

Avatar and ‘*Azāzīl* – Western and Middle Eastern patterns of individual revolt

An essay in the simultaneity of ruptures

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Abstract

Given the high acclaims received from critics as well as the big success on the market, but also the hot debates they incited, both James Cameron’s utopia *Avatar* (2009) and Yūsuf Zaydān’s ‘*Azāzīl*’ (2008) can be considered to have hit the nerves of their time. Despite very different settings – mid-22nd century on a remote planet (*Avatar*) vs. Egypt and the Levant at the time of early ecclesiastic schisms (‘*Azāzīl*’) – and despite very different plots and protagonists, the two best-sellers nevertheless have a lot of traits and basic structures in common and may therefore be compared as more or less simultaneous representations of their authors’ (and the reading resp. cinema publics’) worldviews. Analyzing ‘*Azāzīl*’ a year after the Taḥrīr revolution, it is perhaps not much surprising to find in the prize-winning novel the germs of an uprising: cast in the form of a *Bildungsroman* it features a long and painful process of individual maturation that culminates in the decision to completely break with the prevailing system and instead focus on one’s real self, guided by an intuitive knowledge about what is truly human and natural. It may however be more astonishing that a very similar development is enacted also in Cameron’s *Avatar*. Given the similarities in a Western and Eastern cultural product, both narratives may be understood as expressions of a global tendency, among intellectuals (but also larger parts of the populations), to suggest rebellion against much dated politico-ideological and socio-economic orders and their moral codes.

From the fall of 2010 onwards, and especially since the ‘Taḥrīr Revolution’ of January 2011 in Egypt, the Arab world has undergone dramatic changes.¹ Although the extent and consequences of the uprisings in which millions took place and that eventually brought about the fall of dictators like Zīn al-‘Ābidīn Bin ‘Alī, Mu‘ammar al-Qadhdhāfi and Ḥusnī Mubārak, were unexpected by many, even by native Arab observers of the socio-political scene, they had, of course, not come out of a sudden. There was “something in the air”² already since roughly the turn of the millennium, something that had made itself felt, for instance, in the *Kifāyah* movement in Egypt. The exact nature of this “something”, however, was still rather obscure—otherwise, the world would not have been so surprised

1 Whether the events should be called ‘revolutions’, ‘rebellions’, ‘uprisings’ or with some other term, is still controversial among political analysts. But terminology is also a heavily contested matter between the activists and the regimes. While the latter are eager to deny the former the status of ‘revolutionaries’ and rather refer to them as ‘rebels’ or ‘terrorists’, the oppositional movements in turn tend to underline that they fight for the just and noble cause of a veritable ‘revolution’, *thawrah*.

2 Cf. “Preface” to *From New Values to New Aesthetics: Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature*, vol. II: *Postmodernism and thereafter*, ed. S. Guth & G. Ramsay, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011: 9-12.

by the uprisings the moment they broke out. Hounded by the daily events, public media has been (pre-)occupied, ever since, with trying to catch up, to monitor present developments and to speculate, in an often nervous and agitated manner, about the future, while little effort has been made to carefully analyze the conditions that preceded and prepared those moments that were to become crucial for the history of the Middle East. As a consequence of turning the eye away from the historical preconditions, the very nature of the uprisings themselves has still remained rather unexplored, and what happened is far from being thoroughly understood. In a situation where one is at a loss about what exactly one should look for, or look at, and how to collect relevant data about this pre-revolutionary period now, *post eventum*, i.e., after everything has become part of a bygone past, literature can, as always, serve an important function. A detailed analysis of the contents and structure of fictional works produced during the first decade of the 2000s, particularly those that enjoyed large popularity among the readership, can tell us a lot about what was going on in the minds of people who actually lived these 'pre-revolutionary' conditions. In doing exactly this, the present contribution aims at adding a small piece of insight to the mosaico that, it is to be hoped, some time in the near future will complement to form a clearer picture of this historical turning-point.³

While the use of an Arabic key text from the period—Yūsuf Zaydān's prize winning novel 'Azāzīl (2008)—as the textual basis for an investigation into the relation between literature and the so-called 'Arab Spring' will seem quite natural in the context just mentioned, the reader will probably wonder why 'Azāzīl should be compared, as is obvious from the title of my contribution and the abstract, to a cineastic blockbuster originating from the West—James Cameron's utopia *Avatar* (2009). As I will try to show here, the answer to this question, and with it the legitimacy of my approach, lies in the similarity, despite obvious differences on the surface, of the two best-sellers and the usefulness of the comparative methods *per se*. Comparison in general can be a highly yielding heuristic tool, its efficiency increasing with the number of aspects or categories in which a given text A may be compared to a given text B. Observations made in the former often help to improve our understanding of the latter, either because text A provides answers where text B remains silent (and vice versa), or because text A comes up with a couple of new questions to text B, questions that would perhaps not have been asked at all had we not had the contrasting foil of the other text. In addition, comparative approaches always highlight both similarities and differences, overlappings and divergences. This is the case with 'Azāzīl and

3 A number of contributions to the collection on *Postmodernism and Thereafter* in modern Arabic literature, mentioned in the preceding footnote, try to fathom the new tendencies already. After that, more light on the new phenomena, and deeper and more analyses and background information, are to be found in the proceedings of the subsequent EURAMAL meeting (*Desire, Pleasure and the Taboo: New Voices and Freedom of Expression in Modern Arabic Literature*, held in Rome, June 2010), ed. Isabella Camera d'Afflitto (et al.), about to appear as a special issue of *Rivista di Studi Orientali*, Rome: Sapienza/Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2014; two important articles by Tarek El-Ariss: "Hacking the Modern: Arabic Writing in the Virtual Age", *Comparative Literature Studies* 47/4 (2010): 533-48 (now also in his *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political*, New York: Fordham UP, 2013: 145-71, notes 206-09), and "Fiction of Scandal", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 510-31; Xavier Luffin, *Printemps arabe et littérature: De la réalité à la fiction, de la fiction à la réalité*, Bruxelles: Académie Royale de Belgique, 2013; Susanne Schanda, *Literatur der Rebellion: Ägyptens Schriftsteller erzählen vom Umbruch*, Zürich: Rotpunktverlag, 2013.

Avatar too. The striking parallels, especially in narrative structure (number and sequence of ‘functions’ in the Propp’ian⁴ sense, see below) but also in major features of content (macro-semantic categories, i.e., the actual textual realisations of the functional variables), as well as the resemblance and comparability of the imagery indicate a similarity of experiencing and thinking about the world *across* the East/West divide that is apt to demonstrate, to a certain extent at least, that, and to which degree, globalisation has replaced the former divide by a—relatively—unified outlook on life. It is certainly not by mere accident that two bestselling texts⁵ from the end of the first decade of the new millennium re-enact a process of maturation and re-tell the concomitant escalation until the point where time is ripe for the protagonists to say ‘it’s enough now, *kifāyah baʿa*’. The wish to rebel against, and eventually free oneself from, a mighty inhuman political and social system was, it will be shown, not limited to the Middle East but was also a Western phenomenon. On the other hand, the dissimilarities that become apparent from different ‘fillings’ of similar, or identical, structural and content variables (functions), i.e., the very specific cultural codings, will call for explanation and interpretation. How does it come that a basically very similar experiencing of the world is translated, on the surface of the texts, into different images? In which way are the trajectories of opposition and rebellion that we can observe in the two representatives of our *Zeitgeist* different from each other, and in which way can these differences help us understand why the individual revolts that both texts enact gave rise to large-scale uprisings in the Middle East while socio-political change in the West—so far, at least—has remained rather limited? While ‘*Azāzīl*, in retrospect, undoubtedly can be read as a ‘pre-Arab Spring’ novel, why has the climate that produced *Avatar*, a narrative that displays such a high degree of similarity with ‘*Azāzīl*, not resulted in something comparable to the ‘Arab Spring’ in the West?

These questions are perhaps too big to be answered here in a comprehensive and satisfying manner. They may however guide the analysis that is to follow. Before embarking on a detailed comparison of the two texts I will first give a short description, including a plot summary, of ‘*Azāzīl*, then locate the novel in a more general analytical framework, which will pave the ground for a detailed parallel function-by-function reading of Zaydān’s novel and Cameron’s film.

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- 4 Vladimir Propp, *Morfologia skazki* (Morphology of the Folktale), Leningrad 1928. The earliest English translation seems to have been published in 1958. This brought the study’s break-through in the West, which was enhanced by the 2nd, revised edition, transl. by Laurence Scott, Austin: University of Texas Press, [1968]. As a forerunner of structuralist approaches to literature, Propp’s *Morphology* from then on was established as a foundational text of literary theory worldwide. “His character types are used in media education and can be applied to almost any story, be it in literature, theatre, film, television series, games, etc.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Propp>, 28 Jan 2014).
- 5 I am using ‘text’ here in its broader meaning of a structured (Lat. *textus* = woven) narrative, irrespective of the medium in which its plot is told. — For the notion of ‘bestseller’ cf. Tetz Rooke, “The Emergence of the Arabic Bestseller: Arabic Fiction and World Literature”, in S. Guth & G. Ramsay (eds.), *From New Values...*, vol. II: *Postmodernism and Thereafter* (see [fn.2](#)), 201-13.

'Azāzīl—a Bildungsroman

Yūsuf Zaydān's 'Azāzīl,⁶ the novel that won the 2009 'Arabic Booker' Prize,⁷ is organized as a typical *Bildungsroman*: it tells the story of the inner maturation of a young monk searching for knowledge in times of confusion—quite significantly, he is born in 391 AD, i.e., the year when the Byzantine Empire officially adopted Christendom and a difficult period of transition and change began to reshape the Middle East. As often in a *Bildungsroman*, the story is organized as a journey between several places where the protagonist, the first-person narrator, makes all the experiences that contribute to the formation of his self. He sets out from Akhmim in Upper Egypt, where he was born, to Alexandria, then to Jerusalem, and finally to a monastery to the northwest of Aleppo. In all these places, the conflicts, so typical of a transition period, between adherents of the old 'pagan' system and the new Christian one are virulent and leave their imprint on the young monk. The experiences he makes and the challenges he has to cope with are religious, philosophical, intellectual, as well as bodily, sexual, emotional.

In Alexandria, for instance, he becomes an admirer of the great neo-Platonic philosopher Hypatia (a historical person who died in 415 or 416 CE).⁸ She is a veritable encyclopedia of late Hellenistic thinking and science—which is no problem for *him* since *he* considers the search for truth to be something very human and natural and does in no way think that Christian belief and the rational sciences are (or should be) mutually exclusive. It *is* a problem however for the more fundamentalist fraction prevailing in Alexandria at the time, a fraction led by the spiritual leader of the Coptic church, the patriarch Cyril (Kyrillos) of Alexandria (d. 444, r. 412-444 AD), who identifies Hypatia's ideas with the 'pagan' past. As is to be expected of a typical *Bildungsroman*, our monk undergoes a deep crisis when he becomes an eye-witness of a fanaticized Christian mob brutally murdering Hypatia, either on Cyril's order or at least with his tacit consent. The crisis challenges his loyalty towards his own religion to the utmost and ends with a first partial change of identity: In reverence for Hypatia, and in spite of her being a 'pagan', the Christian monk from then on calls himself 'Hypa' (Arabic: Hībā).

In Jerusalem, and later in the monastery in Syria, he gets acquainted with a way to reconcile Christian belief and rationalism—and thus also with common sense, or a more *natural* way of thinking, as the novel describes it—in the ideas of Nestorius (c. 386-450 AD), the father of dyophysicist⁹ Nestorianism. This very same Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople since 428 AD, is however dethroned and declared a heretic in 431 AD at the Council of Ephesus, and the fact that Hypa's Nestorian monastery will be closed and probably de-

6 First edition Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2008. I am quoting from the fifth or, as indicated on the front cover, "twelveth" printing (*tab'ah*). Some translations into European languages (author spelt "Youssef Ziedan" in all of them): (English) *Azazel*, transl. by Jonathan Wright, London: Atlantic Books, 2012; (French) *La malédiction d'Azazel*, transl. by Khaled Osman, Paris: Albin Michel, 2014; (German) *Azazel*, transl. by Larissa Bender, München: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 2011; (Italian) *Azazel*, transl. by Lorenzo Declich and Danielo Mascitelli, Vicenza: Pozza, 2010, [Milano]: BEAT, 2011.

7 That is, the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF), cf. <<http://www.arabicfiction.org/>>.

8 Hypatia and her fate have inspired a number of Western writers to compose theatrical plays, essays, treatises, etc. The philosopher's life was also filmatized (*Agora*, 2009, directed by Alejandro Amenábar, script written by the latter and Mateo Gil).

9 I.e., the teaching that Christ has both a divine *and* a human nature.

stroyed by the intolerant, inhumane fundamentalist fraction that is going to take over in the region after Ephesus, indirectly helps him to decide to eventually give up his monkdom.

But there are other reasons still for this decision, which is the novel's point of culmination and marks the end of Hypa's process of maturation and emancipation. For the less intellectual experiences—which are however equally or even more important than the intellectual ones—, two beautiful women are responsible, a certain Octavia (back in Alexandria) and one very young Martha (in the monastery). Both fall in love with him, and he with them, and in neither case can he resist temptation, that is, the call of his more natural impulses, and enter into a bodily relationship with them. In each case this results in great pleasure, but also in a bad conscience and makes him ponder the pros and cons of his monkdom versus what he instinctively feels would be the more *natural* and also more *human* thing to do. But in each case he hesitates too long. It is only towards the end of the novel that he dares to overcome the psychological obstacles that prevented him from following his inner voice, his demon, the 'Azāzīl of the book's title, who often talks to him and whom he first believes to be the Devil but later realizes that he is nothing but another side of himself.

'Azāzīl as a 'Neohumanist' text—the novel and its componential structure

In an earlier study,¹⁰ I had already made a first attempt at translating the events of 'Azāzīl and some earlier novels—bestsellers these, too—into a structure that identified the main components¹¹ of the texts' overall messages (which turned out to be very similar to each other and thus obviously were expressing something like a more general *Zeitgeist*). Elaborating on this framework and on 'Azāzīl now (cf. Fig. 1), we can say that the main driving force of the novel (marked 'impulse' in Fig. 1) is what we may label the 'Human nature, Humanity, or The authentic self, inside the individual'¹² (speaking through the demon 'Azāzīl); these forces meet a system of inhumane and unnatural norms, rules, beliefs, ideologies, taboos etc. that prevent humanity and nature to unfold; they are shown to do so particularly by constantly manipulating the individual, typically through arousing a bad conscience in him/her when loyalty to this System, i.e., the prevailing political, social,

10 S. G., "The Changing Role of Pleasure, or: Towards a Fundamentalist Humanism—Some Thoughts on the Place of Pleasure and Desire in the System of a New Period", in: Proceedings of the 9th EURAMAL conference on *Desire, Pleasure and the Taboo...* (see fn. 3, above), 113-39.

11 For the analytical concept of 'components' and the method of Componential Analysis (after the late Walter Falk), cf. *ibid.* (preceding footnote) and my detailed study (in German), "Post-Postmoderne oder ...? Ein komponentialanalytischer Versuch zu 'Imārat Ya'qūbiyān und Banāt ar-Riyāḏ'", in: *XXX. Deutscher Orientalistentag, Freiburg, 24.-28. September 2007: Ausgewählte Vorträge*, ed. Rainer Brunner, Jens Peter Laut and Maurus Reinkowski, online publication Dec. 2009, <<http://orient.ruf.uni-freiburg.de/dotpub/guth.pdf>>.

12 Cf. the characterisation, highly appropriate in my view, of the hero by a reviewer: "the heart of 'Azazel' is Hypa's simple human nature [!]. Hypa is not the typical monk who leaves the world behind and inhabits a cave. He sees God around him in the kindness of people, not in theology books. Sometimes he questions whether the Christian God is indeed the true God, and at other times, he breaks his vows of chastity when his heart is overwhelmed with beauty. He is human, all too human [!], and in his confessions, he is wholeheartedly genuine and truthful.[!]" Youssef Faltas, "Azazel, the devil within", *Daily News Egypt*, 11 Sept. 2008 (retrieved from <<http://www.masress.com/en/dailynews/107875>>, 31 Jan. 2014).

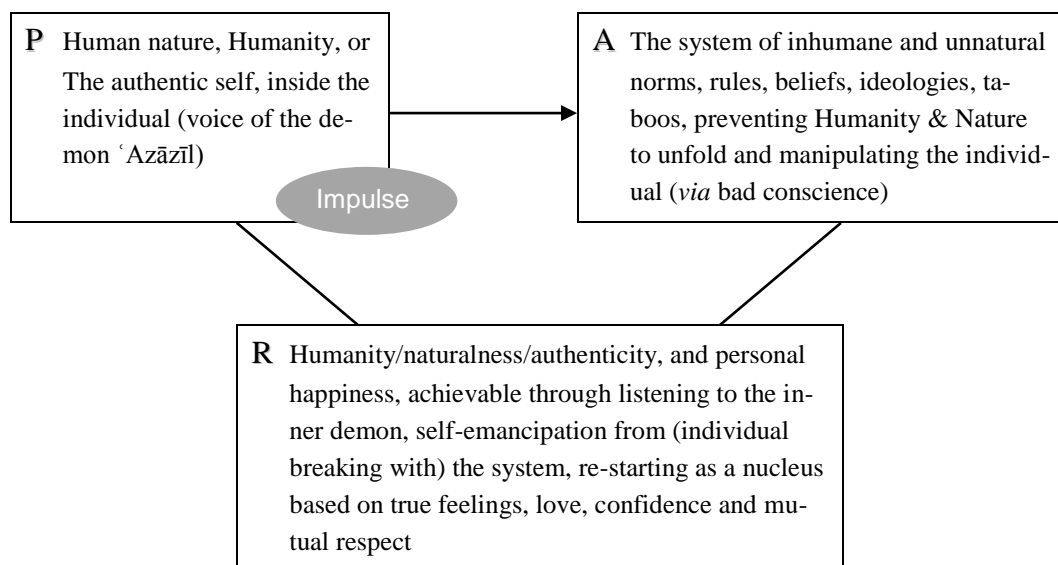


Fig. 1: Componential structure of Yūsuf Zaydān, 'Azāzīl (2008)¹³

economical, religious order and its moral codes, is at stake. In the end, however, both humanity/naturalness/authenticity and personal happiness are shown to be achievable, in this case through listening to the inner demon, through self-emancipation from (and an individual breaking with) the System, which makes the way free to start a new life. The text makes clear that the basic units of the new life that is expected to begin after the rupture with the System will consist of small nuclei of true love, confidence, mutual trust and respect, as imagined in the couples Hypa-Octavia and Hypa-Martha as well as in the friendship between Hypa and Nestorius.

With this structure, the message of 'Azāzīl fits very well into the structure of meanings that were produced during the first decade of the new millenium as a whole, as I have tried to abstract from earlier novels like 'Alā' al-Aswānī's *Imārat Ya'qūbiyān* (The Yacoubian Building, 2002) or Rajā' 'Abdallāh al-Ṣānī's *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* (The Girls of Riyadh, 2005) (cf. Fig. 2):

13 'A' marks the Actuality component, 'P' = Potentiality, 'R' = Resultativity. In the period under study, Potentiality comes as a kind of *thesis* (the driving force that makes things move), while the elements of the Actuality component appear in reaction, as an *antithesis*, to the impulses of Potentiality; the Resultativity component then is the *synthesis* where the outcome of the clash between Actuality and Potentiality appear.

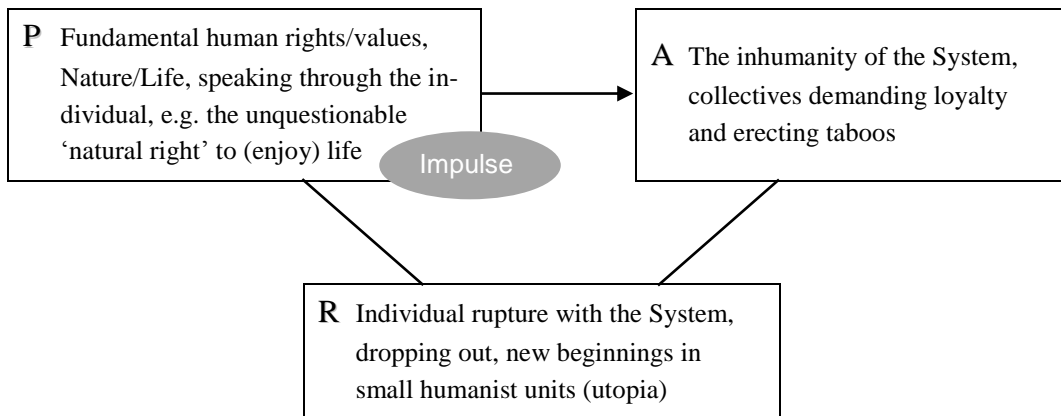


Fig. 2: Componential structure of 'Neo-Humanism' (after c. 2000)

The driving force (impulse) that makes these new texts move, is the individuals' longing for their 'share in life and happiness', which is considered to be a natural general human right. But the individuals are denied this legitimate share by what is shown to be a whole system (this can be, as in *The Girls of Riad*, the system of traditional patriarchal norms, of gender discrimination, state control, and repression, or, as in *The Yacoubian Building*, a merciless, cruel political, social and economic system). The System's denial of the most natural and elementary human rights to the individuals is achieved typically through the erection of taboos against the violation of its norms. In most texts the clash between the two forces results in a high number of casualties: the majority of protagonists in *The Yacoubian Building* and *The Girls of Riad* end as victims who have not achieved what they had been aspiring to. But it is shown also, for a very few of them, that individual 'happiness' and a kind of 'New Humanism' are achievable—on the condition, however, of a courageous and complete rupture with the prevailing social and/or political order and its moral codes.

When I presented such 'dropout texts' a few years ago at the all-German Conference of Oriental Studies in Marburg I already interpreted them as "literary indications of the dawn of a new era".¹⁴ It was clear already then that in a number of contemporary texts that had been published from, roughly, the turn of the millennium (not only in the Arab world, but also in other countries of the Middle East, e.g., Turkey), 17- to 25-year-old young people played a major role, people full of life, who were pushing forward and wanted to unfold themselves with all their needs, desires and dreams, but were prevented from doing so by their surroundings and the conditions prevailing therein; many of them were shown to eventually 'solve' their problems by radically breaking with their environment. To this generation of dropout heroes and, quite significantly, also many heroines, who had

14 S.G., "Die Aussteiger—Literarische Anzeichen für den Anbruch einer neuen Zeit", paper given at the 31. Deutscher Orientalistentag, Sept. 20-24, 2010, Marburg/Germany.

abandoned traditional society more or less and were inclined not to care any longer about any convention and authority whatsoever, had to be counted not only the hero of *An takūn 'Abbās al- 'Abd* (2003) by Aḥmad al- 'Āyidī,¹⁵ or the Islamist Ṭāhā in al-Aswānī's *Imārat Ya 'qūbiyān* (2002), but also the anonymous blogger in al-Ṣānī's *Banāt al-Riyād* (2005), the very pragmatic Buthaynah from the roof of the Yacoubian Building, but also the two major protagonists Asya Kazancı and Armanoush Tchakhmakhchian of Elif Şafak/Shafak's *Bastard of Istanbul (Baba ve Piç, 2006)*.¹⁶ From the Persian scene, the narrator of Shahriyār Mandanipūr's *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* (2009), which is a similarly "passionate, inventive and humorous exposure of the stupidity and cruelty of a society ruled by fear",¹⁷ can be mentioned in this context. All these fall into the category of what Tarek El-Ariss now has convincingly subsumed, for contemporary Arabic literature, under the heading of "fiction of scancel".¹⁸

In *To Be 'Abbās al- 'Abd* it is already the flippant tone of the 'motto' preceding the novel that indicates that the one who is speaking here does not care much about traditional practices: "... and [to] the ceiling of my room, which contained me when the world moved a few centimeters forward," it says towards the end of the dedication (p. [vii]).¹⁹ Then the novel opens with a scene – held in a pretty slippery language – in a women's restroom, and the actual beginning of the first chapter is:

"There are things that ruin your day just by being there. [...] Who am I? I am I and I have my reasons and I have no reason to be indebted to you or anyone else. My only ambition is to survive on my own, in one piece, and for the whole world, as a ball of wax, to go to hell."²⁰

And Article 8 of Asya Kazancı's "Manifesto of Nihilism" testifies to a similar rupture with her surroundings:

"If between society and the Self there lies a cavernous ravine and upon it only a wobbly bridge, you might as well burn that bridge and stay on the side of the Self, safe and sound, unless it is the ravine that you are after."²¹

All these texts (except for *'Abbās al- 'Abd*, perhaps) end with imagining a new beginning in form of small 'cells of pure humanity', so to speak, without however becoming much more explicit than that. The future order of society remains obscure, still utopian, in a way.

Given the high degree of congruency between, on the one hand, the overall messages of the works of fiction from which this schematic representation has been abstracted, and, on the other hand, the general spirit of the 'Arab Spring', it is probably little surprising that a novel like *'Azāzīl* that expressed the widespread feeling that time was ripe for change,

15 English translation by Humphrey Davies as Ahmed Alaidy, *Being Abbas el Abd—a modern Arabic novel*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006.

16 First English edition: Viking Adult, 2006; Turkish: *Baba ve Piç*, Istanbul: Metis, 2006.

17 Kate Saunders, *The Times*, back cover of the English edition, London: Abacus, 2011.

18 For bibliographical details cf. [note 3](#) above.

19 Quoted from the English translation (cf. [note 15](#)).

20 [Ibid.](#), p. 3.

21 Quoted from a later edition: Elif Şafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, London: Penguin Books, 2007, p. 143 (in the original, this text is highlighted in bold).

received a prestigious literary prize and became a big success. Much more surprising, however, is certainly the fact that a *Western* work of fiction that came out almost simultaneously with *ʿAzāzīl*, James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009), a film that, judging from its overwhelming success, must in its turn have hit the nerves of its time in the West, should display an almost identical inner structure and an almost identical sequence of functions (in the Propp’ian sense of the word) as are to be found in Zaydān’s *ʿAzāzīl*.

***Avatar*—The plot**

The similarity between *Avatar* and *ʿAzāzīl* is certainly not evident at first sight. On the contrary, the two texts might even look too different to allow for a comparison at all. While the story of *ʿAzāzīl* unfolds in early 5th-century Egypt and the Levant, *Avatar* is a utopia set in the mid-22nd century on a remote planet called Pandora. Yet, as the following plot summary already will show, *Avatar* too culminates in an act of individual rebellion after having dedicated the main body of its narrative to a re-enactment of the processes that lead to the principal character’s decision to step out of the system and become ‘another’, an ‘alien’, as the humans condescendingly use to call Pandora’s ‘aboriginees’.²²

[The planet Pandora where human colonizers mine for a valuable mineral, ‘unobtainium’,] is inhabited by the Na’vi, sapient humanoids who live in harmony with nature and worship a mother goddess called Eywa. To explore Pandora’s biosphere, scientists use Na’vi-human hybrids called ‘avatars’, operated by genetically matched humans; Jake Sully, a paraplegic former marine, replaces his deceased twin brother as an operator of one. Dr. Grace Augustine, head of the Avatar Program, considers Sully an inadequate replacement but accepts his assignment as a bodyguard. [On an excursion into Pandora’s forests Jake’s avatar gets attacked and subsequently remains alone, with night falling in. He is about to be killed by] Neytiri, a female Na’vi. [However, w]itnessing an auspicious sign, [Neytiri] takes him to her clan, whereupon [her] mother, the clan’s spiritual leader, orders her daughter to initiate Jake into their society.

Colonel Quaritch, head of [the humans’ armed forces on Pandora], promises Jake that the [mining] company will restore his legs if he gathers intelligence about the Na’vi and the clan’s gathering place, a giant arboreal called Hometree, on grounds that it stands above the richest deposit of unobtainium in the area. When Grace learns of this, she transfers herself [and her group of scientists] to an outpost. Over three months, Jake grows to sympathize with the natives. After Jake is initiated into the tribe, he and Neytiri choose each other as mates, and soon afterward, Jake reveals his change of allegiance when he attempts to disable a bulldozer that threatens to destroy a sacred Na’vi site. [When Quaritch learns about Jake’s ‘treason’ and the mining company realizes] that the Na’vi will never abandon Hometree, [the chief of the company] orders Hometree destroyed.

While trying to warn the Na’vi, Jake confesses to being a spy and the Na’vi take him and Grace captive. Seeing this, Quaritch’s men destroy Hometree, killing Neytiri’s father

22 The following plot summary is a condensed version of the very good entry “Avatar (2009 film)” in the English Wikipedia, <<http://en.wikipedia.org>> (accessed Jan. 09, 2014). In order to facilitate reading, omissions have *not* been marked with dots. But square brackets will indicate my own wording. Apart from these additions, and the omissions just mentioned, the remainder of the text has preserved the source’s original wording.

(the clan chief) and many others. [Nevertheless, Neytiri's mother] frees Jake and Grace, but they are detached from their avatars and imprisoned by Quaritch's forces. Pilot Trudy, disgusted by Quaritch's brutality, [helps the imprisoned and] carries them to Grace's outpost [from where they can reconnect to their avatars and thus 'reanimate' them].

To regain the Na'vi's trust, Jake connects his mind to that of Toruk, a dragon-like predator feared and honoured by the Na'vi. Jake finds the refugees at the sacred Tree of Souls. [He] speaks to unite the clan and tells them to gather all of the [Pandoran] clans to battle against the [humans]. Noticing the impending gathering, Quaritch organizes a pre-emptive strike against the Tree of Souls, believing that its destruction will demoralize the natives. On the eve of battle, Jake prays to Eywa, via a neural connection to the Tree of Souls, to intercede on behalf of the Na'vi.

During the subsequent battle, the Na'vi suffer heavy casualties, but are rescued when Pandoran wildlife unexpectedly join the attack and overwhelm the humans, which Neytiri interprets as Eywa's answer to Jake's prayer. [In this way, Pandora is saved from the impending danger.] [In a final 'showdown',] Quaritch breaks open the avatar link unit [from where Jake, with his human body, is operating his avatar], but Neytiri kills Quaritch and Jake [is saved].

With the exceptions of Jake and a few other scientists, all humans are expelled from Pandora and sent back to Earth, after which Jake is transferred permanently into his avatar with the aid of the Tree of Souls.

So far the mere surface of the 'text' that does not seem to have much in common with 'Azāzīl. But this is only the level of outward representation, and what we really have to look at are the underlying patterns.

Avatar (2009)²³ and 'Azāzīl (2008)—striking functional parallels

A first important parallel is the angle from which the stories are told. In both cases this is a *first person perspective*, and in both cases this narrative is also presented as the protagonist's own *diary* (the monk's autobiography, recorded on scrolls before he left the monastery, and Jake Sully's recordings on the video log, respectively). We can assume that the reason behind the choice of this option has been the authors' wish to have a focus on the *individual* who is experiencing the world (the structural 'individual vs. world' opposition implying also a 'individual vs. world' divide in their *Weltanschauung*), and to qualify that individual's report about his experiences as *authentic*, 'real' and trustworthy. Another point of congruency is the fact that the diaries certainly are meant to serve as a device to let the reader/spectator follow the protagonists' *innermost thoughts and feelings* and their intellectual and emotional development. Giving the reader direct access to the heroes' psychology may also have an appellative function: the authors may have intended it as a means not only to facilitate the readers' identification with the heroes but also to instigate

23 The version used here is *James Camerons Avatar—Aufbruch nach Pandora* (DVD video; languages: German and English; subtitles: German, English, Turkish; ca. 155 min.), © 2009 Twentieth Century Fox Film Co. and Dune Entertainment LLC, and © 2010 Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment LLC. Quotations will be from the English version (wording as in the subtitles) in the *h:mm:ss* (hour:minutes:seconds) format.

them to take similar action. In addition, in both cases the protagonists' reports are read/watched from a considerable temporal distance, in *retrospect*, at a time when the narrated events are already over.²⁴ Towards the end of both main narratives, the protagonists leave their autobiographical documents behind, assumingly with the idea that their experience shall be read by some later generation and remembered by *posterity*. Given retrospection, the testamentary character of the narrative, its documentation of an experience of another world, and the fact that both stories end with the main character breaking with the present order of things and leaving 'this world' behind, we can say that it is with all probability exactly the process how, and the fact that, this complete rupture 'really' *has* taken place and, hence, *was/is* possible, that is the story's main message and the lesson the authors implicitly wanted their readers/spectators to learn.

Interesting for our comparison are also the focalizers themselves, i.e., the two characters with whom both authors evidently wanted us, the readers/spectators, to identify and whose standpoint we are thus made to take. In both cases they are persons who start their journeys as *victims of the violence* that has become widespread in their respective worlds, both of which are presented as inhumane worlds of war and brutality. In *'Azāzīl*, Hypa becomes an *orphan* and a *monk* because of the first violent clashes between the emerging new Christendom and the representatives of old pagan beliefs;²⁵ in *Avatar*, the hero Jake is a *paraplegic* who received his handicap as a victim of the situation back home on Earth. It is well safe to assume that in making interreligious clashes, quarreling over dogma and the struggle of religious groups for political power the main feature of the narrative space in which the events of *'Azāzīl* unfold, Zaydān not only wanted to describe a situation in a distant historical past but also had the contemporary Middle East in mind.²⁶ In a similar vein, Cameron,

24 *'Azāzīl* has a fictitious editor who, in his *muqaddimah* (p. 9-12) signed "Alexandria, on the 4th of April, 2004", explains that the text that is to follow was found ten years ago, in form of 30 scrolls, hidden in a monastery to the north-west of Aleppo; that its original was written during the first half of the fifth century CE in Syriac; and that he, the editor, found this (auto-) "biography" (*sīrah*, p. 11) worth translating, a task he has been working on all over the past seven years. – *Avatar* does not use exactly the same image; however, as becomes clear from the last shots at the latest, the story is told in retrospect (Jake's voice from the background, commenting the scene towards the end when the humans are sent back to Earth: "The aliens went [past tense!] back to their dying world. [...] The time of great sorrow was [past tense!] ending", 2:26:22-48). Also, on several occasions the spectator is alerted to the fact that Jake is recording his impressions on a video log, and before his final transfiguration into a Na'vi there is a scene (2:27:07 ff.) that starts with Jake (still in his human body), sitting in his wheel chair, talking to the camera (and the spectator) as if to posterity: "Well, I guess this is my last video log. [...] This is Jake Sully signing off." These last sentences that he still speaks as a member of 'this world', so to speak, are addressed to the microphone and camera of the video log (2:27:14-28), the screen showing day and time of the recording, etc. – This parallels Hypa's, the monk's, writing down his memoirs on the scrolls before 'signing off', for his part, in *'Azāzīl* (p. 367). On the first scroll ("*raqq I*"), the author of the memoirs introduces himself to the reader who may find them, as the monk Hypa who recorded his life in them, starting on the 27th of September, 431 AD (p. 14).

25 His father still adhered to the old Egyptian religion (brought sacrifices to the god Khnum) and was therefore murdered by fanaticized proselytes in Upper Egypt when Hypa was a boy of nine years (cf. *'Azāzīl*, p. 42).

26 In Egypt, the public reception of the novel was unfairly dominated by angry Copts who read it as an attempt at falsifying the history of Coptic Christendom and an attack on 'their' patriarch, St. Cyril, cf., among others, S. Schanda, *Literatur der Rebellion* (fn. 3), pp. 135-6. Some of the titles—I am giving those of monograph-length only!—of Coptic rebuttals of the novel may give an impression of the

in his description of the world Jake leaves for Pandora, clearly refers to conditions in the present world. As a matter of fact, interreligious fightings and sectarian power struggles are less important for the Western author than they are for the Arab novelist, and this is why Cameron highlights other aspects of the present, such as the use of gigantic, oversized machines for inhumane ends, be that war on Earth, the colonization of the universe, the subjection of innocent extraterrestrial populations, or the greedy exploitation of Nature. What unites the pictures the two authors draw of the worlds of the prevailing Systems (that would represent the essential feature of the 'antithetical' Actuality component in Figs. 1 and 2 above) is the notion of *modernity*. (Although Zaydān places the events of his novel in a late Hellenistic period, this period 'functions' basically along the rules of modernity, and his characters act and feel as modern man would do.)

It is also worth mentioning that the damages our heroes suffer from modernity, are characterized as mostly psychological in the case of 'Azāzīl while the image of a paraplegic in *Avatar* focuses physical disability. As we shall see later, this difference has a number of important consequences with regard to the type of actions the heroes can perform and with which they can react to the challenges they have to cope with. For the moment, it will suffice to keep in mind that psychological damages, according to Zaydān, are something his hero has to struggle with over decades²⁷ and paralyzes him in many situations that an external observer would have characterized as golden opportunities or chances the hero should have seized, while physical disability, in *Avatar*, does not affect the hero's will and capability to become active: the film imagines an avatar, a new undamaged body, in which a new life can start as soon as Jake's brain is connected to it. In contrast, if we think of the monk's body being almost 'renewed' by the sexual act with Octavia, Hypa still remains paralyzed, unable to follow 'Azāzīl's, the good demon's, advices.

These differences notwithstanding, there is congruency between the novel and the film in a major structural feature, namely the organization of the two narratives as *Bildungsromane* and in the fact that in both of them the processes of inner development and maturation, so typical of the genre, are initiated and made possible through *traveling* away from home. The journeys both protagonists embark on—Alexandria and the Levant in the case of 'Azāzīl, a remote planet in *Avatar*—give the monk as well as the ex-marine the chance to *meet a better world*. As has often been observed, in *Avatar* the planet Pandora

agitated polemical tone of those who felt violated: *al-Radd 'alā 'l-buhtān fī riwāyat Yūsuf Zaydān: Baḥṭh wathā'iqī tārīkhī wa-'aqā'idī li-muwājahat "'Azāzīl"* ("In response to the slandering/false accusations in Y.Z.'s novel: A study based on historical documents and theology, countering 'Azāzīl", 2009, by Bishop Bishōy, secretary of the Coptic church's synode); *Tays 'Azāzīl fī Makkah* ("Azāzīl's goat in Meccah", 2008, by Father Yūtā); *Riwāyat 'Azāzīl: hal hiya jahl bi'l-tārīkh am tazwīr li'l-tārīkh? Raddan 'alā riwāyat 'Azāzīl li'l-duktūr Yūsuf Zaydān* ("The novel 'Azāzīl: ignorance of history or a forging of it? In response to...", [undated, online at <<http://st-takla.org/>>] by 'Abd al-Masīh Basī Abū'l-Khayr); *Shifrat Zaydān – Zeedan Code: Fakk rumūz riwāyat 'Azāzīl li'l-duktūr Yūsuf Zaydān* ("The Zaydān Code: Deciphering the symbols in the novel 'Azāzīl by Y.Z.", 2009, by 'Ādil Girgis Sa'd). – In other Arab countries, where Christian-Muslim relations are less precarious, the readership had no problems with reading the novel as historical allegory about modern religious fanaticism and interreligious clashes.

27 When Hypa arrives at the monastery he is already thirty-five years old, and when he leaves he is forty, which means that twenty years have passed since he started his journey in Alexandria.

clearly is depicted as a kind of *paradise*.²⁸ In *ʿAzāzīl*, this is not paralleled completely, but the grotto at the beach close to Alexandria where Hypa happens to meet Octavia with whom he experiences a period of happiness after all the sufferings he has been through back home in Upper Egypt, a period in which the flow of time is almost suspended, has clearly paradisiacal traits, too,²⁹ and the monastery where he, later on, meets his second great love, Martha, is if not another ‘paradise’ so at least a very idyllic place where Hypa for a long time can find peace of mind.³⁰ It seems therefore that both Cameron and Zaydān aimed at giving those whom they had chosen to be the ‘heroes of our times’—those whom they modeled as mutilated individuals who already had suffered at home, in ‘this world’, so much that they wished to leave these places for another world—the chance to start a new life in another place, detached from the present world and modernity, a place where it is possible to make more positive experiences and come to know, or imagine, a new order of things, a world that is different from the modernity they have grown up in. The choice of the ‘travel’ plot, enabling translocation, and the introduction into the narrative of paradisiacal/idyllic ‘spaces of difference’ can therefore be interpreted as springing from the authors’ wish to help the ‘victims of modernity’ find a way to discover and/or develop alternative ways of life and restructure their worlds. Interestingly enough, the Arab author seems to remain more ‘realistic’ than Cameron in this respect in that he obviously does not feel obliged to recur to a completely utopian topology, but stays on Earth, letting the monk travel in *this* world. Thus, while the better world of Pandora is a typical ‘non-place’ (*utopia* < Greek *ou* ‘not’ + *tópos* ‘place’), Zaydān’s little paradises/idylls can still be located on a map of the Middle East. On the other hand, the spatial remoteness at least of the Nestorian monastery in Syria almost gives this place the quality of an isolated island, and *temporal distance* to/from the present is even bigger in *ʿAzāzīl* (some fifteen centuries ago) than in *Avatar* (145 years ahead), which makes both places almost equally ‘fantastic’, and the novel’s grotto and monastery in this way become as unreachable as the film’s beautiful forests. (By way of analogy we could therefore look at Zaydān’s resorting to historical fiction in

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- 28 This has already been remarked by several observers, cf., e.g., the following statements: “Avatar is Paradise Lost. It is the longing for an earth before the discovery of agriculture some ten thousand years ago, the inexorable rise to seven billion people and the brink of environmental apocalypse” (JennyPeacock, “Pandora’s Pagan Paradise?”, «enfolding.org», 11 Jan. 2010, <<http://enfolding.org/pandoras-pagan-paradise-spoiler-alert-avatar-review/>>), “Although direct biblical references are rare, on the structural level, the narrative plays with set pieces from the paradise story” (Florian Jeserich, “Spirituality as Anti-Structure in James Cameron’s *Avatar*”, *Journal of Religion and Film [JR & F]* 14/1, April 2010, § [3], <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol14no1/Reviews/Jeserich_Avatar.html>), “Pandora, a paradise planet of superb transcendental beauty” (Renee Dunlop on *CGSociety* :: *Production Focus*, 14 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.cgsociety.org/index.php/CGSFeatures/CGSFeatureSpecial/avatar>>), “What made Avatar special was that [...] we could encounter this world [...]. The movie awakened in many the longing for a paradise. I believe this longing is rooted in the Genesis account of creation. Man had a paradise but it was lost through a great tragedy” (Patrick Zukeran, “Avatar and the Longing for Eden”, [n.d.], <http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.6094815/k.2270/Avatar_and_the_Longing_for_Eden.htm>), all last accessed on Feb. 04, 2014.
- 29 In retrospect, Hypa once even calls it “Octavia’s paradise” (*jannah*, p. 126). Cf. also the descriptions of the place where Hypa and Octavia meet, in a language reminding of the marvels of *1001 Nights*.
- 30 The monastery is described as being located somewhere “between heaven and earth” (*ʿinda ʿl-tiqāʿ al-ard biʿl-samāʿ*, p. 193).

order to sketch a utopia as just another possible variant of utopian *science fiction*³¹ while Cameron rather stuck to a 'classical' form of the genre, locating the events some time in the future, thousands of light-years away from Earth.)

Although having suffered severe injuries from the prevailing order in the world, both heroes are, at the outset, still part of their respective Systems. While Hypa is a victim of Christendom, he becomes a monk. He prefers to remain faithful to his monkdomeven after having been offered a life in peace and happiness by, and at the side of, Octavia. And although Jake Sully has been disabled by the logic of war on Earth, he has still remained a marine in his heart, a fact that makes him prefer, for a certain while after his arrival on Pandora at least, loyalty towards the military-like security forces under Quaritch over allegiance to Dr. Grace Augustine and her team, despite of the fact that this latter group stands for a much more peaceful, non-violent approach to the new world of Pandora, an approach that is eager to understand the marvelous secrets of nature on the planet and pays full respect to the Na'vi and their society, their customs, manners, and ethical values.³² He keeps reporting to the Colonel even after having fallen in love with Neytiri. Yet, both heroes are shown to have preserved deep inside themselves what actually is the main driving force of their search for a new life and an essential precondition for its very possibility: the 'strong heart'³³ or the 'pure spirit',³⁴ as it is called in *Avatar*, to which in 'Azāzīl corresponds Hypa's good demon, the voice of the unadulterated, authentic, natural and totally human part of his self.

What is most interesting in this respect, and I think also highly significant, is the fact that both texts, independent from each other, come with almost mystical or mysterious images for what in the componential structure is the main driving force of the events and therefore has the 'impulse' on its side (cf. Figs. 1 & 2 above). While Zaydān created the little *jinn*, or *shayṭān*, 'Azāzīl who is always whispering in Hypa's ears, Cameron expresses

31 If we allow for a wider definition of 'science fiction' then historical fiction may well count among the sub-genres of this category—and particularly so in cases like that of 'Azāzīl where the 'effect of reality' (R. Barthes) is enforced not only by the choice of a diary as the medium through which the reader learns about 'history', but where we also have a scientist-like fictional editor who claims that the monk's diary was discovered only recently during archeological excavations, that he himself translated it from Syriac into Arabic, and who supplements his 'edition-translation' by attaching some photographs ("Mulḥaq al-ṣuwar", pp. 369-80): "The remains of (what may have been) Hypa's house in his home country", p. 371; "The remains of the theatre where Hypa followed Hypatia's lectures", p. 376; "The archeological ruins to the northwest of Aleppo (where the scrolls were found)", p. 378; "The ruins of the monastery, as they look today", p. 380.

32 Quaritch asks Jake to spy out for him on the Nav'i: "Look, Sully. I want you to learn these savages from the inside. I want you to gain their trust. [...] Can you do that for me, son?", and Jake answers: "Hell, yeah, sir" although he is pretty aware of the fact that this implies abusing his position within the group of researchers led by Grace (0:21:45-22:10) and, of course, the trust the indigenous Nav'i set in him.

33 In reply to Jake's question why Neytiri saved him from being killed by an attacking forest animal, she thinks a bit, then says, meaningfully: "You have a strong heart" (0:37:46).

34 In a highly 'magical' scene at night (0:38:54 ff.), Jake is suddenly surrounded, and for a moment covered, by hundreds of beautifully white seeds of the Sacred Tree (as Neytiri tells him, 0:39:41), coming down from the air. These "very pure spirits", as Neytiri further characterizes them, are a sign from Eywa, the Nature deity, that tells Neytiri that Jake is being accepted by the latter on account of his pure nature.

the secret power of Jake's pure and 'strong heart' in an even more magical, almost miraculous way: Right in the beginning, when Neytiri is about to kill the naive intruder Jake, a "sign from Eywa" (the natives' Nature deity) flies in from above, and the white, jelly-fish- or dandelion-like seed sits on the arrow that she is just aiming at Jake and thus tells her that Jake is a creature whose life the divine powers consider worth to be saved. Interestingly enough, the Deity who in this way conveys a kind of secret blessing on the representative of modern injured mankind, is not a *metaphysical* authority but forms part of the physical world: it is Nature.³⁵ Zaydān is less mystical here, but his choice of the demon could be read, in its turn, as stemming from the wish to find a representation of the forces he has in mind that combines mystical marvel with a chthonic notion. Furthermore, he too makes clear that the hero has the blessing of a Deity that is less transcendental and more open to a natural rationalist characterisation than that of the fundamentalist Christian groups.³⁶

The next major 'function' in the plots of the two texts are the *learning processes* that the pure, but also naïve and ignorant³⁷ protagonists undergo when they meet the world away from their homes. Exactly like the monk's 'pure soul' in *'Azāzīl*, Jake-the-marine's 'pure soul', too, starts to absorb heavy loads of new *knowledge* as well as to make many highly *emotional* experiences: In the same way as Hypa listens to Hypatia's lectures on philosophy and later to Nestorius's wise teachings and advices, Jake learns everything about life and nature on Pandora from two mentor figures, Grace and Neytiri, and just as the monk unites, sexually, with the representatives of the better world (Octavia, Martha), the paraplegic Jake (in his avatar) becomes Neytiri's mate. As in *'Azāzīl*, so also in *Avatar*, there is a strong element of *Nature* which the new physical and emotional experiences are embedded in and thus also form part of. In *Avatar*, this becomes very explicit already in the beginning when Jake for the first time tries out his new Na'vi body: there is a scene in which the disabled man, for the first time standing on his legs again, in his Na'vi avatar, re-connects to the soil and in this way begins to feel himself, *his* self, again (when Jake, overwhelmed by feeling his new body, begins to run away from the laboratory, the camera slowly zooms on the avatar's legs and, when he stops, focuses his feet digging themselves into the Pandoran soil, the toes pleasurably enjoying the brown crumbs running through them),³⁸ and also later, when they start to explore Pandora, Jake cannot but gaze in awe-stricken silence when he sees, e.g., the Hanging Mountains³⁹ or the magic beauty of a night

35 For 'pantheism' in *Avatar*, see shortly below.

36 Larger parts of *'Azāzīl* are devoted to the discussion of the decisive question of the period, i.e., that of the nature of Christ. Was he purely God himself, or did he have both a divine *and* a human nature? And, depending on the answer to this question, should his mother, Mary, be called *theotókos* (God-bearer, Birth-giver of God) or rather just *christotókos* (Christ-bearer, Birth-giver of Christ)? The novel is clearly in favour of the latter, the less orthodox (Nestorian) view which emerges as the more plausible, more 'natural' view but, unfortunately, is condemned as heresy at the Council of Ephesus.

37 Neytiri to Jake: "You're like a baby. Making noise, don't know what to do" (*Avatar*, 0:37:21), "[You're] stupid! Ignorant like a child" (0:37:56).

38 *Avatar*, 0:18:01-03.

39 Helicopter flight to the outpost through the mountains 0:52:49-ca.54:00, Jake and colleague gazing in excitement 0:53:30 ff. ("Oh, my God", 0:53:38; pilot: "You should see your faces", 0:53:50). – Cf. also the extensive first ride on the dragon-like *ikran* from the point when Jake starts to control the 'bird' (1:09:10-10:35, 1:11:00-42).

on Pandora.⁴⁰ (The beauty of the place where the monk Hypa first meets Octavia is a clear parallel in 'Azāzīl to the descriptions of paradise-like nature on Pandora).

As is to be expected in a *Bildungsroman*, nature in both texts has also a rationalist, here: specifically *scientific aspect*. Its magic and beauty are something that can be explored and 'proven' scientifically. In 'Azāzīl, the laws of Nature are explained with the help of rationalist philosophy, as 'incarnated', first and foremost, by Hypatia. As a consequence, it is also the more natural, Nestorian theology that is favoured throughout the novel as the more beautiful, more intriguing one, as opposed to a literal, dogmatic, less convincing and therefore less aesthetically appealing interpretation of theological questions like the nature of Christ. A crucial question for the monk is also the compatibility of religious belief and dogma on the one hand, and his interest in, and wish to practice, medicine. In *Avatar*, the mysteries of nature are being studied by the group of researchers led by Dr. Grace Augustine, and there are a number of scenes that demonstrate to the spectator that although Nature on Pandora is different from nature on Earth, it still has its rules and laws; those aspects that the team already understands even show that Nature on the planet is by far superior to that back home.⁴¹ The compatibility, underlined by both texts, of the rules of the better world, however mystical and based on pure, authentic love it may be (see below), with the laws of logic is a further interesting point of overlapping between the products of the creative imagination of a Western and an Egyptian author. I am inclined to explain this feature as a remainder of modernist thinking: How critical of modernity Zaydān and Cameron ever may be, they did not want to give up rationalism completely for a world that may be a better world but cannot be understood any longer. The ideal seems to be a *rationalized* or at least *explainable* paradise.

In both texts, the knowledge about the alternative ways of life, and thus possible ways out of the crisis of modern man, clearly fulfils a function that corresponds to that of the 'magical agent' in the Russian fairy-tales analysed by Vladimir Propp. (Perhaps it is not much surprising, then, that both authors endow this knowledge with the quasi-mystical notions mentioned above.) Equally interesting as the fact that in both texts the variable of the 'magical agent' consists in the physical and intellectual experiences just described, is the identity of those who convey these gifts to our heroes, i.e., Propp's function/role of the Donor. It is noteworthy, from a gender perspective, that in *Avatar* all, in 'Azāzīl most of the Donors, i.e., those who enable the hero to resist the adversary and find a kind of solution to the situation caused by the Villain, are beautiful women.⁴² While the younger women main-

40 00:35:40-36:00.

41 Cf., among others, the scene (00:25:25 ff.) in which Grace inserts a needle-formed sensor into a vein-like root on the ground in order to scan it, whereupon the screen of her measuring instrument displays a kind of roentgenogram that shows all kinds of activity. Member of team: "Wow! It's that fast?" – Grace: "Amazing, isn't it?" – Team member: "Yeah!" – Grace: "So, that is signal transduction from this root to the root of the tree next to it. [...] You know, it's probably electrical, based on the speed of the reaction."

42 In *Avatar*, the name "Grace" seems to be chosen to underline the 'grace' it means for Jake "Sully", i.e., a representative of those who 'sully' Paradise, to get introduced to the secrets of "Pandora" (from Greek *pân* 'all', and *dōron* 'gift', thus the "all-gifted" or "all-giving"). Thus, the positive character as a donor of the 'magical agents' is not only underlined by attributing physical beauty to the respective women, but also with the help of such linguistic devices. Furthermore, in 'Azāzīl, Octavia and, even more so, Martha are described as veritable luminous figures. Cf., for instance, the scene when Martha enters the

ly exercise the function of Donors of *physical* pleasure (Octavia and Martha in *ʿAzāzīl*, Neytiri in *Avatar*), the older ones take the part of Donors of the *intellectual* ‘magical potions’ (Hypatia in *ʿAzāzīl*,⁴³ Dr. Grace Augustine in *Avatar*⁴⁴). It is only in *ʿAzāzīl* that the role of a conveyor of the intellectual agent is assigned also to a man, the task/role being divided among Hypatia and, later, Nestorius.

In a *Bildungsroman*, the inner development of the protagonist can be expected to constitute the main body of the narrative. Having classified the two texts under discussion as typical *Bildungsromane* it is perhaps not surprising to find that at least two thirds or three quarters of *Avatar* and *ʿAzāzīl* are devoted to the maturation and self-finding of the protagonist. This is noteworthy in itself because it is very telling with regard to the way two contemporary authors—one from the West, the other from an Arab country—view the position of man in the world of today: according to both, the most important thing for the individual in this world evidently is to *learn*, to go through this long process of *maturation* and *self-finding*. In accordance with the central importance that is assigned to the passages and transitions this involves, both works also deliberately mark the changes of their heroes’ identities *symbolically*. In *ʿAzāzīl*, the monk literally becomes ‘half of Hypatia’ by calling himself ‘Hypa’⁴⁵ (after she has been killed by the fundamentalist mob), significantly in an act of self-baptising, in this way partly abandoning his Christian identity and assuming that of the ‘pagan’ philosopher. In *Avatar*, Jake not only acts in a Na’vi body from the very beginning (the text thus assigning to him *two* ‘natures’, one human and one Na’vi-to-be, already shortly after his arrival in the new world), he also undergoes a number of *rites de passage*. For instance, it does not take long until he becomes a Na’vi ‘warrior’ after having learned to ride an endemic type of ‘horse’ (which implies also learning to link his mind to the animal’s mind and in this way controlling and piloting it, a ‘technique’ that connects him to Nature and the world of Pandora even more—via this neural connection he somehow unites with the creature). Then comes the time when he has learned enough about Pandora, the Na’vi people and their values in order to meet the next challenge and pass the next ‘exam’, or rite, that is necessary to complete his instruction: the taming and flying of a dragon-like *ikran* (again by connecting his neural system to that of the beast). Later in the film, he even subdues *Toruk*, the mightiest and most dangerous of all *ikrans*, to his will, which secures him uncontested respect as a great leader among the Na’vi.⁴⁶ Since in an earlier scene Neytiri had explained to Jake that power over *Toruk* is only granted to very exceptional Na’vi and that this for the last time happened only very long ago to Neytiri’s great-great-

library where Hypa is studying a treatise by Galenus: “I saw her standing under the door, surrounded by the light that came from behind her. She was like a *ḥūrī* who had come down to earth, dressed in the heavenly light, in order to bring peace to us [...]” (p. 290).

43 Hypatia is described as a woman of about forty years (*ʿAzāzīl*, p. 135). While Martha is “around twenty years old” (p. 272), Octavia is said to be a widow of twenty-eight (p. 90). Seemingly corresponding to her age somewhere *between* Martha and Hypatia, she grants Hypa not only sexual pleasure but is also well-read and an admirer of Hypatia who is able to engage in religio-philosophical discussions with Hypa.

44 In *Avatar*, however, also Neytiri takes on the role of Jake’s teacher and spiritual mentor.

45 *ʿAzāzīl*, p. 165.

46 *Avatar*, 1:51:15ff.

grandfather,⁴⁷ it is clear to the spectator that Jake's mastering of Toruk is tantamount to his becoming part of Na'vi mythology—a very powerful symbol of his new identity.

Another important aspect of congruency connected to the process of maturation that both authors obviously consider to be a key necessary experience for modern man can be seen in the fact that the periods of *bad conscience and doubts* that the monk Hypa lives through in 'Azāzīl are paralleled in *Avatar* by the loyalty conflicts the marine undergoes. 'What the hell are you doing, Jake?' the latter asks himself immediately after he and Neytiri have 'chosen' (declared love to) each other and had sex for the first time.⁴⁸ He has a bad conscience because he is betraying the two parties he feels he has to be loyal towards: in siding with the Na'vi he betrays the Commander for whom he has agreed to spy on the Pandora natives; on the other side, he is unfaithful towards his beloved, Neytiri, and the Na'vi who are giving him the chance to becoming one of them,⁴⁹ because he has not yet told her and them about his essentially being an undercover agent. Jake's feelings here correspond exactly to those the monk Hypa has, on the one hand, vis-à-vis his religion when he has sex with Octavia in the beautiful grotto, and, on the other hand, vis-à-vis Octavia herself because he does not tell her about his being a monk and therefore cannot marry her (she thinks he is the one whom she has been waiting for for quite a long time) (cf., e.g., *raqq* 6, pp. 115-23, then also 126 ff., or 195, the latter with a comparison of his disloyalty towards Octavia and Hypatia with St. Peter's denial of Jesus⁵⁰!). And his crisis is again augmented after having remained a passive bystander when Hypatia was murdered and Octavia, having courageously tried to intervene and come to her assistance, found her death, too ("Why was I too coward to come to Hypatia's rescue when she reached her arm out for me? Octavia tried to protect her and prayed to Serapis, the god of Alexandria, for help and therefore ended as a corpse thrown away at the margins of the street, covered with her own blood. [... Hypatia cried for help], but I did not rescue [her] from the hands of my brothers in religion", p. 160-61). From the conspicuous parallelism of this type of crisis of conscience we may, of course, infer that both authors consider the loyalty conflicts they make their heroes undergo to be a crucial step in the process of maturation of modern man on his way to a better world. Given that this world is imagined as a negation of, or opposition to, modernity, it is safe to say that it is also a *postmodern* world. The difference, however, between earlier productions that also were labeled 'postmodern', productions from the 1980s and 1990s, is that the reader is not just made to discover, with the help of another look at reality, that things may not be as terrible as they used to be but also can grant some pleasure;⁵¹ rather, we are presented here with the existence of whole other, alternative

47 *Avatar*, 1:13:58.

48 *Avatar*, 1:21:10.

49 There is a scene (*Avatar*, 1:17:36 ff.), after the *ikran*-taming, in which Jake is officially declared to be now "a son of the Omaticaya" (= Na'vi) and "part of The People", gets the blessing of Neytiri's mother, their spiritual leader, and then is formally initiated into their community in a ceremony in which all its members interconnect—everybody puts his/her arms on the shoulders of one's neighbour—and Jake becomes the centre of a huge spider net-like organic web (*Avatar*, 1:18:05).

50 Cf. the Gospel of Marc 14: 29-31.

51 Cf. my "Individuality Lost, Fun Gained: Some Recurrent Motifs in Late Twentieth-Century Arabic and Turkish Novels", *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 7 (2007) [published Feb. 2008]: 25-49, accessible online: <http://www.hf.uio.no/jais/volume/docs/vol7/v7_2_Guth.pdf>.

worlds that are essentially better than the one we are living in now. The existence of such worlds, i.e., of alternatives to modernity, is not just something that first of all has to be discovered and whose discovery comes as a kind of surprise (as in earlier texts from the post-2000 period: cf., e.g., the tiny little ‘cell of love and human dignity’ represented by the couple Zakī Bek and Buthayna at the very end of *‘Imārat Ya‘qūbiyān*). By contrast, in *‘Azāzīl* and *Avatar* the alternative worlds are shown to exist from a very early moment on (the grotto at the beach and the monastery in Zaydān’s novel), or even from the very beginning (Pandora in Cameron’s film), and while the hero’s (modern man’s) task still is to discover these worlds, it is rather the discovery *from within*, in detail, of something the existence of which can already be taken for granted. The heroes of *‘Azāzīl* and *Avatar* are rather explorers of the new worlds than their initial discoverers, their main actions do not consist in the finding of new solutions (after crisis), but in learning to accept solutions that already exist and, in theory, are known. The *Bildungsroman* structure and, with it, the texts’ focus on learning, experimenting, going through experiences, and thereby slowly maturing means a focus on the process that enables the protagonists to eventually adopt these solutions against the opposition of the old dated systems (i.e., modernity) from which the heroes come, as whose members they start out, and to which they remained tied, for quite a while, through ‘pacts of allegiance’ inherited from the logic of the old order. Taking this difference into account, we may say that *‘Azāzīl* and *Avatar* already display a clearer vision of the new goals that can/should be achieved as well as of the challenges that will have to be mastered in order to do so, a clearer vision than the one we come across in earlier texts, from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, in which alternative visions only flashed up towards the end, briefly and rather vaguely, and, given the power of the systems in place, often appeared rather surprisingly (although the authors were eager to mark them as possible way-outs of the current dilemmas).⁵²

Assigning most of the text to the maturation process also seems to be, for both authors, a device to let their heroes enjoy, again and again, the pleasures that a decision to adopt ‘the other way’ might offer. As we have seen above, the respective scenes also serve to underline the message that the alternative way of life actually is the more *natural*, more *authentic* one. But another, and perhaps equally or even more important, function of this is to demonstrate the degree of fun, pleasure and fulfilment, and the peace of mind a transition from the old system to the new one is likely to bring about.⁵³ Zaydān has been accused of indulging all too much in the description of the sexual pleasures the monk Hypa experiences with

52 Component Analysis distinguishes three main phases of a period: a) *Markierungsphase*, b) *Visualisierungsphase*, and c) *Konkretisierungsphase*, cf. Walter Falk, *Handbuch der literarwissenschaftlichen Komponentenanalyse: Theorie, Operationen, Praxis einer Methode der neuen Epochenforschung*, Frankfurt/M. [etc.]: Peter Lang, 1983: 184-189. According to this model, the earlier texts can easily be read as belonging to the initial stage of the new period in which a change in the way of experiencing the world is recognized and somehow marked as new, while *‘Azāzīl* and even more so *Avatar* clearly have reached the next level, i.e., that of a *Visualisierungsphase* in which new visions use to take a more concrete and detailed shape.

53 It is clear that Zaydān here is continuing a development in modern Arabic literature that seems to have gained momentum with postmodernism and the writings of the ‘generation of the ’90s’. The phenomenon was specifically addressed by the 9th EURAMAL conference (Rome, June 2010) the proceedings of which are about to appear under the title *Desire, Pleasure and the Taboo...* (see above, fn. 3 and 10); cf. also my “Individuality Lost, Fun Gained” (see above, fn. 51).

Octavia and Martha. These are however only one, though of course a very important, aspect of the advantages the alternative way of life can offer. Equally important are the atmosphere of silence and peace of mind which both texts describe in long passages. It is as if the authors not only wished to give their heroes (and, of course, the reader) the opportunity to gather some information and enlighten them about the alternative way of life but also to grant them enough time to make themselves *truly* acquainted with it and to test it out *in some detail*.⁵⁴ This is why Zaydān not only describes 'exceptional' sexual pleasures but also lets the reader get insight into the monk's everyday life over a number of pages, and this is why he lets him practise the profession of a doctor for quite a while in the monastery,⁵⁵ for the benefit of the people. Cameron, in his turn, lets Jake Sully experience everyday life among the Na'vi, too, and he too lets his hero act for a while in a newly acquired profession—as a warrior, in this case—for the benefit of the inhabitants of the New World.

The function (in the Propp'ian sense) of 'Hero acting as a useful member of the New Community/Society' is however filled in a considerably less modest way by Cameron than by Zaydān. While the Egyptian writer always lets his hero doubt in his own capacity and remain most humble and pacifist, the Western film director immediately makes his protagonist the saviour of the better world from being destroyed by the Old System. This can be read, and actually has been read, as an indication of, once again, Western arrogance, a late echo of the imperialist ideology of the white man's duty to intervene for the benefit of the colonized⁵⁶ (a substantial change of course being the fact that in *Avatar* the Western hero rescues the colonized from his own fellow Westerners and helps the civilisation of the victims to gain the upper hand and expel the intruders). Be that as it may, what can be said without judging this turn of Cameron's plot as morally unacceptable is however the fact that his hero is much more proactive and confident in himself than Zaydān's monk. Although the attack of the Old System, i.e., one of the last major functions in both narratives, is imagined with almost the same degree of brutality by both authors—the villain(s), obsessed with their own selfish ideology and determined to take what they lust for, start to destroy the weak, though better, 'enemy', and leave a swath of devastation behind them wherever they turn⁵⁷—, the possibilities and reactions of the protagonists are shown to be rather different. Quite significantly, the Middle Eastern author creates a hero who feels powerless against the fanaticism, injustice and violence of his time and sees no other way to survive than to flee, leave his little paradise to the greedy mob, instigated and infuriated by scrupulous fundamentalist potentates, and search for another, better world somewhere else. Translating this into post-2000 Middle East realities, it can hardly be read other than as a desperate statement of hopelessness and powerlessness of modern Middle Easterners (and perhaps intellectuals in particular) vis-à-vis the contemporary situation: under the present

54 This is another point that supports my reading of both texts as belonging to a *Visualisierungsphase*, see note 52.

55 First mentioning of Hypa's agency as a healer: p. 202-03.

56 Cf. Rudyard Kipling's poem *The White Man's Burden* of 1899.

57 Cf., in *Avatar*, the airraid on, and destruction of, the Na'vi Hometree, the very centre of their civilisation, for the sake of mining "unobtainium", the precious mineral whose major occurrence is known to lie exactly under this tree, and in *'Azāzīl* the reports reaching the monastery about the advance of the anti-Nestorian forces, raiding the country, destroying non-'orthodox' sites and slaughtering 'pagans' as well as 'heretics'.

circumstances, the only ‘solution’ seems to be to leave the country. In contrast, in a Western author, these feelings obviously have not (yet?) gained the upper hand, although the effort needed to stop ongoing injustice and bring about change is shown to be enormous and only to be achieved by a veritable hero. This may be due to cultural differences, e.g., the Western individual’s belief in his/her own possibilities, as against, perhaps, a more ‘fatalist’ tradition in the Middle East; the Western citizen’s belief in the ‘changeability’ of political systems, particularly after the fall of the Iron Curtain as a result of broad grassroots movements, as opposed to the uninterrupted tradition of authoritarian, and often despotic, rule in the Arab countries); the self-confidence and belief in one’s own strength of a member of a Western society that can count itself among the world’s Great Powers, as opposed to a long tradition, from the beginning decline of the Ottoman Empire through colonialism and imperialism right up to the present day, of experiencing oneself as inferior and subject, in spite of oneself, to the aspirations, arbitrariness, violence, exploitation, and/or tyranny of others; finally, and more specifically, the difference may of course also be due to Cameron’s being American, i.e., a citizen of *the* modern superpower, grown up in a society that has a tradition of making what seems to be impossible come true and that cultivates individual heroism probably more than any other country in the world, while an Egyptian would have to go back in history to the time of the pharaohs in order to find his country among the world’s superpowers.

Given a different character disposition of the Eastern and the Western representatives of the victims of modernity, and, as we have seen above, also a different kind of paralysis—psychological in the case of Hypa, physical in Jake’s—the kinds of Combat (as a Proppian function) that the two have to fight, and in which both stories also culminate, must differ from each other. In *Avatar*, the Crisis is imagined as a typical military combat in which the ‘good guys’—Jake and the Na’vi—have to stand the attack of the ‘bad guys’—Quaritch and his army. In contrast, Hypa’s crisis is shown to result less from the attack of the exterior enemy than from the turmoil inside himself, a consequence of his long-standing psychological paralysis. In both texts, however, the powerful old systems threaten the new ‘paradises’—the Nestorian monastery and the world of Pandora, respectively—and with them the protagonists’ new identity in the newly discovered niche of a more natural and humane existence, the anti-Nestorian mobs corresponding to the anti-Pandorian war machinery. The battles that follow this threat are imagined as a big showdown in *Avatar*, with Jake’s smartness outplaying the aggressor’s military superiority and (with the help of Pandora’s wildlife, i.e., Nature/the Deity!) eventually defeating them, culminating in a man-to-man duel between the hero and the main villain in which Jake is saved, at the last minute, by a deadly arrow from Neytiri’s bow, precisely placed into Quaritch’s heart. In *‘Azāzīl* we have a dramatic escalation too, but this is realized completely differently, though equally life-threatening: Hypa falls into a deep coma-like sleep, with heavy attacks of fever, a symptom of a severe, and crucial, inner crisis.⁵⁸

In both narratives, however, the crisis triggers the decision to completely give up all previous loyalty and attachment to the old system and go over to the other side. After the crisis is overcome in *‘Azāzīl*, and the battle won in *Avatar*, the plots end with scenes that imagine a new beginning in a utopian place: While the last sentence in *‘Azāzīl* is “*thumma*

58 *‘Azāzīl*, *raqq* 27-28, cf. especially pp. 341-49.

ʔarḥalu, maʕa shurūqi ʿl-shamsi, ḥurran...”⁵⁹ (And then, at sunrise, I will set off, as a free man, + three dots!), and the reader is left with the idea that Hypa followed Martha and they tried to start a new life somewhere, perhaps back in Upper Egypt, Jake’s transformation into a new identity, realized as a marvelous transfiguration, a transition, irreversible this time, of his soul from his human body into that of a Na’vi, completes his integration into the new Pandora community. The very last screen shot—the newborn Na’vi Jake opening his eyes and thus starting into a new life⁶⁰—which can be considered to be a (Propp’ian) function in its own right and is perhaps best to be labelled ‘New Beginning’, resembles in its brevity and essential openness exactly the three dots with which *ʿAzāzīl* closes this chapter and at the same time opens for a new one—a last impressive parallel between two narratives that, despite their origin in different regions of this world, display very similar basic structures and in this way testify to a *global* tendency towards rebellion against the way things used to be until now, i.e., a desire to rebel against a dated politico-ideological, socio-economic, and religious order and its moral codes.

In conclusion, it might be helpful to summarize the findings of my analysis in a table that juxtaposes some major functions (certainly not all) of the two texts, trying to identify them with some functions from Propp’s syntagm of a standard Russian fairytale. As will be evident from this overview, both *Avatar* and *ʿAzāzīl* share important features with the genre as analyzed by Propp. But certainly not all. For details of my interpretation and their cultural implications the reader is kindly referred to the main body of the above essay.

⁵⁹ *ʿAzāzīl*, p. 368.

⁶⁰ *Avatar*, 2:28:44.

| Propp ⁶¹ | <i>Avatar</i> | ' <i>Azāzīl</i> |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Preliminary story</i> | | |
| <i>Villainy</i> Villain causes harm/injury to family member. | Jake is wounded, disabled in a war back home, on Earth (violence, destruction, war, exploitation) | Hypa's father murdered by Christian mob, Hypa psychologically damaged, becomes a monk |
| <i>Beginning counter-action</i> Seeker agrees to, or decides upon counter-action. The hero now decides to act in a way that will resolve the lack | Jake decides to try his luck somewhere else, seize the opportunity offered to him to replace his dead brother on a remote planet | Hypa decides to search knowledge (with the hope of finding solutions to his questions) out there in the world |
| <i>Departure</i> Hero leaves home. | Jake travels to Pandora. | Hypa sets off for Alexandria. |
| <i>Main story</i> | | |
| <i>First function of the donor</i> Hero is tested, interrogated, attacked etc., preparing the way for his/her receiving magical agent or helper (donor) | Jake is left alone at night in the Pandoran forest. Neytiri observes how ignorant he behaves and is about to shoot him. | Hypa meets Octavia. She surprises him with her readiness to give herself completely to him. |
| <i>Hero's reaction</i> Hero reacts to actions of future donor (withstands/fails the test, frees captive, reconciles disputants, performs service, uses adversary's powers against him) | Although Jake behaves "like a baby", his "strong heart" is recognized by Pandoran nature (a "sign from Eywa") and acknowledged by Neytiri. | Hypa lets Octavia seduce him, opens up for the unconditional love she wants to grant to him. |
| <i>Receipt of a magical agent</i> Hero acquires use of a magical agent | Jake is given the chance to learn everything about Pandora | Hypa experiences love and sexual pleasure. |

61 Titles of Proppian functions and explanations selectively taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Propp> (02 Feb 2014) for reference.

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| <p>Complicity Victim taken in by deception, unwittingly helping the enemy. The trickery of the villain now works and the hero or victim naively acts in a way that helps the villain.</p> | <p>Jake remains a marine, loyal to the System, starts out as a spy for Quaritch.</p> | <p>Hypa remains a Christian monk, loyal to Christianity</p> |
| <p><i>The sequence Meeting a donor → Hero's reaction → Receipt of magical agent → Complicity is repeated several times, with some elements often being woven into each other (e.g., Hero's reaction and Complicity) and thus having double functionality. The sequence constitutes the essence of the heroes' learning and maturation processes.</i></p> | | |
| <p>Meetings with donors & Receipt of intellectual magical agents</p> | <p>Jake receives instruction from Grace and Neytiri on scientific and religio-philosophical matters (pantheism) and learns to understand Pandora, its nature, wildlife, society, history.</p> | <p>Hypa listens to Hypatia's lectures, studies medicine, gets acquainted with rationalist interpretations of religion (Nestorius).</p> |
| <p>Meetings with donors of emotional 'magical agents'</p> | <p>Jake mates Neytiri. Jake connects to Pandoran nature, begins to "see" the world of Pandora</p> | <p>Hypa experiences Octavia's and Martha's love (and bodies) and the fatherly friendship of Nestorius</p> |
| <p>Hero's reaction & Complicity / Betrayal</p> | <p>Jake masters all rites of passage and becomes a veritable Na'vi. For a long time he conceals his identity as a spy.</p> | <p>Hypa learns a lot, intellectually and emotionally. For many decades he remains loyal to Christianity.</p> |
| <p>Hero's reaction & Transfiguration Hero is given a new appearance (is made whole, handsome, new garments etc.)</p> | <p><i>As is typical of the Bildungsroman genre with its focus on the steps by which the heroes advance and become more mature, the successful appropriation of the 'magical agent' of knowledge about the alternative world and way of life and, hence a (partial) change of identity, is often marked symbolically.</i></p> <p>Jake becomes a Na'vi 'warrior', chooses and tames an <i>ikran</i>, is officially initiated into Na'vi society. Eventually, he even masters Toruk and acts as the native population's leader.</p> | <p>The young monk changes his original name into 'Hypa'.</p> |
| <p>Trial</p> | <p><i>This is only a specific variant of the Hero's reaction. In both texts, it takes the form of a loyalty conflict, accompanied with heavy doubts and a bad conscience.</i></p> | |

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|---|---|--|
| | Jake feels he is unfaithful towards Neytiri <i>and</i> to Quaritch. | Hypa is torn between loyalty to his faith and towards Octavia, Hypatia, Martha. |
| <i>Struggle</i> Hero and villain join in direct combat. | <i>The culmination in both texts starts with an escalation that challenges the heroes' making use of the 'magic agent' (their knowledge of, and about, an alternative better world) and their final rupture with the System. The representatives of the old System threaten (in an inhumane, cruel, brutal attack) the better world and the progresses the heroes have made so far.</i> | |
| <i>Escalation & challenge</i> | 'Paradise' Pandora threatened by war machinery. Jake's new identity at stake. | Liberal Nestorian monastery threatened by fanatized fundamentalist mob steadily advancing. Hypa's new identity threatened. |
| <i>Hero's beginning counter-action</i> | Jake gathers the Pandoran forces and prepares defense. | Hypa begins to prepare to leave, starts recording his life. |
| <i>Direct combat</i> | Quaritch's air forces attack. Heavy fighting. Final showdown in duel between Jake and Quaritch. | Hypa is struck down by a severe illness, symptom of his inner crisis (the Old System attacking him from inside). |
| <i>Victory</i> Villain is defeated. | Helped by Pandoran wildlife (and, thus, also the deity), the Na'vi emerge victorious. Neytiri kills the villain Quaritch. | Hypa survives the illness/fever, emerges as though newborn. |
| <i>Liquidation</i> Initial misfortune or lack is resolved. | (implicitly realized:) The intruders from Earth will not get what they were after (the precious 'unobtanium'), the Pandorans in this way getting back the paradise that the humans had begun to usurpe from them. Jake gets his legs back (by going over into the Na'vi body). | Hypa emerges from the fever attack as though he was born anew, being able now to take a conscious decision to start into a new life. |
| <i>Transfiguration</i> Hero is given a new appearance. | Jake leaves his former human body and adopts, once and forev- | (not realized – unless Hypa's emergence as |

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|---|--|---|
| | er, a new shape. | 'newborn' is read as pointing to such a transfiguration) |
| Punishment Villain is punished. | The surviving colonizers are sent back home, expelled from the Pandoran paradise. | (not realized) |
| Wedding Hero marries and ascends the throne (is rewarded/promoted). | <i>Although at the end of both texts the reader/spectator can assume a kind of wedding to take place as soon as the hero and his helper (one of the Donors) will meet again (Jake–Neytiri, Hypa–Martha), the final function in both is less imagined as a getting together of these couples and the hero ascending to the throne than it is envisioned as the dawn of a new era in general in a utopian place.</i> | |
| Departure to utopia / Dawn of a new era | New beginning on Pandora (away from Earth / old system). Jake's soul successfully transferred in a Na'vi body. | Vision of new beginning together with Martha in another place: "And then, at sunrise, I set off, as a free man..." |

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