

This brief summary of some theoretical issues related to the analysis of love romances shows that interpretation has to focus on the relationship between individual and society, space and time and the opposition between Fate and free will, predestination and contingency. It is these issues that are vital to the broader question of the kind of genre to which the romances should pertain. To examine these questions, we will now turn to one of the most significant love romances of the *Thousand and one nights*, which at the same time represents a model of the genre and stands out because of its literary merits: the story of *Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr*, followed by its continuation, the story of *As'ad and Amjad*. We will focus on the spatial aspects of the narrative, both in their formal and metaphoric functions.

### **The romantic hero and his landscape: the story of *Qamar al-Zamān***

The story of *Qamar al-Zamān*<sup>12</sup> consists of two main components; firstly, the story of the love between prince Qamar al-Zamān and princess Budūr, and secondly, the adventures of the two sons of Qamar al-Zamān, As'ad and Amjad. Within the latter part a love story is inserted, the story of *Ni'ma and Nu'm*.<sup>13</sup> Especially the first story falls into the category of the love romance, with some specific features; the second follows the scheme of the romance, but is still somewhat different from the stereotype. The story of *Qamar al-Zamān* begins with the king of the Khālīdān Islands expressing his fear that his empire will fall into ruin since he has reached old age and does not yet have a successor. However, due to the will of God, he begets a son, whom he calls Qamar al-Zamān. When Qamar al-Zamān has reached his adolescence, the king suggests that he should marry, in order to secure the continuation of the dynasty. To his great dismay, however, the boy refuses adamantly, claiming that he abhors women. After persisting in his refusal, he is finally locked up in one of the towers of the palace. Far away, on the other side of China, lies the island empire ruled by King Ghayūr. He has a stunningly beautiful daughter, who, in spite of her father's insistence, refuses to marry any of her many suitors. Furious, the king puts his daughter into confinement. The two episodes are clearly mirrored: Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr are each other's reflection, and this determines their fate. They are brought together by two ugly jinn, see each other briefly, fall deeply in love, exchange rings and are separated again.

As a result of the separation from their beloved, after such a brief moment of bliss, both Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr pine away from grief. They are thought to have become mad and are put into seclusion. Budūr's brother Marzuwān hears of his sister's illness and decides to help her. He penetrates her cell disguised in women's clothes, discovers the true nature of her illness and promises her to find her beloved. He travels to faraway lands and eventually, after a shipwreck, is cast away on the shore of the castle where Qamar al-Zamān is imprisoned. He succeeds in healing Qamar al-Zamān by promising to take him to Budūr, and without informing his father, Qamar al-Zamān follows him to his land. They conceive

a ruse to make Qamar al-Zamān's father believe that his son is dead, leaving bloody traces to pretend that he has been killed by a lion. Once they have arrived in al-Ghayūr's capital, Marzuwān instructs Qamar al-Zamān to disguise himself as a soothsayer, go to the palace and claim that he is able to cure the princess. Qamar al-Zamān obeys and succeeds in healing Budūr with a letter in which her ring is concealed. In a very fine, although not very subtle passage, it is told how the princess breaks her iron chains through the sheer force of her love, and embraces her beloved.

After a while, Qamar al-Zamān expresses the wish to return to his father and introduce Budūr to him, and the couple depart for the long journey. While resting on the way, however, Qamar al-Zamān cannot resist untying Budūr's clothes while she lies asleep beside him, and he finds a precious gem hidden inside her trousers. While Qamar al-Zamān looks at the gem, it is suddenly taken away by a bird. Chasing the bird Qamar al-Zamān loses his way and ends up in a strange town. It is a town of fire-worshippers, but fortunately the prince is given shelter by one of the few Muslims living there, who employs him as a gardener. After Budūr discovers the disappearance of her lover, she decides to disguise herself in Qamar al-Zamān's clothes to keep the situation secret and to protect herself. Eventually, she arrives at the court of the king of the Ebony Islands, who asks her/ him to marry his daughter Ḥayāt al-Nufūs and inherit his throne. Budūr agrees out of fear of being discovered and she becomes king of the Ebony Islands.

In the final episode of the story the two lovers are miraculously re-united. Qamar al-Zamān retrieves the gem, which he hides in sacks of olives that are loaded in a ship bound for the world of Islam. However, the ship departs without him, because he attends to his protector who has fallen ill and dies. The olives are brought to Budūr, who discovers the gem and sends a ship to fetch Qamar al-Zamān. The circumstances of the reunion are told in a playful and somewhat scabrous passage, when Budūr, still in men's clothes and unrecognized, invites Qamar al-Zamān to illicit sexual acts, which at first he refuses, before complying reluctantly. Evidently, soon he discovers Budūr's true identity and quickly all intrigues are unravelled: all characters assume their true identities, Qamar al-Zamān becoming king of the Ebony Islands, with Budūr and Ḥayāt al-Nufūs as his wives. A situation of normality has been restored, at least to some extent.

The structure of the story of *Qamar al-Zamān* is similar to that of many other love romances. First, there is the threat to the stability of the dynasty and to the continuation of the structure of royal rule. When the threat seems to be removed by the birth of a son, a second disruption appears when the son refuses to accommodate to the regular system of social and dynastic reproduction. Instead of complying with the laws governing his position and role, the prince dissociates himself from the conventions on which the preservation of the structure is based. The confrontation between Qamar al-Zamān's individuality and the system of conventions, completed by his romantic love for Budūr, immediately results in his isolation from the system. By his refusal, the prince has become a marginal person, who operates outside the laws of the established order. The same applies to princess Budūr, whose marginality is stressed by contrasting her imprisonment