ACTANTIAL SCHEMA AND FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE IN SHORT STORY
ṬABLĪYAH MIN AL-SAMĀ' BY YŪSUF IDRĪS

Mufti Zakwan Thoriq[1]*, M. Faisol[2]

[1,2]Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

Corresponding author: thoriqmufti6@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the narrative structure of Yūsuf Idrīs' short story *Ṭablīyah min al-Samā'* using A. J. Greimas' structural narratology, with emphasis on the actantial model and functional structure. The story depicts social and spiritual tensions in rural Egypt through the character of *Shaykh* 'Alī, who experiences marginalization and existential conflict. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the research applies close reading and systematic note-taking for data collection. Through Greimas' actantial scheme comprising six roles: subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent and a tripartite functional structure (initial situation, transformation, final situation), the analysis identifies five interrelated actantial patterns reflecting the protagonist's shifting symbolic and social positions. These results highlight the effectiveness of structural narratology in revealing role dynamics, value transformations, and embedded social critique in modern Arabic literature. Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of Greimas' model for interpreting both narrative and ideological dimensions of texts with strong socio-religious concerns. It concludes by recommending the broader application of structural narratology to modern Arabic works, ideally in combination with ideological or sociological perspectives to deepen textual analysis.

الملخص

تقوم هذه الدراسة البنية السردية في قصة يوسف إدريس القصيرة طبلية من السماء من خلال تطبيق السرديات البنيوية عند أ. ج. غريماس، مع التركيز على نموذج العوامل والبنية الوظيفية. تمثّل القصة توترات اجتماعية وروحية في بيئة ريفية مصرية عبر شخصية الشيخ علي الذي يعاني التهميش والأزمة الوجودية. استخدم البحث المنهج الوصفي النوعي بالاعتماد على القراءة الدقيقة وتدوين الملاحظات لجمع البيانات. ويرتكز التحليل على نموذج غريماس للعوامل المكوَّن من ستة أدوار مترابطة (الذات، والموضوع، والمرسل، والمستقبل، والمساعد، والمعارض) وبنية وظيفية ثلاثية (الوضعية الابتدائية، والتحول، والوضعية النهائية). تكشف النتائج عن خمس صيغ سردية مترابطة تُبرز التحولات الرمزية والاجتماعية للشخصية الرئيسة ضمن سياق الصراع، مما يؤكد فاعلية السرديات البنيوية في تحليل الأدوار وتحول القيم والنقد الاجتماعي في الأدب العربي الحديث. وتوصي الدراسة بتوسيع توظيف نموذج غريماس في تحليل النصوص السردية ذات الأبعاد الاجتماعية والدينية.

INTRODUCTION

Literature works represent a description of human life that can be viewed as an outward manifestation of his inner experience and imaginative thoughts about the events that attract attention of the author (Salam & Fadhillah, 2017). They can also serve as a form of social criticism, bring up topics of education, poverty, and crime (Yulianto, 2021) . Literature writers write work with the help of cultural, religious, and social dynamics in the surrounding environment (Setiadi & Yuwita, 2019), and literature is a place where experiences, psychological, religious, socio-cultural, and moral values are reflected (Sukiman, 2021) Among the literary development of the rapid type (Tarigan et al., 2021), short stories can be distinguished by their laconic, but detailed description of the conflict, characterization, and life values (Hazzlah & Rohanda, 2010).

The short story "Tray from Heaven" or *Ṭablīyah min al-Samā'* is one of the short stories by Idrīs, an Egyptian writer who is widely known for his social realism style. This short story is included in the anthology *ḥādithat sharaf* and has been translated into various languages, including Indonesian. This short story presents a portrait of the life of village society in Egypt through a strong realist perspective. Idrīs uses expressive language and a deep narrative flow to highlight social inequality and religious dynamics that occur in society. This story shows how beliefs and hopes often clash with the realities of life, especially in situations of poverty and social injustice.

According to Ahkam (in Khasanah & Fauzi, 2025) states that Algirdas Julien Greimas built on the ideas of his predecessors by emphasizing the importance of the relationship between language and signs as key elements in the process of meaning formation. Unlike Vladimir Propp, who focused on a specific genre, Greimas developed a universal narrative grammar and applied it to the structural analysis of various narrative forms, including cinematic studies and sentence structure (Amelia & Sukmono, 2025). In his theory, he adopted the idea that highlights the relationship between language elements as the basis for meaning, which later became known as the concept of actants (Nurhamidah et. al., 2025). Thus, Greimas successfully formulated a distinctive narrative study model that not only integrated Saussure's linguistic theory, Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, and Propp's fairy tale analysis, but also expanded the scope of narrative analysis to various cultural and media domains (Haq et al., 2025).

Narratological structuralism proposed by Greimas is a combination of theories proposed by Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In contrast to Propp's theory which focuses only on fairy tales, Greimas' research extends to include myths. Greimas emphasizes more on action (function) than on the actor. In the category of the subject, the narrative cannot simply be reversed, because its progression is shaped by the actions that structure it. The subject, therefore, is not an independent entity but one that is constituted by these actions, this relational position is what Greimas designates as the actant (Wulandari et al., 2020). Greimas summarizes the functions identified by Propp (which number 31) into twenty functions, which are then grouped into three structures based on three pairs of binary oppositions. Greimas' theory is a refinement of Propp's theory. Todorov in (Taum, 2011) stated that Propp himself had introduced the smallest narrative element that is constant in a literary work, known as function.

Greimas' narrative theory is built on the assumption that narrative texts are composed through dyadic analogies which are structural concepts in linguistics, which are rooted in the thoughts of Saussure, while integrating the approach of Vladimir Propp's fairy tale narrative theory (Karnanta, 2015). Combining the two theories produced three approaches highlighting actant relationships between subject-object, sender-recipient, and helper-opponent. In Greimas' framework, an actant represents a narrative scheme focusing on the processes involved in performing or achieving actions. Actant can be

interpreted as a creature or entity that has a role in carrying out a process or action (Santoso & Soelistyowati, 2020). The use of actant scheme is based on Greimas' narrative concept, namely a pattern of thinking that emphasizes the relationship between elements in a unit, rather than only seeing the actors (characters) and elements separately. In other words, Greimas proposed a concept that aims to describe the relationships between the actors in a story (Siswanto & Sukatman, 2022).

Previous studies have used Greimas' narratological approach in analyzing literary works, both novels and folk tales. Muttaqin et al. (2024) in their research shows that all actant elements in the novel, namely sender, subject, object, helper, opponent, and recipient interact with each other to form a complete narrative structure. This study also describes the stages of the story from the initial situation, transformation, to the final situation that marks the achievement of the main character's goals. Meanwhile, research by Misriyani et al. (2022), which examines the novel *The Maze Runner,* highlights the complexity of the narrative based on actantial relations in three main chapters, with the main character facing various conflicts both from within and from outside. Another study was conducted by Wulandari et al. (2020) analyzed two Jambi folktales and found that actant elements and functional structures were used to represent collective values and local culture. Though the theoretical methods used in previous studies are similar, they all act in another narrative setting, genre, and theme orientations. This research provides novelty in the sense of transferring an actant scheme and functional structure theory by Greimas to the short story *Ṭablīyah min al-Samā'* by Idrīs which reveals social conflict and existential crisis of the protagonist in the context of the contemporary Arab culture. Despite varying contexts, themes, and genres, which might result in different structural patterns, the model proposed by Greimas allows making comparisons with the stories that specify general relationships among actants. Therefore, it is helpful to study this short story in Greimas perspective since it can help to reveal the logic of character struggle performed in the story and how Idrīs systematizes social, religious, and existential tension in the structure of the narrative.

Idrīs' short story *Ṭablīyah min al-Samā'* explores social and religious tensions through *Shaykh* 'Alī, who challenges societal norms and even God. The story symbolically and tragically depicts social conflict, making it suitable for analysis via Greimas' actant theory. This study examines the actant roles and narrative functions, revealing power dynamics, social resistance, and collective irony, while contributing to Indonesian narratology and advancing structural analysis of modern Arabic literature.

This study is a descriptive qualitative research that centers on narrative research studies to describe, interpret, and analyze the narrative structure of the short story in details (Yusanto, 2020). The case under the present study will be Idrīs' with his *Ṭablīyah min al-Samā'* due to its sophisticated social, religious and psychological contradictions. Primary data are based on the short story, whereas the secondary ones are journals and books on narratology concerning the actant theory by Greimas. The study is based on the close reading and writing of notes to recognize actant roles and narrative roles, which is the foundation of the study conclusions (Mujarod, 2022). The results of the recording were then considered as data used to draw conclusions based on the findings of the analysis.

Data processing is carried out using a structural study approach, which focuses on the analysis of intrinsic elements. Structuralism is a theory in literary research that seeks to identify, analyze, and describe the relationships between elements contained in a literary work (Fatihah et al., 2022). The elements of literary works are divided into two categories, namely intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements are elements that form literary works from within, including the structure and use of language (Ate & Ndapa Lawa, 2022). Intrinsic elements consist of several components, including theme, plot, characters, characterization, setting, point of view, and style of language (Haniva & Hayati,

2020). Meanwhile, extrinsic elements include factors outside the text that influence the formation of literary works, such as the author's subjective attitudes, beliefs, and outlook on life. (Sum, 2018).

The data were analyzed through the actant scheme in short story *Ṭablīyah min al-Samā'* written by Idrīs by citing the narratology theory of Greimas. The concept of Greimas is based on the philosophical theory that the meaning of narrative is created by the structural relations of the narrative, not by the characters of the narrative themselves; thus, every role serves as a component of a whole system that creates narrative logic and coherence. This theory has six actants: subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent (Wulandari et al., 2020). The central axis of desire is defined by the subject and the object, and the hero always takes the subject position and the object is the object of the narrative struggle (Heryanti & Harini, 2018). The table format of presenting the actantial schema is used to explain these relational structures in the story (Majid et al., 2025)

The sender function is usually paired with the receiver function. The sender, or *sender*, acts as the party that drives the story or becomes a source of motivation for the main character (Tazkiyah et al., 2021). The role of the sender can be filled by someone or something that provides encouragement or ideas to the subject to act in the story. Meanwhile, the receiver function refers to the party either a person or an object that will later receive the object as a result of the efforts or searches carried out by the subject (Fadhilla, 2019). The supporting and opposing functions also play an important role in shaping the storyline. The supporting actant is a figure or element that helps the subject in their efforts to achieve the desired object in the story, in contrast to the opposing actant that hinders the subject's pursuit (Ratna & Intan, 2021). The opposite of the helper, the opposing function plays a role in inhibiting or thwarting the subject's efforts to achieve the desired object (Thera & Utami, 2022).

The data analysis process in this study was carried out systematically starting from a thorough reading of the short story text to identify the actant structure and functional model in the story. The analysis began by observing the actions of the characters to determine their respective roles in the Greimas actant scheme, which includes the elements of subject, object, sender, recipient, helper, and opponent. After that, a functional model was compiled by tracing the development of the storyline which was divided into three main stages, which include initial situation, change stage, and final situation (Megawati, 2018). The narrative structure consists of several elements, including the initial situation, which describes the daily conditions of the characters and the initial desires that drive the story (Aulia, 2020); transformation stage, which consists of three sub-stages, namely the skill stage, the main stage, and the brilliance stage, which marks the increase in conflict and efforts to resolve it (Roki et al., 2018); and the final situation as a form of resolution or new stability after the climax (Megawati, 2018). This analysis process is carried out through identifying important quotations in the text that contain narrative functions, determining the role of the actants in each segment, reconstructing the relations between the actants and the dynamics of the conflicts that arise, and compiling the actant scheme and functional structure in the form of tables and narrative descriptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The actant scheme of the short story *of Ṭablīyah min al-Samā'*

Idrīs' *Ṭablīyah min al-Samā'* portrays *Shaykh* 'Alī, elderly, impoverished man in *Munyat al-Naṣr* known for his volatility and odd habits. One Friday, he stuns villagers by vowing to blaspheme unless granted a "heavenly table" of food. What begins as humorous soon triggers fear of divine wrath. The community tries to calm him with food, cigarettes, and even marijuana, eventually feeding him regularly. The story critiques poverty, social

hypocrisy, and the exploitation of a man labeled "mad."

Scheme I: Unexpected commotion on Friday

At the beginning of the story, the short story describes the village of *Munyat al-Naṣr* as a quiet and slow place, especially on Fridays which are considered "unlucky days." Nothing extraordinary ever happened that day. But suddenly, a person is seen running down the street, a highly unusual occurrence in the village's customs. This phenomenon spontaneously triggers a chain reaction; people who witness it also run even though they don't know what is really happening. This phenomenon forms an odd situation that becomes the trigger for the narrative and introduces the initial tension of the story. In first scheme, the person who acts as the sender is the first man who runs. It is said that there was an anonymous figure who first ran to trigger a mass reaction. He didn't say much, didn't give any explanation, just passed by with a brief greeting.

<div dir="rtl">

ويمرُّ الجاري بجماعة جالسة أمام بيت

</div>

When the runner crossed the crowd of people in front of
the housing complex

The recipients in scheme I are Village Communities. As recipients, the village community receives the "mission" or encouragement transmitted by the runner. They receive psychological, emotional and social influences, which make them involved in mass actions. The object of this scheme is to find out the cause of the crowd or mass running. The main purpose of the villagers' actions is to find out what is really going on. They have no initial information, but curiosity spontaneously becomes their main drive. The object in this scheme is not something concrete, but rather knowledge or information regarding the source of the strangeness that occurs.

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ويجدون أنفسَهم آخِر الأمر يجرون

حينئذٍ يقفون ويحاولون معرفة السبب، وطبعًا لا يستطيعون

</div>

Eventually they found themselves running (recipient)
They wanted to know the reason, but of course they didn't get it (object)

The subjects of this scheme are the village people, reacting collectively to the unusual event of someone running on a calm Friday. Driven by spontaneous curiosity, they become active participants, moving impulsively despite confusion, shame, or hesitation. This mutual curiosity serves as the catalyst, transforming previously passive villagers into agents of action within the community.

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أن ترى واحدًا يجري في منية النصر، فذلك حادث

وحينئذٍ يدفعهم حبُّ الاستطلاع إلى المشي

</div>

If you see someone running along Munyat al-Naṣr Street, it is a strange thing (subject)
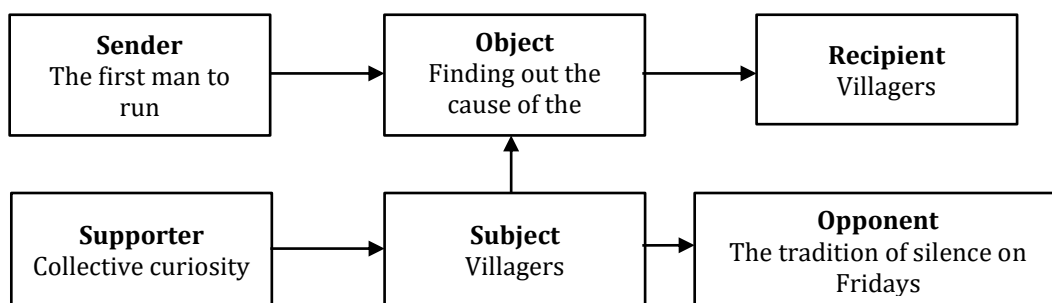*Their desire to find out compels them to start walking (helper)*

The Opponent to this scheme is the customs and social norms of the village itself, especially regarding Fridays which are considered holy, quiet, and full of superstition. Running and making noise is directly contrary to the ethos of Friday in the village. This tradition is a psychological and cultural inhibiting factor against spontaneous behavior.

وينتابها ذلك الركود الذي يستتب في العادة بعد صلاة الجمعة حيث تُرَشُّ أرضُها

Usually after Friday prayers the situation in the village is calm and quiet

This scheme depicts the initial dynamics of the story: a quiet village is shaken by a seemingly minor event a person running which then becomes a social explosion due to curiosity. Although contrary to tradition, the collective psychological drive overcomes the prevailing norms. This scheme paves the way for the main conflict that later appears in the form of the character of *Shaykh ʿAlī* and his tensions with society and with God.

Sender The first man to run	→	**Object** Finding out the cause of the	→	**Recipient** Villagers
Supporter Collective curiosity	→	**Subject** Villagers	→	**Opponent** The tradition of silence on Fridays

Scheme II: Shaykh ʿAlī against God

At this point, the story reaches its peak moment of tension. *Shaykh ʿAlī* stands in Munyat al-Naṣr's square, enraged and distressed, threatening to blaspheme God unless given a "heavenly dining table". His outburst sparks both divine and social conflict, shaking the villagers' collective values and disrupting the community's peace and order. The sender in this scheme is the hunger, poverty, and resentment of life. What drove *Shaykh ʿAlī* to act was not an external order, but the accumulation of bitter life experiences: constant hunger, extreme poverty, and resentment against certain figures (such as Abu Ahmad) whom he considered the cause of his misfortune. This frustration exploded into destructive verbal action.

المرة دي بقالي ماكلتش من أول امبارح العصر

But this time, I haven't eaten anything since yesterday

In this scheme, *Shaykh ʿAlī* serves as the subject and the focal point of the story's tension and conflict. His prominence arises not only from poverty but from his boldness in challenging God's authority. His actions are driven solely by personal survival, expressed through extreme, angry resistance. His "helpers" are his confidence and rage, which become his main source of power. Feeling he has nothing left to lose, *Shaykh ʿAlī* gains a fierce courage that disregards social or spiritual consequences.

كانوا يجدون الشيخ عليًا واقفًا في وسط الجرن

إنما انا مش خايف على حاجة، إن كان زعلان مني ياخدني

Shaykh ʿAlī stood in the middle of the field. He was angry and took off his turban(subject)
If he bothers me, let him take me! I have nothing to fear." (helper)

In this scheme, *Shaykh ʿAlī* is also the recipient, as he acts solely for himself and

accepts whatever outcome follows, whether his demand is fulfilled or punished. He is prepared to face divine anger or social rejection. The object he pursues is his plea to God, embodied in the "heavenly dining table," a symbol of long-denied justice. Beyond food, it represents recognition of his suffering and his hope for a dignified, humane life that fate has continually withheld.

<div dir="rtl">

ماني ساكت إلَّا اما تنزل لي المائدة لغاية هنا هه

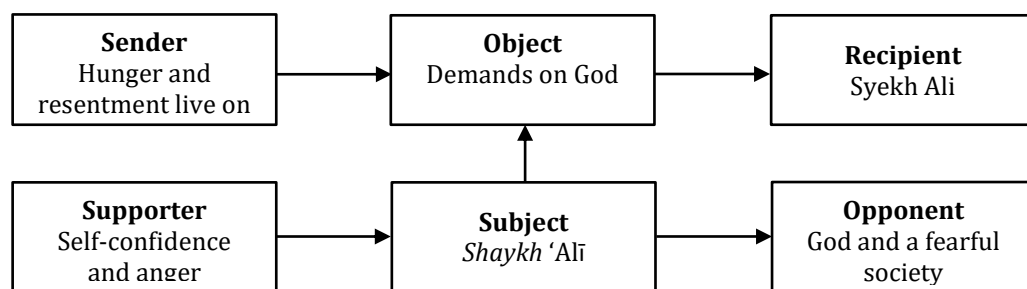ماني ساكت إلَّا أما يبعت لي حالًا مائدة!

</div>

I will just keep quiet when the dining table arrives (recipient)
I won't stop until he sends the dining table now!" (object)

The opponents in this scheme are God (who is challenged) and the villagers (who are afraid). The main conflict is not only directed at God who is considered negligent, but also at the village community who witnessed and felt threatened. The villagers could not let him continue his blasphemy because they were afraid that God's wrath would befall the entire village. Thus, the community also became a silent "opposant" who wanted to stop *Shaykh* 'Alī.

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كانوا خائفين أن يسوق الشيخ علي فيها ويكفر

</div>

They are afraid that Shaykh 'Alī will continue his blasphemy

This scheme represents a turning point in the story, a very intense conflict between the suffering individual and the divine power and social order. *Shaykh* 'Alī becomes a figure who opposes all forms of conformity: he refuses to submit to norms, challenges God directly, and stands alone in the face of a fearful and helpless community. In this scheme, Idrīs presents a sharp satire on how suffering can transform ordinary people into rebels who shake up the social and religious order.

Sender Hunger and resentment live on	→	**Object** Demands on God	→	**Recipient** Syekh Ali
Supporter Self-confidence and anger	→	**Subject** *Shaykh* 'Alī	→	**Opponent** God and a fearful society

Scheme III: Citizens panic, Shaykh 'Alī unshaken

After *Shaykh* 'Alī threatened to blaspheme God due to hunger and poverty, villagers' amusement turned to fear, worried about divine wrath. They urgently tried to appease him with food, cigarettes, and gifts, yet he rejected them, asserting his dignity. This scenario illustrates the tension between a fearful society and an obstinate individual defending his self-respect. The collective fear of the consequences of *Shaykh* 'Alī's blasphemy played a role as a sender in this scheme. The primary driver of people's actions is a pervasive fear of spiritual and social consequences. This fear becomes an internal force that triggers awareness and action. They are not motivated by compassion, but by the need to survive and avoid the risk of disaster.

وأهل منية النصر واقفون وقلوبهم تكاد تسقط من الرعب

The people of Munyat al-Naṣr stood motionless, their hearts almost frozen with fear

In this scheme, village communities become the narrative subjects, they are agents who take the initiative to act. Their goal was not to empathetically fulfill *Shaykh* 'Alī's needs, but rather to save themselves from possible divine punishment due to *Shaykh* 'Alī's blasphemy. They became active parties responsible for calming the escalating crisis. In an effort to calm *Shaykh* 'Alī, the tools used were food, cigarettes, and anything that could be used as an antidote to his anger. In this scheme, food became a symbol of peace efforts. Residents were willing to collect anything to avoid greater damage.

بدأ العُقَّلاء يُطْلِقون من بعيد كلمات طيِّبات يرجون فيها من الشيخ علي

فأحضروه على طبلية

Some of the elders of the community began to try to calm Shaykh 'Alī's anger (subject)
They brought it to Shaykh 'Alī on a tray (helper)

The recipients of this action were the people themselves. They hoped that their action, feeding *Shaykh* 'Alī would secure them from God's wrath. The salvation they fought for was for themselves, not merely to please *Shaykh* 'Alī. And the object in this scheme is social peace to avoid God's wrath. The object or goal of community action is to maintain collective stability and safety. They not only wanted to appease *Shaykh* 'Alī, but also calm any cosmic tensions that might arise from anger directed at God. They want to avoid disaster together.

وقد تحلُّ ببلدهم من جرَّاء ذلك نقمة تأتي على الأخضر

كان كلام الشيخ علي يهدِّد البلدة الآمنة كلِّها

Their village became the price to pay (recipient)
Shaykh 'Alī's words threaten the safety of the entire village (object)
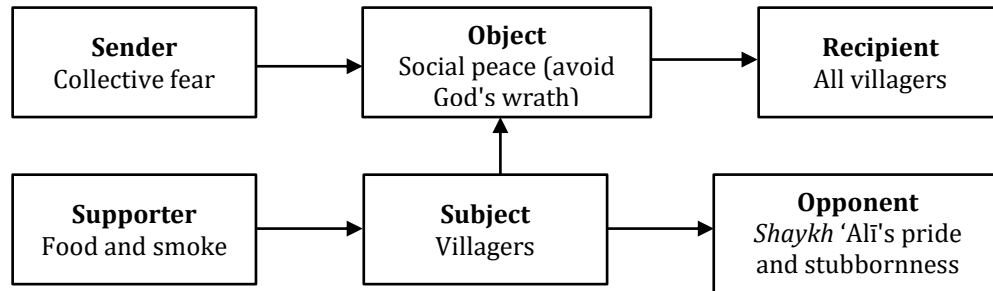
The opposition in this scheme was *Shaykh* 'Alī's stubbornness and pride. Even though the residents had given him food and tried to negotiate, *Shaykh* 'Alī still refused because he felt that the gift did not match his demands. He did not want to be considered a beggar. His pride was getting in the way of the success of the community's mission. Rather than showing the community receiving peace, the quotes emphasize the threat to the object itself. *Shaykh* 'Alī's words and the looming consequences highlight that social peace is fragile and at risk. This fear of losing peace clarifies why the community's actions are shaped by anxiety and the urgent need to protect their stability.

بقي أني عايز مائدة يا بلد غجر، تجبولي طبلية؟!

All I want is a table full of food, you useless thing?!

This scheme depicts society shifting from passive observers to active participants, driven by fear, sacrificing respect to appease *Shaykh* 'Alī, who steadfastly preserves his dignity. The conflict highlights tensions between collective logic and individual principle, revealing Idrīs' sharp social satire.

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┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐
│     Sender      │─────▶│     Object      │─────▶│   Recipient     │
│ Collective fear │      │ Social peace    │      │  All villagers  │
│                 │      │ (avoid          │      │                 │
│                 │      │ God's wrath)    │      │                 │
└─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘
                                  ▲
                                  │
┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐
│   Supporter     │─────▶│    Subject      │─────▶│   Opponent      │
│ Food and smoke  │      │   Villagers     │      │ Shaykh 'Alī's   │
│                 │      │                 │      │ pride and       │
│                 │      │                 │      │ stubbornness    │
└─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘
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Scheme IV: Marijuana as a path to peace, but failed

This scheme portrays the climax of tension between *Shaykh* 'Alī and Munyat al-Naṣr villagers. After food, cigarettes, and words failed to appease him, *Shaykh* 'Alī's anger escalated. In desperation, Manḍūr offered marijuana, but 'Alī felt mocked, intensifying his rage. What drives this action is collective psychological pressure: fear, emotional exhaustion, and the urgent need to stop the crisis. Citizens have tried various rational and empathetic approaches, but all have failed. Fear of God's wrath and social unrest are the senders that drive this compromise action.

وبدأ الشيخ علي يعد...حتى إن بعضهم تهامَس أن النقمة لا بد قد بدأت تحل

When Shaykh 'Alī started counting… some people whispered that the wrath of God was showing itself

In this scheme, the subjects are Manḍūr and other villagers. They took the final step by offering him marijuana, something that might have previously been considered taboo or inappropriate. But in a social emergency, they tried everything to get *Shaykh* 'Alī to stop threatening. Their role as subjects shows the shift in society from being a mediator to actively seeking resolution through extreme compromise. The helper in this scheme is the marijuana provided by Manḍūr. Marijuana here is not just an object, but a symbol of total concession. People who previously avoided unconventional methods now see them as the only way out. In the actant structure, marijuana acts as a helper: a concrete tool that is expected to break the cycle of threat and crisis.

وقال له: «خد! خد يا شيخ، مش خسارة فيك!

ولم يسكت إلَّا بعد أن أحضَروا مندور تاجر المر

Manḍūr saʿīd: 'Take it, take it, Shaykh, you deserve it!' (subject)
… Manḍūr the Ganja Seller gave him a lump of marijuana." (helper)

In this scheme, the recipients are two parties at once: *Shaykh* 'Alī as the direct recipient of the marijuana given, and the community as the indirect recipient of the results of the action, namely the potential for the return of peace. Whether this action will be successful or not, both will receive its impact. The object or purpose of the actions of Manḍūr and the residents is to restore peace to the village. The people wanted to stop *Shaykh* 'Alī's threats to prevent God's wrath, which they believed could come at any time if the blasphemy continued. So, marijuana is not the object itself, but rather the helper that a symbol of a last-ditch effort to preserve peace and avoid destruction.

والجمع يغمره السكون

وإمَّا إسكات الشيخ علي بأي طريقة ...وأصبح الوضْع لا يُحتمَل

They stood silent (receiver)
The situation was becoming increasingly unbearable... or to silence Shaykh 'Alī by any means (object)

The opponent in this scheme was *Shaykh 'Alī's* self-esteem, who felt he was being laughed at. Even though he was given marijuana, *Shaykh 'Alī* did not feel respected, but instead felt like he was the object of ridicule. He refused not because he didn't want the marijuana, but because the offer felt like a veiled insult. His pride was hurt, and his emotional reaction became a major obstacle to the success of the citizen's mission.

أنا أضحكوا؟! هو أني مضحكة يا مندور يا ابن البلغة؟!

Are you laughing at me?! What's so funny about me, Manḍūr?!

This scheme represents the story's peak social crisis, where villagers' final attempt giving *Shaykh 'Alī* marijuana backfires, igniting his pride and anger. It demonstrates that technical solutions fail without addressing individual dignity. *Ṭablīyah min al-Samā'* highlights tragic irony: society creates its own adversary and can only manage conflict through absurd compromises.
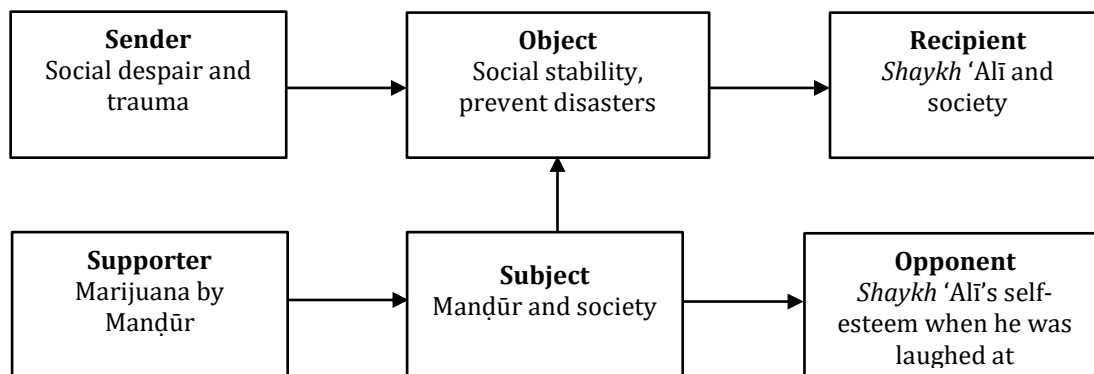
Scheme V: Fake stability through regular bribes to Shaykh 'Alī

The story begins by depicting Munyat al-Naṣr as a quiet, uneventful village, particularly on Fridays, considered "unlucky days." This calm is disrupted when someone suddenly runs through the street, triggering a chain reaction as others follow without understanding why, creating confusion and initial tension. Later, after *Shaykh 'Alī* threatened God and unsettled the village, residents developed a pragmatic "peace strategy," routinely providing him with food and necessities. Treated as a "social time bomb," this practice maintained only an illusion of stability, as Ali's volatile temperament and the underlying threat remained ever-present.

The sender in this scheme is the collective trauma and experience of *Shaykh 'Alī's* explosion. What drives the citizens' actions is the collective memory of how chaotic and dangerous the situation was when *Shaykh 'Alī* went on a rampage. This trauma creates a kind of social alertness: people learn from the experience and anticipate so that something similar does not happen again.

<div dir="rtl">

حتى يدركوا أنهم نسُوا أمرَه وتركوا
</div>

They understand that they forgot about the problem

In this scheme, the residents of Munyat al-Naṣr village act as the main subjects. They had learned from previous experience that tensions with *Shaykh* ʿAlī could not be dealt with with violence or logic, but rather by fulfilling his basic needs. So they took the initiative to act before the crisis occurred. This action was preventive, born of fear and a unique social responsibility: maintaining stability through compensation. The solution that emerged was the provision of food on a regular basis not as charity, but as a form of unwritten social contract. This allowance became a "helper" in maintaining stability, taming the potential for *Shaykh* ʿAlī's emotional outbursts.

<div dir="rtl">

غير أنهم من يومها عرفوا له

وأحيانًا يرضى بما قسم الله
</div>

However, since that day, they have been providing him with an allowance (subject)
Sometimes he will receive his share (helper)

The beneficiaries in this scheme are two parties: the community (who gets peace and social stability) and *Shaykh* ʿAlī (who receives regular food and attention). In a deeper sense, *Shaykh* ʿAlī also gets social validation as an "important figure" who must be cared for so that the village remains safe. This creates a unique interdependent relationship. The goal of citizen action is to create and maintain sustainable social order. This object is not just a condition free from conflict, but a stable system, albeit built on absurd compromises. Residents wanted to prevent *Shaykh* ʿAlī's anger from exploding, which had been proven to disrupt collective harmony.

<div dir="rtl">

ولا يزال سريع الغضب، ولا يزال الناس يضحكون من غضبه

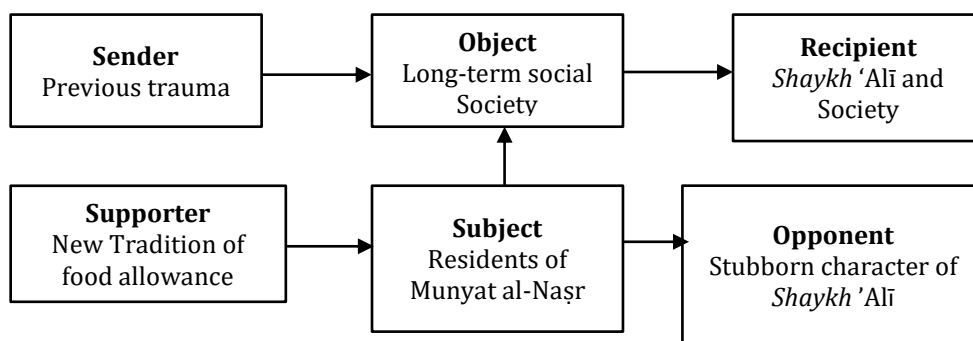وقبل أن تتسرَّب من فمه كلمة كفر واحدة، تكون الطبلية قد جاءتْه
</div>

He still gets angry easily, and people still laugh at his anger (recipient)
Before a curse word could come out of his mouth, a tray would be brought to him (object)

The opponent in this scheme was, *Shaykh* ʿAlī's stubborn which unchanging character remains the true threat. Despite the system, his anger, pride, and readiness to erupt persist, making him a constant opposition to the village's efforts to maintain peace and stability.

<div dir="rtl">

ولا يزال سريع الغضب، ولا يزال الناس يضحكون من غضبه
</div>

He still gets angry easily, and people still laugh at him

This scheme reflects the pseudo-resolution phase in the narrative structure of the short story. The villagers of Munyat al-Naṣr devised a system to contain *Shaykh* ʿAlī, treating him as a guarded danger. Yet, this produced not true peace but fragile order built on fear and compromise. The story satirizes society's choice of pragmatic, absurd solutions over meaningful resolutions to conflicts they perpetuate.

```
┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐
│     Sender      │     │     Object      │     │    Recipient    │
│ Previous trauma │────▶│ Long-term social│────▶│ Shaykh ʿAlī and │
│                 │     │     Society     │     │     Society     │
└─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘
                                 ▲
┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐
│    Supporter    │     │     Subject     │     │    Opponent     │
│ New Tradition of│────▶│  Residents of   │────▶│Stubborn character of│
│ food allowance  │     │ Munyat al-Naṣr  │     │   Shaykh ʾAlī   │
└─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘
```

Functional structure
Initial situation

The story begins by portraying Munyat al-Naṣr as a quiet, orderly village, especially on Fridays, a day seen as unlucky. Life flows slowly, with little urgency, as residents spend the day resting after prayers. This calm routine is suddenly broken when someone runs down the street, an unusual, startling act in such a passive culture. The sight sparks a chain reaction: others also run, driven by panic rather than reason. With no explanation, confusion spreads, and chaos erupts. *wa-yamurru al-jārī bi-jamāʿah jālisah amām bayt* (and a passerby walks past a group sitting in front of the house). This moment marks the shift from tranquility to disorder, transforming the village's ordinary life into a scene of collective anxiety and tension. As stated in the quote:

<div dir="rtl">

أن ترى إنسانًا يجري في شارع من شوارع منية النصر، فذلك حادث

الواقع أنه كانت هناك حركة جري واسعة النطاق ...وفي يوم الجمعة ذاك، لم يكن واحد فقط هو الذي يجري

</div>

If you see someone running along Munyat al-Naṣr Street, it is a strange thing
One Friday, it wasn't just one person running... but many people

This is the beginning of a conflict that will change the social dynamics in the story.

Transformation stage

The transformation stage in this short story is the center of the narrative conflict and tension. This stage consists of three sub-sections: competence, main, and brilliance (Roki et al., 2018)

Proficiency stage

The term "Proficiency" is used to denote the stage in which the character's ability to face conflict is tested to the fullest. In this section, the main conflict appears in the form of the figure of *Shaykh* ʿAlī, an unemployed old man who is angry, poor, and full of social resentment. He stood on the field in a fit of rage, took off his turban, brandished his stick, and most shockingly, threatening to blaspheme God if he is not immediately given a "dining table from heaven." This is where the skill of conflict is introduced: not just about hunger or poverty, but about resistance to destiny and divine authority. *Shaykh* ʿAlī feels that his life has been played by God, and now he demands answers. The sentence *mā nī sākit illā ʾammā tunazzil lī al-māʾida li-ghāyat hunā hāh* (in the name of religion and everything I believe in, I will not be quiet until he sends a dining table now!) become a symbol of the climax of frustration and spiritual challenge to the value structure believed in by society. He turns into the center of the storm, and all eyes are now on him as a source of chaos and potential disaster.

Main stage

As tensions rose, villagers tried calming *Shaykh* ʿAlī with food, fish, cigarettes, and

promises, but he rejected them harshly, deeming their offerings unworthy. His demands went beyond hunger he sought dignity and recognition. The community was trapped, fearing both his uncontrollable rage and potential divine punishment for blasphemy. Quotes such as *ḥadānā samak ṣābiḥ yā Shaykh ʿAlī...* (We have some fresh fish) and *Shaykh ʿAlī's* response *wa-dah akl?! Wa-dīnī, mā nī sākit illā ʾammā tunazzil lī al-māʾida li-ghāyat hunā hāh...* (in the name of my religion and everything i believe in, i will not keep quiet until he sends a dining table now!) confirm that their peaceful efforts are not enough to defuse this existential crisis.

The glory stage

After many failed efforts, Manḍūr, a marijuana seller, offered *Shaykh* ʿAlī hashish as a last resort. Though insulting and inadequate, it temporarily calmed him. Peace returned, not through resolution but by silencing him with drugs and food, forcing villagers to keep appeasing his anger to prevent future chaos. Manḍūr's statement, *wa-iḥnā lāzim nashūf rāḥtak yā Shaykh* (We must take care of your comfort, Shaykh) and the description *wa-qabla an tatasarraba min famihi kalimat kufr wāḥida, takūnu al-ṭabliyya qad jāʾat-hu* (Before a curse word could come out of his mouth, a tray would be brought to him complete with whatever he asked for) show how pragmatic compromise replaced a true resolution. This stage marks a turning point: society begins to submit to abnormality as part of the new order.

Final situation

In the final situation, the story closes not with true peace but with the birth of an absurd social tradition. After that fateful Friday, villagers realized stability depended on regularly feeding *Shaykh* ʿAlī before he erupted. This practice, driven by fear not compassion, became automatic: whenever he raised his stick, people rushed with food, cigarettes, or hashish. It symbolized a hollow compromise, where genuine values and dignity gave way to pragmatic survival, reflecting a distorted balance between fear, submission, and social order. Quotes such a *ghayra annahum min yawmihā ʿarafū lahu* (However, from that day on, they gave him allowances...) and *wa-aḥyānan yarḍā bimā qasama Allāh, amruhu ilā Allāh* (Sometimes he will accept his lot, submitting to God*)* shows that society chooses stability over principle, and tensions remain but are controlled. The function of this final situation is not to show a peaceful resolution, but how collective compromise can establish a kind of "false order" to avoid greater chaos.

Analytical insights based on Greimas' model

This study reveals that applying Greimas' actantial scheme and functional structure to Idrīs' *Ṭablīyah min al-Samāʾ* uncovers layered social tensions, religious symbolism, and the protagonist's existential struggle shaping the narrative. With such structural-semiotic prism, one can see more clearly the relations between the sender, receiver, helper, opponent, subject and object how Idrīs intertwines his criticisms of class hierarchy, moral ambiguity, and spiritual anxiety which drives his main character to make choices and feel his internal struggle. These insights correspond to Muttaqin et al. (2024), who found coherent interactions among actants, and they also parallel the narrative complexity noted by Misriyani et al. (2022) in *The Maze Runner*.

In contrast, the findings differ from Wulandari et al. (2020), whose research highlights collective cultural values rather than individual crises. Given the scarcity of Greimassian studies on Middle Eastern realist-religious fiction, this research fills a scholarly gap and broadens analysis of social critique, cultural dynamics, and spiritual conflict in modern Arab literature. Both works show that the model developed by Greimas can be successfully used to reveal the intertwining of narrative functions with thematic depth, both in the Arabic realist fiction and in modern dystopian literature. Although their

work underlines the communal identity, shared practices and social inheritance of norms as the core of the narrative meaning, the text by Idrīs promises the foregrounding of personal crisis, demonstrating how the crisis of the individual can be used to mirror the fractures in the society. This point highlights the fact that Greimassian analysis can be used to highlight various emphases of the narrative based on the socio-cultural orientation that the text follows.

Given the scarcity of Greimassian studies on Middle Eastern realist-religious fiction, this study can be used to apply the concepts of narrative theory by showing how actantial and functional structures can be used to better interpret religious symbolism and socio-political commentary, in addition to providing a basis upon which subsequent comparative studies could be conducted across geographic, genre, and subject matter areas.

CONCLUSION

Idrīs' short story *Ṭablīyah min al-Samā'*, analyzed through Greimas' structural narratology, presents a symbolically rich narrative in which *Shaykh* 'Alī transforms from a marginalized individual into the center of a social crisis through five interconnected actantial schemes. The narrative unfolds in three stages: an initially calm society, a conflict-driven transformation, and a final pseudo-stable situation maintained through routine gift-giving, while Greimas' framework effectively maps character roles and uncovers ideological meanings, including critiques of structural poverty, social pretense, and the limitations of formal religiosity in addressing human suffering. These findings confirm that the actantial approach is effective for exploring social and spiritual layers in modern Arabic literature and demonstrate that Greimas' theory can be applied to Arabic short stories to address narratological questions. However, this study is limited to a single story and one approach; therefore, further research is recommended using other works or different methods, such as reception studies, semiotics, or literary psychology, as well as comparative studies with Indonesian short stories, to make narratological studies of modern Arabic literature richer, more contextual, and more relevant.

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