel to unknown and sometimes dangerous places. Some of these stories also reflect resistance and the struggles of peoples. Al-Hiti notes that stories of the supernatural can fall within this category, but they go beyond normal heroism. They include events that are impossible in reality, such as modern stories like Superman. (Al-Hiti, Hadi Numan. , p. 182)

Subsection Two: Kamel Kilani – His Life and Work

Kamel Kilani was born in 1897 in the Citadel district of Cairo. He came from a conservative family known for its interest in knowledge. His father was a well-known engineer at the time. He memorized the Quran at an early age. He then joined Umm Abbas Primary School. Later, he continued his studies at Cairo Secondary School. In 1917, he enrolled in the Egyptian University. Kilani worked for many years at the Ministry of Awqaf. His career there lasted about thirty-two years. During this time, he held the position of Secretary of the Supreme Awqaf Council. He was also active in cultural life. He served as secretary of the Arab Literature Association. He chaired the newspaper Al-Rajaa. He was also involved in the Modern Acting Club. His work was not limited to literature. He also took part in journalism and the arts. This made him an important figure in Egyptian cultural life. (Al-Kurdi, p. 8) Kilani translated several international works. These included stories from Boccaccio, Shakespeare, and Cervantes. He also translated *Muluk al-Tawaif* and *Reflections on the History of Islam* from the Dutch orientalist Dozy. In addition, he translated parts of operas such as *La Traviata* and *Carmen*. Kilani is best known for his work in children's literature. He left a strong mark in this field.

He wrote many stories for children, and some were translated into different languages. He was also a pioneer in other ways. He was among the first to address children through radio. He also established one of the first libraries dedicated to children in Egypt (Al-Kurdi, p. 9).

Subsection Two: The Story of Sinbad the Sailor and His Voyages

This section looks at the story of Sinbad the Sailor. It focuses on his seven voyages, his adventures, and his desire to explore unknown worlds across the sea. It also highlights his encounters with strange and unusual creatures.

The story of Sinbad is part of a long literary tradition. It goes back deep into human history. It presents a series of connected events. These events unfold through characters, time, and place. The story relies on suspense and excitement. At the same time, it aims to present moral values in an engaging way.

As Muhammad Najm notes, a story is a sequence of events told by the writer. It may include one main event or several events. It involves different characters, each with a different role. The story does not fully reflect reality. Instead, it reshapes it through imagination. (Najm, 1966, p. 10)

The story centers on a young man from Baghdad. He lived a life of comfort and luxury. However, he chose adventure. He wanted to explore the world. He traveled by sea in search of knowledge and experience.

Sinbad goes on several journeys. In each one, he faces danger. He also encounters strange beings. His seven voyages can be summarized as follows:

- **The Moving Island:** Sinbad and a group of merchants land on what seems to be a green island. They rest there and light a fire to cook. Soon, they discover that the island is actually the back of a giant whale. The whale wakes up because of the heat. It moves suddenly, and many of them drown. Sinbad survives by holding onto a piece of wood.
- **The Valley of Diamonds and the Roc Bird:** Sinbad finds himself alone on a remote island. He sees a huge egg that belongs to the Roc bird. Using his intelligence, he ties himself to the bird. It carries him to the Valley of Diamonds.
- **The Black Giant:** Sinbad falls into the hands of a giant that eats human flesh. He is captured along with others. Through clever thinking, he manages to escape and defeat the giant.
- **Being Buried Alive:** Sinbad marries in a foreign land. He then discovers a strange custom. A husband is buried alive with his dead wife. He finds a way to escape this situation.
- **The Old Man of the Sea:** Sinbad meets an old man who seems weak at first. The man asks Sinbad for help. Once he climbs onto his shoulders, he refuses to get down. He wraps his legs tightly around Sinbad's neck. Sinbad later finds a clever way to get rid of him.
- **The River of Gems:** Sinbad's ship is destroyed near a high mountain. He discovers a river full of precious stones. He builds a small boat and travels through a long tunnel. This leads him to the island of Serendib (present-day Sri Lanka).

At the end of his journey, elephants attack him. They take him to a place where they bury their dead. There, he discovers ivory. This brings him great wealth. He returns safely to Baghdad. By the end, he understands the value of work and experience. He chooses a life of stability over danger and adventure. In each stage of his journey, Sinbad survives against all odds. He faces giants, monsters, and unknown dangers. He escapes through patience, intelligence, and courage.

Subsection One: Types of the Fantastic Character in Sinbad the Sailor

The character is a central element in any story. A narrative cannot exist without it. A character takes shape within a specific time and place. These elements help define its psychological, social, and even age-related features. Characters also interact with each other. Through this interaction, their traits become clearer. Each character reveals its own qualities. This often depends on how the reader interprets it. As Hamdani notes, a single narrative character can have many faces, depending on different readings and interpretations. (Al-Hamdani, 1991, p. 51)

For this reason, the storyteller gives great attention to character. No story can stand without it. It comes right after the main idea in importance. In children's literature, the role of character becomes even more significant. As Muhammad Barighish points out, the character is a very active element in the story. It may even form the central (axis) of children's narrative literature. (Breegish, 1996, p. 219)

The fantastic character in Sinbad the Sailor is not superficial. It blends reality with imagination. It develops across the seven voyages mentioned earlier. It also carries symbolic meanings.

These features can be summarized in the following table :

Type of Character	Example from the Story
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Mythical animal	The Roc bird / The whale
Distorted human	The giant / The Old Man of the Sea
Magical communities	The winged people
Supporting characters	Kings and captains

Sinbad's character is flexible. At first, he is driven by the desire for quick profit. But this soon changes. Under pressure, he becomes someone different. He survives situations where others perish. For example, he remains alive when all the merchants around him die.

He also shows cleverness. He manages to outwit fantastic creatures, such as the Roc bird and the man-eating giant. At times, he feels that he is not fully in control of his fate. It is as if he is guided by destiny. His repeated survival gives the story a sense of the sacred.

As he says:“ Then I came back to my senses and saw the Roc standing on the ground. I quickly untied myself and felt great relief at escaping that desolate island.” (Al- kilani, 2017, p. 25)Some of the main traits of Sinbad's character can be summarized as follows:

a. A contradictory character: Sinbad stands between the human and the extraordinary. He is not a mythical hero. He is a merchant with human traits. He feels fear. He shows greed at times. He seeks adventure. He also moves between wealth and poverty.

As he says:“I lost everything I owned. My end was ruin and loss. I might even be forced to beg, and I feared such a fate”.(Al- kilani, 2017, p. 15)

b. A resilient and challenging character: Sinbad also appears as strong and enduring. He faces extreme situations. He shows patience and the ability to (endure) hardship. This puts him in a constant inner struggle.

c. An adventurous character: All his journeys are built on adventure. Even being in the valley of snakes is an adventure in itself.

As the text describes:“ I lay on my back and placed a slaughtered sheep over me. I held onto it until the birds came and carried the meat away”. (Kamil, 1928, p. 29)

The voyages of Sinbad the Sailor are among the most famous tales of One Thousand and One Nights. They move between reality and imagination.

The fantastic character is central to the story. It drives the events forward. It also represents the dangers that Sinbad faces in his journeys.

These characters can be grouped into different types, as shown in the table below:

Fantastic Character	Physical Description	Moral Traits	Type of Character	Page
The Roc bird	Very large; eagle-like; its size is like a tree trunk	Strong and intelligent	Animal	25 (Hindawi Foundation for Education andCulture)

Monsters and the giant	Man-eating creatures	Savage; frightening; strange	Animal / Human	36 (Dar al-Ma'arif Publishing House)
The giant fish	Resembles an island	Clever	Animal	16 (Hindawi Foundation for Education and Culture)
The Old Man of the Sea	An old man; shows signs of age	Cunning and deceitful	Human	56 (Dar al-Ma'arif Publishing House)

Giant mythical creatures appear throughout the story. They represent extreme challenges. They go beyond natural limits. Their size and power are hard for the human mind to grasp. There are also monsters and ogres. Some are half-human.

They are usually savage and frightening. Strange animals appear as well, such as giant snakes and wild apes. There are even distorted human communities.

All these figures place Sinbad in difficult situations. He cannot rely on physical strength alone. Instead, he depends on patience, intelligence, and clever thinking. These characters often combine human and animal traits. They are violent and unsettling. They create fear and tension. In some ways, they resemble the Greek figure Polyphemus, the one-eyed creature who lived near Sicily. Such fantastic figures carry symbolic meaning. They come from an old tradition. At the same time, they convey moral and educational values. They attract the child reader. They create a sense of wonder and curiosity. They invite reflection as well as enjoyment. As Hussein Allam notes, the fantastic character draws us into the unknown. It allows us to move away from ordinary reality. These stories awaken curiosity and encourage reflection because of their charm and imaginative power. (Allam, 2022, p. 75)

In this story, we also notice strong contrasts. Sinbad moves from wealth to poverty, and then back to great wealth. His journey reflects a fantastic pattern of social rise. He returns from each adventure stronger than before. He survives danger and comes back with great treasures, such as rubies and diamonds, often described as royal gifts. This reinforces the mythical tone of his character.

In the past, Arab sailors faced many dangers at sea. Their journeys were full of risks. The story reflects this reality. It also offers a lesson for young readers. It encourages patience and careful thinking. It teaches them how to face problems and stay in control in the future.

Subsection Two: The Artistic Aesthetics of Sinbad the Sailor

Writers of children's literature did not rely only on written heritage. They also drew from oral traditions. These include folktales, myths, and popular stories passed down through generations. At this stage, the child needs to be introduced to this rich heritage. It helps develop

linguistic, cultural, and literary skills. The child is still learning and forming understanding. As Al-Eid Jallouli notes, introducing the child to folk heritage is important. It connects the child to traditions and customs. It also keeps the link with the past alive. Children are often more open to this kind of material. (Djellouli, 2010, pp. 119-129)

In Sinbad the Sailor, the artistic side is clear. The writer relies on repetition. The story follows the pattern of seven journeys. Each journey has a similar structure, but with new details.

For example: “But my joy did not last. I saw the Roc bird swoop down on a huge snake, swallow it, and fly away” (Al-kilani, 2017, p. 26). The style is descriptive

and narrative. It moves step by step. The risks increase with each new journey. This creates a sense of tension. It reflects a human conflict. The desire for safety stands against the desire for adventure. The language is simple and direct. It suits young readers. The writer uses words that match the child’s imagination. He also uses repetition in word forms, such as: bird, flew, flying. Adjectives appear frequently. For example: deep valleys, high mountains, huge snakes, giant serpents. Opposites are also used, such as rising and falling, day and night. Synonyms appear as well, like caves and caverns. Imagery plays an important role. The writer uses similes to make the unknown clearer. For example, the wings of the Roc are compared to dark clouds. Its egg is like a great dome. Sometimes it is described as a tree trunk. These images help the child imagine size and fear. The giant fish is described as an island. At first, it seems real. Then it turns into something else: “It was not an island, as we thought, but a huge whale.” Metaphors are also used. Natural elements become active forces. The sea, for example, is described as a beast that opens its mouth to swallow the ship. This gives life to the scene. Expressions like “fate threw me” show human weakness against fate. Other expressions suggest fear, such as: “faces turned pale” and “bodies trembled.” These hint at danger without direct explanation.

The beauty of the story lies in its sensory detail. It uses colors, movement, and size in a vivid way. This helps the child imagine the scene clearly. It also shows how the journey shapes the character.

This kind of writing requires skill. The writer must understand the child’s mind. He must also know the stages of linguistic and psychological development. (Najib, 1994, p. 30)

The narrative language moves between reality and fantasy. In many cases, the unreal dominates. As Fatima Badr Hussein explains, the fantastic character often begins with a fixed image. Then it is reshaped. It breaks natural rules and presents unseen worlds as if they were real (Badr-Hussein, 2003, p. 13). This transformation gives the character new features. It moves from the visible to the imagined. It brings the unseen into a form the child can understand. The narrative structure of the story is repetitive. It follows a clear pattern:

journey – danger – survival – return – regret – new journey.

Conclusion:

Sinbad the Sailor by Kamel Kilani is one of the most well-known heritage stories. It reflects how the early Arab imagination viewed the unknown. It also shows the triumph of human will and intelligence over nature and its mysteries. From reading the text and examining its themes and style, we can draw the following points:

a. Educational value: The story offers clear lessons for the child reader. It shows that survival does not depend on physical strength alone. It depends on patience, courage, intelligence, and careful thinking.

It also suggests that inner peace is more important than wealth. Sinbad's journeys are not only about trade or money. He becomes a symbol of bravery. He faces the unknown without fear. He learns how to deal with the impossible.

b. Symbolic value: The fantastic characters represent obstacles. These can be psychological or social. They stand in the way of the adventurer who seeks wealth and self-realization. At the same time, the story carries a moral voice. It highlights the value of moderation and contentment. Sinbad changes over time. He moves from a restless explorer to a more balanced and thoughtful person. This fits well with the aims of children's literature. The story of Sinbad is similar to other heritage texts, such as Kalila and Dimna and One Thousand and One Nights. They share common narrative functions. The fantastic narrative draws on older forms like myth and folktale.

In this way, Kamel Kilani succeeds in presenting a meaningful ending. He delivers moral values through an engaging and enjoyable narrative style.

Suggestions:

a. Revisit Sinbad the Sailor from the perspective of modern children's literature, and compare it with traditional versions.

b. Encourage researchers to use modern critical approaches. These include semiotic, structural, and narrative methods. It is also useful to combine literary studies with psychology and education.

c. Integrate heritage stories into educational curricula for specific age groups. These stories carry important human and aesthetic values.

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