

# The symphonic suite *Scheherazade*: the model of a multiprogrammatic conception

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**Abstract:** The symphonic suite *Scheherazade* (1888) attracts attention not only because of the beauty or oriental exoticism of Rimsky-Korsakov’s music. This programmatic musical narrative about a female narrator sparks the imagination itself. Moreover, the subject matter of this extraordinary work is primarily about the power of creative fantasy and equally about the ability of fiction to shape both human character and reality itself. All the more surprising is such a postmodern interpretation of the female figure in a work belonging to a national school of the 19th century. Or, in the terms of contemporary knowledge, this symphonic suite, having as its subject some stories from the famous collection *1001 nights*, reveals itself as a genuine psychodrama in which the intelligence of a young woman wins in a merciless confrontation for survival, but by even curing the man who was going to kill her. In the end, it is surprising the case of this compositional conception, which without losing its expressive freshness, proves both its actuality and, above all, its fecundity through the ability to accommodate several hermeneutic scenarios in the same sound form.

**Keywords:** symphonic suite, orientalism, narrative, multiprogramming, psychodrama, fiction.

## A. Introduction. Fruitful complications with polysemanticism

1. *Formulation of the problem.* How many meanings with identical truth value can a musical work accumulate? Because it is understandable that each integral historical context formulates its own determinants in terms of the specific normative contents by which it defines its identity. And then, a progressive difference must be admitted between the load of content “primed” by the composer and the multitude of meanings activable during the already historically independent existence of a given work. Thus, it should be presumed from the outset that a musical work ensures its durability through a semantic potential, one that would allow (each time) a new interpretation of the content according to new topical meanings. This is precisely because even the original meaning of the content is nothing other than the consequence of a

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consensual convergence, the latter determined by a set of conjunctural factors not necessarily entirely under the control of the composer who wrote the work.

This type of modelling of a possible semantic scenario could be all the more plausible the more the musical composition is purged of any extra-musical elements – text or image – in the quartet or symphony genre (in the classics and romantics), in the serial, stochastic or sonoristic technique (in the avant-garde composers). But even more challenging and captivating could be the semantic remodelling of a work with a programme, i.e. one already having a notionally formulated extra-musical content. In such a case it would seem that there could be no question of any kind of reinterpretation, since the “letter of the law” regarding content has been formulated by the composer, any “deviation” being sanctioned as irrelevant. But even in such a situation semantic polymorphism has its say, offering one or more alternative keys to reading an apparently already “closed” musical text.

However, cases of self-sabotage should also be allowed, and this is because a musical work supports its articulation through several synchronous semantic rows. In opposition to the extra-musical programme and the expression which, supposedly, must confirm the content of the programme, comes the structural-processual row (melody, rhythm, harmony, counterpoint, texture) which, in the case of a symphonic work, is also amplified by the timbral row of the orchestration. An explicit case of self-sabotage is Debussy's *Preludes*, with the titles at the end of each piece. Dislocating the titles would have an identical effect in cycles such as Schumann's *Carnival*, Tchaikovsky's *Seasons* or Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*.

But here there are two possibilities of critical interpretation, one necessary in the case of each composition under consideration. In the first case it is a reinterpretation confirming the original meaning, as happened, for example, with the fourth part of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and the famous *Ode to Joy*, which eventually became the anthem of the European Union, although the famous theme worked in a different sense in the *Fantasy for piano, choir and orchestra* by the same composer. The same is true of M. P. Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, whose reinterpretations (Ravel, Rogalski, Isao Tomita or Emerson, Lake & Palmer) are focused on reconfirming the original content. Although the intention of each re-interpreter was to dislocate the auctorial semantic meanings, first of all by retimbrality and, implicitly, by recontextualisation.

In a second case, it is an alternative reformulation, with the value of reinterpreting the content, even under the same title, but reconsidering the meaning of the thematic profiles, the relationships between them, as well as the entire dramaturgical plan. This is the case for the first part of the symphonic suite (with variants *Shehrazat* and *Sherazade*), a programmatic narrative about

a female narrator. A story about a storyteller, an exemplary narrative about the power of fiction and fantasy, and not least a promising interpretation in terms of gender musicology as part of postmodern recuperative ideology. A fourth active meaning would also refer to the Shakespearean process of theatre within a theatre (*Hamlet*), but also, in turn, an exemplary model of semantic reorientation according to conjuncture. The typologies of this process can be continued through film in film (or about film) – *Cinema Paradiso* (1988), *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1988), *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) – or painting in painting – Jan Vermeer's *Painter in his Studio*, Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*.

## **2. Starting datas. History of writing, programme content and form of the work**

*History of writing.* After Borodin's death (February 1887), Rimsky-Korsakov begins work on completing the orchestration for the opera *Prince Igor* (winter 1887-1888). The oriental element of the opera (the image of the nomads and the *Dance of the Polovcenes*) inspired him to write a composition of his own, all the more so because it was an earlier intention that had been set aside. The subject is compiled from several episodes of the Indo-Persian-Iranian-Arabic folk tale cycle *1001 Nights*. In Europe the translation by the French orientalist and teacher Antoine Galland (1646-1715), produced between 1704-1717 in 12/14 volumes, became famous. In Russian the volumes are translated between 1763-1777.

The actual writing of the work took the composer only one month (July) in the summer of 1888. The first part was completed on July 4, the second - on July 11, the third - on July 16, and the fourth - on July 26, the entire work being dedicated to V. Stasov, the ideologist of the composers of the *Mighty Handful*. On October 22, 1888, the first absolute audition took place in the first Russian Symphonic Concert under the composer's baton. The symphonic suite *Sheherazade* (Op. 35) was a success right from the first performance, and one of Rimsky-Korsakov's students – Sergei Prokofiev – even wrote a paraphrase entitled *Fantasy on Themes from Sheherazade*. In 1903 Maurice Ravel, an admirer of Rimsky-Korsakov, composed his own, a vocal cycle consisting of three poems for voice and orchestra, which in the Orientalism vein was followed by Paul Dukas's ballet *Peri*, Bizet's opera *The Pearl Seekers*, Delibes's opera *Lakmé*, and even Stravinsky's opera *The Nightingale*. Last but not least, a possible projection of the image of in Shemahan's Tsarina from Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* should be mentioned.

*Explicit content of the programme.* The composer's first intention was to assign a title to each part: *The Sea and Sindbad's Ship* (I), *The Fantastic Tale of Prince Kalender* (II), *The Prince and the Princess* (III) and *Celebration in Baghdad. The Sea. The shipwreck struck by the rock crowned by the Brass Rider. Conclusion* (IV). Later, however, Rimsky-Korsakov eliminates all four

titles. As the composer himself noted, the *Sheherazade* suite is composed of separate episodes that are completely unrelated<sup>1</sup>.

*Genre and form.* Having explicit programmatic titles, the whole work lends itself to the title *suite*. But with the titles removed, the explicit genre of the work could not be other than *symphony*. But this attribution is confirmed by the tempos of the parts rather than the compositional schemes.

Thus,

Part I – *The Sea and Sindbad's Ship* – is conceived as an untreated sonata, with an Introduction and Coda.

*Largo e maestoso. Lento. Allegro non troppo*, in the keys e-moll/E-dur;

The second part – *The Fantastic Tale of Prince Kalender* – follows the standard symphonic cycle and is in large tristrophic form with an Introduction and Coda, the extreme articulations (both A's) containing variational elaborations.

*Lento. Andantino. Allegro Molto. Vivace scherzando. Moderato assai. Allegro molto et animato*, in the key of h-moll;

Part Three – *The Prince and the Princess* – could be seen as a streamlined “replica” of Part One: sonata form without development, only with a Coda and no Introduction, though in another interpretation the form might be identified as a complex tristrophic form.

*Andantino quasi allegretto. Pochissimo piu mosso. Come prima. Pochissimo piu animato*, in the key of G-dur;

Part Four - Celebration at Baghdad - returns to the cyclic standard in the traditional rondo-sonata form, which is a synthesis of the themes of all the preceding parts.

*Allegro molto. Lento. Vivo. Allegro non troppo e maestoso. Tempo come I*, in the keys of the first part: e-moll/E-dur.

And the compositional schemes present the model of a “muted” symphony by removing from parts I and III the Development section, which already at the level of structural identification causes the appearance of alternative interpretations. Parts II and III can be considered as conceived in mixed compositional schemes and only Part IV retains the pure rondo scheme. In such a case, identifying the genre as *symphonic suite* represents a synthesis between programmatic suite and symphony. Rimsky-Korsakov's decision to

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<sup>1</sup> These two actions of the composer – 1. Removal of titles and 2. Organising the composition into supposedly autonomous parts – turn out to be (slightly) inconsistent with the structural-thematic organization of the work. The elimination of titles was due to the (sufficient) semantic *suggestiveness* of the music. And the alleged autonomy of the parts belies the very function of the *thematic synthesis* of Part IV, *The Feast in Baghdad*, confirming the thematically *convergent* orientation of the first three parts.

suspend the evolutionary-conflictual segments can be understood in at least three senses:

*The first*, panthematic of cultural substance: the subject of oriental origin<sup>2</sup>. The meaning of the term implies the opposition West-East as geographical spaces, as well as a dichotomous series such as intensive-extensive, vertical-horizontal, solar-lunar. In cultural terms, orientalism could be deciphered by terms such as *arabesque*, *turquerie*, *chinoiserie* or *japonism*, although in the case of and, implicitly, the cycle of *1001 nights*, the emphasis of priority would fall on the Arab-Islamic acceptance. In an analogy with the ethnic-national ethos – the Italians are passionate, the French are refined and bohemian, and the Germans are deep and disciplined, the Arab-Islamic oriental ethos can be captured in slowness, seduction and sensuality, with an obvious predilection for detail and ornament, but also through exoticism (from the European perspective). In the context of a musical work, this type of ethos determines the option for the uncommitted slowness of a detailed (ornamental-mosaic) descriptivism rather than the dynamism of a conventional conflictual-dialectical thesis<sup>3</sup>.

The second, panthematic of imagistic substance: various situations and contextualizations of the aquatic – ocean, sea, lake, snow, fog, waves, diving, depths, etc. In a reading key similar to Wagner and Debussy, Rimsky-Korsakov “reads” the aquatic equally as element (ontological meaning) and as extent (spatial extension meaning), habitat describable as immensity and thus characterized by a certain inertia and slowness cumbersome. In his youth, the composer undertakes a trip around the world lasting three years, during which time he writes the second part of his first symphony entitled *The Sea*.

Third: as an option for the prominence of the music’s explicitly narrative suggestiveness, which later allowed the ballet dancer and choreographer Mikhail Fokin to adapt the suite’s music for a ballet of the same name<sup>4</sup>.

However, the weakening of structural dramaturgy itself (the *formal* subject) reveals not only the option for narrative dramaturgy (the *literary* subject), but also for orchestral dramaturgy itself (*instrumental-timbral* subjects). The latter has the function of support with the role of “translating” the literary content into articulated sonority and building an effective

<sup>2</sup> An exciting treatment of this subject belongs to Edward W. Said, author of the monograph *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> The works of the composers of the *Mighty Handful* (Mighty Five) can serve as examples: Mili Balakirev – symphonic poem *Tamara* and the oriental fantasy *Islamey*, Alexander Borodin – opera *Prince Igor* and symphonic painting *From Asia Minor* and Nikolai A. Rimsky-Korsakov – symphonic suite *Scheherazade*, opera *The Golden Cockerel*. Among the painters, Vasily Vereshchagin should be mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> The performance took place on June 4, 1910 at the Opéra Garnier in Paris as part of Diaghilev’s *Russian Seasons* in Paris.

suggestive referentiality. And this by virtue of the fact that the titles of the parts were removed by the composer's decision. Thus Rimsky-Korsakov avoided an obvious redundancy, "immersing" and thus "dissolving" the literary titles in the orchestral thematic-texture logic. A single title – *Scheherazade* – had been enough for him. Already the existence of these three *dramaturgical vectors*<sup>5</sup> installs the image of the evolution in synchrony of (at least) three semantic vectors (evolutionary suggestive rows), but priming the suspicion regarding the existence of additional active meanings not explicitly declared.

### 3. The semantic pool of multiprogramming

From the very beginning, a distinction must be made between *metathematism* and *multiprogrammatism*.

The first can be demonstrated by the meta-theme of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* tetralogy, whose content is the unfortunate or even tragic destiny of the misunderstood romantic artist and his art in an ignorant, mercantile and thus corrupt society. Here he could be joined by both Schubert and Mahler.

In another historical context, the creation of J. S. Bach imposes itself as a (symbolic) *meta-theme* for the entire protestant culture – and this in opposition to the Catholic *meta-theme* of Palestrina's creation – and, at the same time, as a *meta-theme* whose content is the synthesis of thought and baroque musical practice on a pan-European scale, as described by Manfred Bukofzer<sup>6</sup>.

For Beethoven, too, there would be at least three *meta-themes*: the first – of the *emancipation* of the musical genius and the abandonment of the servant status, the second – the programmatic glorification of pan-European union (in a different sense from Bach), and the third – *Beethovenocentrism*, i.e. the final definition of the models of form, genre and style, all three of which become referential for the entire musical nineteenth century. This would be a third and final synthesis of pan-European value, in an obvious parallel with Hegel's *Encyclopedia of Sciences* – the last systematic European philosophy<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> By *dramaturgical vector* is meant first of all the dynamic nature of the evolutionary sequence (action) as interaction between elements endowed with a thematic function (actors). The *semantic vector* indicates, firstly, the meaning and role assigned (initially) to a given thematic element, and secondly, the totality of the particular positions that the thematic element takes in its dramatic development.

<sup>6</sup> Manfred Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era: from Monteverdi to Bach*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1948.

<sup>7</sup> All three *metathemes* can serve to justify and legitimize the *tragic-fonclitcal* component of Beethoven's creation: either it is the drama of the voluntary reformulation of the individual social condition, or it is the drama of the reformulation of the social order, or it is the polemical drama of the reformulation of musical thought and practice. All three *dramatisms* reveal all the more powerfully the *Promethean* (forward-looking), i.e. *heroic*, meaning of the Beethovenian mentality: existen'tial hero, Enlightenment-romantic hero and cultural hero. In contrast to

In turn, *multiprogramming* only works within the limits of a single composition<sup>8</sup>. It is about a stratified semantics in several planes of relevance: from the one actually declared (literary) to those deducible from the compositional organization (structural). And it is not a mandatory condition that these plans are semantically convergent. Robert Schumann's *Symphonic Studies*, a cycle structured on several levels of relevance in terms of the compositional scheme of the work, could serve as an analogy for structural *multi-semanticism*. In the case of the symphonic suite, *multiprogramming* works on at least four levels of relevance: (1) the semantic level of the program itself (eliminated by the composer), (2) the oriental cultural reference (Asian fantasy folklore), (3) the logical plan of the scheme compositional (narrative oriented, i.e. "slowed down", by eliminating elaborative sections), as well as (4) the suggestive timbral-orchestral plan.

In the creation of the composers of the *Mighty Handful*, the symphonic poem *Tamara*, composed by Mili Balakirev between 1866-1882 (dedicated to Franz Liszt), and which narrates the image and history of the legendary Georgian queen (currently the Republic of Georgia), attracts attention. The difference of only four years between *Tamara* and Rimsky-Korsakov's is in itself telling in the sense of privileging the female image, but also in the sense of borrowing intonations and themes. Moreover, going through a serious creative crisis at the beginning of the 1870s, Balakirev resumed work on the symphonic poem only in 1876, but no longer sure of his own strength, he frequently resorted to the help of his former student Rimsky-Korsakov. The first absolute audition takes place on March 19, 1882 under the baton of the author.

However, as in Balakirev's work<sup>9</sup>, in Rimsky-Korsakov's the subject is a sinister one: padishah Shahriar is deceived by his own wife, whom he beheads along with all the servants. Moreover, every day the vengeful ruler marries a

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Beethoven's *revolutionary* (populist and superficial) image, the *heroic-prophetic* image is much more pertinent on all three levels.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that *multi-* or *pluri-programming* works at the level of any musical work. As long as the sound form of a work diffuses information on at least two semantic tracks: the meaning of *expression* and the sense of *structure*. In this case it is rather an implicit bi-semanticism. In the case of programmatic compositions, however, the possibility of multiple semantic tracks arises, since music can never be completely subordinated to a literary text or image. In the simplest case of a monothematic piece, the *expressive* and *structural* row will function unbeatably and with explicit orientation towards autonomy. In the case of orchestral music, the number of semantic tracks will also be increased by the contribution of the instrumental-timbral component, legitimate actors of the musical discourse.

<sup>9</sup> The music of the symphonic poem *Tamara* is based on a poem written in 1841 by Mihail I. Lermontov, in which the tsarina appears "beautiful as an angel from heaven, and as a mischievous and wicked demon". Tamara lives isolated in a tower on the banks of the Terek River. At dusk, she lights a candle whose light is visible from afar, and upon the appearance of a lone traveler lured to a shelter, she lures him into her room for a night of love. The next morning the unfortunate man's disembodied body is thrown into the swirling waters of the Terek.

young woman, whom he also executes the next morning. Daughter of a vizier or sister of a guard, Sheherazada accepts to be the padishah's wife, thus assuming the possibility of being killed.

And here more questions arise. Because even if 1001 Nights was read (of course, in an adapted version) as a child and the finality is known, the mere reading through a parent's voice of the approximately eight to ten stories does not convince that it could sensitize the padishah only in the idea that this would be a fan of TV shows. And whatever tricks resorted to – the nocturnal period, the invention of exciting subjects and the well-thought-out unfolding of the action, and even the interruption of the story at the crack of dawn – and which in the end ensured its survival, they do not seem to have been enough to “seal” the sentimental wounds of a vain, bloodthirsty nobleman.

The question remains: *how?* How the inner transformation of the man “forced” to spend his nights listening to the stories of a next wife, whom he knew he would execute the next day, took place, and how the whole process was guided and controlled by his new wife, who proved to possess not only the talent of a narrator, compiling *ad hoc* story after story, but also a skilled psychologist and, perhaps, even a psychoanalyst. And, if at first, she composed the stories being terrorized by an understandable fear of death, later she told them only to draw closer to the man who was becoming dearer to her. Since, it must be assumed that initially Shahriar was not a thug and that he loved his later unfaithful wife, and on the other hand, it would be understandable that “healed” him not only out of the desire not to be beheaded, but also by virtue of an unspoken love. And Rimsky-Korsakov undertook the solution, that is, the formulation of a conclusive answer to each relevant detail of this very complex situation which, in fact, was a life-and-death struggle, but from which both actors emerged only as winners of cause. Of a cause that had already become common to them.

## **B. Part I – Sharhiar, Scheherazade, Sindbad and finally the Sea**

### **4. The hypothesis of fragmentary-kaleidoscopic dramaturgy: the semantic interference of two narrative tracks**

At first glance, the structural-imagery architecture of this part is a fragmented one, i.e. one composed of segments that are firmly separated by their belonging to two different realities (ontologies): one real – Sheherazade narrating her story, and one fictional – the characters the stories told. In other words, the image of the ship (the second Secondary theme), of Sindbad (the main theme), of the sea (the third interpretation of the first theme of the Introduction), of the waves (the “wavy” figures accompanying the main theme), all three of which interfere both with Şahriar's theme and with Sheherazade's theme, it communicates nothing more than the competitive (and thus concerted) employment between two narrative lines, both belonging this time to the composer.



This semantic-fictional concertation acts on at least four tracks of meaning, each with its own habitat, attributes, characters, conjunctures and destiny:

- a. the character Sheherazade in interaction with Shahriar and with the determinant of survival,
- b. the Sindbad character in interaction with the Sea, also with the determinant of survival,
- c. the authorial figure: the composer Rimsky-Korsakov and the aquatic imaginary – the *metatheme* of the personal imaginary, and
- d. the audience's imagination, in whose consciousness the three previous tracks are articulated and interact.

The first two fictional lines are of dramaturgical substance, thus defining the clear and coherent description of the action and the actors. The third track is a biographical-destinatory one, which justifies and legitimizes the conceptual coherence of the composer's thinking, as well as of the work in question (Sheherazade). The fourth track, of maximum evaluative freedom, is one that can be multiplied exponentially and defines the imagination of each listener, as well as the entire imaginary of the audience.

This fragmentariness is all the more surprising since Part I is the key reading for the entire work. In other words, the semantic codes of each subsequent part – the cause of the choices made by the composer regarding the subjects – are precisely contained in the musical material and the logic of its organization both structurally and, above all, timbrally.

Measures 1-17 (17): *Introduction*.

*The first theme of the Introduction.* Padishah Şahriar pleads for the meaning (a) the character of the theme – the heavy and dense steps, in whole tones, and the downward, pressing orientation of the melodic profile, and b. the exposition of the theme in orchestral *tutti* (the deep registered instruments of all three orchestral groups). The very next appearance of Sheherazade only reinforces this perception. The suspension in bi-semanticism also causes a constant pendulum between the two constituents of the image of the padishah: a. the behaviour of Shahriar – the “steps”, and b. the very atmosphere of the padishah's bedchamber – a cumulative image, which runs parallel to the suggestion that the padishah himself it is a cumulative character, i.e. a collective one – the person being defined both by the community of subjects and by the higher position in the noble hierarchy.

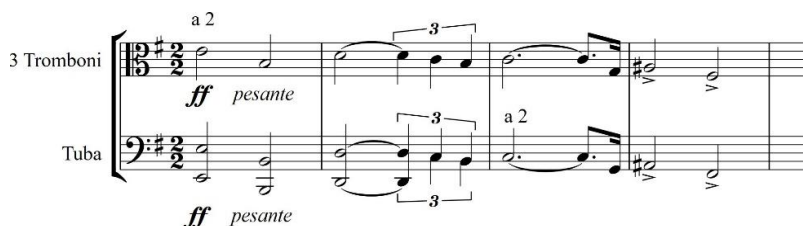


Fig. 1

As the theme of the Introduction, it fulfills, first of all, the function of emotional tuning and, implicitly, of describing the habitat. The dark space of the palace, the padishah threatening Sheherazade, and impatiently waiting for the next execution in the morning. It is basically the theme from which the whole work grows, which will be decisive in the development of Part I, and which will serve as an evaluative reference for each theme that will follow.

The character of the melodic profile is strongly suggestive through an overlap of several semantic constituents: (1) the exposure in orchestral *tutti* in *fortissimo* dynamics, in the *Largo e maestoso* tempo and with the indication of pesante (pressing) character – the image of massive, heavy, domineering rigidity, “petrified” and “crushing” in equal measure, a sensation also amplified by the timbre of the brass (the *rock* hypothesis). Aggressiveness, however, is suggested by a (2) *passus duriusculus* in whole tones – mi-re-do-la# (atonal, as a suggestion of the off-centered personality) – the same dominant and threatening-condescending character by virtue of his noble-hierarchical status (the padishah hypothesis). This concomitance refers to the image of pure masculinity, empowered in its own singularity – the image of raw strength and a destructive will ready for the procedure of “examination”.

Sheherazade’s theme begins in a striking contrast with the previous theme: a. the Exposition is soloistic, and the chords of the harp – as an indication of the narrative, therefore, as a sign of a traditional accompanying instrument of an *aed* (Ancient Greece) or *akîn* (Central Asia) – it only amplifies the feeling of the breeze of a fragile, gentle loneliness, at the same time emanating a breeze of sadness (E minor):

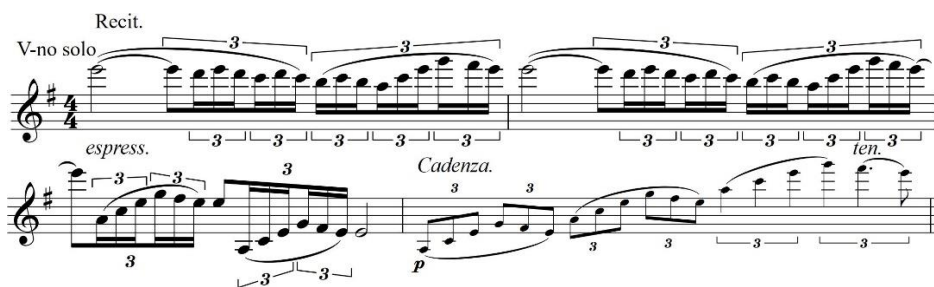


Fig. 2

It’s a surprising change of suggestive register. And the determining focus of differentiation falls on the specifics of the *dancing* manifestation, opening a completely different type of positioning in space, compared to the previous theme. Both the 4/4 meter – a fractional “fragment” from the 2/2 meter of the Padişaj – and especially the explicitly choreographic suggestion and the high register of the Sheherazade theme diffuse a triple suggestiveness.

(1) As an immediate, impactful projection, the young woman is presented by referring to corporeality, which can be translated by elegance, suppleness, but also sensuality.

(2) But the articulation of the theme is done in figurative groups of triplets, which gives the image a *rotation* character as a choreographic element and as such sending to dance. The last figure of each melodic group – the ascending arpeggio – is repeated four times, the last measure – the deceleration with cadential function – presenting three more phrasal groups in a progressive augmentation: two groups of eighths and the last group in durations of fourths.

(3) The last semantic component refers to the image of flow – either the plasticity of bodily movement, or the invasive nature of sensuality, or the direct reference to aquatic – the downward, cascading orientation of the melodic exposition –, through which one or more fountains are suggested. The choreographic poem with prologue and epilogue *Bahcisarai fountain* (1934, after the homonymous poem by Alexander S. Pushkin) composed by Boris Asafiev, or *Fountains of Rome* by Ottorino Respighi, serves as a relevant visual parallel here.

The architecture of the theme is tripodic:

- a. the impulse (*initio*) – note *e3* (fourth),
- b. the discharge (*motus*) – three groups of sixteenths in triplets each organized as a *torculus* figure (ornamental function) and oriented downward, and
- c. compensation (*terminus*) – ascending arpeggio (three sixteenths in triplets – minor trison chord from *a2*) forming a vaulted profile – returning to the initial height – with a final descending trichord in successive steps (three sixteenths in triplets, starting on *g3*). It should be noted that the last group of sixteenths (return) resumes the descending sequence of the three groups of sixteenths (discharge), but without the ornamental figuration.

*The Exposition.* Bars 18-116 (98): The main theme brings a second connotation (Sindbad) to the melodic profile at the beginning of the work – the image of the Swirling Sea carrying Sindbad's ship. It could be said that the whole habitat of the First Part is an aquatic one, although only in a fictional mode, as the background against which the story of Sheherazade unfolds.

Main theme (from *Tutti* violini). The tenth-scale arpeggiated figuration from the viola and cello parts suggests the undulation of the foaming waves of the sea. Against this background, and already in a second sense of content, the theme of the padishah appears – the image of Sindbad advancing on the Sea.

The theme is rhythmically modified – from the cadenced and “cornered” character of the first appearance, to a plastic, fluent exposition, and this even while preserving the recognizable relief of the melody. To transform the theme's ethos, the composer makes four changes:

The musical score is for a section titled "Tutti violini" in 6/4 time. It consists of five staves. The top two staves are for violins, both starting with a *p* (piano) dynamic. The third staff is for a piano, starting with a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic. The bottom two staves are for a double bass, also starting with a *mf* dynamic. The tempo is marked "Allegro ma non troppo" with a quarter note equal to 56 beats per minute. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The score shows a series of rhythmic patterns and dynamics, with a *p* dynamic appearing in the piano and double bass parts in the later measures.

Fig. 3

(a) the ratio of durations from the first measure is reformulated (printed as an anacrusic character),

(b) also in the third measure, in which it reorients the movement in an upward direction (optimums instead of dotted figure),

(c) the heavy steps in the second is changed to the descending fifth in staccato (the foaming crest of the wave breaking against the rock or the hull of the ship), and all this causing

(d) moving the theme in the context of double ternary meter: 6/4 – swing, and not 2/2 – cadence, as at the beginning.

Sindbad's theme is treated in two extended sections. The first segment (measures 18-39 – 22) and the second (measures 40-63 – 24) represent two stages of expressive intensification by moving the theme to a higher octave: from e1 to e2.

This image – the water, the aquatic, the sea, the waves – is of the greatest extent (an invasive one) in both articulations of the form – Exposition and Reprise: in the Main Theme and in the Concluding Theme. The other themes (both second themes and Sheherazade's theme) appear as necessary complementary inserts in this elemental unchaining as oases of peace and serenity.

Fl. Tranquillo

*p* *dim.* *p dim.* *p dim.*

Fig. 4 First Second Theme: The Ship move away on the Calm Surface of the Sea

Fl. Solo

Ob. *dolce*

Cl. *pp*

Fag. *pp*

Cor.I. Solo

*dolce* *pp* *pp*

Fig. 5 Second Secondary Theme: The smooth glide of Sindbad's ship

Solo

*pp* *pp* *pizz.* *pizz.* *pizz.* *pizz.* *p*

Fig. 6 The Theme of Scheherazade: with the accompanying imagery of waves

Measures 96-116 (22, letter D): The dramatism of the Concluding Theme is conceived through several evolutionary vectors, from which the image of the Unleashed Sea arises, in which elements from the themes of Sheherazade and Sindbad interfere. The structural side is organized as a progressive diminution: the increase in intensity causes a progressive “shattering” of the melodic profiles.

The musical score for measures 96-116 is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staves are for woodwinds: Flute (Fl.) a 2., Oboe (Ob.) a 2., Clarinet (Cl.) a 2., and Bassoon (Fag.) a 2. These parts feature complex melodic lines with many triplets and slurs. Below the woodwinds is the Horn (Cor.) part, which plays sustained notes. The bottom staves are for strings: Violins (Viol. Tutti) and Cellos/Double Basses (Cello/Bass). The Violins play a melodic line with triplets and slurs, while the Cello/Bass part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and triplets. The score is marked with a forte (f) dynamic and includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and articulation marks.

Fig. 7

On the “vaulted” figurations in the accompaniment, in the first part of the violins, this one supported by three parts of the woodwinds, a melodic material derived from the Sheherazade Theme appears: the figures of triplets, but the continuity of the “rotation” being interrupted by the duration of the fourth at the end each group.

a. Segment 1 (measures 96-100 – 5):

a.1. Four figurative groups on height *g1*, followed by four more on *a1*

a.2. The upper pitches of each group are constituted in a descending chromatic progression – *g2-cis2*, followed by the resumption at a higher tone – *a2-dis2*. This downward march is doubled in brass.

b. Segment 2 (measures 100-107 – 8):

b.1. Only two figurative groups remain on the pitch *h1*, followed by the trill element of Sindbad’s theme. The highs follow one another as in an accumulation of force for the last assault: *h1-g1-h1-g1*.

c. Segment 3 (measures 108-116 – 9):

c.1. (measures 108-111). In the parts of the trombones and tuba, doubled by the bassoon, appears the abbreviated (dynamized) theme of Sindbad (X 2), expressing the desperate agitation.

c.2. (measures 112-116). As a culmination of the entire Exhibition, Sindbad's Theme returns in full form.

The Sindbad-ship narrative thread will only be completed at the end of Part IV, in the spectacular scene of the battle with the storm, the shipwreck and the sinking:

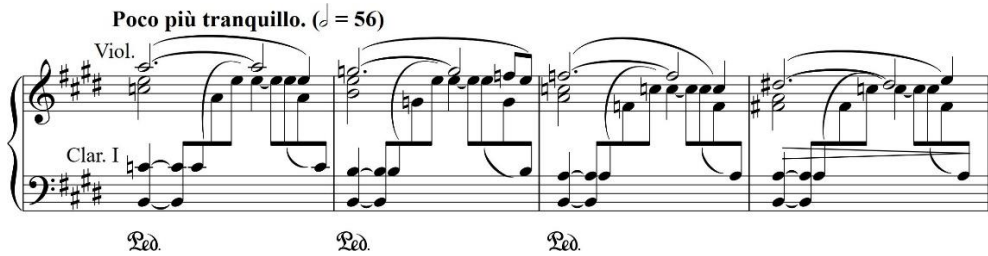


Fig. 8

*The Reprise* (invigorated by reordering and shortening the sections of the Exposition): measures 117-180 (letter E, 64 against 98 measures in the Exposition, i.e. 35 measures less). Traditionally, the role of the Reprise is to reaffirm the main tonality, particularly by bringing the Second Theme back to a tonal common denominator with the Main Theme. And the meaning of dynamization (along with tonal homogenization) is to avoid redundancy by faithfully repeating the Exhibition.

But what would be the meaning of dynamism in the context of a sonata Allegro “decommissioned” by the removal of the Treatise section? First of all, it is about the narrative character of the music, which would be disrupted by the elaborative dynamics of the middle section<sup>10</sup>. A second meaning of dynamization (with the implied shortening of the whole articulation) is essentialization. This second interpretation is all the more important, since the selection of themes that Rimsky-Korsakov makes, but also their positioning in a certain sequence (“hierarchical”, in descending order of narrative importance), reveals the role of each one in the plan the narrative:

Measures 117-138 (21 vs. 46 in Exposition): The main theme takes its rightful place. The reduction to more than half the size clearly shows the more

<sup>10</sup> This model works in the same way for the Overture to Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. But with one difference, because this is not about *narrative* logic, but *playful*, only apparently conflicting logic. The same is true of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* (opera-buffa) and *La gazza ladra* (semi-seria opera).



“ornamental” (conventional) than strictly thematic role of the musical material: the modified reprise of the padishah’s theme as Sindbad’s theme.

Measures 139-154 (15 vs. 18 in Exposition): next Secondary Theme: the image of Sindbad’s ship. Attention is drawn to the dialogic structure of this segment (B2) with a variational allusive character, which in the Reprise appears with the reversed order, i.e. ascending (compared to the descending order in the Exhibition) in the appearance of the “respondents”: Horn+Cl. I, Horn+Ob. I, Horn+Fl. I

Measures 155-163 (8): The Sheherazade theme is in its rightful place (as in the Exposition)

Measures 165-180 (16 vs. 22 in the Exposition): The concluding theme also appears “sectioned” in the idea of eliminating redundancy through a faithful resumption with the Exposition.

*Coda*: measures 181-211. The concluding function for Part I of the suite is obvious.

Measures 181-200 (19): The padishah’s theme is presented in a peaceful, even lyrical, serene expression, a fact that is contributed by the solo exposure of the flute, oboe, and finally, the violin. In the suggestive foreground, the cantabile character of the theme is brought out.



Fig. 9

Measures 201-205 (4): The First Second Theme finds its place in the Coda by virtue of the conventional content – non-thematic, rather expressing movement – of the mere suggestion of the departure of Sindbad’s ship, which is proper to a “film” ending, that is, of the narrative.

Bars 205-211 (6): The cadential ending only amplifies the suggestion of the previous theme by the overall *pianissimo* sonority, the exposition in a rarefied script – the aquatic figuration in the cello only, to which is added the high register of the four chordal impulses in the woodwinds, all ending with three pizzicato measures on the strings.

In conclusion, both the First part of the symphonic suite *Sheherazade* and the entire suite present themselves as a metonymic juxtaposition of images that, as the composer himself states, have no connection with each other. More.

What on the structural level is presented as continuity – the evolution of the two themes – on the narrative level is differentiated as a reassignment of the images by replacing the two original profiles (strong conflict) with the following two (weak conflict), even if in both situations it is about the fight for survival:



Strong narrative vector (thematic+orchestral+timbral): Shahriar-Sheherazada  
 Weak narrative vector (purely narrative-programmatic): Sindbad+sea+ship

The interaction between the two main characters is moved to the fictional-symbolic plane of the narrative: the Shahriar-Sheherazada conflict is represented by the Sindbad/ship + sea conflict.

The “crack” in two narrative planes also causes the “crack of perception”, producing a floating and somewhat confusing suggestibility, as Shahriar’s Theme is obviously transferred to Sindbad’s Theme, while Sheherazade’s Theme receives no analogy. However, both Sindbad and Sheherazade act to save their lives: Shahriar-Sindbad (thematic)/Sindbad- (narrative).

And this “fissure” cannot be perceived otherwise than an asymmetry and a sectioning of the original narrative intentions through a rather mechanical semantic artifice by virtue of the narrative (programmatic) determinant through which the editing process is carried out. The soundtrack becomes a generator of animated images.

And this imagistic “repositioning” weakens in a dramatic and suggestive sense the characters, the roles, and the conflict, transferring them from the interpersonal context – one acute, strong and with an obvious evolutionary potential – to a pantheistic one – two asymmetrical “characters”, such as nature (the sea) and man (Sindbad and the ship). And Shahriar together with Sheherazada become, in their turn, simple spectators of cartoons.

This scenario with the projection of *narrative ghosts* in their quality of cinematic row, in turn, could be accepted if the fiction would contribute to the resolution of the interpersonal conflict on the plane of the real characters. But with the procedural component weakened by the elimination of the Development section, a simple audition presents Part I of the symphonic suite as a juxtaposition of two themes, followed by the projection of a series of images, and this to the satisfaction of both participants. The Coda section specifically suggests such a finality. However, things are not quite like that and thus another scenario should be sought, an organic one and one located at a different depth and even within the orchestral-timbral dramaturgy.

### **C. Second scenario: Sindbad and the Sea – narrative vehicle in a storm of femininity**

#### **5. Coherent hypothesis (monosemantic): relational psychodrama Shahriar-Sheherazada**

A first and important disagreement with the “official” program of the work is declared by the very logic of the thematic evolution and not so much in the structural as in the timbral-instrumental plan, and is formulated by the

“asymmetrical” relationship of the two themes from the point of view of the orchestration:

- a. the pluritimbrality of the first theme (Shahriar) and the monotimbrality of the second (Sheherazade) as well
- b. the plurisemanticism of the first theme and the monosemanticism of the second

In this case, beyond the expression of the two themes, the suggestive conflict is initiated primarily at the timbral level. And from here it becomes obvious that the timbral-instrumental logic follows another narrative program, where the narrator is the composer himself who, in turn, builds a narrative clearly differentiated from the fictional-fantasy narrative of Sheherazade. Thus, the foreground narrative appears as the “official” program, in which the composer “hides” the personal acceptance of the action. And then the logical question arises: what could this consist of?

The simplest and most obvious possibility would be to extrapolate the initial conflict (Shahriar-Sheherazade) over the entire part and follow the thematic-timbral evolution until the end of the part in terms of this relationship. The already mentioned imagistic “asymmetries” would thus be eliminated, and the whole narrative would reveal a completely different coherence and cohesion, this time truly proper to both the imagistic and the structural row. In a certain sense, the absence of the Development section in this *sonata Allegro* could also be explained. And the absence of the Development causes the alignment of the Exposition and the Reprise in a single structural-processual row, in accordance with which the thematic and especially the timbral evolutionary row maintains its linearity.

The idea of an alternative program to the one intended and then eliminated by the composer, requires a hermeneutic explanation, one of rewriting both the narrative logic and the primarily timbral-orchestral logic. In this situation, two hermeneutic understandings can be formulated, one implicit and, in an opposition of continuity – one explicit.

A. *Implicit acceptance.* As indicated above, the first theme of the Introduction – padishah Shahriar – can be considered not only a leit-theme of the First Part, as well as of the entire work, but a theme that in its own way generates the entire work. And it is not just about a first layer, the most superficial, of narrative logic (that is, of the program), nor about a second, deeper one, of dramaturgical logic, nor about a third – of structural logic. It is the *hegemonic theme* of the entire work, a theme that determines the generation and articulation of all constituent layers.

It is a theme-epicenter with the value of organizing factor and procedural control of all characters and events that can thus claim only the status of

accompanying characters. Because Sheherazade, and Sindbad, and the ship, and the Sea, and the Kalender, and The Prince and the Princess, and The Bagdad Feast together with the shipwreck, each in a particular way, are all “agglutinated” around the thematic profile of Shahriar.

*Assertion 1.* In other words, any element of the work is in a causal connection – of origin – with this theme.

*Observation.* A direct filial derivation from Shahriar’s theme is Sindbad’s theme. It is not difficult to understand that the image of Sindbad represents a fictional vehicle – of imaginary identification – for Shahriar. Likewise, all the other characters are conceived in a register of positive, beneficial expression/emotion, and in obvious opposition, even if narratively mediated, to the first theme of the work. And the character of presents herself as the only one of explicit radical opposition.

*Assertion 2.* The sound character Shahriar claims his position as hegemon because all other characters and events are generated and articulated with the first Theme of the Introduction as the absolute reference. And this both in terms of the structural-thematic-expressive profile, as well as in terms of conduct and procedural biography.

*Assertion 3.* For all these elements the padishah’s theme is positioned as a mirror reference, an inverted and conventionally negative one, i.e. in the “photographic” negative.

*Assertion 4.* The conflict of depth of the entire work is articulated between Şahriar’s Theme – the main meta-theme of the *Sheherazada* symphonic suite – and all other themes.

*Assertion 5.* Consequently, the dramaturgical meaning of all themes (images) with accompanying function consists in the deconstruction of the hegemonic theme by deactivating the conflictual relationship and by aligning it with the expressive statistical average characteristic of the opposing group. Thus, a second meta-theme of the work can be defined: the accompanying characters against the hegemon-character.

*Observation.* The composer himself suggests this second meta-theme by deactivating the conflicting component at the level of form both by neutralizing (de-igniting) the procedural dynamism – eliminating the Development section – and by focusing on variational and rondo-type procedurality.

However, how is the procedure of deconstruction of the hegemonic theme organized and what are both the strategy and the tactics of this action? How, by whom, and according to what, are the supporting characters organized?

B. *Explicit acceptance.* The dramaturgical opposition declared by Rimsky-Korsakov – the pole-antipole opposition – is between Shahriar and Sheherazade. Its choreographic theme fulfills the function of support for all other theme-images, which it itself generates.

*Assertion 1.* It should be noted that the insertions of the Scheherazade theme have a double meaning. The first, the programmatic one, consists in recalling her role as a narrator as the author of unsolved stories. Her image transpires after the first exposure (of contrast) in the Introduction, in the moments of initiation of the next narrative thread. And the second, the actual dramaturgical role, becomes clear in the sense in which the character Scheherazade makes her appearance specifically at the points of re-stimulation of Shahriar's memory, attention and interest.

A first layer of opposition is archetypal – feminine-masculine. This understanding proves its relevance, since the interaction between the two characters takes place at night, that is, in the nocturnal regime of the image, as presented by Gilbert Durand. The second archetypal meaning is that the night is the habitat of the feminine archetype. Thus, Scheherezada unfolds in a space that is her own, unlike Shahriar, a man, lured from the diurnal space of the image into one that is foreign to him and that weakens him<sup>11</sup>.

*Assertion 2.* Night is a space in which the signs of objective reality are diluted, hidden from visual clarity, and in the foreground are the interpretations of the dream. The synonymy between dreamlike and fictional can be understood by their opposite situation to the concrete objective, verifiable and equally palpable: one dreams at night.

A second layer of opposition concerns the technique of organizing resistance. Without the full evolution of the interaction between the two characters, only the first exposition of the two themes in the Introduction would have proved a losing one for Scheherazade. Just dancing in front of a nobleman thirsty for revenge on female infidelity (inconstancy) would not have been enough.

*Assertion 3.* Dreamlike and thus fictional is the identity of all the other characters – Sindbad, Kalender, Prince and Princess – who are narrative phantasms presented by Scheherazade. She invents them, describes them, puts them in relation and in the subject of the narrative. And thus he directs them towards and plants them in the consciousness of the padishah. This is how, in the equation of the symphonic suite, the character can resist the padishah only by generating a group of fictional entities, all conceived in a positive emotional and attitudinal register – heroic-empathic.

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<sup>11</sup> The *nocturnal* imaginary as the organic habitat of the *feminine* is a subject treated extensively in European music. From the Queen of the Night (Mozart's *Magic Flute*, symbolic-initiate fiction) to Isolde (Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, legendary fiction). As confirmation here serves the *Curse of the Day* that Isolde asserts, cursing *the day*, on the one hand, as the space in which love for Tristan is a forbidden one, and, on the other, the *day* as the period of time in which she is King Mark's wife. The dichotomy is between *clandestine* and *official*, *authentic* and *conventional*.

Observation. In its first appearance in the Introduction, Shahriar's theme is presented in an orchestral *tutti*. Or, *tutti* meaning *all*, the suggestion is that this character is primarily a *cumulative* character, i.e. a *collective* one. Beyond the personal psychological profile, the word *padishah* means the top position in a hierarchy that sums up all the aspects of a state's existence: community (noble), administrative (legitimate power), military (commander), economic ("fund manager"). In other words, a person at the top of the "food chain". In front of such an *alpha character*, Scheherazade has nothing analogous to oppose him.

The third layer of interaction refers to the sense of finality. Unlike the symphonic suite *Antar* and the opera *The Golden Cockerel* by Rimsky-Korsakov, but also the symphonic poem *Tamara* by Balakirev, where the female character is dominant and, finally, vengeful, in the symphonic suite *Scheherazade* the female character's solution is life, love and last but not least memory.

Assertion 4. This is how the purpose and implicitly the meaning of deconstruction can be clarified: retroversion. In other words, the hegemon theme will not be banished, subdued or destroyed. This will be transformed, i.e. brought back to the former self that was Shahriar even before he was deceived. And then, in the form of captivating stories, the padishah will be given more models to identify, that is, to memorize and practice. Rimsky-Korsakov's choices are telling beyond comment: the traveler-hero Sindbad, the prince-hero Kalender and the relational or even erotic heroes – the Prince and the Princess. Three identity models projected on the padishah for self-identification.

Observation. It is about three archetypes: the *explorer* hero, the *combatant* (*fighter*) hero and the *passionate* hero<sup>12</sup>, thus calling on the curiosity, bravery and empathy of the padishah. Invoking these three states can be understood both as directing the imagination in the intended direction, but also as a conditioning procedure. The secondary dramaturgy of Part I is extrapolated over the entire work: Part II – the model of an adventurous young man, Part III – the model of a love relationship and Part IV – the fulfillment of the relationship between Shahriar and Scheherazade and the celebration in Baghdad. NB. Outside of Part I of the symphonic suite, these characters are positioned in fictional spaces, imagined *ad hoc*. And the audition involves going through the entire reconditioning route traveled by Shahriar.

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<sup>12</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mistica*, Cluj-Napoca: Apostrof, 1995. In this text, the three archetypal categories are stated for the first time: the pilgrim hero, the knight hero and the bridegroom hero. For example, all three archetypes appear in Wagner's work: Tannhäuser is the hero-pilgrim, Lohengrin is the hero-knight (and failed groom, along with Tristan and Siegfried), and Walther von Stolzing – the hero-bridegroom. Now, the *fictional* hypostases that Scheherazade proposes to Shahriar contain exactly these three male typologies: Sindbad – the pilgrim hero (Part I), Prince Kalender – the knight-hero (Part II), and the characters in Part III – the Young Prince and the Young Princess – can rightly be considered to be the hero-bridegroom and heroine-bride.

The fourth layer of interaction consists of Scheherazade's purpose or purposes. A distinction must be made between the immediate purpose and the perspective purpose (finality). These two are interconnected, because in order to achieve the finality, it is necessary to achieve the immediate goal – surviving until the next morning.

Starting from the premise of the relational theater, the hypothesis of the synchrony of the two narratives should be admitted. In other words, the logic of structuring the musical discourse will present both the story of and the evolution of the two participants – (active narrator) + Shahriar (passive audience), their transformation oriented and directed by with a certain goal. And that goal will be survival and ultimately relational fulfillment.

The guarantee of survival is presented to be the maintenance of the interest involved on the part of Shahriar. But that alone would not be enough, because the purpose is to remove not only the specter of boredom or disinterest, synonymous with the idea of execution, but the “rewriting” of Shahriar in empathic terms.

And the key word here is *transformation*, and it is not only about the rather mechanical procedure of persuasion, by no means an explicit one, but about the inner transformation of Shahriar (the audience), the deconstruction of rigid and aggressive masculinity into a tolerant, understanding, empathetic and ultimately affective. Scheherazade helps Shahriar to remember his own capacity to love, which had been obscured by the trauma caused by the infidelity of the woman he once loved. The goal is thus the rebirth of the padishah + the meaning of saving the lives of other women, who would have died if Scheherazade had failed.

And here the personality of Jacob Levi Moreno (1889-1974), psychiatrist, of Jewish origin, born in Bucharest, enters the scene. As a psychosociologist, he is the inventor of the concepts of psychodrama, sociometry, as well as (together with other specialists) group psychotherapy<sup>13</sup>. And the matching of two concepts – psychodrama and group therapy – with the action in Part I of *Scheherazade* represents a pertinent explanation, without “cracks”, and last but not least organic, for the Shahriar-Scheherazade relationship. And this is because the concept of psychodrama explains step by step how Scheherazade proceeded. It is all the more surprising to note how Rimsky-Korsakov himself, long before Moreno, modeled an exemplary

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<sup>13</sup> “... Levi became interested again in theatre and the possible applications of the theatrical arts in therapy. He now frequented the *Museum* café, a kind of Mecca for theatre people. In 1921, with the financial support of his brother William, Levi founded the *Theatre of Spontaneity – Stegreiftheater* at 2 Maysedergasse in Vienna. This theatre, based on improvisation, lasted, without much public success, until 1925. But the date of its founding, 1 April 1921, remained in Levi's eyes the *Birthday of Psychodrama*.”

The text is available on Internet at: [http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob\\_Levy\\_Moreno](http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Levy_Moreno)

psychodrama exclusively through orchestration technique. Hence the conclusion: the second alternative scenario to the referential one (on the subjects of *1001 nights*) must be “read” exclusively in terms of psychodrama, thus strictly respecting the composer's timbral-orchestral conception.

And then, what is the technique of applying psychodrama and how are the roles of the participants distributed? However, the very definition of psychodrama seems to mirror what happened in the first part of the symphonic suite *Scheherazade* (but also throughout the work), because it is about externalization, placement in a fictional object and the discharge of a neurosis through identification with it, which is usually a character in a narrative. The distance obtained in this way facilitates the reorientation of the “parasitic” syndrome and thus determines the possibility of viewing it through the space and perspective offered by fiction. The key word is *theatricality*, because the “patient” as an audience attends the performance in which he can visualize the image and dynamic manifestation of his own phobia, and thus the possibility of a cathartic finality arises.

The reversal of the situation is spectacular in the sense that through the stated narrative thread – padishah Shahriar, domineering and relentless, and a possible next victim, Scheherazade –, the second thread transpires, but with reversed roles – the man as patient and the woman as therapist. However, without wanting to, Shahriar becomes the protagonist in the main role, and Scheherazade assumes the role of director of the entire action, however fictional it may be. The stage becomes the very imagination of both, and the free movement between the two realities – physical and fictional – ends up becoming the very essence of the fully assumed interpersonal game. The evil is thus forgotten, Shahriar – cured, and Scheherazade – saved. And the action in Part I of the symphonic suite is clearly separated into two spaces – real and fictional – each with its own characters.

## **I. Real space. Contextual reasoning.**

1. *Introduction.* The juxtaposition of the two themes: Shahriar-Scheherazade

The only identity image of Shahriar, one untainted by the fictional-therapeutic action of Scheherazade, is the first theme of the Introduction with which the entire symphonic suite begins. It is the first, the only and the last situation, but also the moment, in which the padishah could have escaped what ultimately happened to him. As such, the most intense contrast is exposed only in the opening of the first part through the juxtaposition of the two themes, the two characters, the two identities, and the two intentional strategies:

a. orchestration contrast: the collective character (orchestral *tutti*) Shahriar and the individual character (solo violin) Scheherazade,

b. metrical contrast: the simple binary meter (2/2, Şahriar) and the double binary meter (4/4, Şeherezada), the monovalence of the jerky cadence and the plurivalence of rotation, gliding or floating,

c. contrast of register assisted by implicit contrast of expression: the menacing over-weighting (grave brasses doubled by grave woodwinds) of crushing (“rhinoceros”) steps and the hovering “weightlessness”, of an almost immaterial lightness, of the dance of seduction<sup>14</sup>. Everything that follows the Introduction will no longer be identifiable other than derivative contrast (from the initial one, so progressively weaker). And Shahriar’s Theme will never return to the identity of a collective character presented in a polytimbral tutti.

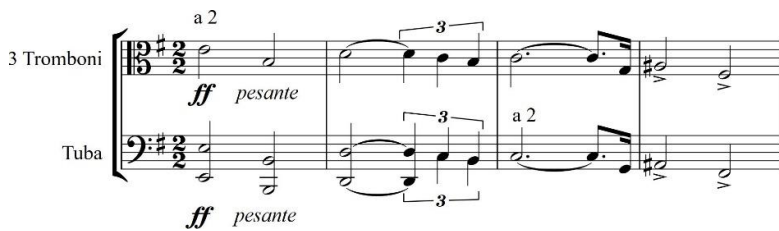


Fig. 10 Shahriar’s Theme

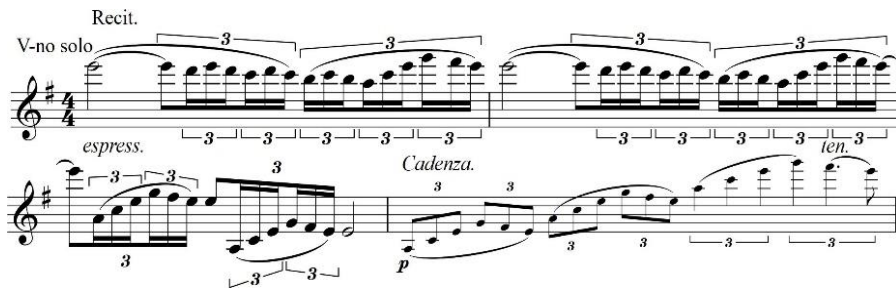


Fig. 11 Scheherazade’s Theme

2. The Exposition. After the juxtaposition in the Introduction, the second Thematic Block (b1 and b2) is the first moment, and practically space, in which the two characters see each other face to face.

NB. It must not be forgotten that the stillness and calm of the second Secondary Theme is the cumulative resultant, that is, the effect, which has its cause in the turbulence of the Main Theme.

2.1. *Lifting the Veil* (first Secondary Theme). In the psychodramatic hypothesis of the action, the first Secondary Theme reproduces the lifting of the first veil (obvious, semi-transparent) of several veils that interpose between

<sup>14</sup> As an analogy for this *dance of seduction*, Richard Strauss’ expressionist work *Salome* can be used. A similar intention – coercion – is the determining factor in the dance of seduction that Salome performs before King Herod (stepfather) – *the Dance of the Seven Veils* – in order to take revenge on John the Baptist.



Shahriar and Scheherazade. She (even as a new wife) is not immediately allowed in the vicinity of the padishah.



Fig. 12

2.2. *The dialogue.* The second Secondary Theme also acquires a completely different meaning, because it performs a first moment in which the two characters do not just stand face to face, but communicate: Shahriar becomes capable of dialogue, and the identity of Scheherazade is thus re-signified as a *dialogue partner*.

The male character is in the first stage of deconstruction:

(a) the initial orchestral tutti is reduced to the solo sonority of the Horn in F. It is worth noting the still metallic sonority (the masculinity, however, blunt), although slightly “throaty” (from the overflow of emotion) of the instrument that exhibits

(b) only the incipit of the (derivative) Theme of Sindbad/Shahriar (sectioned by diminution),

(c) with the role of antecedent phrase (framed in a mixed phrasal structure, of interference) and

(d) in an interrogative form (since only three notes remain, the last two as rising minor third intonation).

(e) *Tranquillo* indications (at the beginning of the first Secondary Theme) and *dolce* (!) at the entrance of the Horn are noteworthy. Or, it is not very clear in which way the sliding of the ship on the water mirror can be associated (in the original program) and that in a *tranquillo* and *dolce* way. It is clear that even the expression indications refer to the quiet mood (as a possibility of dialogue), and the attitudinal expression is *dolce*.

And instead of the natural continuation of the padishah’s theme,

(f) in the Flute there appears, totally surprisingly, a phrasal continuation – a hasty utterance and with an obvious origin in the “revolving” theme of Scheherazade. Two procedures legitimize this thematic-phrasal interaction as dialogue:

(f.1.) takes over Shahriar's phrase from the same sound (but at a higher octave – the feminine register) – *b1* (Horn) jumped to *b2* (Flute).

(f.2.) Two more interrogations follow, as well as two more answers, which are structured in the following two descending minor third steps: *g1* (Horn) – *g2* (Oboe) and *e1* (Horn) – *e2* (Clarinet), constituting thus a descending diminutive trison (with still depressed meaning): *b-g-e*. It is worth noting that although the padishah's "questions" continually descend, follows him, even at the risk of stepping into a register that is not too comfortable for her.

(f.3) Also, it should be noted that in the ascending minor third (interrogative) of the padishah's motive, Scheherazade's answer follows only at the end of her own phrase – the descending major second.

Observation. Already in the Exposition, the concluding Theme is constituted "dialogically" – as a result of the dialogue in the second Secondary Theme, in the form of a synthesis between a segment derived from the Scheherazade Theme and the natural continuation of the main Theme (Sindbad/Shahriar).

Fig. 13

### 3. The Reprise. The second thematic block.

3.1. b-1: the lifting of the next veil, Scheherazade gets even closer to Shahriar.

3.2. b-2: in a subsequent stage of deconstruction – the second –, the character Shahriar adopts the timbral identity of the cello.

Compared to the metallic sonority (yet "hoarse", "cold" and still "distant") of the Exposition Horn, here the "baritonal" consistency rich in "woody", "soft" and "warm" overtones indicate the activation of the empathic state, and becomes, this time, an emotional partner and not just a dialogical one: Shahriar becomes more and more interested in the young woman in front of him.

3.3. The structure of the dialogue is also different:

a. Shahriar's question ends on *d1*, Scheherazade following him an octave higher – *d2*, but on Clarinet. The second query – *f1*, from where it is taken up

with *f2*, in the Oboe, and the third – *a1* and *a2*, respectively, in the Flute. And even if the resulting chord is a minor one – *d-f-a*, the upward orientation (the opposite of the one in the Exhibition) posits the meaning of the dialogue, because the initiative to boost the interaction belongs to Shahriar.

4. The structure of the Coda section is a replica of the structure of the dialogic second Secondary Theme. Psychodramatically, this section presents a third stage of deconstruction that Shahriar endures. Emotionally, however, it's a calm and quiet climax, and because of that downright poignant.

a. with one difference – Scheherazade's "answers" are missing. The composer implies that this is present (already as an accepted image in the padishah's consciousness).

b. The Sharhiar's previous motivic "Questions" become Full Theme again (in the fictional Sindbad hypostasys), and

c. This Theme has three "tiered" exposures. It is only here that the determining meaning of the timbral ethos is revealed, which throughout the work functions as an analogy of psycho-affective transformation.

c.1. The first development of the Theme is done in Flute and starts on sound *e3*. However, the ethos of The Flute is related to the image of childhood and, at the same time, functions as an analogy of unconditional curiosity. In a strict relationship with this posture of the padishah, Scheherazade adopts a maternal "role", accompanying the male-partner, this time already aware of what happened to him, through all the therapeutic-identity transpositions that will follow. The acceptance of childishness also signifies the ingrained trust between the two.



Fig. 14

c.2. The second exposition of the Theme appears in the Oboe, from sound *h2*. This type of ethos refers in equal measure to the idyllic and nostalgic, being able to attribute to it the acceptance of remembering the young Shahriar who once was.



Fig. 15

c.3. The completion of the deconstructive route is produced by the third exposition of the Theme performed on the Violin – from the height of *e*3, and not on the Clarinet (as in the Exposition) or the Flute (as in the Reprise). However, Rimsky-Korsakov's message is an explicit one – the padishah's healing was successfully resolved in the image and timbral bath of Scheherazade's instrument.

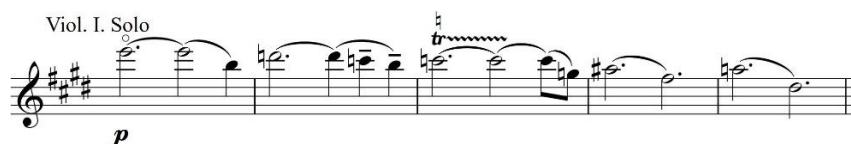


Fig. 16

c.4. All three expositions of the Main Theme have as a background the figurations of waves, which in this context, but also in the presentation of the Main Theme in the Exposition and in the Reprise, work in the analogy of psycho-affective dynamism.

4.1. The last lifting of the veil has the connotation of raising the general curtain on the action that will follow in the remaining three parts.

Both spaces – real and fictional – are structured in a quasi-rondo consequence, because in the absence of the Development section, the procedural functions are distributed in such a way that, succeeding each other, the real and the fictional are interpotentiated on the horizontal coordinate. But the procedural and equally dramaturgical propulsion is also ensured in the structuring on the vertical coordinate, in the image of layers, each with its own semantic track engaged in a synchronous evolution with all the others.

## II. Fictional space. Relevant situations.

1. *The Exposition.* The main theme – the theme of Sindbad/Shahriar – is one characterized by weak individuation of the fictional character. The only characteristic element of its own – the 6/4 meter – can only be understood within the amplification progression – 2/2 Shahriar, 4/4 Scheherazade and 6/4 Sindbad, respectively. The latter is not an autonomous character, but a fictional vehicle, because it is the consequence of the fusion between the patient and the therapist: the generative will of that “pushes” Shahriar towards identification with the vehicle and thus causes the latter to be charged with his own neurosis. In a second sense, the vehicle is loaded with Shahriar's neurosis and thus sailing on the stormy sea represents the transposition of the conflict from the real to the imaginary.

In a structural-dramaturgical sense, Rimsky-Korsakov substituted the Development section with the image of the water storm. Or, as an archetype, water, like night, is the domain of the feminine, therefore also of Scheherazade.

Night is the most favorable time for inventing stories. And Sindbad, as a role and as Shahriar's psychodramatic vehicle, fights with water, the feminine element in a state of storm.

In the psychodramatic hypothesis, both the Main Theme and the Concluding Theme (from the Exposition and Reprise) stand as a sign for Şahriar's disturbed emotionality as a patient, thus aligning two directions of the transformation that he must endure:

a. deconstructive orientation – both themes – main and concluding – both in the Exposition and in the Reprise, are structured in the direction of a progressive structural fragmentation. The concluding theme appears as an intensified continuation of the main theme.

Conclusion: The main theme is progressively fragmented both by fragmentation and by combining fragments belonging to both themes – Main Theme and Concluding Theme. Thus, the Reprise undergoes a drastic boost – from 73 measures in the Exhibition to only 43 measures in the Reprise.

b. However, the intensity, elaborative in its essence, of these two themes conditions the emergence of the oasis of tranquility within the second thematic Block, having calm and clear water as its narrative image. Thus, the first Secondary theme acquires a pertinent meaning as a sign of proximity – the lifting of the dividing veil, and the second Secondary theme is actually a dialogical one.

In turn, through the deconstruction of Shahriar's collective identity, we arrive at a whole chain of poses, this time singular, progressively oriented from the tutti towards assuming the timbre of the violin (the identity of Scheherazade). The thematic euphemism called Sindbad's Theme, in reality serves as the vehicle of deconstruction that carries the padishah from tutti to solo, from the Horn (the second Secondary theme of the Exposition) to the Cello (the second Secondary theme of the Reprise), so that in the end (Coda, the replication of the second Secondary Theme, but without Scheherazade's "answers") to reduce it to the Flute-Oboe-Violin sequence (Coda).

C. The process of fragmentation (dismemberment) of padishah Shahriar's theme is not limited only to Part I of the symphonic suite, although a large part of this disassembly is carried out precisely in this part with the function of initiating and opening the entire work. However, the initiation and unfolding of the action that encompasses all four parts is synonymous with the very process of deconstruction of the hegemon character, and which will end only in Part IV, with the sinking of Sindbad's ship – Shahriar's symbolic vehicle.

Deconstruction should be understood as the process of exposition of Şahriar's theme in several variants (in various expositions of variational substance) of the first theme of the Introduction.



Fig. 17 (c.1.) The Main Reference – first Theme from Introduction



Fig. 18 (c.2.) The First variant of Shahriar's Theme – Sindbad's theme



Fig. 19 (c.3.) The Second variant: Incipit of the Sindbad/Shahriar Theme in the second Secondary Theme in Exposition – Horn solo

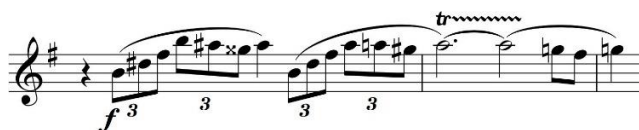


Fig. 20 (c.4.) The Third variant: Sindbad/Shahriar Theme in Concluding Theme: the incipit of the theme is replaced by figurations derived from Scheherazade's theme



Fig. 21 (c.5.) The Fourth variant: Incipit of the Sindbad/Shahriar Theme in the Second Secondary Theme in the Reprise – Cello solo

c.6. The Fifth variant: The Sindbad/Shahriar Theme in the Coda – a provisional finality of the deconstruction process: three timbral variants of the theme, as an “echo” of the three “questions” of the second Secondary Theme (from the Exposition and from the Reprise), in the variant of the descending sequence from the Exposition – Fl. + Ob. + Cl., but in the Coda instead of Cl. Vioara appears – the timbral “avatar” of Scheherazade).

Observation. It should be mentioned here that the timbral transformations of Şahriar's Theme are also indicators of the relevance of the transformations that the image of Scheherazade goes through in the Padishah's consciousness.



Fig. 22 (c.7.) The Sixth *variant*: The Sindbad/Shahriar theme in Part IV – the shipwreck and the sinking – the ultimate finality of the deconstruction process:

D. The final resolution of both spaces, but also of both dramaturgical lines of the entire work – real and fictional – is achieved by the shipwreck of Sindbad in Part Four of the symphonic suite. In addition to the function of a *catastrophic* event, the shipwreck has a *symbolic* function and, at the same time, a *ritualic* one – the performance of the action of deliverance through the fear and pity experienced at the ritual destruction (sacrifice by drowning) of the vehicle. In other words, through *catharsis*, the ultimate purification of the Shahriar.

However, the ritual acceptance of the shipwreck is also strengthened by its concurrence with the celebration in Baghdad, both located in Part Four. Because even at a first contact with the program of the work, the question inevitably arose: why did Rimsky-Korsakov join two events that in no way could be causally connected? Was the celebration occasioned by the shipwreck and death of Sindbad? Or was Sindbad in a hurry to catch the feast in Baghdad and inadvertently shipwrecked? Now, each event belongs to a different ontology: the celebration is a real event, meaning from the same space as Shahriar and Scheherazade, while the shipwreck belongs to the fictional space.

There would also be a final acceptance. The shipwreck that occurs in the fictional space is the cause of the celebration that happens in the real space and appears only at the end of the work as an explanatory comment. The feast in Part Four – a ceremony in turn, like the shipwreck ritual – is merely an amplified replica of the end of Part One, although functionally these two situations are different, since

(a) the Coda section (Part I) records the establishment of communication between Shahriar and Scheherazade and, implicitly, the padishah's agreement to continue the therapy by assuming the following fictional vehicles – Prince Kalender (Part II) and the couple Prince and Princess (Part III). In other words, it is about an opening towards what is to come, while

(b) The Feast of Baghdad is structured as a synthetic articulation and absorbs the themes of the previous three parts. That is, it is about completing the therapeutic process and thus closing the action, and widening the field of vision, from which it becomes clear that what was happening between Shahriar and Scheherazade was experienced with a real shudder by the entire population of the city. This conclusion is not a hypothesis, because (1) at the beginning – as a watchman's sister or a vizier's daughter – appears as a next victim, as a continuation (2) of a long line of young women already executed by the will of the padishah.

And then the Feast takes on a double meaning: (a) Shahriar has been cured of his murderous neurosis and the city has regained the sober ruler it once had, and (b) through her success, Scheherazade has saved all the other girls which would also have been executed if she failed.

## 6. Epilogue

What ultimately came out of Rimsky-Korsakov's pen can rightly be considered as a journey through the fictional spaces of the consciousness of the main character Scheherazade. It is this interpretation, before all others, that presents Scheherazade as the only central character and, in fact, the only character with a real identity of the work. All the others exist only as narrative references that all point towards the narrator. And in this sense, Scheherazade is the vehicle of Rimsky-Korsakov's personality and attitude both in terms of the image of the feminine and in terms of the meaning the composer attributes to the interaction between the sexes and, implicitly, to a couple relationship.

Even Shahriar – the dominant and threatening male antipode – can easily be interpreted as an additional narrative element (or even an imagined one) somewhat subordinate to through his role of revealing and differentiating the young woman's traits and qualities (Part I). And the flight of Prince Kalender on the back of the bird Rukk (in Arabic), Ruk, Rokh or Rukh (in Persian) (Part II), and the gentle delicacy of the interaction of the Prince and Princess (Part III), but also the Feast of Baghdad (Part IV), all are narrative fictions through which the inventor of the stories shines through. And by virtue of her authorial status, only she has the power to thus induce the charm of love through which she shapes for the fierce padishah a certain initiatory route of lure into oblivion and of benevolent transposition through seduction, because only in this way will she, Scheherazade, manage to survive not only in a physical sense, but rather in a relational one, thus saving Shahriar, as a husband, but also herself, as a wife, for love and a happy married life.

And last but not least, the question of meaning and, implicitly, of the meanings conveyed by a musical composition comes under question. What it is? The possibility of psychodramatic interpretation of the symphonic suite *Scheherazade* became possible only after Jacob Levi Moreno invented the concept of psychodrama and set up the practice of group therapy of theatrical substance. In the same way, the Austrian psychologist Bruno Bettelheim manages to apply the psychoanalytic grid to several European fantastic fairy tales only after Sigmund Freud invents the concept, theory and practice of psychoanalysis. And, for example, the misogynistic meaning of a sonata Allegro could only be discovered after feminist musicology appears in postmodernity, which applies this reading grid to this principle of musical form, bringing back to the present, but this time as an explicit feminist symbol,



as presented by Fatema Mernissi in her book<sup>15</sup>. It is precisely in this sense that Rimsky-Korsakov's decision to eliminate the Development section is relevant today, thus defusing the conflict of misogynistic substance, and with it the traditional form of the classical sonata. Hence the transformation of the second thematic block – the avatar of the feminine – into an oasis of peace and emotional balance, of lucidity and calmness, and, finally, of understanding humanity.

And then, what about the meaning in the end? The problem is not a semantic one, but a hermeneutic one, and lies particularly in its method, which may not yet have been discovered, since it becomes clear that a certain meaning becomes visible only after the discovery of a method of bringing it to light. In other words, meaning (a certain meaning) finds its form only as a function of a hermeneutic method by which a certain meaning comes to be formulated, organized and disseminated. And thus, the history of psychology, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, but also of anthropology together with comparative literature, become as many histories of certain techniques for formulating certain meanings. Not to discover them, that is, to bring them out of the immanence in which the meanings waited for the invention of the right method, radiating in the form of archetypes and thus signaling their own existence. Not.

Discovering techniques for making assertions and building narratives implicitly means generating and disseminating meanings through these techniques. Any other meanings will have to invent their own techniques of eliciting and consensual affirmation. In this sense, it must be assumed that Oedipus, the character of Sophocles, was something else, that is, less Oedipal than after Freud validates him as a psychoanalytic archetype. And so, a huge thematic horizon from the creation of the ancient tragedians to the compositions of musical expressionism, become equally archetypal and psychoanalyzable material. Until Jung's theorizations, both Hamlet and Faust are dramatic-literary characters who suddenly jump into the value hierarchy by applying the archetypal concept. Meaning thus becomes fluctuating as a function of the contents and methods upon which the interpretation is focused. The interest is specifically focused on the visibility of meaning, of a certain meaning, as a function of current issues. Only in this way can certain artefacts be recalled from the distant past, which, here, prove their "universality", i.e. their fit with the techniques of understanding established by a scientific consensus of present. And the alleged "universality" acquires meaning only in the sense of utility.

In conclusion, Rimsky-Korsakov took ad litteram the context of the narrator Scheherazade and the deceived padishah Shahriar. She tells him stories

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<sup>15</sup> Fatema Mernissi (2001). *Sheherazade Goes West*. New York: Washington Square Press.

really just to survive. Sindbad is the character of the first story, and not the ascending psychodramatic vehicle in which the noble man will face the watery element of womanhood until the neurotic shipwreck of the latter part of the suite. The following stories are simple stories, selected by the composer for their utility in the suite equation. That is, to produce contrasts that generate processual and, implicitly, narrative continuity. Exclusively to keep the audience's interest and attention active. And finality is finality – fatal for Sindbad and beneficial for Scheherazade. All that is outside, can only be considered as the consequence of the need to practice the invention of stories. A desire that the young woman from Rimsky-Korsakov's imagination awakened in me.

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