Identity in Diversity:

The Thousand and One Nights in English

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List of Abbreviations

EI(2)	*The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second edition)
JA	*Journal Asiatique*
JAL	*Journal of Arabic Literature*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*
ZER	Zotenberg's Egyptian Recension

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Thesis Summary

The Thousand and One Nights is a very large family of texts which has rolled like a snowball through many centuries and several cultures. This thesis explores various levels of the diversity of the *Nights*, ranging from the vestiges of its lost past, through the extant and printed Arabic versions, and beyond to the European reception. Each manifestation of the text participates now in what we perceive the text to be. Any given text today is either unsatisfactory and incomplete, or is redolent with the influence of its Arabic or European double and its past versions. The greatest demarcation is between the Arabic and the European texts but increasingly the two must be seen in the light of each other - they influence, renew and redefine each other across the cultural divide.

A significant part of the *Nights* identity is its diversity. The aim of this thesis is to celebrate the diversity of the text through a general look at its textual history and manifestations, and, having established this base, to explore the implications of reading the *Nights* anew, particularly in the light of a compound textual identity and a culturally hybrid nature. The English translations, particularly that of John Payne, are singled out from this diversity as practical samples for the discussion and the readings.

Chapter one introduces some of the general elements of the *Nights* textual history and complexity, and some of the problems this presents for readers past and present.

Chapter two explores the Arabic textual history and its implications in some detail, looking at both the extinct and extant versions. The last section discusses the main printed editions and the conflict generated by their differences.

Chapter three engages with the European appropriation and reception of the *Nights* limiting the discussion to the English translations.

Chapter four focusses on the problems past and present in reading the culturally hybrid text. Both reader stances of the past and the possibilities for readers in the present are explored.

Chapter five is a close reading of the frame tale, discussing in detail past potent misreadings and the effect of an appropriative textual history on the story. The reading offered is intended to criticise readings of the past and to open up the potential of fresh approaches.

Chapter six offers a sample set of text based readings of five tales, divested of preconceived notions of what the *Nights* is or should be.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

I give consent for a copy of my thesis to be deposited in the University Library and to be made available for loan and photocopying.

E. K. Sallis

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Note on Transliteration

The symbols used for the transliteration of Arabic in this thesis are those of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second edition), Volume VIII, with the exception that *dj* has been modernised to *j*, *ḳ* to *q*. The system used aims at clarity: case endings except for an indefinite accusative indicated in the Arabic text have been left off. Verbs, however, are transliterated in full.

In general, words which have a familiar form in English (such as "Caliph") retain that form. However, as exceptions, Qurʾān is transliterated, and "genie" is changed to *jinnī*, *jinniyya*, or *jinn* in order to distinguish the masculine, feminine and plural forms.

"Sheherazade" is spelled in the European way as a reflection of the composite nature of the *Nights* present day identity.

I am very grateful to Professor James E. Montgomery for providing me with Arabic transliteration fonts, and to Dr Samer Akkach and Amal Abou-Hamdan for kindly reading through my transliterations and translations. I am, however, solely responsible for any errors.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the *Nights*

The *Thousand and One Nights* was secular literature, historically not approved by the cultured literary class as literature at all. It existed as a popular entertainment and much of it expresses the desires, wishes and experiences of a middle to lower class urban and mercantile people.[1] It evolved, arguably as a response or reaction to a rigid social and spiritual structure, and satisfies a need similar to that which generates carnival and carnivalesque inversions in popular cultures.[2] However, all of this is what it was, once. What it is now is infinitely more complex because it was reborn into an alien environment in 1704/1116[3], an environment in which its signs were received in a radically different way from their accepted meanings in their culture of birth. Not only were most referents unknown but the signs themselves took on a reference unique to them, a reference to a general system of imaginative perception in which one of the essential components was mystery and a sense of being cut loose from meaning.

When we develop a new approach and apply it to a work of literature, we thereby modify the past, and we change the work itself.[4] The work exists and persists as an identity by some kind of agreement between word and reader, between sign and interpretation. This is a very fluid concept of identity and, with this in mind, it is clear that works of literature change as people and cultures who read them change. This thesis will explore the

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[1]Stories reflect the values, adventures, beliefs and concerns of Muslim traders of the middle ages - even Hārūn al-Rashīd's court is really an imaginary court made up of merchants (al-Qalamāwī 139; Gerhardt, *Story-telling* 190).

[2]Noted by Ferial Ghazoul (*The Arabian Nights* 128), quoting Bakhtin. Asma Agzenay argues that "the 'Thousand and One Nights' was the privileged space of carnivalesque and anti-authoritarian discourses" (227).

[3]Christian and Hegira dates are given throughout with the Hegira date to the right.

[4]An idea explored in detail by T. S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (*The Sacred Wood* 47-59).

Nights with reference to this view of literature, for the *Nights* has a history distinguished by transformation.

This thesis approaches the text with affirmation of its fundamental heterogeneity, for the text comes to us through a multitude of manuscripts, printed editions in Arabic and very diverse translations. Understanding the issues which surround translation is essential. Extraordinary translations such as the early English translations of the *Nights* represent a process of translation which is more accurately called appropriation. Within the framework of this process, the complexities of the reader-text relationship are unusually prominent; the culturally alien reader offers something different from the regular relationship of text and reader. The *Nights* was traditionally read in particular ways and in Europe fostered an indulgence in the experience of the exotic Other and various aspects of Orientalism.[5] The last two chapters of this thesis will be devoted to exploring specific stories of the *Nights* as literature of their own unique genre, bearing in mind their history of transformation and transcultural reinterpretation.

The Arabic text exists in several different versions, was written down at an indeterminate time, was orally transmitted or created over many centuries and bears the mark of many authors and scribes, many ages, many cities and the fictionalised traces of many peoples, ranging from a nomadic pre-islamic world to the mercantile sophisticated world of the great trade and cultural centres.

Its life in Arabic begins around the 8th/2nd centuries, with the translation and appropriation of the Persian *Hazar Afsana*, or thousand

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[5]The term Orientalism is used throughout this thesis with its Said-given loading: it does not merely indicate the discipline of interest in and study of the "Orient", it is also now necessarily representative of the use to which that discipline was and is put (*Orientalism* 2-3). This discipline is founded on the concept of the uninterchangeable observer and observed (Terdiman 29).

legends into Arabic, and the arabisation and rewriting of its stories. The present day *Nights* seems to owe only its frame story to this early Persian collection.[6] By the 9th/3rd century it is likely that there existed a collection in Arabic which followed the frame and form of the *Hazar Afsana* but which contained many stories of Arabic origin and taste. This was called the *Alf layla*, the *Thousand Nights*. It is probable that by the 12th/6th century this collection had been modified and augmented with many Egyptian elements, and had acquired the name of *Alf layla wa-layla*. After this the collection underwent further additions and revisions, picking up tales of heroism, countercrusade and relatively late Turkish or Egyptian stories until the 17th/11th century. It appears that at some time between the 12th/6th and 14th/8th centuries a very substantial portion of the collection was lost and many additions fulfil a need to remake the collection albeit with some more recent stories. The earliest substantial manuscript dates from the 14th/8th century and the earliest fragment, which is of the *Alf layla*, is of the 9th/3rd century. Most manuscripts used for the 19th/13th century printed editions and translations are very late, generally of the 18th/12th century. Most if not all of the information given here is the subject of continuing controversy.

The first two printed editions of real importance of the Arabic *Alf layla wa-layla* containing one thousand and one nights appeared in the 1830s/1250s and these two have competed ever since for the attention of readers and scholars. They are usually called the Bulaq and the Macnaghten, or Calcutta II. A third important variant in Arabic appeared recently, in 1984/1404. This is the Leiden text, Muhsin Mahdi's edition of the 14th/8th century manuscript used initially by Antoine Galland in the first European

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[6] Several stories have Persian elements or origins (*EI* (2) 1. 363). It is not possible, however, to determine when precisely they entered the collection. Sayf al-Mulūk is the only story which is extant in an independent Persian MS (Oestrup 64-65).

translation of 1704-17/1116-29. This text differs substantially from the other two. The relative merits and weaknesses of these three variants are also the subject of controversy.

The history of the *Nights* in English really began with Galland's translation to French starting in 1704/1116. By 1706/1118 Grub Street versions were available in English, and, until Edward Lane's translation of 1839-41/1255-57, translations from Galland's beautiful and very modified appropriation of the tales ran through innumerable editions and generated imitations, variations, extensions, and indeed the vogue of the oriental tale, a precursor of Romanticism (Conant 245-51). This was an unprecedented popularity which endured more than a century. By the time Lane translated the text more carefully he was responding to a different demand, for the exotic East was waning as a literary stimulation. Travel, marginally more knowledge, and progress in many forms had focused popular and scholarly interest on the sociological realism of the *Nights*. Lane's translation more than encouraged this. His work is presented as information for the scholar and gentleman, rather than entertainment for the people in general (largely a product of his annotations). His translation is direct and clear in style, though, very sadly, heavily edited and even bowdlerised, for his intended reader belonged to the polite society of his times.

Not long before Lane, Henry Torrens had begun an unexpurgated *Nights* (published 1838/1254) which was left unfinished and remained uninfluential. From the 1840s/1250s to the 1880s/1300s Lane's limited and serious version competed for attention with the much loved versions of Galland. Then in the 1880s/1300s both Richard Burton and John Payne produced unexpurgated and complete translations of the *Nights* drawn mainly from the Macnaghten edition but supplemented from the Bulaq and other texts. Payne preceded Burton by a couple of years and Burton has been

charged with substantial plagiarism. Both employed a pseudo-archaic style and translated all the poetry. Burton, in particular, delighted in bringing the more erotic or crude passages before his readers. Payne's is the better translation, being slightly easier for the contemporary reader and being the source for a substantial part of Burton's[7] but, owing to undeserved obscurity, it is now extremely rare.

Burton's translation was famous partly because of Burton himself and after the turn of the century interest in the complete English versions, in fact adult interest in general, slowly waned. Burton's is a daunting collection: it is made up of ten volumes of the the *Nights* and six or seven volumes of the *Supplemental Nights*.[8]

In 1899/1317 J. C. Mardrus retranslated into French in an unscholarly fashion and claimed accuracy in dramatic terms, while expanding erotic passages and adding any material he saw fit. This version was taken up by Powys Mathers, who had no Arabic, and translated into English naively endorsing Mardrus' claim to accuracy. Ironically, most people who have read a complete version of the *Nights* have read this misleading translation, for it is readily available.[9]

While there have been good complete translations this century into German and Italian, there have been no further attempts at complete translations into English.

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[7] From volume 2 of his *Nights* onwards, and to volume 3 of the *Supplemental Nights* Burton leans heavily on Payne (Walther, *Tausendundeine Nacht* 49-50).

[8] Usually 6 volumes in the original and 7 in pirated editions.

[9] The English history of the *Nights* summarised here is not exceptional. The outline of the parallel German history runs as follows: Galland in German from 1706/1118, König 1841/1257, Weil 1839-42/1255-58, Henning 1897/1315, Greve (from Burton) 1907/1325, Littmann 1921-28/1339-46. (For a detailed summary of the German translation history see chapter 4 of Wiebke Walther, *Tausendundeine Nacht*.) This last, the first German translation to be based on the Macnaghten text, is perhaps the best translation of a long version of the *Nights* in a European language. It is certainly a vivid and unpretentious text, pleasant to read.

These English translations were influential in an extraordinary and unprecedented way long before they were remotely accurate. Thus one could say that there persists in the European mind a double image: the real text and the memory of its potent bowdlerised versions.[10] This compound identity is enhanced by the fact that translations stem from the several different Arabic versions or, perhaps more accurately, collections and by the unscrupulous additions of translators like Mardrus and Mathers.

The result is a proliferation of texts and a proliferation of images or impressions of the text.[11] Cut loose from its past, the text persists in discrete linguistic entities and seemingly contradictory versions. Although it is not fully accepted as legitimate literature in the East or the West, it has nonetheless been appropriated into a new canon, a canon which includes while it excludes and which, if nothing else, controls this rampant text.

Studying the *Nights* becomes the exploration of variations on an absent theme or a family of texts, rather than the study of any particular one of them, for the immediate implication of having an identity as literature larger than any of its versions is that no version alone is sufficient for study purposes. The real *Nights* is now larger than any of its manifestations, including those in Arabic. The *Nights* can be seen to have a cross-cultural history and identity which impels it beyond the confines of any single representation of its identity, and which makes it relevant as the only piece of literature which inhabits the nexus of Eastern history and Western being.[12] The *Nights'*

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[10] As Enno Littmann notes, the *Nights* "löst auch noch heute bei den Erwachsenen nicht nur die Freude am Studium fremder Kulturen und Literaturen aus, sondern auch die schönsten Erinnerungen an die Märchenwelt der Jugend" ("Anhang" 6. 655).

[11] Noted by several scholars. See for example Sandra Naddaff (*Arabesque* 3-12).

[12] East and West are designations useful now because of their inaccuracy. They signify imaginary boundaries of identity rather than any real geography; they are an integral part of the *them and us* paradigms essential to European imperialism. They are used in this thesis with this historical etymology in mind. East and West are terms of arbitrary division, and signify attitudes rather than realities (see also Borges, "The Thousand and One Nights" 47-48).

unique place in history highlights some of the problems inherent in a complex relationship between cultures which at source is a conflict between different modes of perception of self and identity.

The life of the *Nights* spans nearly three hundred years of the most ardent and complex misunderstanding. However, these years cannot be dismissed as they have changed the text itself, physically and in its meanings. We now possess a compound text; on the one hand a medieval popular literature built upon a self image now alien in European culture and on the other an integral element and source for Romanticism and European imperial politics.

The *Nights* is not a compound text only because of the uneasy links between the Arabic and English versions. The European texts were accommodating to a confused and compound reception and flexible enough to be convincing in almost contradictory interpretations. The *Nights* were for 18th/12th century Europe the indulgence of lawless imagination and immoderate improbability, the ultimate in flights of fantastic unreality, and, with very little critical discussion, were also used (especially in the 19th/13th century) as an accurate picture of the manners and customs of the Other. The two readers, the armchair traveller and the reader in search of exotic and enchanting unreality, existed side by side, even at times in the one person.[13] By the 19th/13th century the social realism of the *Nights* dominates in the minds of readers. In the twentieth century, having first left the *Nights* to our children, we have now begun to look again, and to look with attention to its narrative art and its internal virtues. For the first time in centuries the *Nights* is beginning to be looked at as a form of literature.[14]

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[13] Such as James Beattie, quoted by Ali (*Scheherazade* 18-19).

[14] Noted also by David Pinault ("Bulaq, Macnaghten, and the New Leiden Edition Compared" 125).

What makes the translation of the *Nights* into the European languages so different from any other? Surely, one may argue, all translations are compound and undergo the same process. This is true, but in degree. The use we make of translations is conditioned by an agreement about, or expectation of the purpose of the translation. We read a translation in a forum understood by the reader and distinct from that of receiving our native literature. The *Nights* was received in the absence of any such understanding, and the culture of its origin was subjected to extremes of prejudice and ignorance; indeed, for much of the first one hundred years of its popularity, prejudice and ignorance encouraged many to believe that Galland had invented the tales.

The idea that the meaning of a text is changed with its form when translated is perhaps self-evident but usually discounted for the purposes of approximating comprehension of the original via the translation, since this activity is one of the main purposes of translation. With the *Nights*, and some others, something beyond this occurs. The changes enacted upon this text are intimately bound up with the viewpoint evoked in the reader. Most translations change less and remain firmly within the bounds of our notion of the accepted relationship between reader, text, and translated text. The *Nights* does not fit comfortably into the genre of a translation and at the same time does not fit into the canon of English literature.

There seems to be an uneasy no man's land between translation as an accepted genre and the literary canon of, in this case, a specific European language. A translation can be described as a window on another literature and, at times, another culture; a window, not a door - we look, but do not pass to the other side. This is a procedure legitimised by practice within its limited confines. The text remains the canonical property of its source and it lives at home. However, there are exceptions. Something can happen to a text

rendering it either homeless or emigrant and, further, rendering it accepted as canonical in an entirely new context. Pope's Homer is Pope's: T. S. Eliot's appropriations have become part of *The Waste Land.* However, what happens if the window is used as a door, and not a door to a text, to complete comprehension, but as a door to a people, living real lives in real time, lives and time both removed from the lives and time of the text? What if the world of a text by the operation of an indefensible, profoundly ignorant and arrogant gesture is made into a real world simply by the perception that this is so?[15] This is unsanctioned use of a translation, not supported by common sense or knowledge, and it is appropriation, a reinterpretation which radically alters the text.

For various reasons, the *Nights* left home and was enslaved to the service of a culture which wilfully misunderstood it. As literature, however, it has remained partially prohibited and marginalised (Mahdi, *1001* 37): an *untrustworthy* text. Obviously there are many reasons for this; in particular, its heterogeneity. How does one decide, and conclusively argue, which of its children is adult and independent? What is its real name? What is its genre? Burton tries to name it by exhausting the list of its known names but it had many before its appearance in English and, on a popular level, many afterwards. For every collator or translator after Lane, the naming of the text controlled it to a degree, for the book would indicate its alignment with "genuine" or corrupt versions by the title; the naming would thus demonstrate the "author's" opinion as to what is the real *Nights.* The title *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* gestures towards early versions, generally Galland; *Arabian Nights* suggests the 19th/13th century popular versions; *The Thousand and One Nights* the semi-scholarly; and *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* indicates, sometimes dishonestly, the

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[15] Agzenay explores in detail the process by which the Orient of the *Nights* became the equivalent, even the truth test, of the real Orient (274).

faithful translation; *Alf layla wa-layla,* the Arabic. Burton in trying to be definitive gives every known variant on his title page and cover.

The effect of the special contribution of the Western reader to the nature of the *Nights* can be illustrated by the history of another extraordinary translation. *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* is a mediocre story of the most unpleasant type written by James Morier, who was attached to several diplomatic missions in Persia early in the 19th/13th century. *Hajji Baba* was published in 1824/1240. It purports to be the life story of Hajji by himself, in a rollicking or picaresque style. It is in fact an unremittingly hostile document to all things Persian and Muslim in which, as an act of bad faith and betrayal of friendship, Morier shamelessly lampoons people who had helped and befriended him in Persia, justifying himself by asserting that he depicts them as they really are. It is an unfunny pandering to anti-Muslim feeling and purblind ethnographical fascinations.

Hajji Baba was translated into Persian around 1900/1318 and instantly assumed a very different identity. It was, and is, extraordinarily popular and influenced the revival of Persian Literature in the twentieth century (Rahimieh 21). Today it is not generally known in Iran that it was originally written by a European. This popularity does not simply demonstrate the Orient "orientalising" itself[16], which would subsume a suppression or an acceptance of the degrading stereotype of Persian Muslim which the book hammers into its Western readers. Rather, this aspect of the book literally ceases to exist when the reader viewpoint which it presumes is absent. The change in general reader changes the text dramatically. What was intended by Morier to be generic condemnation becomes an individual anomaly. For example, the occasion when Zeynab is killed for being pregnant, having

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[16]Said (*Orientalism* 325), and Rahimieh (22).

conceived before she became the property of the Shah, rather than representing the known stereotype, the "savage jealousy of those monsters of Eastern despotism"[17], shows to a Persian reader an individual Shah indulging in illegal murder, giving his character an individuality and a personal nastiness not perceivable for Morier's European readers, especially since Morier meant the Shah to represent all Muslim monarchs. Morier does not even explain that the Shah's behaviour is anomalous and criminal, since he wished his fiction to be as condemnatory as possible. Hajji to the Persian reader is a delightful, irreverent, rascally individual, while to the European reader he was meant to be seen as typical of the type "Persian". In translation to Persian the text is rectified: the farcical mock ethnic language becomes idiomatic and lively Persian, the ridiculing of phrases and curses by too literal recreation of the Persian is made again natural and flowing[18] and, most importantly, the unhealthy foregrounding and highlighting of "manners and customs" becomes background, for that is of course already familiar. It is worth noting that the translator added and subtracted at will and that, over and above these organic changes, the translator ". . . has, in fact, made the Persian text much more subtle and funny than the original" (Kamshad 74).

An influential translation between substantially polarised cultures is a political act, sometimes even an act of sabotage or cold war (as for example translation to denigrate: E. H. Palmer's *Koran*). *Hajji Baba* was written to fill the space in literature and politics created by the popularity of the *Nights;* it is an imitation of the *Nights* in some ways. However, this fraud revitalised the literature of the nation it intended to vilify. It passed through a magic

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[17] This is simply an example of a typical European comment, taken from R. Richardson *Travels along the Mediterranean, and Parts Adjacent: in Company with the Earl of Belmore, during the years 1816-17-18, Extending as far as the Second Cataract of the Nile, Jerusalem, Damascus, Balbec, etc.* 2 Vols London, 1822 (Quoted in Leila Ahmed 69).

[18] Pandit (79, 83). See also Daniel's discussion of *Hajji Baba* (*Islam, Europe and Empire* 207-209).

mirror in the process of translation. This demonstrates just how spurious the informative purpose of such literature is when applied to the wider context of the already informed. It is the bad aspects of *Hajji Baba* which paradoxically make it good in Persian; if it had been an accurate and faithful account of manners and customs it would be of merely archival interest now. The *Nights* was not so fortunate, for the transformations were the reverse, and the saddest joke of 19th/13th century scholarship is that a medieval fiction was seen to be fully representative of a contemporary culture, thereby blinding Europe both to the true text and to the real East.

All texts are modified by a general change in how they are viewed. Translating a text can accentuate this modification because the change in viewpoint is instantaneous and a precondition of any reading. The stereotypes effected by any author cease to operate if the preconceived space in which they are understood no longer exists. The agreement between co-cultural author and reader is broken. A translation can be a text forcibly cut loose from author and authorial or cultural presumptions. The potential for interpretation and response which the *Nights* possesses is precisely that which is generated by this dynamic dislocation.

The non-Arab reader has access to the text in unusual ways. As reader he or she is theoretically in a superb position of potential non-alignment. The prejudgements presumed by the text do not apply and the prejudgements held by the reader are inadequate. If the reader is essentially ignorant of life in an Islamic society, he or she tends to read for the exotic: to make a foreground, or to highlight, that which, for the text, is background. If the text is read, however, with sensitivity to the basic premisses of the world in which it is set, such readers may be in the position to interpret their own prejudice in a no man's land which subsumes the suspension of both realities.

Reader response to the excessively unfamiliar has in the history of the *Nights* been uncritical or simplistic. Readers either indulged in the pleasures of the exotic Other without realising that it is precisely the subject's ignorance which creates the category of exotic and Other[19], or academically rendered the felt unfamiliar familiar as knowledge, "mastering" the various difficulties. Both of these possess an inherent distortive attitude of superiority. Rarely has the effort been made to step beyond one's own familiar circle to a degree of self modification. However, the *Nights* invites this for the alienated reader more than most texts; by its sheer breadth alone it invites participation; it saturates the reader with another fictional world. Furthermore, in the process of being read the text undergoes transformation, for, as there is no consensus as to its identity, the deeper the level of interpretation the greater the modification to text, history, and reader.

Ultimately, the object of a reading is not to master a feral text or an alien idea. Subsumed in the idea of familiarisation is the idea of equality and this has been conspicuously lacking in the history of Western critical reception of the *Nights*. Familiarisation is also an exile from an original locus of identity: it is a broadening of horizons by moving camp. It can never be effective if knowledge involves a principle of raid: capture and retreat to the security of a known identity, enslaving treasures. Alien symbolism, language, manners, and customs can all become known but to become familiar by the definition applied here is much more, for, once familiar, these recede into the background and the text realigns itself under a double sun, illuminated by the double perspectives of divided cultures. This is not conversion of an Eastern text into a Western one or of a Western reader into an approximation of an Eastern one; it is broader, as it is a widening of boundaries.

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[19] Said is the primary source for these ideas, particularly in "Imaginative Geography and its Representations: Orientalizing the Orient" (*Orientalism* 49-73).

The *Nights* presents the reader with a profoundly object oriented world. The Arab listener and reader or the non-Arab reader is an observer, never a participant, rarely even engaged in a state of empathy, although sympathy is often evoked. We are voyeurs, sightseers. For the Western reader in particular, this aspect of all tale-telling became, in the past, more significant. The material of the world of the tales, their very fabric, became an end in itself, an object of the voyeur's voyage. For the *rāwī* and the crowd, however, the material and objects of the tales were background, a necessary adjunct to the narrative, indeed the stock fabric of a story-teller using the eyes of a merchant hero, or reciting for a mercantile society, or both. In Europe this fabric became the substance, the representation of the exotic, and in this way background became and still becomes foreground, and the unfamiliar material of another world becomes the most compelling aspect, whereas narrative, with its more universally human concerns, recedes. If a Victorian hero or heroine entered a room furnished with a lacquered chiffonier, ornate china, frills and lace over limbs of tables, and a jug and ewer of floral design, none of this could be seen as anything more than background and scene setting. One can imagine that if this imaginary novel were translated for a different culture, reader response would be automatically altered, and perhaps a footnote would be added explaining that it was considered mildly indecent to call table legs by that name, and that they were covered by frilly underwear so that their unmentionable thighs could not be viewed or discussed. The eager translator might be tempted to generalise about the modesty and sexual purity of the Victorian self-image, and the hypocrisy of Victorians, given the extraordinary number of prostitutes in mid-Victorian London. For the unfamiliar or unfamiliarised eye or ear, the pervasively material world of the *Nights* demands attention, even while that material is, structurally, clearly background.

The designation of the lives and times and loci of another people as objectively and absolutely exotic is an extraordinary act of innocent arrogance. It is partly the function of stereotypes to define groups by defining an exotic perimeter, but the whole idea of an absolute exotic is defensible only if self-evident: the exotic is that which is outside myself and includes all other selves and all that I observe. This subsumes the idea that from any other point of view I too am exotic. Actually this makes the simply exotic an unexciting category, since it tells me nothing about myself or others, except that there are indeed the self and perceivable others. By contrast, the fascination for the exotic Orient experienced in Europe of the 18th/12th and 19th/13th centuries can be summarised as follows: the Orient can be exotic only with a Westerner observing it. What Europeans collectively observed, *was*, so therefore the European viewpoint was objective fact. From this it followed that the Middle Eastern person was fundamentally flawed because unable to view him or herself as exotic. However, the exotic was legitimised because it served emotional needs: as a grouping of the Other, it helped define a collective and powerful self image (Said, *Orientalism* 54); as a means of subtle denigration it helped to rectify a collective inferiority complex dating from the crusades (al-Azmeh 6); as an idea possessed only by the observers it gave a safe avenue for a fascination which was in the end a fascination with self. The journey to indulge in the exotic was invariably a journey of self-discovery (Kabbani 10-11) and the category endured because of a functional and complacent ignorance. European identity was preserved and assured by distance, and by difference from its chosen Other. Only a European perceived to be suspect and inadequate (such as Jane Digby)[20]

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[20] Jane Digby (1807-81) was one of the most notorious women of the Victorian Age. After several high profile marriages, affairs and divorces, she went to Syria at the age of 46 where she met and married Sheikh Abdul Medjuel el Mesrab. She spent the rest of her life in Syria with her Bedouin husband, spending six months of every year with the tribe, and six months in their house in Damascus. She was remembered for her spirit and horsemanship among

could subvert or violate the otherness of the Other by becoming truly familiar with it. The loss of European self was seen to be in direct proportion to what would probably have been a degree of genuine understanding.

European literature made an object of the East and brought it palpably before the minds of literate people as *object* and as *other*. This generated a sense of mystery where perhaps none might otherwise have been found. The East became excitingly unknowable as systemised ignorance supplanted genuine growth. This freezing of the category of the exotic, this idea of eternal otherness which was really "making strange"[21], prolonged a very satisfying and functional ignorance, an ignorance which first and foremost pretended to be knowledge. This systemised ignorance intervened between experience and experiencer and interpreted the experience in seemingly acceptable ways, significantly, in *familiar* ways (Said, *Orientalism* 59). The individual was precluded from the usual pattern of response to the new: individual assimilation, interpretation and self-modification.[22]

Orientalism is primarily a point of view, now increasingly untenable. However, the works of Orientalists are the edifice upon which contemporary research rests and the treachery of one point of view has left scholars in doubt as to the validity of any, whether individual or general, each of which can be seen to be culturally prescribed in suspect ways. This thesis does not deal with this dilemma. What is simply asserted here is that a multiplicity of

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the Arabs, and vilified even after her death in England (details taken from Margaret Schmidt's *Passion's Child: the Extraordinary Life of Jane Digby*).

[21] A phrase coined by Manganyi (152). Kabbani also discusses how Western narration of the Orient results in an exile of the latter into "an irretrievable state of otherness" (5-6). Norman Daniel suggests that by making an object of the East, European literature thereby made it unfamiliar (*Islam, Europe and Empire* 60-61, 481).

[22] Orientalism was a peculiarly masculine discourse. Melman shows that women scholars and travellers, in being marginal to the political and academic mainstream, were to a degree more individual and less preconditioned in their observations and interactions with people (61-63).

points of view in a given culture towards another is desirable in contradistinction to a general consensus and that the individualising of point of view is dependent on the individual, self-modifying effort to understand. Most desirable is self-modification to the point of familiarity, not just knowledge, at which point cultural difference ceases to figure prominently: it recedes to the background.

The history of the *Nights* has been intimately bound up in this paradigm. The effort to realign an individual response to the text, to become familiar with it on its own terms, will have the effect of dissociating it from an erroneously simple cultural context, and seeing it reemerge as a compound cultural and historical fiction: a medieval literature parallel with but not identical to the problems of the past three hundred years of Western self-perception.

To study the *Nights* as literature and to review its history is a demanding task. Kabbani, with others, warns against seeing only what we expect to see (13, 25) and, although she is not discussing the *Nights* in particular but the continuing persuasiveness of Orientalism at large, this is a good starting point. Prejudice and point of view are made flexible and dynamic only if the reader is conscious of the role they play in any interpretation. Eradication of a fundamental form of prejudication is impossible and indeed rarely necessary. What is demanded of the reader is a critical approach to prejudgement, indeed a reading experience which is self-reflective.

The term "prejudice" signifies for our purposes here that state where prejudgement entirely dictates response, in fact prefigures it. This is a state in which no modification of stance can occur when a subject is faced with the unfamiliar, since response is predetermined from a prescribed stance. Prejudice of this kind precludes familiarisation since a *them and us* pattern

will always obtain in any given judgement. In the light of this specific application we can say that virtually all response to the *Nights* was prejudiced. The ideal reading, one which invites familiarisation from the reader, is not characterised by the absence of prejudgemental cargo, but by a consciousness of prejudgement and a willed maintenance of flexibility: this open-ended criticism should encourage self-criticism simultaneous to the reading of this text.

The text itself sometimes facilitates prejudiced responses. The concentric rings of *them and us* patterns are also represented within the substance, the substrata, of the text itself. The *Nights* can be used as a source for arguments which are for or against anything and has been. To use its extremist aspects, its anti or pro face, is to limit the text, for it oscillates between all imaginable extremes of prejudice. It is an open-ended text, paradoxically, since its many parts are made of the most satisfactory, most closed and complete of genres: story. However, by sheer bulk, the *Nights* overcomes closure. Containing many functional elements of narrative completeness and fulfilment of all wishes in the reader, containing the basic functions of entertainment, it remains in the end a text of thematic insecurity, questioning, testing limits of social perception, open-ended. In the *Nights* attitudes to women, men, race and especially the basic categories of the familiar and the strange are explored with extraordinary complexity. It is on this uneasy threshold that it is most interesting.

Every writer has had to find an excuse to study the *Nights*, since it has not been accepted as literature. Arguably, this is because it does not merit recognition as literature but it is also clear that any such judgement has always involved much more than simple, "objective" assessment of literary virtues. In the first instance, the whole notion of Western literary values is brought into question when applied to an appropriated or foreign text.

Importantly, if an unwritten prohibition seems to prevail preventing discussion of a text as literature, then there can be no argument or dialogue determining its value by this or that standard. It is possible to argue that the literary merit of the *Nights* in non-Arab eyes, far from being a case concluded, is an argument which has only just begun in the last few decades.[23] The most we can say is that it was not popular, ostensibly, for its literary value, in fact it was popular for every reason bar that one. That which is undiscussed cannot be dismissed, but a dearth of discussion can imply dismissal. The *Nights* has subsisted in limbo belonging to neither the Western nor the Eastern literary canon because of a preclusion on studying it in itself. Generation after generation were driven to find relatively dry excuses for legitimising the study of a text which fascinated and engaged them in an immediate way, and none of the excuses have been sufficient to justify the fascination. For Burton it is primarily a text of ethnological, anthropological interest; it is "true" in the context of these fields. The latest reason for studying the *Nights* is Gerhardt's focus on story-telling, taken up and expanded by Pinault and many others in the last two decades. This is important, since it is a movement slowly validating the *Nights* as a representative of its own unique genre in English literature and this is the starting point for a lifting of the prohibition. It is no longer necessary for the *Nights* to be tamed before a real love of it can be put into words: to be defined in order to be defined. It is time to look at a text modified by a complex history of conflict for what it constructs within itself, no matter how inadequate Western or Eastern critics are to the task.

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[23] Peter Heath notes that "mature understanding of the *Nights* is only in its initial stages" ("Romance as Genre" I. 3), while David Pinault remarks upon the major shift to literary analyses in the last 2-3 decades ("Bulaq, Macnaghten and the New Leiden" 125-26).

There is a recurrent tendency among translators both to delimit the boundaries of the subjects of the text and to disallow direct engagement with its many implications. The writing of extensive notes, particularly in the case of Lane and Burton, was a further act of translation. This is a clear reflection of the fact that in the first two centuries of European interest in the *Nights*, the text gestured towards a nonexistent reader. The rapt listener, intimately connected with folklore, Islam, social convention and anecdote, and with a proper sense of the stories' historical provenance, is of course nowhere to be found in Victorian England. This does not mean that a reader who is completely unfamiliar cannot read but rather that such a reader will read very differently, since he or she is cut loose from the prejudgements of the text. Furthermore the reader of each of the last three centuries has customary prejudices which are specific to culture and class (to simplify greatly). With an alien text these will simply not be catered for and will generally become in degree irrelevant or inadequate in the task of interpretation. The translators' attempts to control or direct reader response represent some of the choices. However, when the text presumes prejudices the reader does not have, and expects unfamiliar ones, we find ourselves on a threshold of interpretation which flows palpably both ways: text and reader are both on the point of change by any attempt to *familiarise*. To remain unchanged and limit the text to what its background reveals (in this case "manners and customs" etc.) or to make a category of what is by definition evanescent (the exotic, dependent on unfamiliarity) are merely first instinctive responses to the confrontation of alien text and reader. Disorientation as an initial stance can be valuable and the collisional engagement of inconsistent or dislocated prejudice can be self-modifying. The sensitive reader of the *Nights* undergoes modification of viewpoint or self (sometimes the same thing for practical purposes) not because the text is always enchantingly great art but because its comprehensive scope creates an impression of familiarity, a familiarity which

does not necessarily reflect simple knowledge but an involvement in a fictional world provided by the events, background and presumptions of the tales, and in this fluid fictional reality, the persuaded reader is much more susceptible to the enchanting moments. The breadth of the *Nights* offers the opportunity of saturation in a world functioning similarly to, but on a much larger scale than, the world of Tolkien's major fiction.[24] This world invites the reader to interpret with reference to the fictional world's laws and patterns, rather than with recourse to an outside paradigm. Historically, of course, the offer was not often taken up. The primary need for a reader is not the guide provided by Lane and Burton and others who instantly reorientate first impressions in accordance with already known social mores but rather an affirmation of the legitimacy of the reader stance of doubt and disorientation. The reader needs to be free to interpret from the internal information of the tales, to approximate a suspension of culture-specific interpretation. This must fictionalise the reader as well as the text. The text which emerges from this dislocated environment is quintessentially fictional, recreated shorn of its real cultural and historical reality, while the reader in this relation is creator of self and world, and the resultant viewpoint or self is fictional in the sense that it is intimately interconnected with an extrapolation from what is already fiction, a rarified approximation of stepping beyond the rigidly prescribed entity of culture-specific self. This is not to argue that we need no information at all. We acquire the necessary information to access Chaucerian poetry, we acquire much esoteric knowledge to access Modernist poetry, but we never mistake the information for the substance, a common fault of approaches to the *Nights*. This fault is simply the product of falling back on the simplest interpretative stance in the absence of feeling any familiar ground. The reader must approach an alien text with the same credibility given to very new literatures: that is with the firm belief that there

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[24] The comparison with Tolkien's fiction is suggested by E. M. Sissons (13).

is something, no matter how new, which makes it worth exploring as literature, even if this means modifying the definition. Any judgement to the contrary can be validly made only after such an endeavour. For the *Nights* to be studied at all, it seems clear that it has to be studied more.

It is still necessary for every study of the *Nights* to contain within it the background information necessary to place the reader in context. The heterogeneity of the text or texts, while being a most prominent feature, may not be a self-evident fact to non-specialists, while the importance of its historical and temporal range in any reading, and its resistance to generic definition, may not be apparent if left unexplored. Accordingly the following two chapters will outline the Arabic textual history and the English translation history of the *Nights* as a basis for the analyses of specific tales in the last half of the thesis. Chapter four will explore some of the complexities of reader point of view in the history of the compound text's reception, and look at some reading strategies for the encounter with the cross cultural text. Chapters five and six offer new readings of tales. The Frame tale is discussed in chapter five, comparing and contrasting text-based and traditional European interpretations, while chapter six demonstrates the possibilities of text-based readings with analyses of a sample of five tales.

Chapter 2: Arabic Textual History of the *Alf layla wa-layla*

As is clear from the Introduction, textual diversity is a feature of the *Nights* and finding the definitive text appears to be impossible. This chapter does not aim to assert a definitive text. Rather, the objective is to familiarise the reader with the history, origins and identity-in-diversity of the *Nights* in its contemporary form. This chapter will also justify the use of the later Egyptian texts in the literary analysis of this thesis. The 1984/1404 edition of the largest Syrian survivor has generated the need to reevaluate our reasons for liking or relying on the more unwieldy and disintegrated Egyptian recensions upon which Lane, Burton, Payne and Mardrus based their translations.

Why, one might ask, is it necessary to examine the Arabic origins of an English text beyond the confines of a general summary? There are several reasons why this discussion is important. A text which is dependent on a society's ignorance for its understood identity is very vulnerable to any increase in knowledge. Self-evidently, the ways in which such a text is read are subject to rapid change. The greater the gulf between the interpretations of the parent text and those of the derived text, the greater the vulnerability of the derived, especially where the parent text has a parallel existence. It is increasingly difficult to separate the English versions from their Arabic counterparts in any absolute sense. The English and French versions have profoundly altered the Arabic by altering how it is read. Conversely, the Arabic has repeatedly altered the English, first of all by the successive new translations and secondly by the always increasing knowledge about the interrelationship between the two. Today the growing number of bilingual scholars in the field are a contributing factor and the *Nights* is being read in new ways. Understanding the *Nights* through any one manifestation, whether Mahdi's Arabic text or Burton's translation, needs to be based on a recognition that this is a mediated access to what is a larger and more flexible

entity. The English texts now fail to be definitive of their own identity, but by this failure they become incorporated in the general life of all the texts, for the Arabic texts are in the same situation. The *Nights* is not obtainable from the Arabic versions alone. What we find now is that neither the English nor the Arabic *Nights* can be studied effectively without reference to the other, since each is actively affected and modified by the other. This is awkward and, at worst, very impractical. It is, however, not invalid. This thesis will look at an English manifestation of a much larger text. This chapter will give the historical background sufficient to make this point appreciable.

The earliest information about the *Nights* comes from various sources of the 9th/3rd and 10th/4th centuries. The earliest is a 9th/3rd century paper fragment of a text called *A Book containing Stories of a Thousand Nights* (*kitāb fihi ḥadīth alf layla*), which gives a title page and an opening page to a story-telling session between Dīnāzād and, by speculation, Shīrāzād.[1] In the 10th/4th century we have an important passing reference in *The Golden Meadows* of al-Masʿūdī and a more detailed notice in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm. There are few other records or mentions of the book until the first extant MSS of the 13th/7th and 14th/8th centuries. A chance record of book-lending in 12th/6th century Cairo gives the fact that the *Thousand and One Nights* was on loan at that time (Goitein 301). There is, lastly, an indirect linking of the name of the book with that of al-Aṣmaʿī, an important writer in the court of Hārūn al-Rashīd, which, if not apocryphal, places some form of authorship or identity in the 8th/2nd century (Irwin, *Companion* 50).

An overview of the history and origins of the *Nights* has been given in chapter one, so what follows is designed to complement and expand the sketch given there. Some of the early references noted above will be

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[1]Nabia Abbott, "A Ninth Century Fragment of the 'Thousand Nights'" 152-53. All citations to follow are from this article.

discussed in detail, for they are our only extant clues, and while they seem on the face of it to be a poor inheritance, they do tell us a great deal which is worth remembering when making guesses about the later texts.

The 9th/3rd century fragment of the *Thousand Nights* made famous by Nabia Abbott in 1949/1368 is the earliest extant piece of information available on the history of the *Nights* and, interestingly, also the earliest known portion of a paper book. It appears in two joined folios of what was apparently used as scrap paper by a lawyer, Aḥmad ibn Maḥfūẓ ibn Aḥmad al-Jurhamī, in October 879/266. Nabia Abbott argues an early 9th/3rd century date since it would have taken quite some time for what appears to have been an elegant book to become disintegrated, separated and, finally, scrap paper. Amongst the lawyer's practice scribblings, a title page and another page of sixteen lines of quite familiar text, are found:

> A book of tales from a Thousand Nights. There is neither strength nor power except in god the highest, the mightiest.
> In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate
> NIGHT
> And when it was the following night said Dīnāzād "O my Delectable One, if you are not asleep, relate to me the tale which you promised me and quote striking examples of the excellences and shortcomings, the cunning and stupidity, the generosity and avarice, and the courage and cowardice that are in man, instinctive or acquired or pertain to his distinctive characteristics or to courtly manners, Syrian or Bedouin. [And Shīrāzād related to her a ta]le of elegant beauty [of So-and-So the / and] his [f]ame (or [c]raft) . . . (Abbott 133)

This is most of the text. The last lines are fragments and traces, skilfully guessed and put together by Abbott. From this tiny moment in the history of the text, it is clear that the translation of the *Hazar Afsana* and its derivatives and imitations were at least popular enough by the early 9th/3rd century to give rise to books which were selections of the complete work, such as this one, and to travel and become adapted to local colourings (154). Dīnāzād's request here is for purely Arab stories, particularly Syrian. Nabia

Abbott argues that the book most likely originated in Syria and not in Baghdad (145).

Baghdad is the site of the *Hazar Afsana* translation, which must have been around Manṣūr's time, 754-775/136-158 (Abbott 154). This early book hints at a reception of the *Hazar Afsana* into Arab culture comparable to, if not in excess of, the extraordinary impact of the *Arabian Nights* in Europe. By the end of the 18th/12th century in France and England, less than one hundred years from its initial appearance, the *Arabian Nights* had generated unprecedented number of editions, translations and imitations sufficient to create a literary movement. The translation of the *Hazar Afsana* prefigures in many ways this later and better known history and it is an interesting hypothesis that the European reception of the *Nights* can inform us about the Arabic reception of its progenitor. The parallels are clear. Like the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, the *Hazar Afsana* was a translation from a different culture; it was also readily and maybe even immediately appropriated and adapted; there is no reason to suppose tales to have received faithful or scholarly treatment; it was very quickly imitated and transposed and supplemented with Arab stories; its name was changed; and, finally, it was enormously popular while not receiving full or assured literary status. Baghdad of the late 8th/2nd century was a burgeoning city, multicultural and cultured, industrialised and world famous. By the late 10th/4th century it had 1.5 million inhabitants (*EI*(2) 1. 899). Within the dynamics of such a city waves of popularity for new entertainments could spread in months, let alone years. Within roughly two hundred years, as with the *Arabian Nights* in Europe, the *Hazar Afsana* was deeply embedded into the culture which had appropriated it and it was utterly transformed in the process. As with these latter times, because of the nature of the text as popular literature, scholarly rules and practices did not apply in the work's reception, translation and popularisation: it was appropriated rather than simply translated. In both

cases, this was not just because the literature was suspect in terms of class, but also because its culture of origin was partly despised and at least misunderstood. Finally, as ʿAlī Aṣghar Ḥikmat shows, the *Hazar Afsana* may have maintained a parallel existence in Persian after its reception and appropriation by another culture.[2]

Al-Masʿūdī's reference in *The Golden Meadows* of 947/336 and that of the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm tell us a little about what became of the *Hazar Afsana* and tales of the same genre under the influence of this appropriative and possessive popularity. Al-Masʿūdī describes the pseudo-historical tales told in the court of Muʿāwīya as "embellished and fabricated" (Abbott 150), and as being of the same type as the books "transmitted and translated . . . from the Persian . . . such as the book *Hazar Afsana* . . . . The people call this book *A Thousand Nights*." He gives the names Shīrāzād and Dīnāzād to the two principal women but offers little or no further information. He mentions some other books of this type, the book of Jaliʿād and Shīmās, and the book of Sindbād, but from his tone it seems that he maintains a disapproving disdain for this kind of literature. This source is confused by several variants of Masʿūdī's text giving different information. Thus the title is in some MSS the full *Alf layla wa-layla*, and Dīnāzād is sister, maid or nurse depending on which text is used (Abbott 150). A fuller and more useful description of the *Hazar Afsana* is given in the *Fihrist*, one of the most valuable records of 10th/4th century Arab culture. It is an extensive bibliography, written in 987/377, of all that Ibn al-Nadīm had read or seen in his career as bookseller. It gives a fascinating indication of the interests and the breadth of literate Arab society. The sections on popular literature, and in particular on the

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[2]Ḥikmat translates from Persian a verse by the poet Quṭrān al-Tabrīzī (11th/5th century) as follows: "*samiʿtu wa qaraʾtu min Hazār Afsāna alf ṣiffa wa ṣiffa li-mahālik Rūʾīn Dazh al-sab*ʿ" (12). (I heard and read from *Hazar Afsana* one thousand and one descriptions of the seven perils of [the fortress of] Ru'in Dazh [trans. mine]). As Ḥikmat notes this puts the *Hazar Afsana* in existence to at least the 10th/4th century.

tellers of fables and evening stories, provide us with a great deal of information about the provenance of the *Nights* genre. Notwithstanding the fact that almost every commentator on the *Nights* quotes and discusses the following passage from the *Fihrist*, it is worth repeating here, since it is the most fruitful source of information extant on the early life of the *Nights*. Ibn al-Nadīm, after introducing story-telling as originating with the Persians, goes on to say:

> The Arabs translated [story literature] into the Arabic language and then, when masters of literary style and eloquence became interested, they refined and elaborated it, composing what was similar to it in content.
>
> The first book to be written with this content was the book *Hazār Afsān*, which means "a thousand stories." The basis for this [name] was that one of their kings used to marry a woman, spend a night with her, and kill her the next day. Then he married a concubine of royal blood who had intelligence and wit. She was called Shahrāzād, and when she came to him she would begin a story, but leave off at the end of the night, which induced the king to spare her, asking her to finish it the night following. This happened to her for a thousand nights, during which time he [the king] had intercourse with her, until because of him she was granted a son, whom she showed to him, informing him of the trick played upon him. Then, appreciating her intelligence, he was well disposed towards her and kept her alive. The king had a head of the household named Dīnār Zād who was in league with her in this matter. It is said that this book was composed for Humā'ī, the daughter of Bahrām, there being also additional information about it. . . . The truth is, if Allāh so wills, that the first person to enjoy evening stories was Alexander, who had a group [of companions] to make him laugh and tell him stories which he did not seek [only] for amusement but [also he sought] to safeguard and preserve [them]. Thus also the kings who came after him made use of the book *Hazār Afsān*, which although it was spread over a thousand nights contained less than two hundred tales, because one story might be told during a number of nights. I have seen it in complete form a number of times and it is truly a coarse book, without warmth in the telling. (Dodge 713-14)

There are several noteworthy points in this passage, points which will have relevance to the discussion of later MSS and editions of the *Nights* and which prove valuable in the current debate between those who defend the

simpler Syrian texts and those who value the more heterogeneous Egyptian versions.

The passage suggests that, as early as the 10th/4th century, interest in the *Nights*' precursors and in similar story cycles was not confined to a popular level, and that the reworking of tales by the educated class of writers was already a feature of the genre. Ibn al-Nadīm goes even further than this: "masters of literary style and eloquence" were responsible for refinement, elaboration, and composition of new stories. This assertion is made despite the fact that Ibn al-Nadīm himself quite clearly does not share their interest in the tales. As we will note later in this chapter, the accusation of refining, elaborating and composing tales is also levelled at the 18th/12th century compilers, with the suggestion that they thereby adulterate the collection.

It is also clear from the quoted passage that the size of *Nights* prototypes was substantial and that one thousand nights was an accepted length. Not only was the *Hazar Afsana* one thousand nights, but so also were imitation collections. In the same section of his book, Ibn al-Nadīm names Ibn ᶜAbdūs al-Jahshiyārī as a collector of stories who attempted to make a book of one thousand stories, each of a night, but died having collected only four hundred and eighty. The earliest prototype, the *Hazar Afsana*, has one thousand nights and "less than two hundred tales". This is worth bearing in mind since the name *One Thousand and One Nights* is often argued to be hyperbolic (*EI* (2) 1. 362), and furthermore when it is argued that the later compilers were mistaken and acting in an unprecedented fashion when they supplemented the fragmented collection to its present form of around two hundred and eighty tales and one thousand and one nights. Ibn al-Nadīm is a reliable source here: he is not merely stating a hyperbolic number, for he saw the complete *Hazar Afsana* several times.

The passage also indicates that whatever the form and content of the lost stories of the *Hazar Afsana*, the frame story of the tenth century is

recognisable as the story of our present *Arabian Nights*. Shīrāzād of Masʿūdī is, just forty years later, Shahrāzād the heroine of the present day Arabic *Alf layla wa-layla*, (europeanised as Sheherazade). This change is probably an effect of the Humaī legend[3], for several elements come into the apocryphal ascription of the *Hazar Afsana* to Queen Humaī. She was the daughter of Bahmān, or Artaxerxes Longimanus, a legendary king of Persia, 465-425 BC, and the mother of Darab, or Darius II (Cosquin 314). She ruled wisely and well for thirty-two years in place of her son, according to Firdausi's *Shahnameh* of the 11th/5th century (326, Masʿūdī 239). Al-Tabarī, historian and chronicler, gives the name Shahrāzād to Humaī in his work of the 9th/3rd century (Oestrup 12), while Al-Masʿūdī tells us that it was her mother's name (239). Given the myth of Humaī recorded by Ibn al-Nadīm, it is not really surprising that the similar sounding Shīrāzād should become Shahrāzād, since by implication her story might be that of the queen for whom it was written. It does not really matter whether this is historical in any sense or not. What is fascinating is that the tale of Sheherazade, with its accretion of a large number of thematically resonant tales and its place as the source of a multitude of descendants in various literatures and cultures, should also generate antecedents: the legend of Queen Humaī is also the legend of a powerful woman, and the ascription of these tales to the order or hand of a female monarch says more than the search for real writers, compilers, and copyists in pre-Islamic Persia or India. The narrative of women thus begins imaginatively before the fiction of Sheherazade and the legendary queen writing what the fictional princess says lends narrative authority. This is an infinite regress. What was Humaī's story, we are driven to ask. This could be supplied by legend, just as the question who wrote or invented Sheherazade gave rise to the myth of a powerful female origin.

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[3] Variant: Ḥumāya (Masʿūdī 239).

Another legend of the ancestry of the *Hazar Afsana* tells that Alexander was the first to use such stories, not just for entertainment but to keep himself "vigilant and on his guard" (Abbott 151).[4] A practical purpose or excuse for tale-telling was thus given a seal of regal approval; the suggestion that they were entertaining enough for a great king was a way for verifying both content and value. (It is interesting that precisely the same kind of myth had vogue in 18th/12th century Europe: The *Arabian Nights Entertainments* were often believed to be written for the entertainment of "Eastern Princes" [Ali, *Scheherazade* 18-19]). Such legends represent the advertisements and the marketing of the tales on a popular level, while at the same time defending them against the charge of frivolity.[5] The preface to the entire *Nights* collection operates on a similar advertising level, for it stresses the serious, the wondrous and the edifying aspects of the tales to follow, suggesting that they have greater literary respectability than is in fact the case. Beaumont discusses the use of a preface as a disguise for fiction: a "false face" by which "the alien seeks admission to the house of literature" ("Comic Narratives" 236).

One can argue that the existence of the frame tale in the 10th/4th century in a form closely corresponding to that of today suggests a similarly complex relationship at that time between the frame and the enframed material. The frame would have operated in precisely the same way regardless of the actual content of the enframed, generating the reason and the means for the telling of tales while enacting and simultaneously deferring

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[4] On this point the translations of Abbott and Dodge differ. Abbott's is that given here, whereas Dodge's ambiguously states that Alexander safeguarded and preserved the tales, or that the tales safeguarded and preserved him and his companions (714). The Arabic text is: "*wa-l-ṣaḥīḥ . . . anna awwal man samara bi-l-layl, al-Iskandar wa kāna lahu qawm yuḍḥikūnahu wa yukhrifūnahu, la yurīdu bi-dhālik al-ladhdha, wa innamā kāna yurīdu al-ḥifẓ wa-l-ḥirs*" (Quoted in Shaḥḥādh 30).

[5] The names of Humaī and Alexander form the rudiments of a false genealogy for the tales. Beaumont suggests that the manufacture of false genealogies is one method by which fiction attempts to validate itself in a literary milieu which rejected it ("Comic Narratives" 236).

resolution of its own story. The existence of such a frame informs and transforms the enframed and the lost tales of the early collections would not have been exempt from this slow subtextual action and doubling of meanings. Interestingly, it is the frame story which is always remembered; Ibn al-Nadīm, unmoved by the collection as a whole, nonetheless records the principal features of the generative tale. Keeping the complexities of the frame tale intact is essential to the meanings of the whole and, as we shall see, this is one of the reasons for preferring some of the Egyptian versions of the frame over the Syrian printed edition.

This particular chapter of the *Fihrist* offers us a good introduction to the range of popular literature and literary activities of the 10th/4th century. Ibn al-Nadīm gives lists of every kind of story or light literature which held currency or with which he had come into contact. These include lists under the following headings: tales of buffoons; books of fables; books on sexual intercourse (in the form of passionate love stories); fools' anecdotes; books of sermons, morals, wisdom tales; books of other Persian evening stories; tales from India; Byzantine evening stories (including a Greek version of Sheherazade and Shahriyār's story); proverb collections; biographical stories of kings; stories of pre-Islamic passionate lovers; stories of "loving and fickle girls"; stories of love between the jinn and humans; books of wonders of the sea; and many others. Evidently, and presumably before the *Nights* collection was fully formed, all the familiar ingredients of the *Nights* as we know it today were present in abundance in 10th/4th century Baghdadian society. Most of these headings represent types which Ibn al-Nadīm lists in the dozens. Of love stories in the evening stories alone he gives thirty-seven instances, none of them immediately recognisable amongst the many which appear in the *Nights* today (Dodge 722-3). This heterogeneity of original source material, with both its diversity and hybrid literary nature, is the

primordial sea from which the *Nights* evolved and it predetermined the similarly diverse nature of our known enframed collection.

There are two more instances of a mention of *Alf layla wa-layla*, both of them tantalisingly brief. The Geniza was a receptacle for notices and records in the Jewish community of 12th/6th century Cairo. It contained anything from marriage records to laundry lists (Irwin 138). One fragment from a booklender's notes of the 1150s/550s has, among others: ". . . Majd b. al-ᶜAzīzī [has] the Thousand and One Nights" (Goitein 302).[6] It is from this single phrase that we know that *Alf layla wa-layla* was a book under its present title in 12th/6th century Cairo. The second mention is more tenuous: Al-Maqrīzī (died 1442/846) in his *Khiṭāṭ* quotes a man who died nearly two hundred years before, who in turn quotes another man, a Cordovan, as having mentioned a "popular book of stories as being *Alf layla wa-layla*" (Goitein 301). From this emerges a hint of nostalgia and of a lost age, for, while it tells us little, it suggests that in the 14th/8th century the age of the text's extraordinary popularity was past. This ties in with the fact that after the 12th/6th century unimaginable numbers of books were lost forever and more than half of the old *Alf layla wa-layla* had disappeared. Of the tens of thousands of books suggested or listed in the *Fihrist* only a minute fraction are extant today. It must be remembered that the first mongol invasion of 1258/656 razed Baghdad and, sweeping westward, destroyed practically every city almost to the Mediterranean coast.[7] We can speculate that the silence in sources from the 10th/4th to the 13th/7th centuries on the subject of the *Nights* was owing merely to the perception that it did not warrant comment. However, from the 12th/6th to the 14th/8th or 15th/9th centuries, the silence expresses loss and dissolution.

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[6] "*Majd b. al-ᶜAzīzī kitāb alf layla wa-layla*" (Goitein 302).

[7] They were halted by Baybars at ᶜAin Jālūt in Syria.

At the close of the 12th/6th century it is clear that the *Alf layla wa-layla* had already had extraordinary popularity and had appealed to a very wide range of people. It incorporated most probably literally one thousand and one nights and, if the form of the *Hazar Afsana* and its imitations was followed, around two hundred tales. We can assume that tales were constantly being lost and gained, since there was no reason for the text to be treated with anything other than the greatest of freedom. From the earliest sources we know that the text was both the material of the professional reciter, free to add or subtract according to personal or audience taste, and also the raw material for rewriting by literary figures, who wrote and circulated versions according to their tastes. It was a public library - a free resource with something for everybody. In this context it is not surprising that copies were mistreated, split, lost, sold for parts, rebuilt and rewritten as an ongoing literary and professional game. Presumably, however, *Alf layla wa-layla* was substantially similar in form and effect, although not in content, in 12th/6th century Cairo as it is today.[8]

These early Cairene versions would have targeted a variety of audiences and readers, on several social levels. There were quite literary, or even mock literary, collections and there were most certainly also the bawdier, working class entertainments. In the middle ground, many entertaining and sometimes edifying tales would have existed, aimed at the interests and experience of merchants, shopkeepers, traders and passing travellers. This simplistic classification of stories is made more complex by the fact that almost certainly each of these types was also imperfectly imitated, lampooned or parodied (a recursive humour about stock figures and

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[8] "There was in the Medieval world a more or less complete *Thousand and One Nights* of which Galland and the Vatican MSS are only fragments" (Macdonald, "Lost MSS" 220) "Galland" here refers to the Leiden text.

narrative types is typical of late tales such as Maʿrūf the Cobbler). Stories were also simply eroded and altered by time. While we do not know the content of early collections, it is harder to assume it to be homogeneous than to presume it to be a collage of styles and levels similar to that which we have today, bearing perhaps even stronger traces of the diverse cultural origins of tastes and tales. These forms of stories were being repeated, created and parodied in enormous numbers, and there is little reason to suppose the *Nights* to have remained aloof. Rebuilding the content of the *Nights* from available sources appears to have been an ongoing pastime which was accelerated, not initiated, by the revival of interest of the 17th/11th and 18th/12th centuries.

The problem in deciding upon one text of the *Nights* in preference to another is directly related to how we view the activities and results of this pastime. If we consider meddling with the contents, rewriting the tales and altering the language of the tales as reprehensible and damaging, then clearly the preferred text is that which shows this least or, in this case, that which precedes the meddling of the last few centuries. However, this proves both arbitrary and unsatisfying, for these activities are inextricable from the history and formation of the *Nights*. Whether 10th/4th century or 18th/12th, the *Nights* is the product of popular and literary interaction. Playing with the text was permitted because it was not in itself valued and its popular value was essentially performative. If playing with the text is no longer permitted, it is perhaps because following the European appropriations we value it more in literary circles, East and West, basing this on a history of nearly three hundred years of intense admiration and validation of its status. However, it must be remembered that Galland had to manipulate the text extensively before eliciting the favourable response his translation received and that European interest in the versions which meddled least with their Arabic sources (Payne's and Burton's translations) was far more reserved. It is no

simple matter to determine whether or not it is wrong in any sense to meddle with the form or contents of this singular family of texts. Galland's artistic creation has its ardent and convincing defenders today (cf Rida Hawari, Georges May, C. Knipp). For this thesis, the fuller, more complex, and less abbreviated versions, despite their weaknesses and inconsistencies, are more useful and satisfying. This is not, however, intended as a value judgement. This thesis is looking at specific kinds of literary functions in a text which has demonstrably many other functions.

What becomes interesting from this point is the nature of the enframed collection, for the extant versions are made up of tales ranging from the pre-Islamic fables to those of Mamlūk Egypt, from folktale to reworked literary pieces, many of them, regardless of age, added to the collection at this time, and many more dating from Mamlūk times (1258-1517/656-923). This addition and invention occurred at the same time as the entropic destruction of texts, and the attrition and loss of stories. Any story, often only tenuously consistent with the concerns of the frame, could be added to the collection at whim, either for bulk or because of the taste of the compiler. The sources, literary and popular, of many of the stories originate in urban Cairo, and in the popular recollection of the golden age of Baghdad (Irwin, *Companion* 124-5).

From the 14th/8th century onwards a proliferation of variants and versions takes place. From this time, we are dealing with a different kind of history, for our evidence has changed dramatically. On the surface, the *Nights* appears to have a simple evolution from this point on. However, the ways in which the *Nights* of today came to reach its present forms mimics its very early textual history: it was a free-for-all for compilers, redactors, rewriters, copyists, translators, appropriators and adulterators. It is from this confusing melée of activities that we must describe the nature of the text and

its history. A great many value judgements obtain in assessing the various texts and extensive tests can be undertaken to determine whether a given treatment was valid or not. Argument on whether an older text is a better text or what the lost antecedents of a text might have been, can be quite compelling. In the case of the *Nights*, however, this absorbing debate ultimately suggests that the best text is the oldest text which is the one we no longer have, the most valid antecedent is also the missing one, and the best translation is that which could have been based on these. Faced with a myriad of texts, all having some weaknesses and some extraordinary beauties, the stance here will be as far as possible to prefer that which pleases most for its literary qualities and for its reflection of the concerns, themes or simply the equilibrium of the frame. This does not result in a selection of the best text, just that which overall serves best here.

However, a brief exploration of the major families, the Syrian and the Egyptian (as represented by the printed editions), is valuable, since the English reception of the *Nights* is based on translations or appropriations from both. It is important to observe at this point that the division between Syrian and Egyptian versions of the Nights is a little arbitrary and, despite the debate over their respective validities, the families are by no means totally distinct.[9] The approach to the history of the *Nights* from the 14th/8th to the 19th/13th centuries will now be retrospective: this discussion will take the individual printed editions as the starting point for a glance at their origins. I have had access to only one collection of the *Nights* MSS and am therefore not qualified to make any comparative or comprehensive

[9]Patrice Coussonnet goes further and suggests that the division is unjustified (rev. of Mahdi 17; "Note de lecture" 348). See also the discussion of variation in Sheherazade's closing formulae on page 45 below.

assessments of what this extensive resource has to tell us.[10] Of greatest interest here has to be those MSS sources which have also had the greatest influence: those which make up the printed editions of the *Alf layla wa-layla*.

The first printed edition is known as the Calcutta I, edited and refined by Sheikh Aḥmad Ibn Maḥmūd Shirwanī al-Yumanī, and published in two volumes of 1814/1229 and 1818/1233. This version contained only the first two hundred nights and the story of Sindbād the Sailor (*EI* (2) 1. 360). It was intended for the use of European students of Arabic, with a view to familiarising them with a more colloquial idiom (Mahdi, Muqaddima 14). Interestingly, this edition is drawn from the Syrian MS family and in this differs from the other 19th/13th century editions. It is not, however, a faithful transcription of its sources (Mahdi, Muqaddima 15).

The first major, complete edition is the Bulaq, published in 1835/1251, possibly based on a single Egyptian MS (Irwin, *Companion* 44), although its language has at some point gone through a process of refinement and correction. It contains one thousand and one nights. It is followed by the Macnaghten, or Calcutta II, in 1839-42/1255-58, collated with reference to one principal MS and the preceding editions. Nonetheless it represents the same general text as the Bulaq, that is the late Egyptian recension of one thousand and one nights and around 190 main stories.[11] The MSS, all no longer extant, upon which these two editions were based were representatives of a version which had been collated only recently (probably by a single individual in the 18th/12th century (*EI* (2) 1. 360). These two editions formed, and for many still represent, the standard *Nights* text (Grotzfeld 74).

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[10] The most informative descriptions of MSS are Mahdi's volume 2, Zotenberg's *Histoire d'ʿAlā al-Dīn ou la lampe merveilleuse*, and Macdonald's various explorations. David Pinault's study *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* makes valuable use of his MSS sources.

[11] Bencheikh, Bremond and Miquel *Mille et un contes de la nuit*, 16.

A fourth printed edition appeared between 1825/1240 and 1843/1259. This is the Breslau of Maximilian Habicht and Heinrich Fleischer. While it is the only version other than the recent Leiden text which is to a large extent an accurate transcription of its MSS sources, it has other problems. Habicht is more accurately called a redactor than an editor (Macdonald, "Habicht" 687), for his text proves to be a compilation from diverse sources, not all even drawn from the *Nights* texts. He claimed to have a Tunisian MS but this proved to be a fabrication. The Breslau is in twelve volumes, the last four edited by Fleischer after Habicht's death (*EI*(2) 1. 360). Although he has been thoroughly condemned for his literary fraud and exposed by disgusted orientalists (such as Macdonald), Habicht's practice resembled the compiling tendencies which gave rise to many of the other printed editions, let alone MS versions of the past, or the translations to follow. His text has remained marginalised and unpopular amongst scholars probably because he lied about it, rather than as a reflection of a qualitative assessment of its contents. As Mahdi has shown, none of the printed editions can withstand much scrutiny before Habicht-like practices emerge in their histories.[12]

Apart from these editions, several reprints of Bulaq and Calcutta II appeared later in the century, along with an expurgated Beirut edition of yet another MS of the same recension (*EI*(2) 1. 360).

In 1888/1305, in an analysis of various *Nights* MSS, Zotenberg identified for the first time the very recent date of the Egyptian recension behind all but one of these editions and at the same time dated and identified the MS used by Galland as both much older and of a different branch. The version fixed in place by the 19th/13th century printed editions is known as the ZER, the Zotenberg Egyptian Recension.

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[12] Mahdi, *1001*, Chapters 2 and 3.

From 1888/1305 until 1984/1404 the ZER texts were viewed as vulgate amongst non-Arab readers[13], all others being seen as apocryphal (Grotzfeld 74), a classification which satisfied artificially a need to limit the choices of text. Since 1984/1404 proper recognition of the importance of the neglected branch, the Syrian, has become essential to the field.

As mentioned in chapter one, the Leiden text is a scholarly edition by Muhsin Mahdi of the earliest extant manuscript of size, which is by chance also that which was used by Galland in the first European translation. It dates from the 14th/8th or 15th/9th century (Irwin, *Companion* 61), and is of the Syrian family of texts. The earliest extant MS of the Egyptian family is at least one hundred years younger. This text as it stands today is about three quarters of the manuscript held by Galland, for in the last few centuries a fourth volume, which was possibly a fragment from a different MS[14], has been lost. It is probable that even with the fourth volume, it was still incomplete, for we know that Galland had to remake the closing sequence of the frame tale from other sources.[15] It is a fairly pure and consistent version of what are known as the core stories. It must have had a rather more substantial ancestor for its copyist to have worked from, but not large enough to have established conclusively the existence of a complete *Alf layla wa-layla* in the 13th/7th or 14th/8th centuries. It is important to remember that all stories in later versions, other than the core stories, were most likely added to the collection after the date of this MS, regardless of their actual age as independent stories.

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[13]The Bulaq text is usually seen as the vulgate in Arabic (Bremond in Miquel, *Les Dames de Baghdad* 16; Manzalaoui 39; Ghazoul, *Arabian Nights* 22). However, I have had some trouble finding the Bulaq or the Macnaghten texts in bookstores in Jordan and Yemen. The modified versions of al-ʿAdawī's later edition are readily available.

[14]Inconsistencies in Galland's diary and prefaces suggest this possibility (Mahdi, *1001* 26).

[15] It is often suggested that Galland made up the closing of the frame in his translation. However, as Grotzfeld shows, he seems to have been familiar with the general outline of a genuine closing sequence, whatever his source (81).

The core stories are shared by almost all substantial versions of the *Nights*. They are The Merchant and the Demon (with two or three enframed tales), The Fisherman and the Demon (with two enframed tales), The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies (with five tales), the Hunchback cycle, including the stories of the barber and his six brothers, the Story of the Three Apples, enframing the Story of the Wazīrs Nūr al-Dīn and Shams al-Dīn, the Story of Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī and Anīs al-Jalīs, the Story of ʿAlī Ibn Baqqār and Shams al-Nahār, and the Story of Qamar al-Zamān.[16] These core stories of the Leiden edition all appear to date from Mamlūk times, specifically of the 13th/7th and 14th/8th centuries. The Leiden version seems, like every collection, to be a remade *Nights*: reconstructed from available stories of the times, and from a remembered identity of perhaps a Cairene collection. While it is the earliest and most important text of the Syrian branch of *Nights* texts, it contains within it the suggestion that the division between Syrian and Egyptian texts is a little arbitrary, since although written in Syria, it shows a positive Cairene influence.[17]

Mahdi argues that the immediate ancestor of this 14th/8th century version influenced every later rebuilding of a *Nights* collection (Muqaddima 27-29). The Egyptian versions, however, are in some features more complete than the Syrian in these core stories (Irwin, *Companion* 60). For example, virtually all Egyptian versions include the third sheikh's story in the Merchant and the Demon cycle - a story called for by the context but omitted in the Leiden text. This would indicate that the Egyptian copies, while late, are derived from an older tradition.[18] Either there is, as Mahdi argues, a

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[16] Usually only the beginning of this tale appears in the representatives of the Syrian family of texts.

[17] As Robert Irwin notes, these stories show a greater knowledge of the city of Cairo than of any Syrian locality (*Companion* 60).

[18] As Macdonald demonstrates: "a quite modern MS may carry a more complete tradition than one centuries older" ("Classification of some MSS" 321).

common Syrian ancestor for both families or there is a fuller Egyptian source for present day versions which is now lost. More confusing still is the possibility that either theory is too exclusive to be accurate. The idea that very large heterogeneous versions postdate Galland (and are created in response to European enthusiasm) is made all the more uncertain by the existence of a substantial Turkish MS dated 1636/1046, comprising 765 nights (Zotenberg, *Histoire* 21-23).[19]

One is reluctant to devalue many elements of the fuller texts, in particular the Cairene stories, especially considering that the full length, lost *Nights* of the 12th/6th century is Cairene. Despite having been added much later, stories in some cases date from those times and earlier (as for example, the stories surrounding the rogue Dalīla the Crafty)[20], and are the traces of that version.

The Rylands 646 MS dated c.1550/957[21] is a relatively early Egyptian family MS which includes the ʿOmar Al-Nuʿumān saga (incorporating the tale of Ghānim), Khailakhān's adventures by sea and land, and the King of Persia and the two aged sheikhs who tell him stories (Mingana 884-85). ʿOmar al-Nuʿmān begins in this MS at Night 281, more than two hundred nights later than in the Macnaghten text (Mingana 884). This particular MS shows conclusively that addition and expansion beyond the core stories was a feature of *Nights* compilation much earlier than the 18th/12th century compilation of the ZER. This is confirmed by the MS of the tale of Sūl and Shumūl which shows a story in transition to becoming incorporated in the

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[19]This MS is one of a small number of lengthy MSS predating Galland (see Macdonald, "Earlier History of the Arabian Nights" 393; Mahdi, *ʿIdda al-naqd* 290).

[20]Dalīla and some of the other rogues were notorious historical figures of the 10th/4th century (Irwin, *Companion* 145-6).

[21] This MS has its own little family, as it resembles two other MSS: Tübingen MS (32) of the early 16th/10th century, and the more modern Madrid (XLIX 1&2) (Macdonald, "Classification of some MSS" 308-10). Macdonald describes 646 in some detail in "The Earlier History of the Arabian Nights" (392-93). See also Mahdi (*ʿIdda al-naqd* 298-300).

Nights (although it never made it into the known collections). This MS dates from the 14th/8th or 15th/9th century (Mahdi, *ʿIdda al-naqd* 294), and could therefore be older than the Leiden.[22] An interesting feature of 646 is that the formula by which Sheherazade closes the tale-telling session at dawn is the same as that of the Leiden and is quite distinct from the later Egyptian texts' version.[23] This would suggest considerably more blending of the families than is at present usually allowed. It is well to bear in mind that Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo were really not so distant from one another. A mobile mercantile civilisation linked them and had something as portable as a story or collection of stories not travelled, had styles of *Nights* writing really been consistently regional, this would have been rather surprising. What is certain is that we really do not have enough representatives of the textual history to build up more than a hypothetical confluence or differentiation between them.

The most unsatisfying aspect of the Leiden text is its incompleteness. It ends mid-story and lacks the closing sequences of the frame tale. The opening of the frame tale is much simpler and less impressive than in the fuller versions - of this version (and the Breslau) it is correct to say that Sheherazade tells stories "to save her lovely neck" (Arberry, *Scheherazade* 16-17). It is interesting to note that this definitive text, put forward as such by Mahdi and endorsed by several scholars following him (for example Sandra Naddaff) who suggest that by its historical authenticity alone this text closes the controversy of the diversity of the *Nights* once and for all, is in itself a tale

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[22]It is of the 14th/8th century according to Seybold (v), and 16th/10th century according to Irwin (*Companion* 83).

[23] A sample of the Arabic of the Night break of MS 646 (identical in this phrase with the Breslau), is as follows: "*wa adraka Shahrazād al-ṣabāḥ fa-sakatat ʿan al-ḥadīth*". The Leiden text has: "*wa adraka Shahrāzād al-ṣubḥ fa-sakatat ʿan al-ḥadīth*". By way of comparison, Bulaq and Macnaghten give: "*wa adraka Shahrazād al-ṣabāḥ fa-sakatat ʿan al-kalām al-mubāḥ*".

which does not satisfy the most basic need of its genre: tale-telling demands completion.[24] Rather than giving us the ultimate solution to the problematic issue of the *Nights*' identity, Mahdi has provided us with the infinite deferral of solution. On the simplest level the Leiden edition will never stand alone.[25] We are much more ready to honour old scars than recent ones. Perhaps the Leiden text can only be argued to be the purer, preferable text because its scars are too old to be perceived.

The Leiden text speaks for itself. It offers a *Nights* different from the others which asserts unequivocally the importance of the core stories which the two branches have in common. Stylistically and thematically it offers a more coherent and, because short, more crafted version, and is a window on the *Nights* of the past. It establishes continuity in the development of the *Nights*; in a sense its closeness to the 18th/12th century versions is at least as interesting as its differences. It rectifies an imbalance in our perceptions of the *Nights*, while complicating the overall issue of identity. Mahdi's own defence of his edition, however, is based on his definition of the use and value of the *Nights*. His valuation of the text is based on a very specific view of its identity: it is the most important prose work of Mamlūk story art and record of Mamlūk story language, and the scholar therefore must preserve it as such (Muqaddima 39). It is unquestionably true, and richly demonstrated by Mahdi, that if the book is a resource for scholars of the features of specifically Mamlūk story-telling, then the later editions have tampered with and obscured the purer Mamlūk text. However, it is difficult, from another point of view, to measure the *Nights* according to the qualities of one text, or

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[24]See also Coussonnet ("Note de lecture" 352).

[25]"Limiter les 1001 Nuits aux seuls manuscrits de la famille syrienne . . . constitue, en tout état de cause, une entreprise abusive, mutilante et dangereuse, et de surcroît scientifiquement erronée" (Coussonnet, "Note de lecture" 351-52).

one moment in its long history, no matter how tempting this may be. If we chose any other single representative, argued its virtues in contradistinction to its rivals, we might end up arguing that the Leiden is an early primitive model of more creative later developments. The *Nights* is much more than either a messy 18th/12th century Egyptian story anthology or a 14th/8th century Mamlūk artform.

Mahdi argues that this edition is the answer to the problem of identity; that it takes precedence in every respect over the ZER texts. This is argued squarely on the basis of authenticity. However, for reasons given earlier in this chapter, authenticity is very hard either to deny or to establish exclusively. From the standpoint of this study it is not tenable to argue that, just because the 14th/8th century gives us a more restrained and much shorter *Nights*, the authentic form is short or neat. It is hard to argue that the stylistically more coherent fragment is more valid than the heterogeneous extravaganzas which postdate it, since it is also clear that in a different form they must have predated it. The tales of Mahdi's text appear to have been either written, or substantially reworked in the 13th/7th and 14th/8th centuries, but it does not follow that because we do not know with any certainty any single tale of the 12th/6th century and earlier also being part of the *Nights* of that time, that the later versions are less authentic. There is nothing to show that the Leiden text was not created in precisely the same ways as later compilations; put together from the available stories in currency at the time, remaking a remembered collection. It is easier to view the simpler beauties of the Mahdi edition as more accidental than generic, and the restrained Syrian versions as complicating the whole picture, rather than dominating it. Furthermore, Mahdi's assessment of respective literary value is arguable: it is a matter of point of view, rather than demonstrated fact, that the ZER texts are "a proliferation that produced an abundance of poisonous fruits" (Haddawy 1. xii) in a well ordered garden. Lastly, the assertion that

the vast majority of the tales which have been influential in the last three hundred years are not genuine and therefore not desirable is not going to consign them to oblivion in one stroke, particularly as being truly spurious, as is believed to be the case with Aladdin, could not remove it from the popular canon. In practical terms, the *Nights* will still designate the few stories inside Mahdi's boundary, and the many outside it. The Leiden text serves merely as a subset of its tales about which we have specialised information.

The question which remains about Mahdi's assertions when looked at in the context of the *Nights*' textual history is whether it is relevant to apply twentieth-century or Western methods to determine the true text of a textual family which never evolved by a fixed methodology (Irwin, *Companion* 58-61). Should we look for a pure prototype at all in a textual history in which impurity and chaotic growth seem to be the only constant features? It is possible to argue that any selection for the sake of purity or consistency is a distortion. If flourishing inconsistency and heterogeneity are inherent we surely damage this intangible identity-in-diversity to limit our base of valuation down to one mid-life fragmentary representative.

The families are different. It is hard to say which is better, since both families have unfortunate weakening omissions or poverties and conversely beauties lacking in the other. Overall, however, there is a significant contribution by the Egyptian redactors, summarised in one word by David Pinault: creativity.[26] As he demonstrates, the Egyptian texts in many instances improve the story art of the sometimes more sparse Leiden text (135-43). It is precisely this element, along with the inclusion of many stories well worth study within the the *Nights* frame, which makes the Egyptian versions exciting for literary analysis. In the present state of the *Nights* studies,

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[26] "Bulaq, Macnaghten and the New Leiden Edition Compared" 142. Unless otherwise indicated the following citations are to this article.

however, it is possible to study the individual story in whichever version pleases the given reader most. As Pinault, who works in English from various Arabic sources, suggests:

> . . . rather than insist on the consistent superiority of one [Alf Layla] edition over another, one might profitably focus instead on the evaluation of individual stories on an individual basis, together with the collation of different editions for the sake of comparing stylistic effects and varying authorial approaches. (157)

The brief exploration of the main Arabic versions given above gives a picture more of proliferation and diversity than of a clear evolution of a predominating identity. The content of the tales in any given variant can serve little better in the search for a generic definition.

The problem of defining the *Nights* through its content is clearly demonstrated in the history of one of its masks: it was seen as a collection of folktales, or as a receptacle of folklore. The technique in this and other attempts at definition has been to select one recurrent aspect of the tales and ignore the existence of others. The *Nights* is substantially a collection of popular entertainments regularly meddled with or influenced by more literary interests, which ends up almost by accident being unusually and surprisingly sophisticated and complex in its literary functions. However, to assert its folktale components alone is to distort even its simpler popular aspect. Folktale is by nature oral and, while elements of folklore (the manners and customs and beliefs of a people), are present to a degree in almost all tales, reading for these alone is a very safe and outdated approach. To look at the *Nights* tales only through their fascinating folktale analogues and sources is to plough with a racehorse: it can most certainly offer that service, but is more exciting in another.

It has been suggested as recently as 1988/1408 that even a text as late as the 19th/13th century Macnaghten stands in fairly close relation to an authentic folktale tradition (Molan, "Oral Connection" 195). However, the support for the argument is derived from the inclusion in the text of indicators of oral delivery. The Macnaghten text has many instances of the verb *qāla* (he said, shorthand for *qāla al-rāwī* the reciter said) used without relevance to its setting (Molan, "Oral Connection" 95-99). The argument is that these represent shreds of an oral identity for the stories. However, while the historical fact of oral performance of the *Nights* is not in dispute, the argument that it represents a genuine non literary oral tradition is quite a different matter. The presence of the verb *qāla* is more likely to indicate oral performance than origin (Pinault, *Techniques* 14). The *rāwī* worked either from a written text or from having memorised a written text. MS 657 (204) of the John Rylands Library has periodic incidences of the phrase *qāla al-rāwī* in red, clearly representing here as in other MSS noted by Pinault (*Techniques* 13-14), markers or prompts for the professional reciter and usually indicating a new subject or change in voice or tempo (Pinault, *Techniques* 13-14). The phrase *faqālat lahu al-ʿajūz* (and then the old woman said to him) in 657 is particularly interesting: it is highlighted in red, prewarning of a change in character and pitch of voice. These extratextual prompts have more in common with stage directions in a play than with a genuine folkloric tradition.

If we decide that MSS containing performance directions like the extratextual phrases in red represent the popular reciting level of the *Alf layla wa-layla* cycle, then it is a fair supposition that those MSS which lack such prompts represent a more literary existence, an existence amongst readers rather than listeners. With this in mind the various MSS held in the John Rylands Library give us some further intimation of the oscillation of the *Nights* between its popular performative level and its literary level. Again it

is clear that becoming literary did not happen in the 18th/12th and 19th/13th centuries alone. MS 646, discussed above, is a manifestation of *Alf layla wa-layla* in a literary genre: it is from a substantial book ornamented to please the eye, has no red prompts and has twenty-nine illustrations. It predates several MSS which are reciters manuals, such as 654 of 1778/1202, and 657 of c. 1650/1060. (MS 654 is a curiosity, since it is unfinished by its copyist. Following leaf 21 the spaces for the red *qāla al-rāwī* have been left, but not filled in.)

Although undoubtedly many elements and indeed tales of the *Nights* came from the oral tradition of folktales, this does not alter its essentially literary history, any more than the same fact about the *Canterbury Tales* alters its literary identity. Being written down, and especially being *written up* for a different recipient, translates and transforms a story. To become a *Nights* story was to be written; the frame and the earliest known fragments are translations and parts of books. The issue is confused by the fact that recognisable tales of the *Nights* had and still have a purely oral life in parts of the Middle East. The same is true of many stories which originate in any literature, East and West. The *Nights* is a book which acted as a collector of stories, literary and oral, which by inclusion became literary in an inconclusive kind of way. The assertion that the *Nights* is one or the other is incorrect since it is uncomfortably both, and neither.

This is a book intensely conscious of being a written text, so conscious that, curiously, its connection with orality is stressed (as is noted by Naddaff and Walther, amongst others). Being written was recognised as an honour conferred upon a tale, and the process of transition from oral to written is highlighted as the ultimate recognition of a fine tale. The ubiquitous king hears the tale with pleasure, and orders that it be written "in letters of gold", and stored in the treasury. The idea that *Nights* tales were entertainments for kings and princes, an idea which prevailed over more than a century in

Europe, is self-evidently ludicrous. Evening stories were popular in some of the Ummayad and Abbasid courts, particularly that of al-Muqtadir (908-931/295-322) (Ghazi 169), but the caliph or king's appearance in the story as a character, the passive listener, alerts us to the fact that these are stories told to a very different audience, constructed with the historical fact of royal interest used as a prop for the fiction. The tales imitate or even parody the *samar*, or evening stories, of the early Islamic courts, but most certainly postdate them.

Despite the fact that the *Nights* has a substantially literary history and that it is derived from translations of books, it reflects in its narratives a striking awareness of the threshold it inhabits - it is a two-way door between the two worlds, oral and literary. As we shall see, Europe inherited this dual identity, for the *Arabian Nights Entertainments* is also made from both literary and oral sources.

Suhayr al-Qalamāwī argues that when written and studied, a popular story begins to die, for its identity and structure are a living creation formed interactively between teller and group (132-3). The *Nights* is from the possibilities between these two worlds: born in the written form, it exists historically side by side with the art of story-telling, with the *rāwī* and the crowd. The fact that the *Nights* could be eroded and lost and then renewed from these sources is an indication of their richness and vitality at a given time. The muted, incomplete and stiff literary nature of the *Nights* today is obvious only when it is contrasted with tales collected directly from oral sources. C. G. Campbell collected a series of stories from Arab tribes in the 1940s/1360s which show a vitality and richness which has faded in the process of multiple copying which the *Nights* has endured.[27] Galland's additions to his *Mille et une nuits* which were derived from oral sources (Aladdin, Ali Baba etc) demonstrate the same phenomenon.

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[27]C. G. Campbell, trans., *Tales from the Arab Tribes* (London: Ernest Benn, 1949).

This is not the only liminal aspect of the *Nights*. The text in every version is a linguistic mongrel, although in differing degrees. As with all liminalities, being neither one thing nor another means it is both something and nothing; being on the threshold in itself is not necessarily a positive quality. The language of the *Alf layla wa-layla* oscillates between formal and colloquial, and has often been seen to represent a middle Arabic. However, some compilers refined the language to a degree, as is the case with the Calcutta I edition, whilst others drew from diverse texts having a different linguistic pitch, thus ending up with a patchwork effect, as is the case with the Breslau edition. Middle Arabic, as it is given in the *Alf layla wa-layla*, is at least in part a product of the accretions of a random textual history. The consequent blend of correct literary Arabic (*fuṣḥa*) and colloquial Arabic (*ʿāmiyya*) is sometimes very contrived, unnatural, or even intentionally comic. The presence of colloquial words in a formal structure can demolish, or at least make pretentious, any gestures at higher linguistic affiliations. The *Alf layla wa-layla* cannot be respectable Arabic literature because it violates the language and laughs at itself on purpose (or by accident) too often. Al-Sāmarāʾī extracts innumerable instances of colloquial Arabic, and sees the movement between high and colloquial Arabic as a deliberate and literary play with forms. The phrase in the Fisherman and the Jinnī "*wa ayqana bil-halāk wa bāla fi thiyābih*" (Beirut 1981, 39) (he knew of his death and pissed in his pants [trans mine])[28] is rendered in *fuṣḥa*, but is stylistically colloquial (al-Sāmarāʾī 187). Whether through art or accidental accretions, the *Nights* even

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[28] In one instance where a series of proverbs are adduced, two are literary, and two are colloquial: "*yā tujjār ya arbāb al-amwāl, ma kullu mudawwar jawza, wa la kullu mustaṭīla mawza, wa la kullu hamrāʾ lahma, wa la kullu bayḍāʾ shaḥma . . .* " (O Traders! O Men of wealth! Not all that is round is a walnut; not all that is elongated is a banana; not all that is red is meat; not all that is white is fat . . . [trans. mine]) Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī and Anīs al-Jalīs (Beirut 1981, 210-11). The last two are literary, according to al-Sāmarāʾī (198).

in English retains an at times witty blend of literary and street sounds of the medieval era.

Predictably, the relationship between the *Nights* and high Arab literature and letters serves us little better in the search for identity, for the connection is neither clear nor uncontentious. One thing is clear: *adab* literature, the refined highly intellectual product of a literary elite for a literate elite is very far removed from our ribald, artlessly erratic text. However, shreds and distorted reflections of *adab* literature are abundant in the *Nights*. Some literary figures interested themselves in stories and anecdotal narratives, to be pirated by compilers of the collection. As mentioned above, some compilers, conscious of the standards the text failed to meet, tried to make the text more literary. However, any fictive text had to disguise itself in one form or another to be incoporated in the canon (Beaumont, "Comic Narratives" 232-36) and disguise or sophisticated obfuscation was beyond the *Nights'* capacities. Nonetheless, anecdotal literature and fable literature are famous components of *adab* prose and, as Robert Irwin shows, proved to be a rich source for *Nights* material (*Companion* 83-84). The borrowing from the *Kalīla wa Dimna* is obvious, and fringe dwellers like the maqāmāt or collections like al-Tanūkhī's *al-Faraj ba'd al-shidda* (Joy after sorrow) contributed both stories and its theme to many parts of the *Nights*.

The objectives of *adab* literature were certainly to entertain but to be instructive at the same time - to "instruct through entertainment" using "a harmonious blending of the serious and the joking" (*al-jidd wa-l-hazl*) (*EI* (2) VI. 109). The *Nights* conforms with this in a broad and simplistic way, in perhaps a lateral way, for it fictionalises the definition itself: it is a story about instruction through story-telling entertainment. This popular recreation and recollection of *adab* rules is vibrant and irreverent, for this popular literature

keeps the rules only upon its own terms. The *Nights* shows a consciousness of the rules it breaks and the standards it fails to meet. Unarguably the *Nights* is not *adab* literature and the purity and art of *adab* literature is degraded in this activity but something is also achieved.

The line of demarcation between the two worlds is fuzzy. While high life was frequently the subject of popular tales, the converse also existed as a distinct literary genre. The maqamāt and the convention of exploring *al-jidd wa-l-hazl* exploited the lower trades and their activities in polished literary styles for a highly educated audience which, although witty, was not always derisive (Sadan, "Kings and Craftsmen" 91). Furthermore, the *Nights* is not alone in mixing literary and semi-colloquial features of language (although it appears to be the outstanding example), for in some instances of these genres the drop to colloquial style is used for effect (Sadan, "Kings and Craftsmen" 31). The blend which appears in the *Nights* reflects both trends and, while ostensibly popular in purpose, defies simple pigeonholing. It appears to be a hybrid born substantially of later times, a trash can, or as Robert Irwin suggests, a "cultural amphibian" (*Companion* 113). The *Nights* is the perennial thief, the receiver of stolen stories.

Every assertion made to defend one set of texts dissolves away at a touch: the suggestion that supplementation from unrelated story cycles was done predominantly in the 18th/12th and 19th/13th centuries by literary compilers does not bear scrutiny. Similarly, the idea that the *Nights* has been mistakenly made literal, that the "real" collection was much smaller, cannot resist the pressure of evidence from the early records such as that of the *Fihrist*. Definitions of identity which limit the *Nights* to oral or literary traditions exclusively cannot be sustained in the light of the evidence from the text itself. Rejection or affirmation of either family of the Arabic versions results in loss, for what the Egyptian recensions lack in stylistic and temporal

unity, they make up for in breadth and literary complexity, while the Syrian text, although fragmented, preserves a coherence missing from the "complete", more diffuse texts.

Chapter 3: English Translations of the *Thousand and One Nights*

The *Thousand and One Nights* is a collection of stories which have greater unity amongst themselves than any simple anthology can have, as the stories form the narrative fabric of a narrative and often concern themselves with the same themes. This collection, however, proves also to be a family of texts having such diversity in its representatives that determining the precise content of even the framing narrative is nearly impossible, as the proliferation of texts multiplies the possible images of the characters and events. Having selected almost arbitrarily which version to prefer, the scholar reacts to the ghosts of the other versions. Sheherazade had three children and was spared or, in the alternative, she educated the king through stories, changed him and had no children.

From this original diversity sprang such diversity in translations that none proves satisfactory, although all the major translations contribute something new, some transformation of the material which has been enduring and influential. At the least, each English translation (and the set is arbitrarily limited to the English translations) is a document on the cultural singularities and perceptions of the times of its translator, highlighted by the encounter with and appropriation of the alien text and at the most, each translation is a literary phenomenon, a work which has virtues and differences great enough to distinguish it from the others and to give it a semi-independent life.

No translation in English has managed to supersede its predecessors. Burton did not manage even partially to eclipse Galland, while Mardrus survives by being the most available and, for the uninitiated reader, the most accessible. No translation has managed to hide from the reader the fact that

there is more out there, that the book in hand may well not equal the value of those in the bush.

The new translations divided rather than stole the readership. After Lane each version had its group of adherents. One commentator conveniently solved this competition of versions by parcelling each off with a different purpose and a different readership: Galland's was for the nursery, Lane's for the library, Payne's for the study, and Burton's for the sewer.[1] This flippant comment shows the saturation felt, and accepted, by English readers; it was perfectly reasonable to suggest that the book, in different forms, could penetrate every stratum of the reading public.

Variation is essential to European Medieval texts.[2] If we accept a similarly flexible textual identity for the *Nights*, we have a case where the medieval character of a text has been maintained well beyond the medieval period, and maintained by Europeans. Because the *Nights* was textually uncertain, fragmentary, contradictory and, probably most of all, Arabic, Europeans treated it with a freedom unconstrained by post-medieval perceptions of textual rights.

The *Nights* in English is a much mediated affair. Because the Arabic texts have been used repeatedly to renew or redefine the English versions, and English readers' impressions, they cannot be ignored: they are the secret informant behind the scenes. Just as Burton saw himself as correcting Lane's bowdlerisation with his "complete" translation, an Arabic version was Lane's

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[1] *Edinburgh Review* (July 1886) 184 (cited in Burton, *Supplemental Nights* 7. 440).

[2] See Paul Zumthor: ". . . la variabilité est un caractère essentiel de tout texte médiéval. Il exclut en principe tout recours à la notion d'authenticité telle que l'élabora, à partir du XVIIIe siècle, la philologie moderne" (12).

means of rectifying the license taken by Galland. The text in English has and had an independent life but is always connected to and implicated in its Arabic double and parent. The genealogy of a given English text is not something which lies behind it: it is something which develops alongside it, and which, especially now under the influence of an increasing number of bilingual scholars, affects it. In the past the demand of European readers for information and accuracy generated the search for MSS and, it has been argued, the creation of all of the lengthy versions in Arabic (Mahdi, *1001* 100, 101). The texts in Arabic and in the European languages have periodically been the stimulus and the source for renewal of each other. The use of one English version can no longer take place in a vacuum. The *Nights* in English one hundred years after Burton's translation is something uneasily constructed from Galland, Lane, Burton, Payne, Mardrus (or rather Mathers) and twentieth-century selections, and is larger than them all.

If Galland saw the *Nights* as educational, as "a graceful mingling of delight and edification" (Irwin, *Companion* 19), then he had something completely different in mind from the blend of instruction and enjoyment invoked by the preface to the *Alf layla wa-layla*. The European reading was primarily undertaken for education about and enjoyment of the exotic Other. By contrast the invocation in the Arabic text invites participation in and learning from general human realities. An important feature of nearly all of the translations of the first two centuries after Galland is that rather than translocating tales from one language and one culture to another, they are a means for talking to Europeans about the people who made and heard the tales. These translations make explicit interpretations of their material, either in the text, or through extensive footnotes. Payne and Burton sit uneasily on

the threshold of a change in this practice. Payne was the first to see his work as a literary text, if for the English reader, and therefore let it speak without annotations (Irwin, *Companion* 27). Burton holds tenaciously to the European reader through his notes, yet his and Payne's translations represent their origins with far less compromise than their predecessors and several influential successors. Husain Haddawy's translation (1985/1405) of a selection of stories from the Leiden text, followed recently by a second volume of stories from both textual families, is a good example of a translation which is free of this culture specific communication. His translation serves his text; other English translations served their readers.

The contributions of the translations to the identity of the *Nights* are unusual. As is usual for a translation, they made the text accessible to a culture different from the text's culture of origin and, as is also usual, the change in language and idiom and reader changed the text and its literary effects. The European translations, however, did much more than this to the *Nights:* they remade it. This means everything it meant for the Arabic compilations. Each English text offers a compilation which either includes completely new stories or selects concordant ones, and offers radically altered literary styles. The new stories became indicative of the whole collection and, in cases where no Arabic MS was found, were retranslated back into Arabic (*EI* (2) 1. 359). Particularly in the West, these grafts took, and later translators such as Littmann found themselves unable to exclude them. Littmann incorporated them into his careful and scholarly German translation of the Macnaghten text (*EI* (2) 1. 360). Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Aladdin or the Wonderful Lamp, and Prince Ahmed and the Fairy Pari-Banou, to name just three, are contributions to the *Nights* of the first European translation,

fixed irremovably into the collection by its subsequent popularity.[3] Some of these stories have been found in *Nights* MSS, some have been found in independent MSS and some, in particular Aladdin, have never been found in an Arabic MS not apparently derived from Galland's translation (Mahdi, *1001* 78).

While this study is aimed at scholars in both Arabic and English studies, and while it is desirable to use a translation both 'complete' and accessible, this has proved unsatisfactory. Both Burton and Mardrus add and embroider in ways which falsify an ideal of the text and in the current upsurge of interest in the *Nights* are unlikely to be enduring versions. All complete English versions are unsatisfactory; Payne tiptoes around erotica and, along with all the rest, makes some mistakes. Mardrus adds erotica and is a translation of a translation, and Burton (on rare occasions) interpolates his own racism. Only Burton and Mardrus are readily available. It is possible for the scholar to translate anew from the Arabic for each quoted instance, as Pinault has done. However, this creates a stylistic disjunction for the English reader who may wish to read more of a given story than is quoted. Furthermore, this is a study of the *Nights* in English and it would be pushing the paradox of the absent text too far to ignore all representatives of the family in the literary analysis. (For fluency and focus, John Payne's version will be the anchor text in chapter six.)

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[3] The complete list of Galland's eleven interpolated tales is as follows: The History of Prince Zeyn al-Asnam and the King of the Genii; The History of Codadad and the Princess of Deryabar; The Story of the Sleeper Awakened; Aladdin or the Wonderful Lamp; The Story of the Blind Man Baba Abdalla; The Story of Sidi Nouman; The Story of Cogia Hassan al Habbal; Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves; Ali Cogia the Merchant of Baghdad; Prince Ahmed and the Fairy Pari-Banou; The Sisters who envied their younger Sister (Payne 9. 264).

Many excellent studies introduce and discuss in detail the translations and their foundation texts. Robert Irwin and Muhsin Mahdi give valuable introductions to the history of each translation and translator. The discussion here owes a lot to these scholars and their predecessors and offers nothing really new on the detailed descriptions of the various translations. However, it is necessary to reinform the reader by revisiting this history; each study of the *Nights* has to be in part introductory before it can lead the reader further.

There are several English translations which will not be discussed in detail here, as they are relatively unimportant. Jonathon Scott brought out a "new" translation in 1811/1226 in six volumes. This was in fact mainly a retranslation of Galland, with a small amount of additional material from the Wortley Montague MS. Henry Torrens began a translation of the Macnaghten MS before it was edited and published. He published one volume only in 1839/1255 before leaving the field free for Lane, who was in the process of publishing his translation of the Bulaq text. Beyond these there are, amongst the innumerable more recent selections of *Arabian Nights* tales, several selections which represent new translations from the Arabic. Those of A. J. Arberry, N. J. Dawood, and Husain Haddawy are best known. The last of these, despite being a selection only, is the most important translation of recent years. It is based on the Leiden text, and is by far the most readable translation available in English. It is accurate, impersonal, and breaks successfully with Naddaff's Borgesian theory of *Nights* translation: rewriting the text in one's own image.[4] It is also the first to present the poetry with its dignity or humour intact.

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[4] A concept which has proved fruitful for critics. It has been discussed by Naddaff (6) and Kabbani (45). The phrase is originally coined by Naddaff, based on the ideas in Borges' two

Antoine Galland

Galland's *Mille et une Nuits*, in English *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, was perhaps the most influential and popular translation in European history, and perhaps equalled only by the translation of the *Hazar Afsana* in the Arab world. It was published in twelve volumes which appeared at irregular intervals between 1704/1116 and 1716/1129, and was translated anonymously into English from 1706/1118. It is, as has been noted earlier, based rather loosely on the Leiden text for a significant portion of its overall contents, but is in its entirety a compilation from extraordinarily diverse sources. It is created first of all out of a combination of literary and oral sources; it was received from both streams of story. After exhausting his MSS sources (which alongside the Leiden text included an independent MS of Sindbad the Sailor and, as Zotenberg has shown, at least one other substantial MS [*Histoire* 16]), Galland resorted to the tales which his friend Hanna Diab, a Syrian, could tell him. In some cases it is these orally received tales which have achieved the most memorable status, such as Aladdin, and Ali Baba. Hanna Diab must have been a vibrant story-teller. Galland also lacked the close of the frame, and it was originally thought that he made it up. However, the closing sequence he gives appears to conform with a genuine variant which exists in MS form (Grotzfeld 87). It was quite accurately transmitted to him from his source. (Hanna gave Galland stories both orally and via his own MS copied from memory).

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critical essays on the *Nights*. This unique feature of Haddawy's translation is also noted by Naddaff (123).

A sample of his style and the use he makes of his source is the reader's first encounter with Sheherazade:

> Scheherazade was possessed of a degree of courage beyond her sex, joined to an extent of knowledge, and degree of penetration, that was truly astonishing. She had read much, and was possessed of so great a memory that she never forgot any thing, she had once perused. She had applied also, with much success, to philosophy, to medicine, to history, and to the arts; and made better verses than the most celebrated poets of the time. Besides this, her beauty was incomparable; and her virtuous disposition crowned all those valuable qualities. (Forster 21)[5]

This is not so much a translation as an analytical comment upon the original, which highlights and explains for the reader her courage, memory and accomplishments, and adds the beauty and virtue essential as prerequisites for a truly admirable 18th/12th or 19th/13th century European heroine. Of the original Arabic, only the short phrase "she had read and learned" and the words "medicine", "philosophy", "history" and "poetry" are represented in this adaptation. No astonishment at Sheherazade's accomplishments is expressed in the original; there she is the excellent representative of women rather than the exception to a bad lot. The Arabic is more spare, crafted and focused; her brain is excellent because it is by her wits that she will succeed. Virtue needs no comment, as for a woman in her position it is assumed, while beauty is not mentioned. The European version is much more diffuse and less sophisticated. The astonishment this excellent, and in Galland's version, exceptional woman arouses is amusing.

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[5] *Shahrāzād qad qara'at al-kutub wa-l-muṣannafāt wa-l-ḥikma wa kutub al-ṭubbiyyāt wa ḥafiẓat al-ash'ār wa-ṭāla'at al-akhbār wa 'alimat aqwāl al-nās wa kalām al-ḥukamā wa-l-mulūk, 'ārifa labība ḥakīma adība, qad qarat wa darat* (Leiden 66). Shahrazad, had read the books of literature, philosophy and medicine. She knew poetry by heart, had studied historical reports, and was acquainted with the sayings of men and the maxims of sages and kings. She was intelligent, knowledgeable, wise and refined. She had read and learned (Haddawy 1. 13).

This is the Sheherazade who became the most enduring in the European imagination. Of the subsequent translations, Lane, Payne, and Burton, in following closely their originals, do not mention physical beauty and yet "lovely Sheherazade" is as essential to the European reader as are her narratives and actions; she recurs in commentary, selections, pictures and derivations to the present day.[6]

Galland's translation altered style, tone, content and colouring of the Arabic text. Designed to appeal, it enhanced the exotic, magical fairy-tale elements and discarded sophisticated or darker elements. Not surprisingly, Galland was and is the source of most children's versions, and is probably responsible for the long lasting misconception that the tales can be categorised as fairy-tales.

Where Galland's translation coincides with the Leiden text, it represents less than one quarter of the tales to be found in the longer Arabic versions. Approximately one third of Galland's final creation is made up of the interpolated tales of Persian, Turkish and Arabic origin (Payne 9. 263). Galland did something more than redefine the possible boundaries of the *Nights*. He stripped them down to the pleasing essentials for his times:

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[6]The crossflow between the Arabic and European versions is highlighted by tracing the movement of motifs such as this one. Al-ʿAdawī's edition of 1907/1325 describes Shahrazād and Dunyazād as being of beauty and loveliness (*dhātā ḥusn wa jamāl*). His version is derived from the Second Bulaq of 1863/1280, and the interpolation of the description is clearly an inheritance from the European *Nights* tradition. The Maktaba al-Thaqāfiyya popular edition of 1981/1401 appears to extrapolate from the same sources, giving ". . . of beauty and loveliness, splendour, stature and elegance" (*dhātā ḥusn wa jamāl wa bahaʾ wa qadd wa iʿtidāl*) (10). The edition of the Dār maktaba al-ḥayāt of 1995/1416 also follows this trend, giving "two girls of great beauty, loveliness and splendour" (*bintān rāʾiʿatā al-ḥusn wa al-jamāl wa-l-bahāʾ*) (15). Both of these editions are curiosities of European influence in other ways as well: the first has illustrations which are poor reproductions of those in Burton's *Nights*, while the second has illustrations in the European style (reminiscent of Edmund Dulac) by Leon Carré. (Translations mine).

Richard Hole suggested in 1797/1212 that from Galland's translation we are "as much unaquainted with the merits of the original as we should be in respect to the former beauty of a human body from contemplating its skeleton (10)". However, upon this skeleton Galland built something new - so new, delightful and refreshing that it revitalised the literature of his culture and also guaranteed the ultimate renewal of the life of the *Nights* themselves. That the *Nights* were reworked, retranslated and redefined was inevitable; Galland's popularity ensured the interest and his very free method of appropriation eventually demanded redress.

Edward William Lane

Lane's translation came out as a serial over three to four years, 1838-41/1254-57, also bound in three volumes. Lane's source text is the Bulaq of 1835/1251 with some additional reference to the Breslau and Calcutta I texts. He introduces Sheherazade as follows:

> [Shahrazad] had read various books of histories, and the lives of preceding kings, and stories of past generations; it is asserted that she had collected together a thousand books of histories, relating to preceding generations and kings, and works of the poets. (1. 10)[7]

Simple, accurate and formal in style, this translation has an elegance which is at times quite at odds with the rowdy, earthy, inelegant and bawdy styles and content which make up many of the *Nights*' tales. Consequently, Lane was driven to omit a great deal in order to maintain the high and serious tone of his creation and to appeal to a wide readership without fear of the censor. Lane's is an artistic composition: he selects or alters material to be

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[7] *Wa kānat al-kabīra qad qara'at al-kutub wa-l-tawārīkh wa siyar al-mulūk al-mutaqaddimīn wa akhbār al-umam al-maḍīn qīla annaha jama'at alf kitāb min kutub al-tawārīkh al-muta'alliqa bi-l-umam al-sālifa wa-l-mulūk al-khāliyya wa-l-shu'arā'* (First Bulaq 5).

tasteful and coherent in style. Interestingly, he also argues that the work had a single author, an illusion fostered by the uniformity of his own translation but not credible in the light of any original version: the heterogeneity of styles and target audiences in the original alone prohibits any such assumption (Payne 9. 287). Lane's translation is seen by some to be the finest in English (Leila Ahmed 160) and by others to be pompous and latinate (Irwin, *Companion* 24). It is elegant, the language is simple but beautiful and it is readable. However, selected for homogeneity rather than representation and heavily edited according to the tastes and the market of the times, it is very different from its parent. This editing policy proves very destructive to the breadth and depth of the world of the *Nights*. Burton suggests aptly that: "coarseness and crassness are but the shades of a picture which would otherwise be all lights" (I. xvi). However, Lane's editing reveals significant expectations of his readers and his own prejudgements.[8]

There is a tendency amongst scholars of Lane's era to minimise or erase certain Other, specifically feminine, aspects of the text, thereby bringing it closer to an acceptable idiom. The voice of Sheherazade herself is seen as somehow obsolete or unnecessary. Lane's original edition of thirty-two serial pamphlets omits Sheherazade's formal division of nights with its intrusion of the tale-teller's voice (as does Payne's after him). With this omission he concentrates attention on the tales themselves, while the teller's presence recedes to the outer limits or borders of the nearly three years of telling. A curious effect of the serial, however, is that Lane himself takes her place: the break between pamphlets occurs sometimes even in mid-sentence. Readers

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[8]As Muhsin Jassim Ali notes ". . . these translations or redactions reveal much about contemporary predilections, and must be seen as significant signs of the prevailing literary concerns of the times" (*Scheherazade* 6-7).

would have had to wait nearly a month for the continuation. Lane and his publishers became the tangible manipulators of suspense and expectation, supplanting the female Sheherazade. They thus also created a contemporary space for the stories, for this suspense was felt in a real present. The repetition of Sheherazade's voice at each dawn, by contrast, always reminds us of Sheherazade's story and inhabits the world of fiction and imagination.

Lane's notes have a major role in his translation. They are the information scaffolding through which Lane educates and controls his readers' responses. The information offered in the notes give a ready made interpretative point of view, encouraging the reader to read for information, formulating the objective European persona for the reader to emulate and preventing identification with the characters and events. These notes discourage an engaged reading by maintaining a them-and-us perspective on the people of the tales. The polemics of the notes are dubious. The formula in which Lane combines a fictional incident and a historical anecdote to make a generic judgement on behaviour or idiosyncrasy of the always alien Easterner, recurs again and again in his writing. Shahriyār's murderous habits are compared to those of a historical tyrant[9] and the generalisation proffered is that crimes of such blackness are not only possible but recurrent in the East (Lane 1. 39). Lane as scholar and Englishman completely distances himself from such events and his pose goes unquestioned. It is as if his simple faith that the West is different will erase the fact that any human history will disgorge such events if prodded and that his culture's collective history cannot possibly be an exception. As a scholar, Lane should not have

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[9] This feature of Lane's writing is also noted by Edward Said (*Orientalism* 161). Lane had this in common with a great number of Orientalists and enthusiasts; in fact this form of argument was an accepted methodology by which Europeans discussed Orientals (see also *Orientalism* 96).

indulged in so simple a mistake and had he thought for a moment of the ludicrous nature of the reversed formula, he could not have done it. If an outsider had asserted that Heathcliff and Jack the Ripper between them demonstrated convincingly the selfish and uncontrolled nature of Victorian males' sexuality along with their complete disregard for the common humanity they share with women, Lane and any other Briton would have been outraged. Lane's now unscholarly formula panders to public and publisher but is indicative of a willed maintenance of ignorance both by him, and by extension, his readers. The rejection of the judgement on Victorian males is instant and felt, based on a familiarity with society which makes the judgement self-evidently incorrect. Five years' residence in Egypt did not give Lane the rudiments of the same familiarity and saturation. He learned many facts but he did not mix as an equal. He was immersed in observing the exotic and managed to solidify artificially this necessarily evanescent genre. He freezes the exotic in a changeless perspectiveless medieval canvas, and he does it extraordinarily well. It is clear that he never once exploded the nature of this exercise by applying his objective standards to himself. There is a sterility and corrupt aspect to such an approach to another culture, something which disturbs us now, in the last part of the twentieth century. In Lane's time, however, the otherness of the East was in the category of known and, ironically, well demonstrated fact. It was almost unimaginable that it was otherwise. We must remember that this period proves that the outside observer armed with *Wuthering Heights* and mid-Victorian newspapers, and well supported from home with a preconceived idea of Victorians, eagerly expecting to see in life what he or she has read about, would in fact see full evidence of murderous tendencies in Victorians virtually daily. Truth is established by seeing that which you have been taught you will see.

Lane's ideological and race-centric stance is the source of most infelicities in his work. It is useless to wish that Lane had translated the entire *Nights* without bowdlerising, for this would have been counter to his whole approach. In his notes and in his editing and in his influential book on manners and customs he reconstitutes himself as the voice for the people of Egypt: male or female, wealthy or poor, urban or rural. However, his friends and informants must be assumed to have been male, middle class to wealthy urban dwellers and Lane's comparative ignorance of all other classes, whether women or the poor, reflects also the limitations of the class with which he mingled. In *Manners and Customs* he has relatively little to say about the poorer classes, both because it was not possible for him to discover much through his sources and because it would have been counter to his image as a scholar and a European to be intimate with them.

Lane's tone reveals a genuine liking and respect for Egyptians and a scrupulous wish to appear objective. The nature of his endeavour keeps separate the categories of observer and observed, and for those times this legitimised his work as scholarly. In the present day he is still highly regarded because his many facts are verifiable and vindicate him as a researcher. It takes a second reading, however, to notice that the class for which he shows this liking and respect and indeed accuracy in observation is a very small slice of society, and the groups remote from his immediate experience are treated with a rigid and callous distance. Women for example are always objects, never human beings and Lane speaks so knowledgeably about their lifestyle, practices and customs that it is disturbing to realise that he "knew" all this from male gossip.[10] Lane's writings function on a *them and*

[10]Burton notes Lane's relative ignorance of country people, women and children: in fact "two thirds of humanity" (*Supplemental Nights* 7. 426). Melman also notes Lane's dependence on male sources (74).

us polarity firstly between European society (his readers) and Egyptian people (his subject) and secondly between the Egyptian men he met on common human ground and all other Egyptians.

We should admire Lane, for within his cultural context he was an admirable scholar. He presents us with a *Nights* very different from any other. It is a very different step to admire all of his work uncritically for its applications within our cultural context. In an era critical of culturally prescribed perception it is the very act of writing about and defining an Other which is brought into question and scrutinised.

John Payne

Payne's translation of 1882-84/1299-1301 is based on the Macnaghten text, supplemented from the Bulaq and the Breslau texts. It is a translation of the Macnaghten text most of the time but enriched and refined by extracts from the others. The passage which introduces Sheherazade is translated half from the Macnaghten and half (from "Moreover") from the Breslau.

Payne introduces the heroine as follows:

> [Shehrzad] had read many books and histories and chronicles of ancient kings and stories of people of old time: it is said that she had collected a thousand books of chronicles of past peoples and bygone kings and poets. Moreover she had read books of science and medicine; her memory was stored with verses and stories and folklore and the sayings of kings and sages, and she was wise, witty, prudent and well-bred. (1. 9)[11]

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[11] *Kānat [Shahrazād] qad qara'at al-kutub wa-l-tawārīkh wa siyar al-mulūk al-mutaqaddimīn wa akhbār al-umam al-māḍīn qīla annaha jama'at alf kitāb min kutub al-tawārīkh al-muta'alliqa bi-l-umam al-sālifa wa-l-mulūk al-khāliyya wa-l-shu'arā'* (Macnaghten 1. 6). *Kānat [Shāhrazād] qad qara'at al-kutub wa-l-muṣannafāt wa-l-ḥikma wa kutub al-ṭibb wa ḥafiẓat al-ash'ār wa ṭāla'at al-akhbār wa aqwāl al-nās wa kalām al-ḥukamā' wa-l-mulūk, wa hiya 'ārifa labība ḥakima 'adība* (Breslau 1. 17).

Payne's translation is the best full English version, although its completeness has to be qualified, as this translation is really a new compilation, created on an inclusive rather than a selective principle. The notion of completeness is in itself questionable in the context of a family of compilations which compete with and contradict each other. However, Payne's translation shows an uncomplicated attempt at the scholarly and accurate rendition of his chosen material. He includes the poetry if in rather ugly and awkward renditions but sadly leaves off the formal division of nights. His transliteration of names and places, as with Lane's, is too archaic to be palatable for the contemporary reader. He has a tendency to understate erotica; in fact he cut explicit sexual scenes if they were not to be found in all three of his sources (Irwin, *Companion* 27). For the scholar, Payne's is the most important translation in English of the longer versions of the *Nights* and, with Burton, it is an essential research tool for entry into the *Nights* in general. It is the only major English translation which aims at establishing the *Nights* as literature and not as a social commentary.[12] His translation is, however, extremely scarce, a fact which contributed significantly to the greater fame attached to Burton's translation. Burton reached a far wider readership and gained notoriety, but, as he plagiarised Payne extensively, it is fair to say that Payne's work is communicated through Burton's and perhaps guarantees the assurance of the more famous translation.

Richard Burton

Published in 1885/1302, Burton's translation is usually said to have the same genealogy as Payne's. However, Payne's English version has to be

[12] As we shall see, Mardrus' claim to this objective is subverted by his performance.

seen as a major source of Burton's. Despite a dependency between the two, Burton's has unique features: he translated the poetry in new ways and recreated the *sajᶜ*, or rhymed prose, in English. He retains the formal division of nights, an element which is essential to the work. He introduces Sheherazade as follows:

> [Shahrāzād] had perused the books, annals and legends of preceding Kings, and the stories, examples and instances of by-gone men and things; indeed it was said that she had collected a thousand books of histories relating to the antique races and departed rulers. She had perused the works of the poets and knew them by heart; she had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and accomplishments; and she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred. (1. 15)[13]

This version of the introduction is slightly more pompous and ornamental than Payne's but is basically the same. Payne's is less jumbled. Burton's plagiarism of Payne is neatly captured in this sample; he alters Payne's wording but offers precisely the same passage which, as we have noted, comes from two completely different Arabic texts.

The most noticeable aspect of Burton's translation overall is its erratic nature. Sometimes it is very fine, effective and consistent to its own chosen style or idiom. But sometimes (more often in the *Supplemental Nights*) it is contorted and contrived. On rare occasions he embellishes the original from his own prejudices (see chapter five, page 142) and he interpolates one complete story from unknown sources.[14] He is not as good as his most

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[13]*Kānat [Shahrazād] qad qaraᵓat al-kutub wa-l-tawārīkh wa siyar al-mulūk al-mutaqaddimīn wa akhbār al-umam al-māḍīn qīla annaha jamaᶜat alf kitāb min kutub al-tawārīkh al-mutaᶜalliqa bi-l-umam al-sālifa wa-l-mulūk al-khāliyya wa-l-shuᶜarāᵓ* (Macnaghten 1. 6). *Kānat [Shāhrazād] qad qaraᵓat al-kutub wa-l-muṣannafāt wa-l-ḥikma wa kutub al-ṭibb wa ḥafiẓat al-ashᶜār wa ṭālaᶜat al-akhbār wa aqwāl al-nās wa kalām al-ḥukamāᵓ wa-l-mulūk, wa hiya ᶜārifa labība ḥakīma ᵓadība* (Breslau 1. 17).

[14]This interpolated tale, How Abu Hasan Brake Wind, is believed to be of European origin with no known Arabic source (Irwin, *Companion* 34). Interestingly, however, a version of it

admiring critics believe, and not as bad as is maintained by his most critical detractors. His very real problems are in themselves revealing.

The most problematic aspect of Burton's version is not his translation of the *Nights* but the dominant space he carves out for his own personality through his constant authorial presence in the footnotes. These notes are designed to guide the reader's interpretation and impress the reader with Burton, and these two purposes are in conflict (Knipp, "Arabian Nights in England" 46). Rather than helping the reader, Burton's fascinating and famous notes are a major obstruction[15].

Burton creates his own place and identity in the text, asserting his own authorial role from the outside. He also delineates a specific reader: his voice mediates between an alien text and this reader, thus assimilating the text to his idea of who is to read it. The persona of his reader is urbane, a male amateur scholar, a male who shares Burton's interest, but not his knowledge, and who adventures voyeuristically from club or armchair. If we accept that every text creates a space for its reader, prejudges its reader's general identity, then it is easy to see that this Burton-sympathising reader struggles to supplant the heterogeneous reader originally designated by the text and, furthermore, not by having a space created in the real body of the text, but by being involved in a constant dialogue with the spurious "author" through his parasitic text, the footnotes. Burton is not alone in this assertive form of translation. Naddaff notes that each translator makes the text anew *in his own image* (6).

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was collected by Campbell from the Muntafiq tribe. It is called The Story of the Prince of Kermanshah and his Misfortunes (*Tales from the Arab Tribes*).

[15]Noted by several scholars. Robert Irwin suggests that they are "obtrusive, kinky and highly personal" (*Companion* 34).

One way of describing the exceptional nature of Burton's relationship to his text is to identify the author as parasite, the text as host. His presence in the text taints the free function of the text's own elements. He attempts to control reader response through limiting the areas of interest and through insidious insistent reminders of his views at the foot of nearly every page.

This has a direct effect on narrative impact. Burton is often described as hard to read and generally this is seen to be a problem inherent in his translation. However, the relation between narrative text and parasitic authorial intrusion is close enough to break continually the reader's concentration. A simple example will suffice to show this. The following is not hard reading:

> So they obeyed his words and staked out a wide circle with toils; and there gathered together a mighty matter of all kinds of wild beasts and gazelles, which cried out for fear of the men and threw themselves for fright in the face of the horses. Then they loosed on them the hounds and lynxes and hawks, and they shot the quarry down with shafts which pierced their vitals; and, by the time they came to the further end of the net-ring, they had taken a great number of the wild beasts, and the rest fled. Then Taj al-Muluk dismounted by the waterside and bade the game be brought before himself, and divided it, after he had set apart the best of the beasts for his father. . . . (2. 294)

However what Burton really offers is this same passage divided in the middle by a footnote on lynxes, Arab terms for falcons and a reference to two other works by himself[16], which perhaps he hopes we will look up before reading on.

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[16] The footnote in Burton's text reads as follows:

> 2. The lynx was used like the lion in Ancient Egypt and the Chita-leopard in India: I have never seen or heard of it in these days.
>
> 3. Arab "Sukur," whence our "Saker" the falcon, not to be confounded with the old Falco Sacer . . . . Falconry which, like all arts, began in Egypt, is an extensive subject throughout Moslem lands. I must refer my readers to "Falconry in the Valley of the Indus" (Van Voorst, 1852) and a long note in Pilgrimage iii. 7 (2. 294).

This is a benign example. Many of Burton's notes are fascinating, titillating, digressive, conversational and controversial in tone. They demand attention and create a habit of reading them as they appear rather than following the narrative and its very different moods. The effect of this competition for attention between notes and narrative has often been victory for the notes; many commentators say unashamedly that the greatest virtue and source of interest is the notes (eg Dearden 9). This implies that the best thing about the *Nights* is Burton, for the interest in the notes tends always towards a fascination with their author.

The oblivion into which Burton's *Nights* has drifted stems partly from the uneasy midground it inhabits: is it literature or ethnography? Is it beautiful or shocking, authored or authorless, "real" or imaginary? If Burton had been author, not translator, the text would most likely have held lasting fame. Burton's style, method, and purpose have been severely criticised. He has been accused of everything from puerile egotism to being a literary cat burglar. Norman Daniel views his style as an obstruction to comprehension and the fact that he writes as an Arab would have in English as no virtue (*Islam, Europe and Empire* 55). This is just but does not address the merits of the style, only its faults.

Daniel's charge amounts to meaningless self-indulgence on the part of Burton and, given Burton's predilections, this is at least half true. However, to reiterate, the *Nights* is much larger than any single one of these attempts to circumscribe it. It is a content cut loose from one history and insecurely attached to another. It is a text which assumes styles as mantles or disguises. If Burton's text distances us from the present by the sometimes not so skilful use of an invented archaic language, that is simply the next mutation and development in a history riddled with transformation. Burton's translation

serves to modify our responses to the next full translation as did Lane's and the variations on Galland's before him.

Burton achieves something often missed with his strange, sometimes ugly, mock archaic language, for the *Nights* is a medieval text, more remote in time than in culture and religion. Up until the publication of his and Payne's respective translations, the *Nights* had been seen as representative of manners and customs of the contemporary East, for Lane's translation had strongly supported this notion of the *Nights* for himself, perhaps, as well as for his readers. Lane's famous work *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* gives the distinct impression that the *Nights* is one of his major sources. Burton and Payne's archaism has the immediate effect on the reader of making the text remote in time, and the invented language they employ makes it remote also from the real world: it makes it into a fictional world set in a fictional historical space sometime long ago. This is a major contribution, if not necessarily intended.

Perhaps Burton's and Payne's stylistic experiments ultimately fail, especially for the twentieth-century reader. However, these two translations made several necessary additions: most importantly completeness, accurateness of a kind and stylistic distancing of the text from contemporary reality.

Despite its acclaim in its early years Burton's version did not retain lasting popularity. This full translation told English readers one thing: they did not own or encompass this text, and the truer the translation was to its original, the harder response and classification along accepted modes of reading became. In its full and vital form it was not quite what they had loved. Burton's translation spoke suddenly of the limitations of an ambitious imperialism, no longer of its power and mastery of another people, literature

and language. It was no longer comforting to say that the English translation improved the Arabic when the full translation proved how much had remained unseen and unfelt in preceding texts. The muted and softened *Arabian Nights* had been for generations a loved part of childhood and adolescence and suddenly it appeared in a much more vigorous, and even alienating, form.

Joseph Charles Mardrus (Powys Mathers)

Mardrus' French version was published in 1899-1904/1317-22. The well known English translation by Powys Mathers appeared in 1923/1341. It claims to be an accurate translation of the Bulaq text; in fact Mardrus pretended to have had the MS upon which the Bulaq was based (Irwin, *Companion* 38). Mardrus is more than free with his sources and, despite claiming word for word literality and completeness, he leaves out more than half of the Bulaq text. Pious or moral tales are passed over and only anecdotes pertaining to love or lovers are retained (Gerhardt, *Story-telling* 96). The tales he does include are abridged or rewritten and completely altered stylistically. As Irwin notes, it is a translation which "spoke to and of [Mardrus'] own time (*Companion* 37)".[17] His knowledge of Arabic has been harshly criticised.[18]

Mardrus' *Nights* is urbane and seductive, written and stylised for the European reader with already fixed expectations of the Eastern Other. Despite being easily dismissed by the scholar, whether Arabist or not,

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[17] "Mardrus's effort has no affinity whatever with the '1001 Nights': but all the more with the boulevard literature of the Paris 1900's" (Gerhardt, *Story-telling* 103).

[18] Hagège, "Traitement du sens et fidélité dans l'adabtation classique" 129-32; Cattan 16-23.

Mardrus' version demands some discussion. It is, as stated earlier, the most accessible long version in English (through Powys Mathers' translation) and is likely to be read more often than any other European version. It is also the source text for several book-length critical studies, notably that of Marie Lahy-Hollebecque.

His style is interpretive throughout, covering by invention the real weaknesses in his knowledge of Arabic. After introducing the two daughters of the wazir, who ". . . in matters of beauty, charm, brilliance, perfection, and delicate taste, were each unrivalled save by the other" (7), Mardrus gives Sheherazade's introduction as follows:

> Shahrazād had read the books, the annals, and the legends of old kings, together with the histories of past peoples. Also she was credited with possessing a thousand books of stories telling of the peoples, the kings, and the poets of bygone ages, and of past time. She was sweetly eloquent of speech and to listen to her was music. (8)[19]

The additions show Mardrus' recurrent tendency to embellish his text, to make it appeal more strongly to the senses. While Sheherazade's excellence is conveyed, it is predominantly in terms of the pleasures involved in being in her company, with less emphasis on her intelligence. This differs markedly from the style and meanings of the Arabic original, yet it is a surprisingly effective introduction of the persona and voice of the tale-teller; the reader will also be in her company for the long session to follow. The above passage also shows Mardrus' attempt to sound like an Arab story-teller: "eloquent of speech" is mimicry of the already familiar European "Oriental" style (common in, for example, Burton).

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[19] *Wa kānat al-kabīra qad qara'at al-kutub wa-l-tawārīkh wa siyar al-mulūk al-mutaqaddimīn wa akhbār al-umam al-maḍīn qīla annaha jama'at alf kitāb min kutub al-tawārīkh al-muta'alliqa bi-l-umam al-sālifa wa-l-mulūk al-khāliyya wa-l-shu'arā'* (First Bulaq 5).

Mardrus remakes the relationship between Sheherazade, Shahriyār and Dunyāzād. He provides a running commentary on the "action" of the frame tale by having the two main participants discuss or muse on the significance of various tales and their own circumstances.[20] Through this commentary Mardrus creates an explicit drama of personal growth for Shahriyār, alongside many definitions of Sheherazade's identity, wallowing in themes of male authority and female wisdom prevalent in Europe at the turn of the century. This reconstruction of the frame relationship is cloying and unsubtle. It involves a plodding demonstration of crises of conscience and an irritating conversion of the implicit to the explicit. It lacks art.

The names Mardrus gives his characters give the illusion of unfamiliarity and novelty to stories which were already thoroughly known. Docte-Sympathie, Délice-du-Monde, Douce-Amie, Fleur-de-Granate and Belle-Heureuse[21] are new figures, familiar only after a mental exercise as Tawaddud, Uns al-Wujūd, Anīs al-Jalīs, Jullanār and Nu'm. In translating the characters' names into things, objectifying them, he is pulling the European idea of the exotic out of the hat, "making strange" with a wave of a wand. They are observed anew as objects, their once exotic Arabic names having by Mardrus' time become loved and familiar.

A major aspect of this translation does not show in the quoted passage. At worst Mardrus and Mathers' version is a long text of soft pornography (Cattan 18). The original has plenty of sex, whether explicitly described,

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[20]Chapter 4 of Marie Lahy-Hollebecque's study *Schéhérazade ou l'éducation d'un roi* represents a summary of this interpolated narrative, giving also an analysis or description of its rather obvious progression (41-68).

[21]If anything they are worse in Mathers' translation: Sympathy the Learned, World's Delight, Sweet-Friend, Pomegranate Flower and Happy-Fair.

suggestively indicated, directly, or indirectly communicated. The difference here is that the role of the European voyeur is palpable, and parts of the text resemble the suppressed whisper, "Hey check this out", shared between the author and the reader at the expense of the characters. The translation speaks to a culture and gender specific club, offering sexual titillation and pleasure along with an unsubtle cultural sneer. The interpolations and additions it took to create this prevailing tone are too numerous to mention. No tale is entirely free of subtle changes, while interpolated sexual material is very common. One example will suffice here. In the tale of ʿAzīz and ʿAzīza, a young woman lures ʿAzīz into her house only to trap him into marriage, one of the most sexual and loveless marriages of the collection. Mardrus describes ʿAzīz's initial impressions of the girl with several embellishments of his own:

> When I saw that her chemise hung out disordered from her drawers and that the strings of these were all untied, I guessed that she had been indulging in some very pleasant pastime before she opened the door. (1. 686)

The suggestion of the girl masturbating is added to the scene merely as graffiti on a pre-existing picture. The entire sexual scene to follow is made particularly objectionable by the translator's insistence on calling her an "exquisite child", so that a seemingly precocious sexuality extends into a pederastic fantasy. The Arabic text of this passage has a worldly woman trap a weak and immoral man, with none of this prurient material. Burton's translation of the passage is as follows: ". . . she had thrust the skirt of her shift into her trousers-string being busy with some household business" (2. 328). This clearly has an effect on the sensual ʿAzīz, but is not designed to have the same effect on the reader.

However, it must be conceded that Mardrus at his best created a vivid and engaging reading of some of the stories, capturing in part the spirit of joyous story-telling present in the original. By unashamedly writing for the comfort of the European reader, he captured something the Arabic version would have had for the Arab audience; a familiarity with the form and a consequent indulgence in the content. This exists in his version alongside the pandering to the European interest in Eastern tales. For many, however, Mardrus' version will be the lazy reader's *Nights* and for those already familiar with a more accurate translation or an Arabic version, it will offend a sense of the aesthetics of the harsher purity and vigour of Arabic tale-telling.

This is the *Nights* we have today; a composite bearing the traces of many different ages, cultures and genres, put together again and again by many different compilers, East and West. Each compiler had a different idea of what the *Nights* should be and added individual emphases to each collection. The breadth of such a text is endless and any assertion of identity or of thematic unity amongst the tales can be only partially true. Thematic harmony and chaos are equally perceivable and compelling, depending on our point of view.

The present *Nights* is the outcome of an almost infinite number of regroupings of the content. Compilers were driven to remake the text out of dissatisfaction, driven to rectify the tension between what was included with, and what was excluded by, any given representative. Its present form also demands a solution, something more, or new, which will include the contradictory elements of the past, something to relieve the pressures exerted on it by its extracultural identities. Without doubt, any new compilation will

establish greater diversity than harmony. This is the nature of this text; it will always be somehow larger than any single representative of its identity.

The drive to pin the text down to one most authentic and most desirable representative is very strong, for to deal with the *Nights* is to deal with an epidemic of texts. A satisfying closure of its open-ended indeterminate nature would be attractive. However, the most rigorously established and defended attempts at closure, most recently Mahdi's by exclusion, and, before him, Burton's attempt at total inclusion, and Lane's carefully weeded garden, have proved all the more unsatisfying. The "complete" or "sufficient" variant offered in these cases is too vulnerable to what it needs to shut out to attain closure. We have to be content with indecision, indeterminateness and uncertainty, both in our attitude to the text's identity and, as we shall see, in the reader's point of view. The *Nights* in its history and compound cultural identity coalesces on the threshold between possibilities.

We are bound to view the *Nights* as a deviant, a text from the shadier side of textual histories. No violence will satisfactorily reform it, and curbing its tendencies is even harder. It was and will always be an indiscriminate, expandable file. When the stories from diverse sources are incorporated into the collection, they undergo a degree of change as they realign themselves within a context and the frame.

The problems of identity of texts whose origins are remote in time and which appear in several differing forms, are not easily resolved.[22] In the field of European medieval studies, the ideal of a 'definitive edition' of such texts has been generally discarded in favour of a more pluralistic appreciation.

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[22]This is a recurrent issue for *Nights* scholars. Bencheikh, Bremond and Miquel observe: ". . . les *Nuits* ne sont pas seulement un ensemble et un seul, mais aussi, tout autour de lui, une infinité d'efflorescences, écrites, jouées, rêvées, filmées . . ." (*Mille et un contes de la nuit* 8).

The more traditional methods, selecting one version among many or combining several versions in one (Rosenstein 157), are destabilised by what they mutilate or ignore. Some of the ideas and terminology from this parallel discipline can be fruitfully transplanted to the topic at hand, supporting the idea of living, however uneasily, with different versions of the *Nights*. *Mouvance* asserts the uniqueness of each version of a text, where each version is an enunciation of an aspect of the text's history (Rosenstein 158). An editing practice based on the idea of *mouvance* will see each version as worth independent preservation. This cannot be limited to texts of the medieval period alone, for if *mouvance* "invites us to see the literary text as organic and growing" (Rosenstein 158), then any such restriction is arbitrary, especially as in the case of the *Nights* later compilations are the sole representatives of earlier MSS. The obvious implication of this in the *Nights* studies is a proliferation of interpretation in a world of textual chaos. The principle of *mouvance* entails choosing to live with and celebrate the plurality of texts with the same name, and in the case of the *Nights* this means coping with many very large texts, something not possible in practical terms. In a detailed analysis of a given story, content is liable to get lost in the mapping of variation. Despite these problems, however, the principle is unavoidable; since narrowed arbitrarily to a single text, the *Nights* cannot satisfy. The translations and the many Arabic versions are perhaps best viewed as non-interchangeable performances of the score.[23]

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[23]The *Nights* lends itself to this kind of comparison. Ghazoul suggests that, like a game of chess, "the text preserves its identitty(sic) although it is performed in more than one way (*Arabian Nights* 16).

The identity of the *Arabian Nights* has been questioned and explored repeatedly throughout the last three hundred years and it is answered in a bewildering variety of ways. However, we forget that the question implied in this wealth of possible answers is not what is the ultimate definition of the *Nights* or its definitive text but who is the reader of the *Nights*? Since it is obvious that this reader has been as mutable as the text, the question liberates us to explore the *Nights* through its past reception, East and West, and beyond that, to receive it in a new context. It misses the point a little to become immersed in the search for the most legitimate text, since at no time does the *Nights* seem to have been anything but flexible and fluid. Answering the first question leads us to a fascinating labyrinth of texts and manuscripts and lost recensions. Answering the second leads us to interpretation.

Chapter 4: Reading the *Arabian Nights*

> At the minimal level, every type of text explicitly selects a very general model of possible reader through the choice (i) of a specific linguistic code, (ii) of a certain literary style, and (iii) of specific specialisation indices . . . (Eco 7)

In other words, every text contains an assumption as to the identity and context of its readers. Clearly a translation is in a special category, as its specific linguistic code is altered and, with it, its designated readers. In the case of the *Nights*, something beyond translation has occurred. The compilation of the text in Arabic over ten centuries[1] successfully broke with each of these modes of selecting a reader and resulted in a diverse and slightly disreputable collection in response to which the reader had to guess the "general model" of who to be.[2] Translation into European languages resulted in the suppression of this core uncertainty about reading the *Nights* and concentrated attention upon the creation of the European self and context for responding to the text. The European *Nights* is a text shorn of its possible readers and displayed before strangers, a fact which left Europeans free to read it as they liked. This freedom was quickly relinquished in favor of a few dominant approaches. What took place was rather like a child reading an accessible adult book. There was a strong drive to know all, to fit the text into some kind of context and to make it certain, both textually and in interpretation. Gaining knowledge, and defining the "specific specialisation indices" assumed great importance. The core uncertainty of the *Nights*, the fact that it is too old, too diverse and too fragmentary to fit comfortably into

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[1] Ten or four, depending on the view of textual history preferred. The enframed tales of extant MSS accrued to the collection from the 14th/8th century. However, if we include the frame and the extinct collections, the earliest mention is of the 9th/3th century.

[2] As Peter Heath remarks: "Shared tradition between author and audience is essential to literary communication" ("Romance as Genre" 1. 5).

anyone's definition of its identity and reader, has naturally resurfaced as an outcome of all this knowledge.

Any reading of any text, whether it be a poem or a billboard, is a result of the encounter between the text and the specific context of the reader.[3] Simply put, all reading is mediated by the times and culture of the reader:

> At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions - social, historical, meteorological, physiological - that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. (Bakhtin 428)

This mediating context is neither rigid nor necessarily predictable. It is likely to have evolved in each individual case through many preceding encounters, between self and culture, self and society, self and family, and self and other texts, and is likely also to be coloured by conscious mediatory stances; feminist, psychoanalytical, post-colonialist. Over and above this inescapable participation of self and culture in reading and interpretation, however, a specific kind of conditioned reading occurs in the encounter between cultures and particularly in the reading of translations between hostile cultures. Such translations are read with the assistance of a systemised form of mediation through knowledge and information provided by experts. Over time this assistance has a tendency to become a fixed and prejudiced reading forum. Few Europeans (or people of European origin) can read the Qur'ān without having their Western conditioning switched on first. It is an interesting exercise to read the Bible as though it is the Qur'ān and to monitor the activated expectations and judgements. This exercise highlights the ability of

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[3]See Ross Chambers for a full discussion of this concept (*Story and Situation* 8-9).

the reader to create him or herself in the act of reading and pinpoints many of the expectations aroused, although in a more muted form, in the moment of reading the *Nights*. The reader of a translation from a relatively unfamiliar culture responds to the text with whatever tools are available and with fewer tools and less flexibility than when reading a text in which dislocation is not a primary and immediate fact. When the text originates with a perceived enemy, these tools have a tendency to be ready made, long entrenched, and derived from the polemics and definitions arising out of wars. Western reading of Islamic texts is not as simple as this but because hostility and antipathy have endured for so long, a base level of relatively unquestioned attitudes and information about Islam and Arabic people has also endured and has provided, in a variety of transmuted forms, many of the elements of Western contextual self-creation in the act of reading. It is stressed that this Western identity is manufactured in the moment of responding to the Eastern text; a fictional reader rises to the occasion. Awareness of these elements of reading is the first step towards bypassing them and creating a communicative interpretation of the stories.

"East" and "West", as suggested in chapter one, are misleading terms. They have been used for centuries to designate areas which have never been East or West of each other. The "East" gestures vaguely at an area stretching from Morocco to China, even Japan, while the "West" today subsumes Europe, America, Australia and others. If we limit the discussion to the Arab East, this comic inaccuracy is part of the daily vocabulary of both groups. East and West are familiar generalisations which affirm an absolute differentiation. What they mean is hard to pin down with precision, for they are terms which utilise the opposite of representation: "East" and "West" simplify and stand in place of the groups they designate. "East" replaces a

heterogeneous cultural, religious and linguistically diverse human crowd (just as, in the case of the Arab nations, it replaces twenty-two different countries) with a vague, homogenising term. The term "West" does precisely the same thing for its members.[4] The origins of this terminology can be summarised as follows: Europeans defined their perceived Other geographically and assigned themselves the opposing term; "West" by contradistinction with the "East"[5]. This demonstrates the obvious: the terms are representative of a state of mind and the product of a process of self-definition rather than a response to a geographic or historical reality. They indicate and subsume certain attitudes of each group about the other. These homogenising generalisations have proved destructive and enduring. Although they retain a popular currency sufficient to maintain knowledge of what they mean, they can be seen to represent a major error of cross-cultural perception and history. In this chapter they will be used to represent criticism which is polarised on a specific *them and us* paradigm. In the light of this it is perfectly possible for an Australian or European scholar to write non-"Western" criticism.

The *Nights* is a benchmark text of both the changing and the enduring attitudes of readers.[6] Some readers had something to offer outside the inherited structures of Western interpretation although very few are

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[4]See Borges' discussion of this idea in "The Thousand and One Nights" (*Seven Nights* 47-48, 51), and Melman (3-4).

[5] An idea explored by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (43), and Schwab (*Oriental Renaissance* 1-4).

[6]Elisséeff, amongst others, notes that the translations of the *Nights* changed with the changing world, moving from satisfying readers' pleasure and curiosity to feeding ethnographic and philological interests (84).

completely free of prejudiced modes of thought and communication. It is important to distinguish between readings which endorse preconceptions, and readings which offer something more flexible and honest; between the conformist and the less mediated individual response to the text. Clearly the translations as readings represent both modes and cater for local prejudices or expectations at the same time as giving something new and immediate about the *Nights*. Commentary on the *Nights* appears dominated by the prejudicial mode. However, it is possible to read this commentary as a struggle against the restrictive mode; using it out of necessity but marked by dissatisfaction. In many ways the division of East and West was a significant impediment to expression, a fact which is shown in the readings over the centuries of the *Nights*.

On the negative side, the recurrence of a simplistically Western reading of a simplistically perceived Eastern text is striking, despite the intense interest spanning several centuries and despite the participation of people who differed in class, culture and language in Europe. The *Nights* was read in this preconstituted Western way because, in the light of adherence to an absolute division between the two worlds, it provoked it - by being *a priori* Eastern in the reader's mind. The stereotype of the unchanging East which, as many scholars have shown, represented a profound misunderstanding of Arab culture by Europeans, generated an inflexible, stereotyped Western reader. As counterweight to the illusory world of the East which was read into the *Nights*, readers entered an illusory, if seductive, role in relation to the text. Western interpretation of the *Nights* has often been a performance of two players, text and reader, each of them wearing a

mask.[7] Perhaps all reading of the *Nights* must now be influenced by this history which in the past was characterised by paucity of thought, inhibition in response and intellectual inflexibility. However, it can be argued that this extraordinary relationship of text and reader can also be fruitful and liberating.

Europe experienced three principal movements of interpretation of the *Nights*. The first was to read for the exotic experience, a movement which made the text more strange than it in fact was: because it came from the Other, very little of it was seen as familiar, or equivalent, to a European experience. The second was a natural offshoot of the first, despite being its diametric opposite. As real knowledge about the people of the Middle East increased, the interest in the fantastic Other was transformed into an interest in "manners and customs"[8], an interest serviced by the translations and annotations of Lane and Burton successively.[9] The *Arabian Nights* became a textbook on the Other.[10] The third represents an increased focus on the tales for their own sake: the search for analogues and origins was a major academic game of the late 19th/13th century, as is demonstrated by the copious additions by Clouston (and others) to Burton's text. Dissatisfied with the

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[7]An idea concordant with Ross Chambers' argument in his chapter "Self-Situation and Readability": "One's whole experience of being a reader gives support to the view that the communicational roles are textual products, rather than the reverse" (23).

[8]"Manners and Customs" is a ubiquitous phrase in commentary of the early 19th/13th century, and famous from the title of Lane's influential book *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, first published in 1836/1252.

[9]Agzenay discovers a progressive "transvaluation" of the *Nights* in which a perceived exotic "fiction" came to be seen as "factual" (Chapter 5, especially 208, 214-16, 227). She suggests that the shift in focus is from the "imaginative" to the "scientific" (245).

[10] This transition is also discussed by Ali (*Scheherazade* 26-28). All future references to Ali are to this book unless otherwise indicated.

available methods or mediatory guides, scholars seem to have had trouble formulating comfortable interpretative stances. In many ways the search for analogues flourished in the absence of assured approaches.

The literary qualities of a story were not dealt with in any detailed fashion by these three modes of reading. In the first instance, the reading for the exotic amounted to no more than stating: "this is different", with some discussion of whether difference was good or bad. In the second, it is clear that a story does not *mean* 'manners and customs', although it can show them. Lastly, a story cannot be satisfactorily described by discovering its parents and grandparents.

Examples of readings from commentary on the *Nights* are the best way to demonstrate the troubled critical modes of the preceding centuries. The brief selection which follows is on the one hand representative of Eurocentric reading but also shows the attempt to break free of the East/West division and to talk about the *Nights* with a degree of immediacy. Through this selection we can map the progress of the different modes of reading and their ultimate stagnation at the beginning of this century.

The exotic world derived from the first European readings of the *Nights* was unsurprisingly also identified as the world of an unfettered imagination. The regulated nature of neo-classical social and literary values has been seen as a major contributing factor to the early phase of the *Nights*' popularity (Ali 14-17). Escape to another world also meant escape to different laws and principles and in the 18th/12th century the *Arabian Nights Entertainments* were both praised and derogated for their "lawless" imaginative scope (Ali 19). It is important to note that this is the European

imagination in the process of self-identification and definition; this is the period leading up to the literary revolution of the Romantic Movement. The wild imagination seen to be an inherent feature of the *Nights* was in fact the mirror of the European self discovered through confrontation with the not-self:

> Their Orient was . . . a projection of their own desires, taking shape through an exquisite contact with the mysterious as well as the picturesque image of the East in Scheherazade's tales. (Ali 45)

The *Nights*, as both Conant and Ali are aware, was catalytic.

This exotic, unlimited world was largely a product of the scene setting and vivid background of the tales. Robert Heron in 1792/1206 comments on the "dazzling and amusing" impact of this exotic world, a world of ". . . gold, jewels, pearls, rubies, emeralds, the bales of rich stuffs, and superb pellices, the crowded kans, luxurious gardens, and apartments beyond description sumptuous . . ."(quoted in Ali 14). W. E. Henley suggests that the characters (and with them the reader) experience a "practical Infinite of gold and silver stuffs and jewels and all things gorgeous and rare and costly" ("Views and Reviews" 210). These characters are "bathed in odours, clothed in glittering apparel, fed with enchanted meats, plunged fathoms deep in the delights of the flesh" (210). It is interesting to note the concrete and material nature of this description. The *Nights* was so descriptive to the unfamiliar eye and ear that it was practically tactile, a fantasy made tangible through its abundance of things and its absolute dependence on a material world different from Europe's. This world, which in Henley's description emerges as a sensual heaven, was either seen as imaginary, or as exactly equivalent to a gorgeous, opulent, imagined East. This idea that the *Nights* tales were real predisposed later writers to prove their verisimilitude with contemporary life. Even the supernatural figures, the Jinn, who were in the

early reception the embodiment of the "terrible and the marvellous" (Ali 32), had their presence in the tales justified in terms of social realism by later scholars. Lane, amongst others, comments at length on the total unquestioning faith of the peoples of the East in the existence of these beings.

The *Nights* was alien and exotic to the 18th/12th century European reader mainly because it was Islamic. Had it been derived from any other source, it would have been merely different and probably much less interesting. To understand the context which celebrated the strangeness above all of stories roughly conforming with European taste and expectation in story-telling[11], it is necessary to look at the prejudgements which obtained in the first reading. The European reader was surrounded by facts and images of Islam which emphasised its Otherness, its threatening potential and its moral reprehensibility. At that time the East ". . . was chiefly used as a figure of speech for fabulous wealth or excessive tyranny" (Conant 234). Islam commanded no respect, but a degree of latent fear. George Sale was vilified for translating the Qur'ān (published 1734/1147), his knowledge and interest both seen as suspect (Davenport xi).

The *Nights* had an unusual mix of the recognisable and the provocative. It activated enough preconceived notions in its readers to be palatable and enticing. By contrast, tales from India, even Persia, only slightly more alien in form and content, could not and did not command the same fascination, since these other orientals were not enemies known through

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[11]These stories were also already broadly familiar in thematic conventions, as noted by Ali (14). Cf Oriental tales in Christian clothes: Chaucer, Sercambi, Ariosto. As Ali and others note, immersion in this exotic world was possible because of "the existence of a mytho-religious structure which leads the reader to believe that he is reading about a world which is not completely alien to him" (31).

a shared history and the scars left by irreconcilable differences.[12] The stories of the *Nights* were popular because their readers, no matter how bizarrely, related to them. However, these stories originated with a moral, if not a political enemy, and a significant degree of excitement also came from having a peep at a society believed to be exotic, Other and also inferior and undeserving.

This reading was a skirmish with European desire and identity rather than real connection with another culture. Reading the enemy, and the daring love of the enemy, knowing and mastering the enemy, are compelling reader stances.

The trends in reading the *Nights* overlap to a considerable degree. Henley, quoted above, is a good example. Well into the present century admirers of Galland's translation reverted to and redefined the exotic, fantasy world of the earliest readings. However, the manners and customs label is applied first by Galland himself in his Preface. As early as 1724/1136 Mary Wortley Montague applied the exotic rubric to the real East as she perceived it and found that they matched; she found that the *Nights* was real and true in Turkey (Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* 21). However, the late 18th/12th and early 19th/13th centuries saw changes in emphasis. The *Nights* had trained people how to look at the Arab world and what to look for.

George Lamb's Preface of 1826/1241 makes explicit the shift of interest from the exotic to manners and customs and armchair travelling. In the first sentence he breaks with both the Galland-centred value assessment and the primacy of the concept of imagination:

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[12] Said notes that ". . . the Near Orient, became known in the West as its great complementary opposite since antiquity" (*Orientalism* 58).

> The universal approbation [for the Arabian Nights] is less owing to the art of the translator, or the colouring of a vivid imagination, than to the peculiarity of the Oriental genius which they exhibit, and to the faithful picture of Arabian manners which they present us. . . we mingle among their merchants, join their travelling caravans, visit them in their social circles, and even penetrate their harems. (v-vi)

This passage is typical of the prevailing style of writing about the East, in which *we talk to each other about them.* The restrictions of the Western outlook are apparent as Lamb struggles to express a felt and immediate enjoyment which he knows he shares with others in a style which has as a prerequisite distance and objectivity. This style centres on the role of the reader. The experience of the reader is more prominent than the matter read; the viewer is the protagonist and hero in many of Europe's early excursions into the *Nights.* The outside observer has a privileged position as expert, in fact any disadvantages of being an outsider went unrecognised by European readers who embraced the idea of an East mediated for them by one of their own. Lamb's reader is the invisible European, able to interpret and bring the Other to life. This invisible European was to prove so potent a fascination that periodically reader would become actor and would go East in person. Burton in his impenetrable disguise in Mecca is none other than this European fantasy, playing a flawed game of knowing.[13] (He even did his best to penetrate the harem, or at least to gain titillating knowledge of it.) However, the best spy will always be the double agent, a factor which, for reasons of xenophobia and self-image, 19th/13th century Europeans failed to notice.[14] Lamb's language seems innocent in its enthusiasm, especially under

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[13] Kabbani discusses the game, or play aspect of Europeans travelling in disguise. Like any game, it was not meant to become real (89-90).

[14] Burton, Lawrence, Jane Digby and others had uncertain bicultural identities.

the harsh light of contemporary criticism. The fantasy of penetrating the harem of the Other cannot be read today without knowing that it meant on a subconscious level precisely what it says. Kabbani has argued that the Western fantasy of the Oriental Harem, predominantly a Western invention in its cloying familiar features of seclusion, sexual frustration and scanty clothing (cf the works of Ingres), is a formulation of Western desire in which woman is generic with the composite identity of victim and sex object (Kabbani 73, 77, 84).[15]

Lane believed that the most valuable aspect of the *Nights* was what it could tell us about Arab, and specifically Egyptian, people. His translation served as the source text for his studies on manners and customs, as demonstrated in his extensive annotations, his book on manners and customs and the later re-edition of his *Nights* footnotes in one volume. However, despite the intense popularity of the *Nights* as a travel guide and anthropological study, manners and customs were not in themselves, as Leigh Hunt pointed out in 1839/1255[16], nearly as interesting as the *Nights* had made them. Something was conspicuously lacking from readings based on this element of the tales.

The creation of genealogies for the text by finding analogues, folkloric parallels, or familiar or approved Aryan origins was a very popular mode of accessing the Nights and the idea that it is simply a collection of folktales or fairy stories persists today as a result. The study of the Homeric elements in Richard Hole's essay on Sindbad the Sailor of 1797/1212 and in

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[15]It is worthwhile noting, however, that Melman's study of British women's views of the Orient shows that there was a gulf between "witness" and "non-witness" (ie male) accounts of the harem.

[16] *London and Westminster Review* 1839, 111.

Clara Reeve's *Progress of Romance* of 1785/1199 are notable early examples. This was to become an absorbing and inexhaustible research field. The folkloric or philological study seems to have reached its peak in the late 19th/13th century, although several 20th/14th century studies are isolated instances of the same thing. A genealogical or analogical study can be derived from any narrative if we ask where else the story is told. In the case of the *Nights* this kind of reading grew, nourished by the uncertainties of the reader.

Male translators facilitated a male reading. A text which ranged freely through different ways of specifying the gender of its readers began to select (in Eco's sense) the European male. An example of gender blind reading is H. G. Farmer's *The Minstrelsy of the Arabian Nights*, written as late as 1945/1364. Farmer, his ear attuned to the music of the *Nights*, is deaf to the many women singing of loved and lovely boys, and reads the generic protagonist of the tales as male, subject to the three forbidden pleasures of "Wine, Women, and Song" (4-5). The West was so accustomed to criticising the sexual politics of the East that neither the carnivalesque social exploration of gender in the *Nights* nor the real problems in Western sexual politics were perceivable. The Western assumption that the *Nights* spoke to men about women had become predominant, supported by the incorrect assertion that men told the tales exclusively to men in the East.[17] The reading of women as

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[17]Women are and were also the transmitters of stories. Certain genres of tales such as epics, histories and legends (*sīrāt, asāṭīr* etc) were seen to be the province of the male *rāwī*, while others such as imaginary tales and evening stories (*khurāfāt, asmār* etc) were tales for the *rāwiyya*. However, there was no known significant exclusion of tellers or listeners amongst adults (*EI* (2) III. 371-72; Muhawi 334). Wiebke Walther argues that from the internal evidence of the tales, the creator, teller and audience were male, citing instances of farfetched descriptions of birth and the relative unimportance of children (*Tausendundeine Nacht* 72-3). However, the collection is too diverse for the evidence of one tale to prove anything about the provenance of others, and one might argue that images of masculinity are equally imaginary or forced.

object emerged in the mainstream of 19th/13th century responses parallel with a reading of women as despicable. Many commentators argued that the women of the *Nights* were depraved, licentious and debauched or, as one reviewer suggests, generically immoral and unscrupulous.[18] If we suspend preconceived views evoked by the adjective Islamic, then the *Nights* appears as a text in which the sexes are often similar. The loves, lusts, revenges and generosities, and the social roles of any given character can reappear in another story in a character of the other gender. The most obvious example is when the story of the woman merchant and her two sisters transformed into dogs is retold in all its details with a hero and his canine brothers. Neither the idea of what a man should be nor the idea of what a woman should be in any real society determines what they are in this carnivalesque fiction. We have heroes who wet themselves, heroines who win battles and a pious woman who plays music to a relatively benign congregation of devils.

Most readings of the 18th/12th and 19th/13th centuries centred on the European self; readers found confirmation of self, current ideas and culture in the alien text. The *Nights* gave Westerners the opportunity to explore their prejudices without taking responsibility for them.[19] The fictional princes of the tales could be abused for excesses, while the abuser vicariously enjoyed, and in many ways shared, the attitudes depicted. Many attitudes read into the tales reflected European perception. In the first century of popularity in

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[18] "Malheuresement la plupart de ces jolies femmes ne sont rien moins que bonnes: elles abandonnent souvent un mari qui les adore, pour suivre un homme qu'elles ne connaissent pas, et elles ne se font pas scrupule d'employer, pour parvenir à leur but, les moyens les plus atroces." ('G. T.' 166).

[19] Kabbani discusses this idea in relation to the hierarchical race and gender theories of the Victorian era (64).

Europe, it is the rare commentator indeed who has sufficient knowledge to label the depiction of princes in the tales as imaginative fiction. With the exception of a few critical writers like Cracroft[20] (and many creative writers who drew freely on the influence of the *Nights*), the early European reception was essentially conservative. This conservatism is fundamental to the category of the exotic, as exploring the realm of the Other had more to do with European make believe than any entering of the unknown. The accommodating text supported every reading, for an internally inconsistent text can be used to adduce evidence for opposing arguments and the possibilities for counter argument are made endless by the *Nights*' breadth, bulk and diversity.[21] There is only one basic constant within the text; it is solidly, if at times irreverently, Islamic.

By 1900/1318 the complexities of the reader's position in relation to the *Nights* began to show in critical writing. The Arabist D. B. Macdonald divided readers of the *Nights* into three exclusive categories: the Arab reader (medieval or contemporary); the Arabist who read "with certain emotions, mostly ethnological, sociological, anthropological, but also, in part, aesthetic"; and finally "all those who read Western languages in ignorance of the East". He concludes that "For each of these audiences 'The Nights' is an essentially different thing, and produces an essentially different effect" ("On Translating II" 185). This awareness reflects questions raised implicitly by every

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[20] See Bernard Cracroft's thoughtful essay, "Is it possible to Recover the True Meaning of the Arabian Nights?" *Essays, Political and Miscellaneous*, (London: Trübner, 1868.)

[21] Robert Irwin argues that "Because the *Nights* is an omnium gatherum, one can use its texts, through selective quotation from the stories, to support the argument that homosexuality was widely approved of, or to argue that it was indifferently accepted, or to demonstrate that it was absolutely abominated. It was certainly openly discussed . . ." (*Companion* 169). The same can be said about any contentious issue one cares to name.

European version since the irresolvable oscillation set up by the appearance of Lane's. Macdonald suggests that because "'The Nights' of an English reader can never be 'The Nights' of an Arab" the activity of the translator is to create an illusion and for Macdonald that illusion has to be of an Oriental fairy world, with no hint of the West, a world which the Arabist retains only by holding onto impressions from his childhood. Macdonald is searching for a solution to the complexities of textual identity and literary effect of the *Nights*. There is a hint of sadness at the loss occasioned by the knowledge of the Arabist and a nostalgia for a reading redolent with enchantment and "glorious visions", such as the early readings of Galland from before the information boom, or the honest wonder of the child who reads for unashamed and unprejudiced pleasure. Macdonald yearns for an escape from knowledge, knowledge which has brought about the transformation of the *Nights* into

> . . . a vast storehouse of information on the manners and customs, the spirit and the life, of the Muslim East. [The Arabist] cannot help himself; he cannot read them as the Arab does; he cannot read them as the non-Arab does. (185)

Here at the beginning of the present century we have a reading which comes from a deeply informed Orientalist, which documents the unsatisfying and stagnant arena that reading for knowledge and information had become. Macdonald rejects the reading for, or based on, knowledge, without specifying a new position for the reader. He leaves the *Nights* as literature in an unresolved dilemma, for, while he would be the last to assert that the *Nights* was children's literature, he advocates an unmediated reading which to him only seemed possible in childhood. (Interestingly, the *Nights* were extremely popular as children's literature in the early 20th/14th century.) Nearly a century later, we can see Macdonald as an observant pioneer of the

demand for new ways of reading, a demand coming to fruition in the West only in the last fifteen years.

In English in particular, and in Europe generally, the first half of this century showed a dearth in ways of reading. The *Nights* flourished only as children's literature. Scholars devoted themselves to the arduous task of cataloguing and classifying texts and contents. Macdonald worked until his death in the mid 1930s/1350s on clarification and classification of MSS and printed variants. Elisséeff's valuable classification of themes and motifs (1949/1368) is another example. These studies reflect a search for a viable way to talk about the *Nights* and are the foundation of the more text-based literary approaches of the present.

Another text-based strategy for reading the *Nights* has been the exploration of types, tracing their frequencies and anomalies from the collection as a whole. Instances of a given type, say the warrior woman, are listed and contrasted with each other, noting the exceptions. This kind of commentary predisposes the formation of an overview narrative which is superimposed onto the tales and which unifies them into a coherent body of narrative information. These studies can make the reader more familiar with the collection but they are sometimes mistaken for a detailed, engaged reading. The overview provides information which is not in itself amenable to varied subjective readings: only limited argument is possible regarding the number and types of warrior women in the text. Furthermore, it is often this overview which is interpreted and debated, rather than the individual narratives from which the instances are taken.[22] The warrior woman becomes

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[22] See for example Wiebke Walther "Das Bild der Frau in Tausendundeiner Nacht".

a generic protagonist, with each individual instance reduced to being merely a manifestation. The significance of the warrior woman in fiction, in Islamic society or in the tales, becomes the ground for engagement of the reader's subjective response, and one warrior woman, say Ibrīza, can be put in contrast or argument against another, such as Budūr. These characters from different stories become the composite protagonist of a new fiction written down in critical texts. The tales as individual literary works tend to be forgotten, when in fact this overall picture should lead to a finer focus.

We do not need the centuries of information available from and about the *Nights* to ask ourselves what narrative functions make a given story good. However, European readings and translators' alterations of the text were responses to inherent difficulties which are no closer to resolution now than they were in the past and we have now many more versions to work with. The preceding chapters have given an idea of the compound and flexible identity of the text. This and several other uncertainties predispose mediated readings. There are still volatile elements which strongly encourage remaking the *Arabian Nights* in one's own image (Naddaff 6).

A good reading is going to be active and personal; a subjective endeavour. The definition applied here is this: an effective reading communicates across the cultural divide; it is conscious of a diversity of readers. Although it may have one cultural origin, it will have several cultural destinations. Commentary on a text hybridised between two polarised cultures should speak to both. Criticism needs to discard or restrain mediating interpretative guides or use them as background, rather than substance. The *Nights* can generate argument beyond the level of a

hermetically sealed disagreement with a given critic's knowledge of Islamic history and culture.

To read for new experiences rather than confirmation of old ones is difficult. It involves a deliberate suspension of prejudgement, which can only ever be partial. One response is to presume that diversity does not really exist: I and you are the same. Them and us, black and white, East and West differ only if we perceive them to be different. This is what could be called safe argument. However, this is also a closed and sterile approach which, while having an obvious truth, ultimately establishes in critical writing a simple prohibition. This is also a difficult approach to take with the *Nights*, since almost every contentious issue, whether race, sex, religion or politics, is given a part in the arena of the text. The stories range through power struggles between men and women, between self and other, and, less prominently, between Christianity and Islam and the problems inherent in social and racial inequalities. An effective reading has to engage with the details of these issues without relying too heavily on narrow pre-learned culture-specific ideas.

The *Nights* has never been hard to read and appreciate. The perennial difficulty has been writing about that appreciation. If self-awareness enhances the effectiveness of writing, it has to be self-criticism. Writing with intention to communicate will predispose a writer to inclusive speech and should help to counter *them and us* assumptions. Critical writing is an art in which the author can choose to avoid prejudicial modes where they are inappropriate.

However, a reading which can invite readers into a process of self-conscious familiarisation with fictional experiences and can communicate effectively across the cultural divide is not easily achieved. Western criticism

of Islamic texts is often fraught with problems in communication. Prejudice against Islam is so deeply rooted in Western culture that it would be idealistic to suggest it can be willed away by a simple decision to think without it. An effective reading of any Islamic text will demand more than knowledge from the reader; the reader must recreate him or herself anew, approximating an unprejudiced stance. Ignorance does not preclude communication but prejudice is absolutely inimical to it. Communication between polarised cultures is effective only through conscious effort.

Certain prerequisites help to substantiate this possibility of self-awareness. The first is an acceptance that there is a problem; a belief that, in general, Western society is strongly prejudiced against Islamic society. The second is the intention to communicate beyond a closed circle and a readiness to signify within the text that intention. If the writer is conscious of a wide audience, certain styles of writing and certain subjects become instantly redundant, in particular any specification of a *them and us* paradigm, for example an explanation or description of manners and customs. In fact an awareness of Arabo/Islamic readers makes extracting cultural mores from a medieval storybook suspect and embarrassing. Chaucer's characters may well have some traditions and rituals in common with contemporary English people, but pointing this out to English readers with any undue emphasis is silly. There are some simple techniques with which the writer can indicate to the Western reader that the communication is not taking place in a closed circuit in which *we talk to each other about them* and at the same time indicating to the Eastern reader the intention to communicate. The most obvious flag of this kind is the use of Christian and Muslim calendars side by side in all dates. Such gestures also ask concession for ignorance or oversight in respectful cross-cultural writing.

The following model of styles of argument is proposed as a means to self-conscious criticism. Two broad categories of argument are used in persuasive writing of all kinds. Argument which compares several things and concludes with a relative valuation sets up a hierarchical pattern in which on the simplest level difference is seen qualitatively; *this* is better than *that*. This can be called vertically patterned argument. By contrast, horizontally patterned argument is inclusive as opposed to exclusive. Diversity and difference are discussed and celebrated without qualitative dismissal. The writer does not presume to measure relative worth. A readiness to use this kind of thought is essential to reading across cultures where that reading is to communicate to both. It is in fact most liberating to leave aside cultural comparisons. In the light of this kind of approach the literary history of another culture cannot be measured by one's own literary heritage. The Arabs cannot be said to have developed no theatre just because shadow plays and story-tellers' performances have no real resemblance to a three act play.

The pejorative or positive judgement in critical writing, with which the writer comments on the value rather than the nature of a given reading experience, is appropriate to many kinds of argument, for example review writing, where an arguable value judgement is demanded of the reviewer. Sublimated in any vertically patterned phrase is a *them and us* polarity, for the reader is invited by agreement to an exclusive point of view, where the lower end of the scale is excluded or devalued. This has a positive persuasive function but, because persuasive, it has negative applications and is ubiquitous in prejudice of all kinds. This kind of writing is at its simplest and most easily criticised when sex or race or belief are set up in vertical relation. It is not suggested here that value assessment is in itself wrong, merely that it has specific strengths and weaknesses in literary criticism. Value assessment

can be used fruitfully to argue the merits of one tale against another but the parameters for determining better or worse are at their most indefensible when derived from outside the text. For example, a tale in which the hero gains the hands of all of the princesses or heroines at the end should not be seen as a lesser tale than another simply because it challenges an individual or cultural sense of morality.[23]

Vertically patterned argument and horizontally patterned argument represent two kinds of approach of the self to the world: one experiential and inclusive, the other decisive and exclusive, and in reality virtually all criticism uses both. Poetry has often the most harmonious blend, as it manipulates breadth and height: at its best it manipulates responses on an axis, offering responses to inclusiveness and equality in metaphor.

The imperfect, insecure or perhaps merely different perception in the strange medium (here an Islamic text) can reveal more than the perspective drawn from a more familiar forum. Comprehension is not as immediate in reading the *Nights* as it would be in an accepted monocultural text. The meanings of the *Nights* are fluid and uncertain in the European context and, consequently, text and reader directly modify each other. This can be fruitful, rather than an obstruction to analysis. The *Nights* does not have to be reinvented to be interpreted, as in the past. Acceptance of uncertainty is perhaps the preliminary to a convincing reading, whether the

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[23]Qamar al-Zamān marries his beloved Budūr and her "wife" Hayāt al-Nufūs, while ʿAlī Zaibak marries all four women who feature in his story. Peter Heath also notes that compliance with generic norms or expectations cannot be the measure of a good story ("Romance as Genre" 1. 10). Ghazoul discusses the deficiencies of the traditional method of using European conventions, literary or otherwise, to evaluate Arab stories, noting the tendency for difference to be seen as a defect (*Arabian Nights* 29-32). She is also a strong advocate for reading a tale according to its own internal rules (33).

reader's origins are Eastern or Western, for identity and content of the tales are not now entirely definable or able to be familiarised.[24]

Beyond the problems of mediation and prejudice lie other more practical difficulties in reading the *Nights*. A close reading of the tales is desirable, but a sense of priorities when faced with the wealth of disparate material they offer is very difficult. A recurrent problem for any close reading is maintaining the fragile balance between seeing too little in the tales and seeing too much. The decision to value or devalue a given motif or occurrence has to be that of the individual critic, based only on a real familiarity with the work. The tales' literary functions, while often sophisticated, are at all points subverted by bad writing and disjunction in a variety of forms. The stories have in some cases weathered many centuries, and it is not always possible to be sure what is art and what is age. This problem is particularly acute when a given story either includes or possibly utilises inconsistency or obliquity. The fascination of this element is enhanced by the fact that quite clearly oblique and allusive exempla are one genuine technique of this kind of story-telling. (Not only is Sheherazade's entire escapade an exercise in oblique telling, but the use of poetry throughout the *Nights* is nearly always accompanied by the mental exercise of searching for relevance which is at times only dimly apparent from the context.)

While the *Nights* is a structured and complex whole, its clearly apparent artistry is complicated, even contradicted, by its artlessness: its seeming simplicity and disorder. Great art and profound depth, accidental

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[24]East or West, the *Nights* is too old to be fully assimilated or made familiar, a fact Bernard Cracroft noted in the 1868/1285. Two dimensionality is a product of our loss of connection with the contextual detail of a given story (Cracroft 74-77).

felicity and random oversight mingle in almost all texts and tales. Not every asymmetry or every discord can be ascribed a purpose, since one of the *Nights*' obvious aspects is its inconsistency. However, this disorder can no more be used to vitiate all claim to art than it can be ignored or mistakenly seen as deliberate. It adds chaos and unpredictability to already complex functions and interactions. Dislocation or fragmentation in a tale can be exciting, enhancing mystery much as a time-erased section of a Grecian urn can suggest both what might have been depicted and the age and process endured by the artifact. Many disjunctions in the *Nights* are the product of decay and replacement: it has been subjected to loss, attrition, entropy and the efforts of many hands. It is completely misguided to ignore this and perceive significance where we really have lacunae and centuries old meddling. It is also undesirable to try to supply the missing portions. This aged text element is yet another complication to effective reading and comprehension and, if the truth be told, no matter what a reader does about it, it enriches the puzzling endeavour of reading; it is the joker in the game of interpretation. However, variability of the standard of art in the *Nights* is far more than just the marks left by the passing of time. It is the definitive irregular text. If the whole range of human activity and emotion is represented, so is the whole range of literary style. It has been asserted that the *Nights* represents a literary style purely its own: neither classical Arabic nor popular but something in between and apart (Irwin *Companion* 10-11, among others). For every finely structured tale there is a diffuse one, for every adorned, a plain, for every colloquial, a literary. In terms of its artistry, it is clear that without the frame narrative it is a much simpler and more diffuse collection.

The relationship between the frame and the enframed has several aspects. The most obvious is structural; frame rubricates the enframed. That

the enframed tales represent a very long-winded delaying device for the resolution of the tensions of the frame is also obvious; the told tales are part of the action of the world of the teller. More difficult to define is the reference of the frame onto the enframed beyond the imposed rubric of Sheherazade's reiterations at dawn and the invocation of each successive night. To what degree does the frame play a role in the action of the enframed? To what degree do the structural reminders of Sheherazade and Shahriyār's story assert or establish a deeper link - an interference with the meanings of the told tales? These questions are not easy to answer, as for a start, even where the effect of the frame is most delightful, it is perhaps fortuitous, at least in part an effective accident. Regardless of the frisson felt by the reader, none of the collisions of infidelities, the repetition of mutilations, the ransom of lives by art and the powerful women, are ever taken up and explored explicitly with reference to the frame. We know from the close that these stories have had a purpose and the desired effect; the frame is more than a pretext for the enframed. However, the diversity of tales, creators, and eras within the text adds significantly to the problem of defining this relationship, since almost every compiler seems to have had a different idea of the strength or weakness of the link. Simply put, some stories have strong symbolic, emblematic or thematic links with the frame, while others have none. The nature of the link must be assessed story by story, since it is not possible to assert that any single coherent principle of reference applies.

However, whether by art, or by the accretions of centuries, the frame tale imbues a complexity to the whole. This is more than the doubling of meaning and perspective that Sheherazade's presence and story can entail: the frame tale appears to have magnetically attracted a substantial number of

tales to the collection which echoed in different degrees its theme, motifs or dramatic conflict. This is easy to understand: a teller offering a Sheherazade-told tale is more likely to use thematically consistent material, whatever the source.[25] The collectors and compilers, similarly, would lean towards material concordant with existent ideas. As a result we find in the *Nights* a preponderance of stories which one way or another resonate with the concerns of the frame narrative and, no matter how organically this came to be, we are presented with a kaleidoscope of impressions on conflict of power, the sexes, art, life and death. Any doubling of meanings which takes place between the frame and the enframed, however, has an obliquity and passivity which should be retained in any discussion of its impact. It is mistaken to ignore the presence of the frame but it is equally mistaken to see the tales as an explicit commentary on the frame, as Mardrus unwittingly proves. The imposition of a purpose to the content tales does an injustice to a diverse and heterogeneous anthology of stories, while asserting that they are simply a motley accumulation of the centuries and therefore have no real literary or internal relationship with the frame does an injustice to a group of stories with a kind of harmony in their togetherness, and held together by an enframing fabric as solid and certain as it is adjustable. The critic is left with the problematic and uncertain position of stating that doubling of meaning is present, whatever the subtleties of its definition, where the individual reader feels it to be.

The close to the frame which, while not present in any of the English translations, represents the most satisfactory in literary terms, changes dramatically the interpretation of the meanings of the enframed, for

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[25]Ghazoul observes that the frame acts as a "filter" for the enframed stories rather than just a receptacle (*Arabian Nights* 48).

in this version the frame story is told as an enframed tale, bringing about the close by having Shahriyār recognise himself and ask how the tale ended. He then follows the prescription given for a happy ending. This crossflow between the world of the teller and the world of the told is extraordinarily satisfying and has the effect of specifying the role of the tales in no uncertain terms. In the light of this close, the relationship between the action of the tales and the action of the frame is altered, for the myth of Sheherazade's presence as a guiding artistic consciousness is strengthened. However, the fact of diversity of sources remains unchanged. The frame appearing as the enframed casts a spell on the whole collection but answers no questions and fixes no boundaries to the possibilities of interpretation.

All texts are altered by a change in how they are perceived. All selves and cultures are also altered by a change in how they are perceived (Said), and identify themselves virtually through being observable, that is to say, as texts. We are getting closer to the idea that a self is not so different from a text. There is a dynamic flow between a written text and the selves who read and manipulate it. Text, context, and author reemerge in these studies in a new world, the infinite possibilities of changes in how they are viewed recreating them anew. Author does not have to be an individual and the history of the *Nights* offers the amusing and unique picture of a text writing its authors, who in turn remake it in their own images (Naddaff 6). The reader is modified with the text which becomes a magic space, where that which becomes familiar is not necessarily real in any way, but where the modifying power of the reading experience is prominent.

Chapter 5: Sheherazade/Shahrazād: A Commentary on the Frame Tale[1]

[1]This chapter makes use of a cross section rather than an exhaustive collection of frame tale variants. They are taken from the following: Muhsin Mahdi ed., *Kitab alf layla wa-layla* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984) (the Leiden text); *Alf layla wa-layla* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-thaqāfiyya, 1981); W. H. Macnaghten ed., *The Alif Laila, or Book of the Thousand Nights Commonly Known as the Arabian Nights Entertainments* (Calcutta: W. Thacker, 1839) (the Macnaghten text); Antoine Galland trans., *Les Mille et une Nuits* Édouard Gauttier ed., (Paris: Didot, 1822); [Antoine Galland] *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* (Edinburgh: William P Nimmo, [n. d.]); Richard Burton trans., *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (Burton Club, [1885]); Edward Forster trans., *The Arabian Nights* (London: William Miller, 1810); Husain Haddawy trans., *The Arabian Nights* (London: W. W. Norton, 1990); *Kitāb alf layla wa-layla* (Beirut: Maktaba al-ḥayāt, 1995); *Kitāb alf layla wa-layla* (Breslau, 1824-43); *Kitāb alf layla wa-layla* (Bulaq, 1835); Edward William Lane trans., *The Thousand and One Nights Commonly Called the Arabian Nights Entertainments* (London: Charles Knight, 1839); Enno Littmann trans., *Die Erzählungen aus den Tausendundein Nächten* (1953; Frankfurt: Insel-Verlag, 1976); Powys Mathers trans., *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night* Translated from French of J. C. Mardrus. (London: Routledge, 1953); John Payne trans., *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night* (Villon Society, [1884]).
Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from Payne's translation.

Once upon a time, Shahriyār, the king of the islands of India and China was overwhelmed by a desire to see his brother Shāhzamān, the king of Samarcand and Tartary, whom he had not seen for twenty years. He sent for him on the spot. As Shāhzamān was on the point of leaving, he by chance discovered his wife asleep on his bed with a black slave. Overwhelmed by pain, he killed them both and left at once on his journey to his brother's kingdom. He arrived at his brother's noticeably affected by grief and despair. However, a few days later by chance he saw his brother's wife and ten slaves and slave girls make love in the garden and he cheered up with the realisation that his brother's misfortune was greater than his own. Shahriyār asked him that evening for an explanation of both his unhappiness and his recovery and, reluctantly, Shāhzamān told him the whole story. Shahriyār insisted on seeing the betrayal of his wife for himself and when he did, he left the palace with only his brother, profoundly unhappy. Both kings were determined to roam the world until they found someone more unfortunate than themselves. After a while they came to a meadow by the sea, and rested themselves under a tree. Suddenly an enormous jinnī rose out of the sea and, as the brothers leapt into the branches to hide, came up to the tree and put a great chest on the ground. The jinnī opened the chest and took out of it a beautiful woman. He laid his head in her lap and fell asleep. The woman looked up and saw the two brothers and insisted, using the threat of waking her captor, that they come down and make love to her. Eventually they complied and she added their two rings to

the five hundred and seventy she already had. She then told them that the jinnī had abducted her on her wedding night and despite his keeping her padlocked in a box under the sea, she had nonetheless managed to sleep with anybody she desired. Shahriyār and Shāhzamān cheered up at once, for they realised that the jinnī's misfortune was greater than theirs. They went home and had the unfaithful women and slaves killed. For three years Shahriyār then married a virgin girl every night and had her killed in the morning. At the end of three years, his wazir was in a terrible predicament, for he could not find a new bride for the king. The wazir had two daughters, Sheherazade and Dunyāzād. Sheherazade was wise and intelligent and very highly educated and when she realised her father's dilemma, she persuaded him to let her marry the king, saying that either she would ransom the daughters of the people, or she would live.[2] Sheherazade married the king and when night fell, after the king had taken her virginity, she asked to see her younger sister to say goodbye. She had prepared Dunyāzād beforehand to ask her to tell one of her tales to while away their last night, which Dunyāzād did. The king and the younger sister listened as Sheherazade began a rivetting tale, a tale which was unfinished when the day broke. The king decided to let her live until he had heard the rest of the tale. Nearly three years followed in which Sheherazade told tale after tale and, at the end of

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[2]At this point Payne makes an error in his translation which is damaging to the story, so in the paraphrase above I have reverted to the elements as given in the Macnaghten text: *Yā abati zawwijnī hādhā l-malik fa-immā an aʿīsh wa immā an akūn fidān li-awlād al-muslimīn wa khalāṣihim min bayn yadayhi* (7). Neither Littmann nor Burton missed this point in their translations, Burton observing in a footnote that Sheherazade is proposing to "'Judith' the King" (15).

> that time, the king's heart was changed. He had learned to love Sheherazade and he had had three sons born in that time. At the end of one thousand and one nights he renounced his cruel vow and he and Sheherazade lived happily until they died.

This is the story which forms the elastic border (Naddaff 3-4) of the *Nights*, a story which has endured in a recognisable form since well before the 10th/4th century, from a time when the enframed stories are pure speculation. This is the signature story: it is Sheherazade's life and narrative power which are remembered long after we become hazy about the myriad details of the contents and it was Sheherazade's story which generated the sequential renewal of the collection, for it remained relatively constant as over the centuries the enframed tales were lost, forgotten, ameliorated, or renewed from other sources. It is this story which confers upon its enframed tales the transformation into a unique literary genre, its unity-in-diversity.

Reading Sheherazade is the starting point of a reading of the tales. However, readings of Sheherazade, while being legion, have in the past been limited and limiting. In Europe and in the Middle East, many factors have traditionally intervened between the tale and the reader: at times enthusiastic ignorance and at others an entrenched distaste for the genre. Sheherazade's story has been often, and influentially, misread.

Many readings are possible. The following discussion is not intended as an inhibition to other readings, past or present, but rather to open up the endless possibilities of new readings by exploring some of them and to free the tale from the chains of persistent misconceptions. I hope both to show the beauties of the frame tale in its most crafted form and the diversity of its variants, European and Arabic, starting with a selective reading of the frame

tale using Payne's English, which will serve as a backdrop for a discussion of other European and Arabic variations on the theme. The variants are more than just translations or recensions, for each is dominated by its author's perception of the identity and meaning of the text. The chapter will look at some of these interpretive texts as both variations (of differing degrees of complexity) and also as an introduction to elements of European literary interpretation of the tale.

The frame tale can be seen as an exploration of ideas on a theme of infidelity and betrayal, its effects and a final resolution. Harmony between man and woman initially represented in marriage is destroyed by betrayal. The resultant disequilibrium is represented in several relationships between men and women characterised by violence and abuse, victimisation, imprisonment and death, and by a disorder and national disaster lasting a term of three years.[3] The rectifying and regaining of equilibrium takes a further term of nearly three years and then equality and balance are again attained in the image of a happy and harmonious relationship.[4]

These patterns can be described in several ways. Shahriyār's loss of mental health (for this is also a tale about very real mental illness) can be seen as a descent into a seemingly interminable nightmare, with a repetition of sex and death revisited, like a scratched record, more than one thousand times (three years). The healing takes an equally long time and is equally

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[3]Not stated in the Leiden text. It merely suggests that it went on for long enough for all the girls to perish, and that "there arose a clamor among the fathers and mothers, who called the plague upon his head . . ." (Haddawy 1. 11).

[4]See Edgard Weber *Imaginaire arabe et contes érotiques* (288-91) for a discussion of the movement from inequality to equilibrium. Sylvia Pavel also discusses the formal structures of equilibrium and disequilibrium in the stories in general in "La prolifération narrative dans les Mille et une nuits" (21-40).

repetitive: each night revisits tales of a range of human experiences including all extremes but these repetitions are also variations and are transformative (Irwin, *Companion* 232-3, citing Bettelheim).

Both brothers experience an assault on their identity and a profound emotional trauma, resulting in withdrawal and depression. In both cases the realisation that suffering is shared releases the brothers from deep despondency and grief. This release is from inaction but not from suffering; it is only a return to physical well-being, and both kings remain emotionally and socially dysfunctional. They emerge from their depression but are no longer participants in harmonious human society and from this position they are opponents to women in absolute terms. When they realise that they share their experience with even a jinnī, they state: "We seek the aid of God against the malice of women, for indeed their craft is great"(7). At this point of the story the kings have indicated the extreme nature of their rejection of women; seeking refuge with Allah is the equivalent of praying for protection from a supernatural evil. In the course of the book Sheherazade does not simplistically disprove the idea that womens' craft is great: sleight and even profound trickery are an obvious part of her plan. Shahriyār's point of view on the "sleight of women" is what changes.

Shahriyār's distorted and disproportionate attitude sets up a critical tension, for the story of Shahriyār and Sheherazade is a romance which here begins with something more than the stock hero averse to women until the fated beloved appears; Shahriyār is damaged and bent on revenge against women, and the story begins with the hero unwittingly on the brink of destroying his own story and genre: killing his beloved-to-be. In measuring Shahriyār's position against some of the rules of this romance genre Peter Heath observes:

> The King . . . has gone astray, lost his wits, and come to erroneous conclusions about how to act in love and life. And this being romance, where unfaithful lovers meet fitting ends, he is in terrible danger. From this viewpoint, Shahrizad steps forward not only to save the other maidens of the kingdom but the King himself. It is he whom she is redeeming. (II. 19)

The possibility of reconciliation and a happy lovers' ending is provided with intensified dramatic tension, for it is less certain; in most romances the trials and tribulations come from the outside and circumstance is the main inhibition to a happy ending. Here we have something much more sophisticated, for the problems the lovers face are intimate and lie between them and their crisis is in the reconciliation of dangerous personal destructiveness. The stakes are higher and the excitement for the reader is correspondingly enhanced to a sufficient pitch to sustain and also explain the extraordinarily long deferral of resolution and closure. The frame story begins with the volatile possibilities offered by a disturbed and generically unsatisfactory lover. Can he be saved from disaster, having already broken so many rules and sunk into self-righteous dishonour? As we shall see, in this world, all rules prove negotiable.

Shahriyār is given depth and colour by echoes and repetition of images and events experienced by him. He is cumulatively constructed rather than described. The importance of his experience of betrayal is established by its appearance and recurrence in the experiences of others, through thematic repetition. The early part of the frame story presents three relationships caught in the consequences of infidelity, with the story's main focus on Shahriyār. Other pairs are Shāhzamān and his betraying queen, killed in his

paler preview of his brother's story, and the jinnī and his entrapped partner.[5] Many of the elements of the story of the jinnī and the lady underscore that of the two brothers, in quite ironic ways (Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body* 18). They are caught in the wheel of an eternal dysfunction: she will always betray, as it seems that she is timeless, and he will always abuse and be betrayed, for he is immortal and larger than life, not a character, but a concept. The pattern set in place by his theft of her body and freedom will endlessly repeat; it is another scratched record. The demon and the girl are a male and female image of endless trauma and revenge. Shahriyār and his shadow brother see (without recognising) one moment of what they could, and nearly do become.

The construction of the whole episode of the brothers' encounter with the woman and the jinnī is complex. Point of view is played with in ways which might go unnoticed, although their effect is felt. The episode is slightly unsatisfying and this can be seen to be a direct result of an unresolved tension between points of view, a tension which at this stage of the tale is more potent if unresolved. The tension is between the experience of the woman and the conclusions drawn from it by the brothers. It is useful at this point to summarise the elements making up this conflict. The tale gives the experience of the girl on three separate repetitions of the facts. Repetition here and elsewhere is a powerful and very simple way of emphasising and intensifying a given feature of a story. The first telling of her tale is overheard by the brothers (and the reader). The jinnī says, after taking her from the coffers and locks: "O queen of noble ladies, thou whom indeed I stole away on thy

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[5]Ghazoul's discussion of binarism is relevant here (*Arabian Nights* 41-44). She sees the "echo" of character and narrative, in its variety of forms, as producing a powerful effect on the reader and a "deeper assimilation of the text" (42).

wedding night, I have a mind to sleep awhile"(5). This statement alerts the reader to an important feature of the lady. Furthermore, it has the effect of designating her identity, for it replaces a name in her captor's address to her; what happened to her has become her. The story is repeated next by the lady herself when, having forced the brothers upon pain of death to have sex with her, she offers her story as an explanation of her actions:

> Know that this genie carried me off on my wedding night and laid me in a box and shut the box up in a glass chest, on which he clapped seven strong locks and sank it to the bottom of the roaring sea, knowing not that nothing can hinder a woman, when she desires aught . . . (7)

This stresses the story and asserts the inexorable consequences of such an injury. The brothers have indirectly heard the story and have been directly told it. The final repetition of the tale shows that they have in their own way received, if not understood, the story. Shahriyār states:

> By Allah, O my brother, this Afrit's case is more grievous than ours. For this is a genie and stole away his mistress on her wedding night and clapped her in a chest, which he locked with seven locks and sank in the midst of the sea, thinking to guard her from that which was decreed by fate; yet have we seen that she has lain with five hundred and seventy men in his despite, and now with me and thee to boot. (7)

The betrayal of the two queens, the brothers' mental anguish and the killing of the first treacherous couple are events which to this point have been very serious facts. However, mass infidelity is also ludic, carnivalesque, impossibly, even painfully, funny. Shahriyār's queen and twenty others fornicate in company in his garden for a whole day and, terrible and serious as his misfortune is, it is also ludicrous. With the appearance of the woman of the box, who has slept adulterously with five hundred and seventy two men, the story is suddenly very funny. The impact of her massively multiplied

treachery on the brothers is maintained alongside the delight of some truly cruel humour.

This interlude, with its unresolved tensions, establishes the potentially fatal failings of the hero. The captive lady does not kill for revenge as Shahriyār does, except in so far as sex and death are twinned in the events and meanings of the frame tale.[6] However, the great number of her infidelities to her captor and the threefold repetition of her story testify to her revenge and the depth of her sense of injury. Shahriyār at this point sees only the male point of view, specifically her gross infidelity to her master. However, to the reader this woman offers a text clearly unread by Shahriyār and his brother, for to the reader she is presented and presents herself as another victim of wrong.[7] Shahriyār sees and responds to only half of her story and the fact that he and his brother have been forced into the role of betrayers passes unregarded. By the end of the one thousand and one nights, he has moved beyond this monocular vision. This woman's story is an early index of Shahriyār's undeveloped awareness. Her vengefulness also presages his. The poetry of mistrust of women which follows her rape of the two kings endorses Shahriyār's point of view but cannot erase the conflicts of the entire passage. We are given a text which shows an evil woman, alongside a clear presentation of her status as hurt and damaged victim. Shahriyār embarks on a course of action in which all women are one woman, his dead wife. He fails to see, at this early stage, that infidelity aside, the captive lady's story is closer

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[6]The "nexus of sex and death" in this episode is discussed by Malti-Douglas (*Woman's Body, Woman's Word* 19-20).

[7]Jerome Clinton notes that in seeing the genie as "the aggrieved party" Shahriyar "overlooks, or gives no value to, the great injustice that the woman has endured" (39). See also Judith Grossman: "Shahriar has misread the experience he was offered, and failed to understand his own part in it - for he himself has cuckolded the Jinni just as the slave had cuckolded him, and all are contributors to the dynamic of coercion and revenge" (120).

to his own than to that of his wife.[8] As we shall see, in some variants, the conclusion to the frame offers the moral explicitly: "All woman are not alike . . . ." (Typically, this idea is played out in the enframed tales. A mirror inversion of it appears in the tale of Sayf al-Mulūk. Badī'a al-Jamāl, a jinniyya, refuses to marry the hero on the grounds that humans are unfaithful. He defends himself successfully with the insistence that not all men are alike.)[9]

Isabel Burton's bowdlerised version of her husband's translation renders this scene most peculiar by the consistent change of just one element. Five hundred and seventy men have talked to the captive lady, in defiance of the jinnī's attempts to keep her powers of "speech" to himself. This becomes idiocy when the brothers seriously acknowledge that the misfortune of being unable to control the tongue of a woman is greater than that of marital infidelity (10-11). One could argue that Sheherazade's powers of speech are implied in this odd variant of the scene.

In this story we have the first clear differentiation between male and female points of view. However, we should bear in mind that male and female are simply useful codes to designate these polarities. In many ways the woman is a double for Shahriyār and not for his female victims (Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body* 18). She responds to her sense of wrong done to her by an intensive repetition of assault in return. She revenges herself. Conceivably, in the world of the *Nights*, death is the worst thing a man can

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[8]Noted also by Malti-Douglas (*Woman's Body, Woman's Word* 18), and by Ghazoul: "Shahrayar's love making with the young woman parallels that of the black slave with his wife" (*The Arabian Nights* 45).

[9] The scene from Sayf al-Mulūk is discussed by Edgard Weber in *Imaginaire Arabe et contes érotiques* (201-3).

inflict upon a woman, while sexual betrayal is the worst thing a woman can inflict upon a man.[10] She shows him the way to revenge without mercy or cessation. It is from her ultimately futile way that he later has to find redemption. He has also to learn to reread and reinterpret his own story.

The relationship between Sheherazade and her father is revealing, for within it paternal authority is invoked but ultimately rejected. Power, violence and tale telling are here introduced in complex ways. It is, despite having the obvious inequality of a parent and child relationship, mutually respectful. Ideas of authority and violence are bandied between them but their actual struggle, if it can be seen as a contest, is one of words and stories, a form of contest which recurs throughout the *Nights* and which usually (although not always) averts violence. This is the first instance of good art prevailing over evil action. He tells his story which encapsulates the threat of violence and invokes an authoritative and punitive relationship between a man and his wife; in the Leiden text she counters with a reminder to him that she could tell a lot of stories to beat that and to assert her point of view, and further, threatens her father with real, not encapsulated violence; she threatens to set the king on him.[11] He accepts this argument and, deeply unwilling, participates in putting his daughter's life in danger. This is no light hearted matter: serious issues are decided in the argument and through the tales. The

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[10]This concept is reified in an interesting way in the frame stories of other collections of tales. In the *Sukasaptati* a parrot fills Sheherazade's role, and tells stories to a young woman to prevent her infidelities to her husband. These collections share an Indian origin with the *Nights*. André Miquel also notices that the young woman in the *Sukasaptati* is in Shahriyār's role (*Les Dames de Baghdad* 140).

[11] The invoking of stories, and the threat of violence appears in the Leiden text alone, making it here the most interesting version. The Bulaq and Macnaghten texts merely have Sheherazade insist on having her way. Burton, however, has the threat of violence in his translation, possibly from the Breslau text.

role of violence and power is central. This early tale-telling joust introduces some fundamental forms of struggle and violence approved as proper within the definitions of the frame tale. Tale-telling (and on occasion song and poetry) will both defuse and express violence throughout the enframed narratives. Here violence is proffered through the action of the tale, and Sheherazade's response is that it is not viable or relevant under the circumstances. Her successful counter attack is a reminder that her father is not only outgunned in the story-telling department but also subject to real violence should she carry out her threat and tell the king. Sheherazade sets out on her marriage to a serial killer with a playful vanquishing of her worried and loving father.

In some instances the joust of stories between father and daughter is more explicit. The conclusion of the Breslau text retells the opening sequence, and gives this:

> Then he cited her a parable, which should deter her, and she cited him a parable of import contrary to his, and the debate was prolonged between them and the adducing of instances, till her father saw that he was powerless to turn her from her purpose . . ." (Burton 12. 267)

Story and action are counterpoised; paternal authority and the threat to beat some sense into her physically are rendered powerless by word and story and, after this victory, story becomes and replaces the real action of the long tale of Sheherazade and Shahriyār. In the real world fighting with words rather than actions was a feature of several cultures, notably the pre-Islamic; the "action" of the *Nights* is at once deadly serious, entertaining and of noble precedent.

Among the complexities of the opening frame story is the mood-setting of Sheherazade's first night. The first tale telling session is curiously

defused of fear: story already begins to soften the potentialities of reality. Oddly, the small group, the two women and the king, are affectionate and seemingly relaxed even on that doubtful first night. Sheherazade is given no verbal assurance that she has succeeded, they simply embrace until he gets up. After the consummation all texts give a secure and cosy scene, wakeful, exchanging conversation and entertainment. The peculiar aspect of this opening night is the absence of anxiety: the dream space is established even in the relationship of the three participants. Most striking in this context is that Shahriyār in every printed variant asks Sheherazade why she is crying, thus giving the lead in to the request for Dunyāzād to be present. This is always after nightfall, suggesting a dream or liminal world.[12] There is something dislocating about this, an oscillation between the knowledge of the King's murderous intentions from which he and we could easily explain tears of the bride on her last night of life and the strange participation the King has in the knowledge that we and the *rāwī* or translator share that all will be well and furthermore pleasantly entertaining. This is not simply badly controlled story-telling. The redemption of Shahriyār enacted through the tales is caught up in the magic of tale-being and tale-telling in one.[13] Shahriyār as listener dimly coalesces with every other listener and all allow themselves to be caught up in the dislocation of reality and its concomitant absence of fear.

The reiterated recitation opening Sheherazade's tale-telling could be viewed as trance induction, each time recalling the king to the portal of earlier altered realities or states. Falling silent with the dawn then releases

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[12]Generally expressed, but only implied in Lane, following the Bulaq text.

[13]Noted by Hamori ("A Comic Romance" 16). Georges May also discusses the analogy between Shahriyār and the reader (133,137).

the king from the trance and the time lapse element is curiously suggestive of altered temporal awareness under hypnosis or deep meditation. The images, suggestions and experiences accumulated over the three or so years resemble the processes of psychological and emotional healing; what we call therapy today.[14] The ending in the Breslau text is particularly apt for this reading, as Shahriyār in a liminal state recognises their own story in Sheherazade's final tale (the Tale of the two Kings and the Wazir's Daughters) and, as if waking for the first time with the dawn, realises and repents, and arises to his healed soul. He can be seen to address consciously the solutions he has worked through at an unconscious level.

The narrative of the frame story continues throughout the one thousand and one nights of tale telling, with the reiteration at dawn, "Shahrazad perceived the dawn of day and ceased to say her permitted say"[15] serving as a reminder to the reader of the subtextual action and unresolved tale, a reminder of what hangs in the balance. It is one of the failings of several versions, including Payne's, that this trance release and induction is deliberately left off by the translator in the body of the text. The intrusion of Sheherazade's tale is important, as Burton, for one, fully appreciates. However, even without the necessary reiteration, there are other reminders

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[14]As Robert Irwin notes, citing Bettelheim, the idea that Shahriyār is healed by the story-telling years is quite common. He disagrees with this reading, however, observing that at no point is Shahriyār described as mad (*Companion* 233). Bettelheim, however, mentions in passing an interesting precedent: "in Hindu medicine . . . the mentally deranged person is told a fairy tale, contemplation of which will help him overcome his emotional disturbance"(88). The best discussion of the healing of a self in the tale and through the tales is that of Judith Grossman (113-26, particularly 121-26), while Ghazoul's comments on the parallels with shamanistic séance is interesting (*Arabian Nights* 126-27).

[15]From Burton's translation. Unlike Payne, he keeps the essential fabric of the frame tale intact throughout.

and motifs within the tales themselves. The core stories' resonance of the themes of the frame is well known but reminders occur throughout more as echoes than as explicit thematic mirroring. The repetition of mutilated and punished women's bodies is an example, foregrounded in particular for a twentieth-century reader. These mutilations and killings spice up a good tale, but they also remind the reader of the possible outcome of the delayed veiled narrative: will the speaking voice be silenced? Will Sheherazade also die violently? This motif, like that of infidelity, functions also on the level of reminding, goading and reproaching Shahriyār, as well as stimulating the reader's sense of suspense. These submerged references work best in texts which have retained the explicit morning and evening reiterations of Sheherazade's existence, for the reader cannot read the tales on one level alone. The technique is very simple but the effect is sophisticated; the frame tale forces a double meaning upon once simple and often unrelated tales. Motifs refer outward to the veiled narrative and ultimately to the reader. Our awareness, no matter how dimly, is provoked by these repetitions: our awareness of Shahriyār both as listener and as protagonist, and of Sheherazade telling and simultaneously experiencing a tale. Thus Sheherazade and Shahriyār inhabit a realm between reader and text. They are both actor and listener, teller and heroine, mirrored or figured in the tales in myriad ways, evoked in our minds by insistent reminders.[16]

Character portrayal in the *Nights* differs in striking ways from the conventions of Western expectations. Western literature and film subsumes a

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[16]The reference of motifs from enframed to frame and back again is often noted. David Pinault's discussion of thematic patterning and formal patterning is particularly useful (*Techniques* 22-25).

notion of the 'developed' character, as distinct from a two-dimensional character which is not 'developed'. These categories are of very little help in reading character in the *Nights*. The familiar two-dimensional character which is the stock, simple figure with structural importance to a tale, East or West, is not the problem, for the *Nights* has many stock characters who fit this definition quite well, especially when they are part of fairy tales of a genre similar to those of Europe. However, complex characters in the *Nights* are also two-dimensional, and this is where Western categories have to be discarded in order to perceive something which has often been ignored. Complexity of character is achieved through repetition, shadows, duplication, collage and indirect referral. It is as complexly realised as non-representational visual arts can be. A doubled character is much more than an emphasis of the one; it is a commentary, each on the other. This is exemplified in the tale of ʿAbdullah of the sea and ʿAbdullah of the land, a story in which each double serves to highlight absence, limitation and inability in the identity of his other. Shahriyār, as shown above, cannot fit with stock definitions. He is the quintessential complex character, unique yet exemplary, and reflected myriad times and in many facets in the often more rudimentary characters of the enframed stories. We receive his depth of character through reflections of him and the referral of those elements back on him. He changes but we do not have to have the change described, for we have been intimately caught up in its process; it brings satisfaction, but no surprise, for as readers we are aware that the time is ripe. In the close of the frame we experience the celebrations and festivities occasioned by his transformation more than any focus on his self; we experience it in reflection yet again.

The *Nights* offers a peculiar blend of the two-dimensional, the simplistic image with a sophisticated meaning, a folk or child-entertainment facade on sophisticated social perspectives and universally human emotional traumas, and a tangible and believable recreation of urban, everyday life blended matter of factly with a fantastic, oneiric world, a world of dreams-come-true.

The closing sequence of the frame tale presents problems for the more than casual reader. The variants of the close differ much more widely than those of the opening; in fact closure of the tale ranges from not at all (it is indefinitely deferred in the Leiden text) to extended and diffuse narratives on the festivities generated by the satisfactory outcome.

The versions which have the greatest literary interest fall in between these poles and range from rudimentary, eroded or fragmented sketches[17] which recall the general features of the summary of a prototext given by Ibn al-Nadīm in the 10th/4th century to literary, crafted versions which appear in MSS of the 16th/10th, 17th/11th and 19th/13th centuries (Grotzfeld 78), and in the Breslau text, but have little currency amongst readers, as they do not appear in any of the better known versions.

The demand for a close is the demand of the genre: stories end in formal completeness, whether it is happily, or sadly. The unsatisfying element of the close to the frame tale is that we have several choices and so all endings are partly questionable. Once we choose that which satisfies us as individual readers, we remain troubled by other hypothetical possibilities; we cannot even really answer in the end whether or not Sheherazade had

[17]Grotzfeld's argument that various ZER endings show the effects of erosion by time, rather than creative invention, is supported by the texts (77-78).

children and, if so, how many. The general features of the frame tale close have become legendary; subject to dispute but having powerful currency.

Grotzfeld gives four sources for the most literary variation of the conclusion to the frame. In this conclusion the fact that Sheherazade is forcing the king to contemplate and modify his behaviour is made explicit. Her final tale is in fact Shahriyār's own story, with no names given. Half way through he asks to hear how it ends. Sheherazade tells him that the king renounces his past actions and that the people rejoice, saying "women are not all alike, nor are the fingers of the hand alike". Shahriyār finally recognises the story as his own, and "[comes] to himself, and awak[ens] from his drunkenness" (Burton 12. 269), recognising at the same time that he has done great wrong. This is very fine, for we have Sheherazade prescribing a course of action to close the nightmare, giving him at the same time a sensible reason or moral for doing so. She then gives him several injunctions on good government. He repents totally, sleeps and awakens whole, loving and sane. The story closes with no mention of, or need for, children. Unfortunately it tails off inconclusively after this satisfying sense of closure with two tales of unclear purpose, but having in common the themes of adultery and punishment. Yet another ending combines the two traditions: Sheherazade tells Shahriyār his own tale, including the birth of his children. He, recognising himself, asks for his children and, comprehending finally the whole process of his redemption, is impressed with her intelligence and stratagem. Somewhat comically, he praises her having gulled him. She says simply: "A woman is worth only as much as her intelligence and her faith. Women are very different from one another" (Grotzfeld 86). He rejoices and his love for her is increased. The lesson has been to recognise individuality and identity: in recognising himself in the tale, he refinds himself in reality, and in learning the explicit

moral that one woman is not responsible for the actions of another, he rejoins a balanced and human world.

As the framing story of Sheherazade and Shahriyār is told as an enframed story, it is transformed. Up to this point it has been the real world, distinct from the worlds of the told tales, and subject to a great deal more uncertainty, since the laws governing it are those of this fictional real world. Once told as one of the tales, it becomes sublimated, and fixed into the world of story and legend, and Shahriyār is freed from it. He cannot just discard and forget his actions in his redemption, for they are too terrible. The events cross over into that less volatile and destructive sphere of story, and live on.[18] As he ceases to be actor, action precipitates into story. This highlights the flow between real action and story action, and real violence and told violence. It ends up being a story about what story could do for a story, where the layers of story refer in complex ways to their established real worlds, and to the relatively unreal world of the reader.

Many conclusions are very poor, without even the virtues of Payne's. For example, some versions have Shāhzamān mirror his brother's conduct, having him become equally murderous. This is careless and thoughtless use of doubling for emphasis. If it were so, then Shāhzamān's crime would be the greater, for his has to endure for six years before he receives redemption second hand from Shahriyār and from marriage to the sister. It is neither a believable reaction to trauma, nor a believable redemption, particularly since he himself recognises his injury as lighter than that of his brother. Shahriyār's kingdom is also the greater, and he was running out of girls after three years.

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[18]Ghazoul also discusses the transition from the real to the symbolic in the act of narration, although not with respect to this particular scene (*Arabian Nights* 43).

It is thoughtless to suggest that the lesser kingdom of Samarcand could sustain six years of such depredation.

Reading the *Nights* is not the experience of the startlingly new, since for almost any reader, the story is already familiar. However, the ways in which the story persists in our memory are strangely at odds with the story as it stands in the available texts. Interpretive stances which begin with the first Western responses to the then alien text still condition many of our readings today. Quite often the fact that the text itself in its Arabic version and complete translations does not support these readings passes unremarked, for our preconceived notions as to what it is that we are reading are both unconscious and over-riding. The following section will look at some examples of old and persistent misreadings, some of them fostered by interpretive or elucidatory translations, and some of them just dictated by potent points of view.

A recurrent misreading of the close of the frame tale is that Sheherazade's life is saved in the end because of the three children she presents to their father. In all variants of this ending, however, the children are presented to Shahriyār and prompt from him a statement as to their superfluity as any kind of ransom[19]: "I pardoned thee before the coming of these children, for that I found thee chaste, pure, noble and pious" (9. 240).[20] It is also not clear that Sheherazade had hidden the existence of their children from Shahriyār until the close of the one thousand and one nights but merely

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[19] Also noted by Lahy-Hollebecque (189).

[20] "*Innī qad ʿafawtu ʿanki min qabl majīʾ hāʾulāʾ al-awlād li-kawnī raʾaytuki ʿafīfa naqiyya ḥurra taqiyya*" (Macnaghten 4. 730).

that she puts them before him as part of her argument against his conduct. They form a persuasive trio, which proves nonetheless unnecessary: Shahriyār is already healed, he just has to acknowledge it formally. The idea that Sheherazade hid the pregnancies and the children recurs again and again as a criticism of the ZER versions and is given weight by the fact that quite obviously some versions did say this, starting with the *Hazar Afsana* as summarised in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm. Clearly some copyists and compilers also read this into the scene and included it in their versions. However, as the text stands from the Macnaghten text and Payne's translation, the criticism is unnecessary.

As soon as Sheherazade is asserted to be exceptional, as occurs in the Galland derived versions of both Enlightenment and Victorian colouring, an important element of balance is lost, for the moment she ceases to be an excellent representative, she ceases to be the champion for her sex as a whole on this battleground. If she is the exception to womankind, then it is no longer clear that Shahriyār is wrong to hate women as he does in the outset of the tale. Several English versions make this distortion, and thereby reflect their male translators' culturally prescribed perception of women. A very Victorian adaptation of Galland describes Sheherazade as a lady of "courage, wit, and penetration infinitely above her sex" (12), while an earlier version (more stylistically palatable for contemporary tastes), Edward Forster's fairly careful English translation of Galland's 18th/12th century text, states that Sheherazade "was possessed of a degree of courage beyond her sex, joined to an extent of knowledge, and degree of penetration, that was truly astonishing" (21).[21] It seems that in Galland's time the courage is the only

[21]"[elle] avait un courage au-dessus de son sexe, beaucoup d'esprit et une pénétration admirable" (Galland 23).

attribute remarkable for its being specified of a woman, whilst in the Victorian text, in a time in which literature played a very active role in the defining and restraining of women, all Sheherazade's attributes mark her out as exceptional. The Arabic text in all versions I have at hand never gives more than a summary of Sheherazade's excellences; she is the true champion of women. Burton, after detailing the extent of her learning, gives:

> she had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and accomplishments; and she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred. (15)

Haddawy presents, after similar details: "she was intelligent, knowledgeable, wise and refined. She had read and learned" (1. 11).

Another element of the introductory description of Sheherazade is conspicuous by its absence in the accurate translations.[22] Sheherazade is not given to the reader as a beautiful heroine. She is simply not described in physical terms at all.[23] This shows a remarkable economy in story-telling, for the listing of the main features of a beautiful woman is almost a hallmark of the *Nights* tales, with the frame tale no exception, for the girl abducted by the genie is described with the stock attributes of beauty. This story-telling is not, however, corrupted down to the mere manipulation of stock figures for their own sake; part of the literary function of the exhaustively described

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[22] The original Arabic printed editions (Bulaq I, Breslau, Macnaghten, and Leiden), and following them, Lane, Payne, Littmann, Burton and Haddawy do not describe her as beautiful, in fact they do not describe her physically at all in the opening of the frame tale. The full description in the Macnaghten is: "*wa kānat al-kabīra qad qara'at al-kutub wa-l-tawārīkh wa siyar al-mulūk al-mutaqaddimīn wa akhbār al-umam al-māḍīn qīla innaha jama'at alf kitāb min kutub al-tawārīkh al-muta'alliqa bi-l-umam al-sālifa wa-l-mulūk al-khāliyya wa-l-shu'arā'*" (1. 6).

[23] The close of the Breslau text differs from the others. It presents a drawn out marriage festival for the two sisters, in which both of them are described in more conventional terms. However, even in this crowd pleaser the emphasis is on Sheherazade having healed the king and having saved the people (12. 413).

women in the tales is as a stock figure of beauty and seductiveness. The story of the abducted girl revolves around her physical beauty; it is the cause of her abduction and her means of revenge. In other words, it has a literary function beyond the vicarious enjoyment of the reader or listener; she is functionally beautiful. Sheherazade, by contrast, fulfils much more complex literary functions and the description of her gives an immediate sense of this. Her intelligence and wisdom are described and emphasised, for it is her brain, not her body which is going to be central to the ensuing action.[24] The fact that she asks for the release from Shahriyār's resolve by appealing to him on behalf of their three sons does not disprove this, for in most versions he has already acknowledged her and forgone his oath. The image of the children does more to suggest the excess of blessings which have come his way as a result of connection with Sheherazade than to invoke her body. Beauty is not mentioned because the female body and physical seduction plays no part in Sheherazade's performance[25], indeed, beauty can have no effect on a man who has been able to have and kill the most beautiful women his kingdom has had to offer. The idea that Sheherazade as a beauty has a persuasive function is crass, given the youth and beauty he has destroyed: it suggests that the others were not beautiful enough to live. The usual story of a journey which results in sexual gratification; attraction, desire, courtship and fulfilment, is irrelevant here. Any concept of conquest by flirtation and deferral is void

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[24]As Samar al-ʿAṭṭār also notes, it is her mind, not her body which is important ("al-Riḥla min al-hamajiyya ilā al-ḥaḍāra" 52).

[25] Fārūq Khūrshīd notes that as a woman and a body she has no value (*fa-Shahrazād ka-ʾimraʾa wa jasad lā qīma lahā fī-l-layālī* (42). Tewfīq al-Hakīm also utilises this element of the relationship to establish the positions of his participants in the outset of the play *Shahrazād*. Shahrazād says: "I am a beautiful body. Am I nothing but a beautiful body?" Shahriyār replies: "To hell with the beautiful body!" ("*anā jasad jamīl. hal anā illā jasad jamīl?*" "*suḥqan li-l-jasad al-jamīl!*") (quoted by Khūrshīd 44, trans. mine).

from the start. Before Sheherazade begins her exploration of desire, sex is had and finished with on the first and every subsequent night.[26] Clearly the desire she manipulates is not sexual, it is narrative, substituted for the sexual. Through the exploration of other forms of desire, desire for knowledge (what happens next), and for resolution (what happens in the end), she initiates a pattern of desire, conclusion and renewal free from the damaged and broken cycle of Shahriyār's sexual pattern.[27] Over time she replaces the variety of wives with a variety of tales and she herself becomes the many-in-one.[28]

That Sheherazade is a "matchless beauty" is a European interpretation, an interpolation which suggests a much narrower appreciation of heroines and their attributes.[29] One of the first European books self-professedly to vaunt a plain heroine was *Jane Eyre*, in which Charlotte Brontë only plays with the idea that Jane is interesting for her own sake, for she manages to inform us indirectly that while unconventional, Jane is nonetheless bewitching and beautiful. The demands of the genre of the Victorian heroine (that she be beautiful) are thus satisfied and Jane's humility is stressed in that she does not recognise her own charms.

Sheherazade is a force, not a figure, until the story reaches equilibrium. It is interesting that "lovely Sheherazade" is yet another potent European addition, which, even when reading Burton or Lane or Littmann, who do not

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[26] Naïm Kattan: ". . . elle entreprendra de séduire le roi. Par sa beauté, par ses attraits? Non puisqu'il aurait déjà eu son plaisir" (174).

[27] Although these observations differ substantially from Naddaff's, her discussion of desire and narrative was influential in the formation of these ideas (44-45).

[28] As Naïm Kattan suggests: "Par ses histoires, elle multipliait sa présence" (174).

[29] cf Galland ". . . elle était pourvue d'une beauté extraordinaire; et une vertu très-solide couronnait toutes ses belles qualités" (23).

mention it, the European reader knows, in fact *remembers*, that Sheherazade is lovely and reads it into the text.

The equilibrium between male and female is vital to a balanced reading of the stories. Male and female are story constructs - quite basic ones. If Sheherazade is presented as disadvantaged and weak, then within the actual tales, the nature of her presence changes, as does her reason for telling of a given incident. This is easily demonstrated; a tale of a powerful woman has a very different meaning when told by a trapped woman, than when it is told by a powerful woman. Tales which portray women as vicious would acquire an unpleasant placatory quality if the teller is in a disadvantaged position, whereas by contrast, an equilibrium in power allows such tales and all others the freedom to explore and expose a full spectrum of attitudes. It is by the representation of attitudes in story that Shahriyār's hatred and psychoses are explored. It is clear that while she must survive in order to achieve this, Sheherazade must also be free to do much more than just ensure her own survival. The balance between this principal pair allows every tale to be both about them and also independent of them. The equilibrium between them of potential violence sets up the space in which story-telling, defusing and deferring violence, can result in the equilibrium of healing. In early European versions Sheherazade is always made weaker than her source character and an alien element of pleading creeps into her story.

From Galland's commentators through to recent writers we read over and over again a version of the distortion that Scheherazade tells tales to "save her lovely neck" (Arberry 16-17). This ignores seemingly wilfully her express reasons for forcing her father to agree to a plan that dismays him. This recurrent misreading reflects the early translators' attempt to recast Sheherazade as stereotypically feminine, passive, reactive rather than

proactive, the trapped victim who saves herself (and herself only) by elaborate sleight. As is clear from a close reading Sheherazade fills always the proactive role, Shahriyār the reactive. Their relationship is one of complex mixing of power, where hers is manifest and transforming, his latent and destructive.[30]

Lane offers a good example, for he shares the Victorian attitude to Sheherazade encapsulated in the quotation given above from the Victorian version of Galland. He subtextually reconstructs Sheherazade in this European image of femininity. He tries to make Sheherazade more acceptable to his society and in doing so he completely misses the implications of a major element of the frame story. Remember that Sheherazade tells her father that either she will live or ransom the daughters of the country with her life.[31] This is deliberately mistranslated by Lane as "either I shall die, and be a ransom for one of the daughters of the Muslims, or I shall live and be the cause of their deliverance from him (11)", with the following vague explanatory note:

> I here deviate a little from my original, in which Shahrazad is made to say, "Either I shall live, or I shall be a ransom for the daughters of the Muslims, and the cause of their deliverance from him." Upon this, the Sheikh Mohammad 'Eiyad has remarked, in a marginal note, "It would seem that she had contrived some stratagem to prevent his marrying again if he determined to kill her: otherwise, the mere killing of her would not be a means of rescuing the other maidens". (1. 39)

Burton gives: "either I shall live or I shall be a ransom for the virgin daughters of the Moslems and the cause of their deliverance from his hands

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[30]Ghazoul also notes the ambivalence of their respective power positions (*Arabian Nights* 43-44).

[31]Azar discusses the French variants of this scene, noting the different motives Sheherazade appears to have in the versions of Galland, Mardrus and Khawam ("La ruse nuptiale"). All three French translations present a martyr/victim in this scene.

and thine (1. 15)", reiterated later: "let him kill me an he will: I shall only die a ransom for others (1. 15)"[32]. The clear implication, not missed by Burton, is that she will take Shahriyār's life with hers. She is prepared to take the king's life if he, she and the other women cannot be saved by other means. Lane disempowers Sheherazade, deliberately changing the text to read that either she will die, saving only the girl she replaces, or the women will be saved with her, apparently on the argument that this is how it should be. This leaves Sheherazade as a willing victim with only one relatively unlikely plan. It does not sit well with her character, for she is strong enough to go against her father's wishes to attempt this scheme. Lane makes her into a Victorian Miss yearning to be either noble or a martyr, whereas the real Sheherazade is a woman determined to end an intolerable situation by persuasion, cunning or force. What she sets out to do is change another person, and this transformation and education are the subtextual action of the *Nights*. Lane's alteration is not just the erasing of the real power the character feels within herself: it reveals Lane's inability to comprehend the woman as given, and raises the interesting idea that at least in Lane's view there could be no reader who could comprehend such a woman. Payne also mistranslates this passage, either making a genuine mistake or also influenced by Lane and by prevailing misperceptions. The point is important enough to revert to the Macnaghten Arabic for this part of our discussion of the tale.

The editing of the response of the Western reader to the *Nights* and Sheherazade is not of course the product of Lane's approach alone. The above incident is merely an example. The true image of Sheherazade is so clouded

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[32]In the Leiden text Sheherazade approximates Lane's martyr/victim: "*immā annanī atasabbabu fī khalāṣ al-khalq wa immā annanī amūtu wa-ahlaku wa-li uswatan biman māta wa halaka*" (66) translated by Haddawy as "so that I may either succeed in saving the people or perish and die like the rest (1. 11)". This is a much less satisfying version of the story.

by these gentler images that the consequences of her intentions have been obscured. The implications of Sheherazade's intentions are an essential element in the balance of the tale. Peter Heath touches on them when he observes that while Sheherazade is risking death, Shahriyār is courting it (II. 19).[33] If she is prepared to kill the king in the event that she cannot change him (as is the case with the two Arabic texts, Macnaghten and Bulaq), then his life is as much in danger as hers. It is an interesting reading indeed, given the history and habit of response to the text, to assert that Shahriyār ransoms his life every night by his acquiescence to the scheme, yet this is clearly the case, and the equipoise of their respective fates is much finer story art. With this aspect in mind, Sheherazade's goading stories, in which she repeats motifs of infidelity especially with black slaves, are a means of testing his limits, rather than just foolhardiness. For the transformation to be effective, Shahriyār has to confront every one of his fixations and obsessions.

There are some problems with Burton's version, both imposed by Burton and inherent to his text. One minor but noticeable piece of careless story-telling (or rather reconstruction) is that Shāhzamān weakens physically and emotionally from his depression on the journey to see his brother, and the tale-teller has Shahriyār notice this change upon their first meeting. Given that in this text it is twenty years since the brothers have set eyes on each other, the reader feels a little disbelieving at Shahriyār's perspicacity. As to interpolations or inventions by Burton, while these are relatively rare, they are annoying. It is an addition of Burton's that the black slave in the embrace of Shāhzamān's queen is "of loathsome aspect and foul with kitchen grease and grime"(1. 4), and also that Shahriyār's wife's lover is "a big slobbering

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[33]Marie Lahy-Hollebecque in reading Sheherazade as powerful, sees the relationship as a duel of sorts (35).

blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight" (1. 6).[34] Burton's obsession with black male sexuality is probably behind additions like these. At the bottom of page six he indulges in his well known footnote on the temptations offered women by the larger penis size and better performance of black men. His emphasis of this prejudice is more than distortive, for the story pairs the two queens with black lovers to stress the assault on the king's self-esteem that the infidelity represents[35], and not specifically their licentiousness. Black people in medieval Arab culture were one of the most disadvantaged classes, for while not necessarily indigent, they were usually enslaved. Blackness is a useful story construct in this context. When a great hero such as ʿAntar has his blackness a feature of his heroic identity, the same social position is being exploited in positive terms: ʿAntar had to be twice as good as any person without social impediments to get half as far, as the contemporary cliché goes. Thus his blackness elevates him; he is more excellent than the excellent *because* he is black. Here, however, the rejection of the king by the queen is a rejection of every element of his social and personal identity, and the story-teller can achieve the impact of this by simply pairing the queen with a person not of the king's class, wealth, benefits, physique, race and culture.[36] The lesser betrayal by the ten slave girls is in the Syrian versions with black slaves, but in the Macnaghten, it is with white slaves.

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[34] Arabic texts give only, for example *ʿabdan aswad min baʿḍ al-ʿabīd* (Macnaghten 2) or *rajulan min ṣibyān al-maṭbakh* (Leiden 57) "A black slave of the slaves"; "a man from amongst the kitchen boys". Masʿūd is described only as *ʿabd aswad* "a black slave" (Leiden 59; Macnaghten 3). The discrepancies here in Burton's translation are discussed by Wiebke Walther (*Tausendundeine Nacht* 36-37), and by C. Knipp ("The Arabian Nights in England" 53).

[35] Noted in the context of sexual impotence by Patrice Coussonnet (rev. of Edgard Weber 20).

[36] See also Ferial Ghazoul's discussion of this element (*Arabian Nights* 19, 56-57).

All of these distortions violate simple but essential balances within the tale. Despite unimportant inconsistencies in various copies, the story is at its finest when its polarities and equipoise are intact. These balances or polarities are achieved so simply that they are often unregarded and often marred or obscured by a given appropriation.

The frame gives the enframed narratives their reason to be and sets up a stimulating unresolved tension and doubling of meanings for the long sequence to follow. The frame also introduces many thematic and stylistic features which will reappear in the stories and has set a standard of artistic complexity which only a few of them will maintain. These thematic and stylistic elements are an essential component of the enjoyment the tales engender and it is of course not necessary to identify them consciously. However, in a study such as this, perceiving what is achieved is the first step to real recognition, appreciation and ultimately preservation of the strengths of the genre.

Chapter 6: Readings of Selected Stories and Anecdotes.

ʿAzīz and ʿAzīza, ʿAbdallah the Fisherman and ʿAbdallah the Merman, Maʿrūf the Cobbler, Hārūn al-Rashīd and the Arab Girl, The Pious Black Slave.

Defining the content of the *Nights* in any kind of literary classification as a preliminary to interpretation is more difficult than it seems. Quite clearly very different types of story are represented in the collection, and differentiation between them is useful, as in many cases they differ so markedly that a variety of models governs their structure and meanings, such as is immediately apparent in the case of the beast fables or the short historical anecdotes. Payne divided the tales into five general categories: histories, by which he meant long histories of which ʿOmar al-Nuʿumān is really the only example; anecdotes and short stories of historical figures and everyday incidents; romances and romantic fictions; fables and apologues (the beast fable sections); and finally, tales of heterogeneous learning, such as Tawaddud (9. 367-73). His third category, that of romances and romantic fictions, was extremely broad, covering all the leftovers of the other more specific groups. It included anything which used supernatural machinery and lacked historical people or anything apparently fictional, ranging from ʿAzīz and ʿAzīza to the Hunchback cycle or to Maʿrūf the cobbler. In other words, most of the tales of the collection remained under this amorphous heading.

Later scholars offered definitions slightly more useful. Robert Irwin discusses them in mutable groups according to the kind of entertainment they offer. Many stories belong to several of his broad headings. His chapters are "Street Entertainments", "Low Life", "Sexual Fictions" and the "Universe of Marvels", and the advantage of these headings is that applicable stories spring to mind. This loose categorisation is based firmly on certain elements of the content, rather than the form of the tales, and given that Irwin's main interest is the social world represented through the *Nights* (*Companion* 5), this is an accommodating and flexible differentiation.

Mia Gerhardt attempts a more literary and comprehensive study and offers a classification of types far more extensive. She divides them into Love-stories, Crime-stories, Travel-stories, Fairy-tales and lastly, Learning, Wisdom and Piety. Each of these has several subdivisions, in which she attempts to take account of chronological alterations in these genres. She omits ʿOmar al-Nuʿumān, and ʿAjīb and Gharīb from classification and discussion, arguing that they were never meant to form part of the collection, and are "alien to its spirit" (*Story-telling* 117). However, even though this is a useful tool in accessing the overwhelming mass of tales, it has its limitations, and can be seen as a provisional model only. A part as large as the crusading epic of ʿOmar al-Nuʿumān cannot be ignored because it differs from the rest; the fundamentally patchwork nature of the whole resists such a judgement. Furthermore, ʿOmar al-Nuʿumān has been part of versions of the *Nights* since at least 1550/957[1] and Gerhardt is willing to accept additions made much later by Galland and others. Another problem is that one suspects that a love story in which Jinn appear is at times not so generically different from one without them, so a distinction between tales with supernatural elements and those without becomes almost arbitrary. Any separation or affinity asserted between two tales, or two types of tale, is subject to criticism and is ultimately an argument which brings us no closer to understanding a given tale. Stating that the wonders of the sea motif appears in the voyages of Sindbād and in ʿAbdallah of the Sea, and derives from a craze of the Baghdadian era actually tells us little or nothing about these tales in themselves. Gerhardt is the first to admit that even the primary transparent differentiation between stories and anecdotes has a "blurred line of demarcation between them" (*Story-*

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[1]See the discussion of this MS in chapter two, page 44.

telling 43). The following section will apply the simplest categorisation of the tales, a categorisation which imposes no interpretation upon them: there are long tales and short tales.

As stated earlier in this thesis, no clear principle governs the relationship between the frame and the enframed. The frame as part of reading a story appears intermittently, fragmented and refracted throughout the collection. Following from the themes and styles of the frame tale the reader can in some stories identify a crucial relationship between art and violence or a development of character based on collage and repetition of reflections. In many instances stories include a repetition of images of violence, infidelity, power and death, with men and women the very different and very variable subjects, forming between them the dialectic tension of action, development and resolution. This recurrence and reflection of frame theme and image is random, and in most cases the demands of the specific tale take precedence over the meanings generated for Sheherazade's story. The second calender's tale (in the Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad) contains within it the metaphor of Sheherazade's transforming the king Shahriyār gone wrong: this variant has the virtuous princess destroy herself to effect the metamorphosis of the beastly man, the man as ape. However, at no time do we feel that this reference to the frame is the point of the event. Tales retain their autonomy and integrity: where they refer to the frame, it is predominantly through the inferences we draw. They are put into a relationship with the frame sometimes only by simple adjacency and the meanings generated by this collocation, while undeniably important and pleasurable, are a shadow of a given tale's internal momentum and laws.

The collection is so large that moving from the particular to the general seems to risk drowning in detail.[2] However, as the recent individual readings of tales offered by Hamori, Miquel and many others have shown, reading one tale as if unique can tell us much more about its genre than the meticulous identification of its generic features, particularly as careful individual readings have not been a feature of *Nights* criticism until recently. This chapter will look at a small selection of different tales primarily as unique literary events, as an indication of the potential of reading the *Nights* for its literary diversity. Some comment on related tales and types will be made but not with a view to formulating any generic classification.

It is problematic to select one version or even the versions in just one language and affirm them to the exclusion of others. The reasons for this have been discussed at length. This unresolved textual identity leaves practical problems. While Payne is the base text for the following readings, Payne's is not in itself a satisfactory text. The text analysed in these pages proves to be in part an ideal formulation: Payne, supplemented by others for his deficiencies, the reiterations at dawn and dusk reinserted and the variants of a given story informing the representative under scrutiny. Payne's story titles and proper names are also too archaic and cumbersome to be retained. These are replaced with transliterations from the Arabic. Dissatisfaction with any single text forces the critic either to affirm uneasily one unsatisfying representative or to react to a potential, rather than a real text.

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[2] A danger noted also by Peter Heath ("Romance as Genre" 1. 4).

Hārūn al-Rashīd and the Arab Girl

This tale appears in the Egyptian MSS and is represented in the Bulaq, Breslau and Calcutta II texts, and, following them, in Burton and Payne, Night 685-86 (Chauvin 6. 143). This is one of the stories in the *Nights* which also appears in an unrelated literary collection, in this case in the Iʿlām al-Nās (Chauvin 9. 60).

> Hārūn al-Rashīd was out walking when he saw some girls drawing water. He overheard one of them recite some verses on love and sleepless yearning. He was struck by her beauty and eloquence, and asked her if the verses were her own. She answered that they were and he challenged her to keep the meaning but change the rhyme to prove it. This she did three times in response to his demands. He asked her obliquely who she was and she answered equally obliquely that she was the daughter of the chief of her tribe. She asked him a similar riddle and he answered in kind, without fooling her. Impressed, the Caliph made the arrangements to marry her and she became one of his dearest women. One day, upon hearing of her father's death, he went to see her, troubled for her sake. As soon as she saw him, she took off all her rich clothes, put on mourning clothes and began to lament her father. His face alone had communicated the news to her. The Caliph wept with her and not long after she died from grief.

This is a short, simple and satisfying tale presented in an anecdotal form. Although it does not name any chain of transmitters, its form aligns it with the multifarious collections of anecdotal literature of the 10th/4th century. Anecdotes (*akhbār* and *nawādir*) began as an oral literature, popular

in the 7th/1st century in Medina. They later became a written resource, having a distinct role amongst other *adab* literatures. Anecdotes were used to break the intensity and give relief from concentration on an *adab* treatise, and the correct use of them was an art. They were one of the entertaining components of instruction essential to the *adab* genre (*EI* (2) VII. 857-8). Significant collections of anecdotal and story literature of the 10th/4th century are extant. That of al-Tanūkhī (*al-Faraj baʿd al-shidda*) has generic links with the *Nights* (Irwin, *Companion* 83). This tale offers a similar, if perhaps more independently literary, version of the same style of smorgasbord entertainment.

There are several components to the anecdote. Most prominently, the poems and the word play which the girl improvises, demonstrating her wit and poetic skill, form the substantial pleasure offered by the anecdote as a whole. Payne's translation of the first can give only a clumsy idea of the original:

> Bid thou thy spright from my couch, I pray, At the season of slumber turn away,
> So I may rest me and eke the fire In my bones that rages may have allay
> For me, the love-lorn, whom passion's hands Turn on the carpet of sickness aye,
> Thou knowest well how it is with me: Doth thy favour last for a single day? (6. 199)[3]

The four variations of the poem are on the theme of sleeplessness as a result of unrequited passion and are intense, direct and sensual in tone; they

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[3] *Qūlī li-ṭaīfik yanthannī ʿan maḍjaʿī waqt al-manām Kaī ʾastariḥu wa tanṭafī nār tuʾajjiju fī-l-ʿiẓām*
danif tuqallibuhu al-akuff ʿalā bisāṭ min sihām amma ana fa-kamā ʿalimti fa-hal li-waṣlīk min dawām (Beirut 1981, 3. 332-3).
Tell your apparition to turn from my bed at the time of sleep So that I can rest and a fire burning in the bones be extinguished
Seriously ill, turned by the palm on a carpet of arrows As for me, I am as you always know: is there any permanence to union with you? (trans. mine).

suggest a woman ill, even feverish, with longing for an absent, or departed lover. The mode of address is to a woman, which should not be taken too literally. It is both an inversion of a standard poetic convention and a sample of poetic "cross-addressing" (Wilmsen). As an inversion of convention it stands out, reinforcing the Arab girl's claim to authorship.[4] Cross-addressing is a feature of Arabic love language in which the loved one is linguistically designated as being of the same gender as the lover.[5] By this transformation one of *them* is brought closer to the self and becomes one of *us*. David Wilmsen observes that in the present day

> reverse gender reference . . . is used in establishing, maintaining and expressing intimacy; in protecting or concealing the identity of the referee or the referent, [and] in banter with same-sex cohorts . . . (*Arabic-L*)

Here, however, perhaps banter is most prominent and the intimacy suggested by cross-addressing is mere embellishment as the poems are offered as wordplay; there is no suggestion that the girl is expressing anything other than her own virtuosity. However, the poems communicate indirectly to the future lover on a different level from the witty interchange between the Caliph and the girl, a communication which, while unintended as flirtation (the girl recites the first version to her friends), participates in the cursorily described marriage of the two. The conjunction of the poems as cause, the marriage as effect, and the understated: "she became of the dearest of his

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[4] I am indebted to Dr Samer Akkach for this observation.

[5] The male addressee of classical Arabic poetry is a formal stylistic feature, too well known to require comment. What is interesting is the inversion here, and the idea that cross-addressing, which is common in spoken Arabic between intimate friends, parents and children, and between lovers, is deliberately utilised. I am indebted to the *Arabic-L* Internet discussion list for a valuable pool of information on cross-addressing generated on the 25th and 26th March 1996/1416, and in particular David Wilmsen's posting 25th March 1996/1416.

women to him" (6. 201) create a picture to be put together by the reader. The passion of the poems obliquely informs us about the relationship.

Two legendary groups are represented in the anecdote through the figures of the Caliph and the girl. The Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd is quintessentially urban and in stories and popular imagination was the most famous and brilliant figure of the Golden Age of Baghdad, the first great metropolis. The girl is one of the few desert Arabs to be portrayed positively in the *Nights*. As poet, she represents the legendary virtues of the desert people, invoking the great pre-Islamic poets for the reader or listener with her identity. Her passion, poetry, independence from wealth and her extraordinary grief give her mythical status and align her with the archetypal pre-Islamic Arab. The pairing of the two carries with it a satisfying union of images of excellence from the two principal worlds of Arab folklore.

The communication in riddles, where comprehension establishes a relationship. The Caliph guesses naturally enough that she is the chief's daughter from her encoded description of herself: "Of its midmost in dwelling and highest in tent-pole" (6. 200). She, however, asks him to answer in kind by encoding her question: "of what [art thou among] the guardians of the horses?" His response: "Of the highest in tree and of the ripest in fruit" (6. 200) is understood immediately by her: she greets him by his proper title. Comprehension signifies the deeper perception of the self behind the code, and not surprisingly results in a relationship. The girl is marked by her perspicacity. She reads the news of her father's death in the expression on Hārūn-al-Rashīd's face; her ability to comprehend communication is highly developed and causes him some wonder. Encoded communication and especially the semiological powers of women from which men are excluded

by incomprehension is a feature of some tales, notably ʿAzīz and ʿAzīza which will be discussed in some detail later.

This is a short "historical" anecdote, very different in form from the complexities of the frame story and from the marvellous machinery of many of the tales. However, the character of the girl and the nature of the relationship are given to the reader by cumulative reflections rather than direct comment, in much the same way as that of Shahriyār, discussed in the preceding chapter. Furthermore, despite being less than three pages long, and more than half its length devoted to the poetry, the tale manages to give a relatively rich image of the girl, the Caliph and the relationship. In the case of the girl, this image is of a character, not a body or a visual object. In fact, rich clothes are mentioned only when she is discarding them forever. Several things are not mentioned; she enters the richest palace in the story-telling repertoire without one description being given to place her physically in that context. The image is created through the use and transcendence of stereotypes. She becomes the wife of the Caliph, a fairly stereotypical reward in tales. It is worthwhile noting, however, that marriage to the Caliph is rarely the acme of the reward scale. More often the Caliph is the agent through which an ideal marriage takes place. The ideal is usually suggested as equal; fulfilment for both the male and the female are essential to it. The sheer number of the Caliph's real and possible sexual partners places him outside any normative ideal, since the desires, physical or emotional, of any woman paired with him, are unlikely to be satisfied for long, certainly not until the "Destroyer of Delights" parts them. In this particular tale, the ideal is partly invoked, since in the case of the Caliph, it must be contained in the suggestion that the heroine beats the competition in gaining his deeper affections. The ideal is partly fulfilled also, as she retains his regard and

intimacy is sustained between them until she dies. The dynamics of the Caliph's household and private life generate a whole genre of stories which play with the conflict between ideal love and the power signified by unlimited abundance of women. Thus the Caliph's passion for Qut al-Qulūb in the tale of Ghānim the son of Ayyūb puts the girl in grave danger from the jealousy of Zubayda, powerful queen, cousin and wife.

The relationship between the Caliph and the Arab girl who became of the dearest of his women in this tale is given through just two scenes of their life together (without even a description of the marriage). The first scene captures his concern over having to tell her that her father is dead and her instantaneous comprehension of it without words; the second shows him grieving with her. Her ability to comprehend and her feeling for him evokes in him something like empathy: his eyes fill with tears and he grieves with and for her when he hears her explain that she read the news in his face. This minimalist picture sketched in a few deft strokes establishes an intimate relationship between a man and a woman, where all the normal gorgeous and unreal portrayals of the Caliph and his world have become irrelevant. The tale manages to establish its own verity and authority by using a pseudo-historical form of address, and by using stereotypes and stock figures in a way which breaks with expected descriptions; the tale suggests that this is the real Hārūn al-Rashīd, a Caliph and a man, not the story book hero.

The encounter between two characters who represent polarised social groups is often the frame upon which an anecdote is stretched and is invariably both interesting and subtly edifying. The form of the genre is too brief to engage with abstract opposites such as good and evil; rather, the form lends itself to depicting the experiential middle ground of life and concerns

itself with social polarities: class, wealth, gender, education and behaviour. This is not to say that the anecdotes in the *Nights* necessarily record historical, realistic or even believable scenes. Many of them play with the validifying convention of a named chain of transmitters to communicate quite preposterous encounters. They are often a record of the weird, the wonderful, the strange or the curious in a fictional experiential world which claims enough reality with its form and its recognisable social types to ask for a suspension of disbelief. The confrontation with the devil or with the angel of death form a small genre of their own; these can also be seen to deal with an encounter with an Other, in which the experiential world of the subject is the focal point. The authoritative form is usually most apparent in the opening, and is the point of departure for some of the best of these anecdotes.

The Pious Black Slave

This tale appears in the Egyptian MSS and in two independent anecdote or story collections: *al-Nawādir* of al-Qalyūbī (died 1658/1068) (Marzolph 171), and *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaẓraf* of al-Ibshīhī (15th/9th century). It has been translated into English only by Burton and Payne, covering nights 467-68 (Chauvin 6.186).

> Mālik ibn Dīnār and nine other theologians and jurists prayed for rain during a drought in Basra, to no avail. At about nightfall, he and Thābit al-Bananī, one of the theologians, witnessed a poor, although attractive, black slave pray, beseeching God to grant rain in the name of His love for him. The sky clouded over and rain poured down. The two scholars were amazed and Mālik ibn Dīnār approached the slave, asking him if he were not ashamed to presume God's love for him. The slave answered passionately that the scholar was not in touch with his own soul, that God's love was proved by the guidance to knowledge which He had granted and that God's love was measured by the slave's love for God. The scholar asked the slave to stay with him awhile but the slave answered that as a slave he had his duties to fulfil to his lesser master.
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> The scholars followed the slave and found that he lived with a slave dealer. Accordingly they went to the dealer the next day and purchased him. Mālik ibn Dīnār asserted that he wished to serve, not be served by him. They went to the mosque and the slave prayed fervently that since the secret between him and God had

> been betrayed, that God might take his soul forthwith. He prostrated himself and the scholar found that he was dead. He laid the body out and found that the face was illuminated and smiling. A stranger came in with two rich robes as shrouds and asked God to bless the scholars for Maimūn, the name of the slave. The tomb became a place of prayer for rain.

This is a religious wonder tale with a clear purpose. It mimics the authoritative anecdote in order to strengthen its claims, as instructive or exemplary tales rely upon being "real".[6] It is anchored from the outset to the names of ten famous theologians and jurists. Payne tells us also that Mālik ibn Dīnār was a "renowned theologian and ascetic" of 8th/2nd century Basra (5. 16). This pool of authority quickly metamorphosises into a literary construct: the greatness of this horde of scholars and their failure as rain bringers is played off against the malnourished, impoverished and in every way disadvantaged figure of the black slave who is successful. The contrast is very effective. The devout young man is described vividly: he is "a black of comely visage, slender-shanked, big-bellied . . . clad in a pair of woollen drawers; if all he wore had been priced, it would not have fetched a couple of dirhems" (5. 16). This character, not named until the end of the tale, proves to have a stronger spiritual connection to God than the great religious thinkers of the times; making a point which derives its effect from his apparent lowliness, strengthened by the fact that he is black, enslaved and poor (cf the

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[6] The use of an invented attribution to justify a fiction is discussed in detail by Beaumont ("Comic Narratives" 232-4). It is a "strategy for bringing [the fictive text] into the domain of literature" (233). Here of course we are not given a conventional *isnād*, or chain of direct transmission, merely a gesture at the possibility that one could have been constructed. The author or narrator can thus bend rather than violate the rules.

discussion of the figure of ʿAntar in chapter five, page 143). The tale has its religious message endorsed by the fact that it is related by the theologian, who realises that the slave is his spiritual master.

It is very obviously a pro-Sufi tale. There are several indications that the slave who has outstripped these traditional scholars is a Sufi initiate. The word for his woollen drawers puts the idea first into the reader's mind, but the prayer makes it apparent. The oneness with God and the seeming arrogance of the self thus being the fulfilment of God are familiar Sufi stances (al-Ḥallāj's apparent blasphemy, the ecstatic "I am God" is the most famous example.)[7] Several words used by the slave, as Payne notes, also recall stages in the mystic's journey to oneness with God (5. 17). The tale affirms the Sufic way directly by having the two prayers answered and indirectly by impressing the scholar Mālik ibn Dīnār.

One phrase which stands out, particularly for the contemporary reader, is the following: in death, "whiteness had gotten the better of blackness in his face, and it was radiant with light" (5. 18). The language is too subtle and imprecise to suggest that his face turned from black to white, a simplistic medieval miracle. Rather, it is clear that his face is still at least to a degree black and that the observer is describing a subjective impression of the illuminated quality of the face, and suggesting at the same time a transcendence of blackness which can be read several ways. One can argue that prejudice in society was such that the story-teller had to whiten his saint in order to justify the elevated role he is given in the tale. Whitening a face, and blackening a face were blessings or imprecations which could be called down upon anybody. Predicated from the prejudices of the times, the phrase

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[7] "I am [God] the Truth" (*ʾAnā al-ḥaqq*) (*EI*(2) III. 100).

is nonetheless an attempt to communicate the slave's blessedness in death, and a radiant happiness, without violating the believable. The phrase, despite its uncomforting racial overtones, also communicates for the story-teller and the crowd a transcendence of the conditions of his life: enslaved, marginalised, deprived of full citizenship and rights, despised[8] and, in the case of this slave, poor and ill-fed.

The story closes with a poem which is perhaps told by Mālik ibn Dinār, or perhaps by the tale-teller as a final comment upon the intimate connection with God to which the anecdote has borne witness.[9] The poem describes Paradise first as a garden in which the just drink old wine and then moves to make explicit that this is a metaphor for "close communion with the Lord". The final line: "The secret of their hearts is safe from other than God's sight; For that their sprights and his are blent in one supreme accord" recalls the final prayer of the black slave: "How then shall life be sweet to me, now that others than thou have happened upon that which is between Thee and me?" This poem functions as a coda in which the theme of closeness to God, proved and witnessed in prose, is transformed into oneness with God expressed in poetry as a more general observation on the completion of the slave's journey, and the possibilities of spiritual transcendence for others.

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[8] Slaves were not necessarily despised: this would be far too great a generalisation on a complex sociological issue spanning the changes and upheavals of more than ten centuries. In the *Nights*, however, black slaves get a very bad press, and this figure is practically the only positive portrayal. However, in the Arabic version of ʿAlī Bābā Marjāna (Morgiane) is a black Abbyssinian slave, whose beauty and cleverness are described in superlatives (Macdonald, "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" 348).

[9] As Daniel Beaumont suggests: "verse is often used at the end of a prose text to give a sense of closure to it" ("Comic Narratives" 21).

ʿAzīz and ʿAzīza

This tale appears in the Egyptian MSS, in the Bulaq and Macnaghten texts, and in Lane, Payne, Burton and Mardrus (Chauvin 5. 144) (Nights 112-129 in Payne). It is unclear whether this story is originally Baghdadian or Egyptian. It is embedded within the tale of Tāj al-Mulūk, which in turn is embedded within the long ʿOmar al-Nuʿumān epic. It is worthwhile reading this particular story with the frame tale in mind, as it is one of the tales which works well with Sheherazade's shadow presence implied.

> Having been importuned by the prince Tāj al-Mulūk to tell his story and in particular the story of her who had given him the piece of linen embroidered with two gazelles, the unhappy young merchant ʿAzīz told his tale.
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> ʿAzīz and ʿAzīza his cousin had been betrothed since early childhood and had lived together as brother and sister. When they reached adulthood, ʿAzīz's parents organised the marriage festivities. On the day of the wedding, as ʿAzīz was making his way home from the bath, fully prepared and perfumed for the event, he happened to sit down on a stone bench to rest from the heat. A white handkerchief fell upon him from above and, looking up, he saw a beautiful woman, who made a series of indecipherable signs to him. ʿAzīz was instantly passionately in love with the unknown woman and after waiting until sundown for her to reappear went home with the handkerchief. When he got home he found his cousin weeping. She told him that the guests and dignitaries had departed and that his father was very angry. ʿAzīz

told her what had happened to him and begged her to help him. ʿAzīza selflessly agreed, and interpreted the signs of the woman for him. The unknown woman was, according to her signals, also in love with him and wished him to return in two days. Neither eating nor drinking, he waited the two days, comforted all the while by ʿAzīza. At the appointed time the lady again appeared at her window and made a complex pantomime of signs which ʿAzīz could not comprehend. He waited again for her to reappear and returned home only near midnight. He found his cousin weeping bitterly and reciting poetry of unrequited love. However, she again translated the signs for him and told him that he was to wait in the dyer's shop in five days time for a further communication from his beloved. ʿAzīz sickened from longing and was consoled by ʿAzīza with stories of lovers to pass the time. This time, however, the woman did not appear and he returned home in deep distress. ʿAzīza was weeping but she greeted him hopefully. ʿAzīz kicked her down and her head was cut open in the fall. She treated him gently, saying nothing against him, and helped him again: the translation was that the woman wished to test him and ʿAzīza counselled him to go to the stone bench the next day. ʿAzīza brought him food but he kicked it away. They passed a sleepless night. The next day at the stone bench, the woman appeared at her window, laughing. She made another series of inexplicable gestures and signs and then closed the window. ʿAzīz returned to find ʿAzīza weeping and bandaged and reciting forlorn verses. She helped him again: he was to go after sunset to the garden of the house and wait there for his mistress and for the fulfilment of

his wishes. She sent him to his assignation, charging him, when he had made love to his mistress and was about to leave, to repeat to her a certain verse. Three times in a row, however, ʿAzīz ate from the array of wonderful foods laid out in the garden and fell asleep, and each time his mistress left objects as messages on his sleeping body. The messages as ʿAzīza translated them were increasingly angry and, finally, threatening. However, with careful foreplanning and his cousin's assistance, on the fourth occasion he managed to stay awake, pass the test and spent a night of lovemaking with his mistress. In the morning, his mistress gave him the embroidered linen, telling him to keep it carefully, as it was her sister's work. ʿAzīz returned home, forgetting to tell his lover the verse from his cousin. He gave ʿAzīza the embroidered linen and she kept it. The following night he spent with his mistress and in the morning remembered to repeat ʿAzīza's message, a verse asking what the unrequited lover should do. His mistress Bint Dalīla's eyes filled with tears and she answered, through ʿAzīz, with a verse counselling secrecy and acceptance. ʿAzīz returned home and found ʿAzīza ill. Through verses, ʿAzīza communicated her situation to ʿAzīz's lover who, weeping for her unknown rival, sent verses back. On the third occasion, Bint Dalīla knew from the verse that ʿAzīza was dead and demanded to know who she was. When she found out that ʿAzīza was her lover's cousin and that it was with her help that he had succeeded she was very angry, and cursed him. ʿAzīz left, troubled, and returned home. ʿAzīza was indeed dead and his mother also cursed him. ʿAzīza had left a message for him; he was to say to his mistress the

phrase: "Faith is fair and perfidy foul" upon leaving. This he remembered to do and his mistress said that she had intended to do him mischief but that with these words ʿAzīza had protected him from her. She then charged him to stay away from all women, as he no longer had his cousin to protect him. His mistress then visited ʿAzīza's tomb and grieved for her, giving alms, and engraving verses on the tomb with a mallet and chisel.

They lived together a year. ʿAzīz became fat and forgot ʿAzīza. However, every night his mistress would ask him to repeat ʿAzīza's final message. One day, scented from the bath and slightly tipsy, ʿAzīz entered a by-street and encountered an old woman who by subterfuge led him to the door of a handsome house. As he stood there a young woman ran up, dazzling ʿAzīz with her beauty. The old woman and the young woman pushed ʿAzīz into the house and locked the door. The young woman beat him up and then offered him a choice of life or death. He chose life which, as she explained, meant living married to her, having sex with her and remaining locked in the sumptuous house. She was his mistress' enemy and portrayed Bint Dalīla to him as a deadly figure, who commonly slew her lovers. She could not understand why ʿAzīz had not suffered at her hand. He told her his story and she wept for ʿAzīza. She said that the phrase "Faith is fair and perfidy foul" had in fact saved him. He was then swiftly married to the young woman and lived a year and had a son with her in the lifestyle she had described. After a year she let him out for a day, after he had sworn upon the Qurʿān, by sword and the oath of divorce that he would return. He went straight to his mistress'

house and found her forlorn, changed and weak from pining. However, once he had told his tale, and that he was only available for one night, she became very angry. Her women threw him to the ground and beat him while she sharpened a knife to kill him. At the last second, however, he cried out ʿAzīza's phrase and she castrated him instead. He returned to his wife's house and passed out, awaking to find himself cast out, being of no further use to her. He returned to his mother's and in his convalescence finally mourned for ʿAzīza. His mother gave him back the piece of linen, as ʿAzīza had told her to do. He found a verse of his cousin's longing and grief embroidered on it, and also a letter acquitting him of responsibility in her death and telling him that the gazelles were wrought by Dunyā, the daughter of the King of the Camphor Islands and not his mistress's sister. She also told him to keep away from all women and not to try to gain the love of the lady of the gazelles. After a year of grief, he yearned for Dunyā and even visited her but his condition made everything hopeless.

Tāj al-Mulūk fell in love with Dunyā from ʿAzīz's description and, taking the young merchant with him, set out to find and win her.

A *Nights* hero or heroine can do a terrible thing and still retain our liking and even respect. Examples spring to mind: Sindbād; ʿAlī Nūr al-Dīn who gives away his love, Anīs al-Jalīs; the husband who kills his wife in the Three Apples; Budūr and Ḥayāt al-Nufūs' love for each other's sons. These are frequently acts of breaking trust or faith with a beloved and inhabit a grey area between storybook good and evil. None of these, however, is quite the anti-hero we find in ʿAzīz, a character made enjoyable, although not

really likeable, precisely because he violates the rules and expectations and fails utterly according to the standard of story heroes.

The world described in this tale is the stuff of Shahriyār's nightmares - with a difference. It is a world populated by women, which is nonetheless real; it is not a fantastic realm in which the women are queens and the men subjects, or where willing women wait in lots of forty for the arrival of the hero. Rather, it is a world in which ʿAzīza cannot go out of her house without compromise, in which the customs surrounding ʿAzīz's family are normal and believable. However, despite this world being the real world, every major event in the tale is controlled or engineered by a woman. There are several major female figures in the tale and only one male, ʿAzīz (his father being mentioned only to normalise his betrothal and to underscore the hero's losses with his death). Women are all-powerful in this series of social interactions by virtue of their comprehension of each others' language, while men are rendered relatively powerless by their inability to comprehend: they are excluded and controlled by their ignorance. The reader, the listener (Shahriyār), the listener Dhū l-Makān, the listener Tāj al-Mulūk, and, until an explanation is given to him by a woman, ʿAzīz, are all excluded from the meaning of words and signs used to communicate. The codes are literally impenetrable until ʿAzīza decodes them or Bint Dalīla's enemy reveals them. We are made to appreciate that ʿAzīza's intelligence, described by ʿAzīz as far greater then his own, is also way beyond ours. This perspicacity between women is not limited to ʿAzīza alone. The point is emphasised by the fact that ʿAzīz's lover can read ʿAzīza's communications with equal skill. A deeper meaning, a comprehension which links up cause and consequence, is perceived by the women and, as suggested above, this explicitly empowers

them. This is one tale which assumes a male reader, since the male recipients (Shahriyār and Tāj al-Mulūk) have their emotions played upon.[10]

All explanations in this world come from women. It is populated and manipulated by women who are able to understand each other sight unseen and across the boundaries of polarised social positions: ʿAzīza is the virtuous, protected, house-bound good girl, while Dalīla's daughter is a worldly woman of independent wealth who chooses and kills lovers as she pleases. The only man in presented in any detail is ʿAzīz, who is the helpless pawn and ultimate victim of these women. He cannot understand them, or their world, and therefore cannot prevail. He ends up a broken and castrated man, telling a tale to horrify anyone remotely threatened by the feminine.

However, the story resists a simple response to this scenario. The women may be numerous, intelligent and deadly in comparison with the men but they differ substantially from each other as characters and the two opposites, ʿAzīza and the daughter of Dalīla, both capture our respect and sympathy, even our admiration. The hero ʿAzīz fails at all times to measure up to their calibre as individuals and the story explores his weaknesses in considerable detail. Despite their power, and often ruthlessness, these women are faithful, whereas Azīz falls for temptation where it is offered, whether in the form of food or sex. He is an inversion of the heroic, for while he is very beautiful and is loved by ʿAzīza, desired and ultimately loved by

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[10]The entertainment value, indeed attraction of the fictional powerful woman, can be seen to express the yearning for equality in society or at least a recognition of inequality. The peculiar status accorded to the slave-girl singer, in history and in the literature, reflects this phenomenon, for these women often had more freedom, opportunity and education than wives could have (*EI* (2). VI. 468; IV. 822). In celebrating the slave-girl's body, intellect and talent, the tales fulfil submerged social wishes in relation to all men and women (Sarkīs 129). As Wiebke Walther notes: "So mag man sich bei den Liebesmärchen und -novellen aus "Tausendundeiner Nacht" fragen, ob sie Wunschvorstellungen, Idealbilder oder vielleicht gar eine Art Antiliteratur darstellen" ("Das bild der Frau" 78). See also Bencheikh, *Mille et un contes de la nuit* 265-66.

Dalīla's daughter, and desired by her enemy whom he marries, he portrays himself (since he is the teller) without hiding his cruelty and physical abuse of ʿAzīza, without covering up his betrayal of his lover or his wife and indeed displays no positive attribute whatsoever except honesty about what took place. ʿAzīz is depicted at several key points in the moment of bodily excretions: sweating profusely and sitting on his handkerchief to keep his clothes clean, at a loss as to how to wipe his face just before he sees Dalīla's daughter for the first time, hastily washing the food off his hands and mouth as his lover enters, pissing on a wall just before the old woman entraps him into his marriage with the enemy. These images of his body, including the castration scene, and his getting fat and slow in the year of good living with his lover, all undermine his physical beauty and seriously damage any heroic status he might have had by being the protagonist of the tale. He is weak, immoral, faithless, vicious and unjust, and his castration comes as a welcome punishment for his repetitious infidelity and his failure to learn. He is scarcely the stuff of a king's role model and the patent impossibility of identifying Shahriyār with ʿAziz forces reappraisal of the women in the tale, for, despite their dangerous nature and unassimilable powers, they show the qualities and conform with the ideals which underscore ʿAzīz's failures. The most prominent of these ideals is the ideal of love and the actions of a lover, exemplified in the purest form by the selfless ʿAzīza's death for love but evident also in Bint Dalīla's year of grief when ʿAzīz deserts her.[11]

The thoroughly rotten hero, as distinct from the rather nobly thoughtless, such as ʿAlī Nūr al-Dīn (ʿAlī Nūr al-Dīn and Anīs al-Jalīs),

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[11]Hamori explores this tale in relation to codes of ideal love in the Arab tradition, noting in particular ʿAzīz's failure to meet the standard exemplified by ʿAzīza ("Notes on Two Love Stories" 69-75).

appears to have been a recurrent character in certain types of stories. ʿAzīz is probably an early form, as his pathetic weakness is fittingly punished: an exemplary, warning element remains in the tale. However, later heroes form a cavalcade of scoundrels, wastrels and social failures, who, through no virtues of their own, do very well in the course of their stories. In fact the tale shows a form of delight in their shortcomings. This generic anti-hero provides a special impetus for the story, not so much to rectify his weaknesses but to make way for his partner to upstage him. The inversion of roles which are otherwise relatively defined in society is one of the major pleasures of popular story-telling and in each case of the rotten hero, the heroine proves resourceful, astute, intelligent and often warlike. Zumurrud is breadwinner, decision maker and ruler, while ʿAlī Shār feebly bemoans his fate.

This hero has a role which is considerably diluted in the purely literary text. Gerhardt notes with wonder that these heroes are offered with no express disapproval (*Story-telling* 141). However, to understand fully the impact of such a hero, we need to return to the creative interaction of the *rāwī* and the crowd. The hero is predicated from the disapproval in the crowd, and the entertaining element is maximised if the performance context is judgemental. A great many elements in the *Nights* appear devoid of disapproval simply because they presume it in their listeners and then play deliciously with it. Nūr al-Dīn, the lover of Maryam the Christian, is first drunk, then beats his father, is asked to leave the family home by his mother and steals a bag of gold in parting. This is how his tale begins. Having broken the gamut of honourable social codes and behaviours, he is set up as the inversion of the heroic. One can imagine the scandalised delight the crowd would show as the list accumulates. Inversions require an accepted

code of roles to be fun. It is noticeable that the hero is so bad in this tale that the space is created for not just a super heroine but a Christian one at that.

Infidelity in its multitude of manifestations in the tales cannot but recall the frame in the mind of the reader and cannot avoid being synthesised into a reading or commentary on the action of the frame. While the reiterations at dawn formally structure the collection with the frame, the repetitions of images of infidelity form the strongest and most recurrent thematic collusion between the two. For both men and women, faithlessness emerges as a redeemable mid-point between good and evil. It is on the arena of fidelity and infidelity that many *Nights* characters emerge as human, flawed and subject to inner change and suffering. The issue of infidelity and betrayal is counterpointed by Sheherazade and the redeeming purpose of her story. Infidelity and resolution of betrayal and psychological and emotional damage are the pattern of many stories. However, in the tale of ʿAzīz and ʿAzīza, the man is the image of dishonour, shame and infidelity; unfaithful in his promises not just to ʿAzīza, whom he did not love or marry, but significantly unfaithful also both to the woman he loved and to the woman he married (Bencheikh, *Mille et un contes* 309). The repetition-in-inversion of the themes of the frame is most effective.

ʿAzīz is entrapped by force, offered a choice between death or marriage with his captor and locked up after his marriage by his wife in order to ensure his fidelity. His role is to do as the cock does; to live the life of luxurious incarceration provided by his wife and to give sex on demand. When his wife discards him, she keeps his son, something ʿAzīz does not even complain about. In this particular relationship we are offered an inversion, even a parody of gender roles (Hamori, "Two Love Stories" 69); ʿAzīz resembles nothing more than the stock female concubine of the tales,

with some added bite to the image.[12] The crudity with which his position is described and his complete powerlessness and idleness are offered with no veneer of idealism. However, this parody is not set in a fantasy world made interesting by its inversions; it is presented as a distinctly possible world. Neither Dalīla's daughter nor her enemy belong to the groups in society which most represent the stereotypes or stock figures. Neither are named, but the invocation of the name of Dalīla is sufficient to give the tale a pseudo-historical context. Dalīla was a Cairene confidence trickster and manipulator famous in the real Baghdad of the 10th/4th century (Irwin, *Companion* 145-6). Several legends of the story Baghdad explore her wiles and trickery. The schemers and masters of this tale have the authority of being her descendants; nominally her real daughter and certainly her narrative daughters. The use of the name of Dalīla simply prohibits this world from being read or heard as unreal or symbolic in the same way as the undersea society of ʿAbdullah of the Sea is.

ʿAzīz is paired by a twin who is also his opposite, however, much in the same way as the two ʿAbdullahs are. Assonant names are usually stridently meaningful in the *Nights;* here ʿAzīza is his other half, having everything he lacks. They are complementary opposites in an ideal world but in the real world it is the contrast between them which generates the ultimate tragic separation. ʿAzīz's permanent incompleteness without his pair and partner is crudely sketched in his castration.

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[12]Bencheikh discusses this element in some detail, suggesting that ʿAzīz plays the role of a muslima: cloistered sex-object after marriage (*Mille et un contes de la nuit* 304-5). However, to read a simplistic social parallel into the tale is to lose its satiric play with social stereotypes.

One confusing element of the tale is the piece of linen with its embroidered gazelles. This component is welded into the tale with some care, yet, other than being a motif to lead into and out of the tale, it seems obscure. None of the questions which we might ask about this motif is directly answered, despite the significance attached to it by ʿAzīza, her mother, Bint Dalīla and ultimately ʿAzīz. ʿAzīza translates for us all the other obscure symbols traded between the women but this one is left to the reader. It is a repetition by reappearance which pressures the reader to search for its meaning. The first indication that it has great significance is when Tāj al-Mulūk meets ʿAzīz for the first time. ʿAzīz appears to lose his mind when the piece of embroidered linen falls inadvertently from his wares. Tāj al-Mulūk then forces the reluctant ʿAzīz to tell the tale of the piece of linen, which is described fully in this framing encounter. It has

> . . . the figures of two gazelles, facing one another, one wrought in silk and gold and the other in silver with a ring of red gold and three bugles of chrysolite about its neck. (2. 221)

They are beautiful enough to provoke wonder and admiration in Tāj al-Mulūk, who asks for the story of "her who gave [ʿAzīz] these gazelles" (2. 222), in other words the story of Bint Dalīla, ʿAzīza and his mother, since all three are effectively the givers. The piece of linen then reappears when he relates how Bint Dalīla gave it to him. She tells him to keep it carefully, for it is her sister's work. ʿAzīz admires the work but disregards her instructions. He throws it down before ʿAzīza, who asks to keep it. In the end the gazelles are given back to ʿAzīz by his mother, who is acting as ʿAzīza's agent, instructed to return them to him once he mourns for the loss of his cousin. ʿAzīza's letter informs him that Dunyā is the maker of the linen, which is sent abroad each year as a mystical advertisement for that princess. Finally ʿAzīz

is instructed to preserve the gazelles in memory of his cousin and not to marry Dunyā.

All of this is very mysterious. However, several elements are clear: the gazelles represent love in some form[13] but not with just anybody. Significantly, the image of abusive sexuality, ʿAzīz's wife, does not either receive or give the piece of linen. She is not a participant in the meanings they offer. Bint Dalīla, however, has an ambiguous role. She loves ʿAzīz and is loved by him but ʿAzīza tells him that Bint Dalīla's claim to the gazelles is a lie. The gazelles depict a love ʿAzīz never attains: the love of two creatures of the same kind, two equals.[14] All his relationships are imbalanced: he is lacking in feeling and at the mercy of his dominating lovers. In the end the gazelles represent his irretrievable loss: severed from his other half, incomplete in a physical, emotional and spiritual sense. Significantly, all the women take the piece of linen very seriously: they understand it. Even Tāj al-Mulūk, who still has his three bugles of chrysolite, responds to it with a search for love and completion.

The presence of this motif on linen in the tale is so oddly achieved that one could argue that its main function in the narrative is mechanical and that it is unsatisfying in its other gestures. We can speculate that some clarifying component which explores its power has been lost. However, given its resonance of the principal theme of the tale, it is hard to agree with Gerhardt that it is a vestige of an unrelated tale linking Tāj al-Mulūk to Dunyā upon which the tale of ʿAzīz and ʿAzīza has been pasted (*Story-telling* 135).

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[13]For a discussion of the trope of the gazelle as lover in a variety of forms in Arabic poetry, see J. C. Bürgel's "The Lady Gazelle and her Murderous Glances."

[14]I am indebted to Teresita White both for this idea, and for pushing me to explore the gazelles' meanings more deeply.

ʿAbdallah the Fisherman and ʿAbdallah the Merman

This tale appears in the Egyptian MSS, the Bulaq, Macnaghten and Breslau texts, and following them, in Lane, Payne and Burton (Chauvin 5. 6-7) (Nights 940-46 in Payne).

> ʿAbdallah, a poor fisherman who owned only his net and relied on God's providence for each day's food, went down to the seashore to fish in the name of his newborn son, his tenth child. He cast his net repeatedly until the end of the day but caught nothing. He headed home, dejected and worried. However, a friendly baker, despite the general food shortage, singled ʿAbdallah out and insisted on giving him bread and money, refusing to allow the fisherman to pawn his net for it. ʿAbdallah was to pay in fish, when times improved. For forty days there were no fish and each day the fisherman got deeper into debt to the baker (also named ʿAbdallah), who had all this time provided the essential sustenance for the large family. At the end of the forty days ʿAbdallah was ready to die from dejection and shame and was shaken in his faith in God. On the forty first day he cast his net praying for even one fish, to give to the baker. He hauled in a stinking corpse of a dead donkey. On the second cast, however, he hauled in a living merman, who told ʿAbdallah that he too was a muslim and asked to be released. They agreed to exchange fruits of the land for jewels of the sea each day and, after reciting the Fātiḥa, the fisherman released the merman, who was also named ʿAbdallah. The fisherman regretted briefly releasing the merman, thinking he

could have paraded him as a curiosity and made some money but the merman quickly returned carrying all kinds of jewels. ʿAbdallah went straight to the baker, and gave him half of the jewels.

The next day the fisherman took all kinds of fruit in a basket to the seaside, called the merman and gave it to him. The merman exchanged it, filling the basket with jewels. After sharing with the baker, the fisherman went to the bazaar to sell them but was arrested on suspicion of theft of the queen's jewels. He was brought before the king, who was also named ʿAbdallah. The queen, however, vindicated him and the good king believed his story. The king married ʿAbdallah the fisherman to his daughter, his only child, saying that wealth needs status. The fisherman's ten boys and his wife came to live in the palace and were treated with love and honour.

Next day and every day after the fisherman went to the sea with fruit to keep his tryst with his friend the merman. All was well, and the king, hearing of the baker, made him wazir, saying that the four of them were brothers.

One day, as ʿAbdallah the fisherman was chatting with ʿAbdallah the merman, the conversation turned to to the tomb of the Prophet. The merman was shocked that the fisherman had not yet made the pilgrimage, although the latter protested that circumstances had in the past prevented him and that in fact he longed to go. They agreed that he would fulfil his wish and go that year, taking a pledge on the merman's behalf. The merman invited him to his house under the sea, as a guest, and to collect the pledge. He

brought the fisherman a yellow ointment and, following instructions, the fisherman rubbed it all over his body. Then they went under the sea together, the fisherman protected from drowning by the ointment. ʿAbdallah the merman showed his friend the wonders of the sea; the immense variety of fish life, many cities, and places, and described for him the different cultural and social practices. The fisherman marvelled at what he saw and heard but became tired after seeing fourscore cities in the same number of days and sick of eating only raw fish. The merman took him to a small city, his own, and to his own house. The fisherman was laughed at by the family: he was a "lacktail", and they were beautiful, but naked and with fishtails, and he was fed fish yet again. However, the king of the land had heard of the lacktail and wished to see him. He was taken to the court and laughed at again but the merman came forward and explained the situation, after which the king entertained the fisherman and gave him jewels. Then the merman took him home and gave him a purse as pledge for the Prophet's tomb. As they were making their way back to the land, they passed a feast, with singing, eating and merrymaking. ʿAbdallah the fisherman asked if this was a wedding and was told that it was in fact a funeral. He asked about the custom in surprise and told ʿAbdallah the merman that on the land the people mourn and weep. The merman was deeply shocked and asked for the pledge back. He ended the friendship forthwith, horrified that the people of the land would grieve upon giving up to God His pledge, that is, their souls.

> The fisherman returned to the king and his family and told the king of the marvels of the sea and what had happened between him and his friend. The king told him that he had been wrong to say what he did. The fisherman returned to the seashore for some time but the merman never again answered or appeared. At last he gave up hope and lived happily with the king and their families until they died.

This tale is divided into two movements which blend smoothly into one another, as motifs in each are reflected and explored in the other. The first is a complete tale in itself, exploring ʿAbdallah's poverty and piety very effectively. The two brothers or counterparts, ʿAbdallah of the sea and ʿAbdallah of the land, discover an identity in difference in this first half, an identity primarily effected by shared faith. However, the great differences between them, noted but dormant in the first half, are the subject of the second. This movement explores the response to the exotic Other in vividly human terms. The two friends separate forever in the end because of irreconcilable differences of point of view. If the first movement establishes the ideal Muslim world, the second demolishes it again with the very human limitations of its members. It is on the one hand the most gloriously idealistic tale and in the end the most resignedly realistic and, apart from that, it is entertaining; its exotic and scientific details are a delight in themselves, both for the *rāwī*'s crowd and for the twentieth-century reader. Quite often, these elements are seen as so dominant that the tale is categorised simply as a marvels of the sea tale, with no further comment necessary.

ʿAbdallah the fisherman is one of the very finely drawn characters of the collection, not because his motives, personal development or inner significance are explored, for they are not. ʿAbdallah is tangibly real because he is reflected in his experiences and his surroundings. His contact with his experiential world is given in moments of immediacy, and this is sufficient to give him a kind of photographic reality. We are observers, eavesdroppers on living moments in the life of an ordinary man, "snuffing the smell of . . . hot bread"(8. 331), or tugging a net until his palms bleed. Even his suicidal feelings of shame are put into words overheard: he says to his wife "I have a mind to tear up the net and be quit of this life" (8. 333). ʿAbdallah is established through these ordinary experiences as someone just like you or me and from there his extraordinary experiences seem to belong in the world of possible fiction, rather than fairytale. His world entraps us in the fantasy of the tale, for in his world a dead donkey not only stinks, he has to move and fish elsewhere in order to get away from the stench.

The rigours of a famine are resolved in unimaginable bounty and goodwill, personified by the four good servants of God. ʿAbdallah the fisherman, ʿAbdallah the merman, ʿAbdallah the baker and ʿAbdallah the king, united by their names, are brothers indeed and help each other without consideration of self or class. In the first encounter, the baker provides for ʿAbdallah the fisherman and his enormous family with bread and money for forty days during a famine, with no realistic expectation of material return. He does not give charity; he repeats again and again that the fisherman may redeem the debt when fish are plentiful, thus preserving equality between them and attempting to allay the fisherman's discomfort. In the second encounter, the fisherman returns the merman to the sea, an act of trust in their bargain which might be against his interests as, realistically, he notes to

himself. Their subsequent trade of fruit for jewels and the establishment of the friendship is marked by its equivalences. Fruit may be easily come by on land but jewels are worthless under the waves. Despite their extreme differences, the two ʿAbdallahs are Muslim and recite in unison the Fātiḥa of the Qurʾān to seal their compact, initiating their friendship as equals. Each of these two encounters suggests its implicit inequalities as well. ʿAbdallah the fisherman is burdened to the point of being suicidal by his debt to the baker, as regaining equality can be achieved only by real rather than hypothetical repayment. As will be discussed below, this debt is presented as a prolonged test of the fisherman's faith. The second encounter, that with the merman, encapsulates a transition from extreme inequality to equality and friendship. The merman is at first the fisherman's prisoner, subject to goodwill, cruelty or caprice. After releasing him ʿAbdallah the fisherman's brief regret at not having kept him as a sideshow, an exotic curiosity for which he could have charged admission, hints at a relationship in absolute contrast with the one they do establish. In the midst of this reflection, he describes the merman as his "prey" (8. 336). The third encounter of this Muslim brotherhood is with the king of the land. The fisherman is as much at the mercy of the king as the merman was at his, and is indeed a prisoner as in the encounter preceding. The transition to equality is unexpectedly and quickly made. The king treats ʿAbdallah the fisherman most honourably and accepts without question that such good fortune may be the lot of any individual. His assistance is as practical and as pragmatic as it is essentially altruistic. At the least it is sensible and unselfish. At first glance it seems as though the king is obtaining access to such riches by befriending and advancing their source.[15]

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[15] Gerhardt also notes the essentially selfless nature of the king's actions, despite appearances (*Story-telling* 265).

However this criticism, applicable to kings in general in the *Nights*, dissolves upon scrutiny. The king argues that "wealth hath need of station" (8. 340), more to protect the possessor than anything: he says he could extend his protection to the fisherman but it might not last beyond his reign. The king's plan is presented as something he thinks up to look after the fisherman: he marries him to his only daughter, makes him, and later also the baker, his wazir, and brings the fisherman's family to the court. Most importantly, he establishes ʿAbdallah as his successor. It is the king who says, after finding out that the fisherman, the baker and the merman are each named ʿAbdallah: "And my name too is ʿAbdallah . . . and the servants of God are all brethren" (8. 342). This general picture of equality and harmony is exceptional and, of course, utopian, yet in its directness and vigour and in the pleasure generated by its underlying patterning, it sidesteps our disbelief.

The sea features prominently in this tale, present from the beginning of the first movement to the final parting in the last. It is more than a backdrop, however; it is, futher, the image of the unknown, even of God. Like God's providence, it gives or withholds life and death without reason or warning. It is bounteous beyond the limits of imagination, peopled and exotic, and ultimately outside the possibility of assimilation. In its aspects of emptiness and plenitude, it is the many-in-one, beyond the experiential capacity of ʿAbdallah the fisherman, infinite and beyond the finite human. The movement from attraction to repulsion is prefigured from the beginning, for it is not the magical, richly giving sea which occupies the first pages. The tale begins with the sea's repeated failure to provide the basic subsistence ʿAbdallah requires for his starving family; it is a vast, harsh, ungiving emptiness which, in failing to provide for life, offers up death implicitly for

the large family and explicitly in the stinking, bloated corpse of the dead donkey. In forty one days of trying, not one single fish is forthcoming. This image changes, for in catching the merman, followed by the visually and imaginatively stimulating exchange of fruits and jewels superimposed suddenly upon the bleak scene, the sea becomes the source of exotic wealth and the unknown home of the exotic friend who rectifies with his bounty the suffering of ʿAbdallah, his wife and their ten young sons. The ten times blessed ʿAbdallah the fisherman then rectifies the dearth suffered by ʿAbdallah the king, who has only one daughter, who is seen cuddling the children he has invited to live with him. Entering the sea and exploring its richness and diversity might have resulted in an assimilation of its mysterious plenty but it does not. We are far from the *who dares wins* concept which governs Sindbād's voyages.[16] The ocean's very plentifulness, contrasted with its emptiness of the opening scenes, becomes the source of ʿAbdallah the fisherman's ennui and revulsion, and inability to assimilate its otherness. Its plenty, appropriately, is captured in the abundance of fish and it is particularly fish as food which finally puts ʿAbdallah off. Ultimately even its diversity is lost in his perception of a surfeit of fish. His needs are relative: the need for fish was relative to his starving condition, while his need for variety is relative to his satiety. The sea, empty or over-abundant, is always too much. Near the end ʿAbdallah the merman reinforces ʿAbdallah the fisherman's growing ennui and sense of the uniformity of life under the sea: "After this wise do all the people of the sea; they traffic not with one another nor serve each other save by means of fish; and their food is fish and they themselves are a kind of fish" (8. 351). In the final scenes under the sea

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[16] The gulf between Sindbād and ʿAbdallah is also noted by Miquel (*Sept Contes* 128).

many wonders of the realm are offered for the reader's enjoyment. However, the pulse of ʿAbdallah the fisherman's revulsion with all he sees is picked up in reiterations of the word "fish". ʿAbdallah the merman's boy is munching a young fish "as a man would munch a cucumber" (8. 352), ʿAbdallah's wife serves "two great fishes, each the bigness of a lamb" (8. 351), and finally he must eat fish of "various kinds and colours" as the guest of the king. His inability to try to participate and understand begins with his rejection of the common food and his reminders of land food (lambs and cucumbers) are funny and effective reminders of the state of his stomach.

ʿAbdallah the fisherman's journey is through the looking glass and to the impossible other side. He travels to the realm of his not-self, outside of his possible life. One of the beauties of this tale is the patterning of reflection and equivalence when he passes under the reflective threshold between the worlds; the sea civilisations are exotic but recall in mirror image and in alter image the land story of the first movement. Just as the friendship with the king ʿAbdallah is the acme of the fisherman's good fortune, so the alienating encounter with the king of the sea is the nadir of his underworld journey. The civilisation might be different but it is also disturbingly similar: structured and hierarchical.

The fisherman is not alienated and repelled simply because of his own limitations. His inability to go beyond the boundaries of his self is reflected in his friend and double, who is ultimately equally unable to accept or assimilate difference. The people of the sea are like the people of the land in that they make fun of, use or reject difference. The fact that a lacktail is sported as a side show and amusement had its direct equivalence in the first movement. Remember that the fisherman thought of precisely the same sport with the merman. The limitations of undersea society alienate the fisherman

to the point of insult: he is an object, potentially of scorn and laughter. The reader is aware of the exact equivalences of the two societies despite the exotic world described. The character, however, cannot respond to the equivalence, as his relationship to the society is the moot point. As the outsider, the exotic, he has no place as subject, since he is unable to redeem his otherness. The friendship, which through faith, equality and respect of the other had bridged or clouded this gulf, is ultimately the casualty of this discovery. ʿAbdallah the merman, in sensing the fisherman's profound rejection, in turn rejects his friend's world on religious grounds.

The first movement of the tale is presented as a test of the faith of a pious man, a test which he passes and for which he is rewarded. The second movement is also a test; a test of the boundaries and limitations of the self and identity of the good man, a social test which he necessarily fails.

At the beginning of the tale the fisherman and his wife are given as the stock figure of the pious couple: ʿAbdallah trusts to God's providence to the extent that he will not use times of plenty to provide for a rainy day; in his words, "To-morrow's provision will come to-morrow" (8. 330), and in his wife's, "Put thy trust in God" (8. 330). This stereotype is very effective, as the picture of this impractical faith is contrasted with the real pressures on the couple: the story opens with the birth of their tenth child and the repeated failure of the sea to come up with provision in the name of the new baby. At the end of the first day in which ʿAbdallah has fished with prayer for his new son and worried for his wife in the straw, he questions this faith for the first time: "Hath God then created this new-born child, without an [appointed] provision?" He immediately answers himself: "This may never be . . . He is the Bountiful, the Provider" (8. 331). He is "broken-spirited and heavy at heart" but his faith is at this point whole. However, this is the first in a series

of doubts he has as things go from bad to worse and he has to endure the debt and dependency upon the baker to feed his family. His wife, soothing the children crying from hunger, has faith in him and in God. She becomes a source of the answers to ʿAbdallah's questions, for to her it is clear that the baker's kindness is also God's bounty. At the point when ʿAbdallah has lost faith in the sea providing for him, it is her reiteration of God's bounty which gnaws at him. In the end, disgusted with the dead donkey, his wife's words in his mind, he says "Is this dead ass the good of which she speaks?" (8. 334) ʿAbdallah's faith is faltering, his pride, independence and identity too embattled by the circumstances. However, providentially, he catches the merman at this point and the release and friendship are enacted on the basis of shared faith and trust. The chain reaction generated by the ideal scene of the meeting of the two worlds and the recitation of the Fātiḥa providentially rewards all involved. The baker's altruistic faith is rewarded, ʿAbdallah's wife is rewarded, the merman is rewarded and ultimately the king and the fisherman become brothers.

As suggested earlier, this tale is often seen as a tale of marvels, which are offered for their own sake. However, in many instances the wondrous in the *Nights* is not the absolutely imaginary, separate and distinct from the real world or offered purely for pleasure. It exists liminally between the real and the unreal, the possible and the impossible, or the pleasurable and the serious (Sarkīs 183). Here the marvels are stimulating and wonderful but ultimately directed towards a comment upon faith, human limitations and the Absolute which encompasses all worlds. After the irremediable rift between the two friends, after all the wonders and marvels and the exploration of the Other, and after all have lived happily and died, we are strongly reminded by the closing phrase of the breadth and all encompassing nature of God:

> And glory be to the [Ever-] Living One, who dieth not, whose is the Empire of the Seen and the Unseen, who can all things and is gracious to His servants and knoweth all that pertaineth to them! (8. 355).[17]

[17] André Miquel suggests: "on dira que . . . le monde des hommes est trop petit pour embrasser ce miracle absolu de la grâce que Dieu nous fit, qu'il y faut autre chose que nos pauvres limites, et que la foi, la vraie, est insondable comme la mer" (*Sept contes* 130).

Maʿrūf the Cobbler and his wife Fāṭima

This is a late Egyptian tale which appears only in the Egyptian MSS. It is represented in the Bulaq and the Macnaghten texts. Following the Bulaq and the Macnaghten, it appears in English in the translations of Lane, Burton, and Payne (Chauvin 81). It is the last tale of the enframed narratives, stretching from Night 989 to Night 1001.

> Maʿrūf, a good, generous, poor cobbler of Cairo, was married to a vicious, cruel woman named Fāṭima, who from malice mistreated him. He found it necessary to flee Cairo after she had falsely denounced him several times to the courts for wife beating. As he sheltered in a ruined place from the winter rain, a jinnī took pity on him, and flew him to a place where Fāṭima would not find him. The cobbler ended up in a beautiful city, a year's journey away from Cairo. He was rescued from the pressures of the crowd by a rich merchant who proved to be his long lost boyhood neighbour and friend, ʿAlī. Delighted to be reunited, ʿAlī set Maʿrūf up with the scheme that had made his own fortune. He gave Maʿrūf a thousand dinars with which Maʿrūf impressed the other merchants with his liberality, giving money without concern, saying all the while that his baggage was on its way. Maʿrūf convinced everybody that he was a great merchant with uncountable quantities of every valuable thing. However, he also borrowed so much money on the strength of it and gave so liberally to the poor, that ʿAlī became deeply concerned. When he confronted Maʿrūf with his worries, Maʿrūf merely answered that when his baggage

arrived, all would be repaid. ʿAlī gave up on him, and adopted a low profile. Eventually the merchants became concerned and complained to the king. The king, however, was a greedy man, and was so impressed by Maʿrūf's munificence that he was inclined to believe him. Against the judgement of his wazir, he married Maʿrūf to the princess, hoping to obtain the fabled wealth. Maʿrūf was at first reluctant, as his baggage had not yet arrived and he could not bestow fitting gifts upon his bride. The king, however, put the treasury at his disposal and Maʿrūf exhausted it with largesse and celebrations for the whole city lasting several weeks. Incited to suspicion by the wazir, the king decided to get the truth out of Maʿrūf by the agency of his daughter. She managed to get the whole story out of the cobbler but, since she loved him, she decided to help him. She packed him off in disguise in the middle of the night, with 50,000 dinars of her money, and a fast horse, promising to send him money and letters, and to bring him back to the city if her father died. She then told her father and the wazir that he had had news of his baggage and had gone to meet it.

Meanwhile Maʿrūf wandered in the open country, distressed at the parting with his wife. At lunchtime he came upon a peasant, ploughing in a field. The peasant went to get him and his horse some food. While he was waiting Maʿrūf, out of pity for the man, continued with the ploughing. The ploughshare struck and got caught in a buried ring of gold, handle to an alabaster flagstone. Maʿrūf pulled it away, and discovered a stairway to a fantastic storehouse of treasure, including a talismanic ring, which he soon discovered commanded a Sultan of the Jinn. With the help of this

Sultan, he provided the peasant with a banquet upon his return, and after that compiled his fantasy baggage and headed back to his wife the princess. The king was overjoyed, the princess delighted and confused, the wazir disgraced, and ʿAlī the merchant deeply impressed upon Maʿrūf's return. However, after a little while the king, egged on by the wazir, began to feel afraid of his strikingly wealthy and overgenerous son-in-law. They carried out a plan to get Maʿrūf drunk in the garden and extracted the secret of the ring from him, and also the ring itself. The wazir ordered the slave of the ring to cast both Maʿrūf and the king into the wilderness. The wazir then revealed himself to be a true tyrant and tried also to marry the princess. By trickery and violence, she managed to get the ring from him also, and to have her father and husband brought back, and everything set to rights. She insisted, however, that the ring remain with her, since neither of them was sensible enough to look after it. The wazir was executed. They all lived happily for five years, during which time Maʿrūf and the princess Dunyā had a beautiful son. However, after five years had passed, Dunyā died, charging Maʿrūf to take care of the ring for his own and the boy's sake.

Suddenly Fāṭima, his first wife, reappeared. Her life had become difficult and she had regretted her past actions. She told Maʿrūf her tale of woe, which culminated with the sympathetic jinnī telling her of Maʿrūf's whereabouts and transporting her there. Maʿrūf treated her with honour and provided her with all she could want, and foolishly also told her about the ring. After a little while, her true character resurfaced. She was jealous of Maʿrūf's

young son and of his many young and lovely concubines, and she coveted the ring. One night Maʿrūf's son saw her sneaking into Maʿrūf's chamber. He watched her search for the ring, which she knew Maʿrūf removed from his hand at night. When she had found it and was about to rub it, the young boy cut her head off with his small sword. Her perfidy was proven by the ring in her hand.

Maʿrūf lived happily after this. He sent for the peasant and made him his wazir, marrying also the peasant's very beautiful daughter, and they all lived happily to the end of their days.

Maʿrūf and Fāṭima are set in opposition from the outset. The story-teller informs us that Fāṭima is "a worthless, ill-conditioned wretch, little of shame and a sore mischief-maker", while Maʿrūf is a "man of sense and careful of his repute" who "fear[s] her malice and dread[s] her mischief" (9. 180). This inequality between them is illustrated and emphasised by the contrast in their modes of speech. Every sentence Maʿrūf utters in the introductory paragraph contains a reference to Allah, whereas Fāṭima's speech borders on crudity and faithlessness. When she mentions Allah, it is with some disrespect: "Whether He provide or not, look thou come not to me save with the vermicelli and bees' honey thereon" (9. 181). This demonstration of faith and contrasting impiety is a very simple way of aligning the reader's sympathies; Maʿrūf's words show him to be a good man, Fāṭima's show her to be a bad woman. The tension set up between these two poles, particularly as the story opens with the bad maltreating and prevailing over the good, creates the expectation of a resolution of this inequality, and a redress for the injustices Maʿrūf suffers at the hand of his

wife. This resolution is long deferred by the adventures to follow but because it is ultimately forthcoming, it is possible to say that the story of Maʿrūf and Fāṭima frames the long sequence of adventures in which the cobbler becomes a rich merchant, a prince and a king through a combination of fraud and inner purity. This framing tale, however, is linked to its enframed narratives in a more organic way than usual in the collection as a whole. It is not specified in any way as distinct and it shares the protagonist Maʿrūf. The frame effect is created by the use of deferral of a resolution of inequilibrium and by the insertion of adventures essentially distinct from the story of the mismatched couple. The hero and the story going full circle are the main structuring devices of a rather rambling episodic tale featuring food, benign confidence trickery, noble peasants, avaricious nobles, street humour and coincidence, but underscored by a serious theme of resignation to destiny and fate, a providence which ultimately rewards the good and punishes the evil.

The explicitly untruthful nature of stories is an essential and liberating feature of Arab tales past and present (Muhawi 331-32). A lie is not the responsibility of the teller and, being untrue, below serious criticism. For this reason, stories could explore real issues and injustices without being threatening (Muhawi 331). In Maʿrūf the Cobbler, lies acquire quite literary features. It is a story in which the lie is virtually the prime motivator, as is perhaps appropriate for a story full of inversions. There are clearly good and bad forms of lying. Fāṭima denounces Maʿrūf as a cruel husband to several judges in a row, maliciously subverting his good character and causing him a great deal of physical and monetary misery. The direct outcome of this series of lies is Maʿrūf's flight from his oppressive wife and his flight from the frame to the enframed. Maʿrūf is the author of the next major series of lies,

the lies of plenty which establish his reputation as an eccentric billionaire merchant and lead ultimately to his marriage to the princess. Ultimately all the lies are fulfilled and, interestingly enough, when Maʿrūf tells the truth, he is either not believed (as when he tells of the jinnī bringing him from Cairo in one night) or the fulfilment of his lies puts his truths into doubt (his confession to the princess is overridden by the physical manifestation of the lie) or he gets into serious trouble (his confession to the king and the wazir). Fāṭima's return at the end involves her attempt to deceive Maʿrūf the benevolent king more evilly than ever, resulting in her death and destruction. However, overall, lies are not a bad thing. They are a safer thing than truths and for the devout and pure at heart they tend to work out well. They are the stuff of life, or at least, of narrative life. The celebration of Maʿrūf's delightful lies has both a taste of the carnivalesque unreality of the noble peasant king and an element of palpable social realism. Maʿrūf and his friend ʿAlī were street kids of Cairo. ʿAlī ran away at age seven having been upset by a beating inflicted by his father for stealing bibles from the Christians and selling them, a scam which both boys had run successfully for some time. ʿAlī, in a foreign city, hustles his way into respectability and helpfully teaches Maʿrūf his technique. In getting the hustle hopelessly wrong, Maʿrūf nonetheless manages to pull off the scam of all time, facilitated step by step by his innate generosity and admirable character. It is a story to delight an urban audience relatively lenient on a distinction between lies and truth but also manages to use lies enough to defuse the image of a cobbler king, a peasant queen and a peasant wazir with which the tale closes from suggesting anything revolutionary. It is a tale informed by a deeply cynical view of the ruling class and an idealisation of the common man.

In this world, the lies of a good man virtually become prophecies, while the truths of a bad man are proved wrong and come to nothing. The wazir almost invariably tells the truth, indeed, in a worldly sense, he offers sound advice to the king. However, in lacking the graces of lies, he also lacks the social and religious ethics to restrain his passions. He is such a bad man that he is proved to be an infidel by his violation of religious law and his proposed violation of the Princess Dunyā, who unsurprisingly prevails over him by deceit.

The most prominent lie, which is also one of the most memorable in the *Nights*, is Maʿrūf's cumulative lie of plenty. One of the delightful aspects of this lie is that it sublimates the *Nights* collection as a whole. Maʿrūf's lie resembles many of the story-teller's lies already encountered; the imaginary realm of unlimited yet thoroughly tactile wealth and the forsaking of all daily care. Maʿrūf dupes the merchants and the king with the same story as has been told the reader many times before, but with this added element of comic suspense: he is believed. When finally the cobbler finds a real treasure as immense as anything he imagined, the reader is very ready to be duped again, as the windfall gets our hero out of a very sticky position. This play with the lie of wealth is a clever revival of a stock feature of earlier tales. Many elements of 'Maʿrūf' reflect a more self reflexive, mature and playful use of the story-telling genre. Inversion of predictable stock figures is the most obvious of these. Gone is the King or Caliph remote in his glory, wealth and power. The nameless king in this tale is weak and avaricious, distinctly lacking in personal grandeur. He is, furthermore, the owner of a real treasury which is a poor and limited thing in comparison with Maʿrūf's imaginary one. Wealth here has a spiritual correlative. The real king, with his real wealth, does not measure up to the abilities and capacities of the

hustler, the "Sheikh of Imposters" (9. 217). Maʿrūf's ability to imagine unlimited wealth and his ability to give it away, reflect an equally unlimited generosity and openness of spirit. The king's rapidly exhaustible treasury of mere real valuables reflects his petty, little minded and unimaginative personality. It is comically delightful that the working class hero nobly separates the king from all of his wealth by the agency of the king's own avarice.

The princess is a good character, although the story-teller keeps us in suspense, when we are briefly unsure whether she will cross over to the realm of good lies or tell the truth and destroy Maʿrūf. She quickly reveals herself to be up there with the best of liars, telling her father and the wazir that Maʿrūf's messenger has reported that the arrival of the baggage is imminent, delayed by the attacks of Bedouins. She embroiders this story so imaginatively that they believe her. Dunyā's language aligns her with the good, and we have an idea that all will be well when she asks Maʿrūf to tell her the truth by invoking the name of God. In this case, truth does Maʿrūf no harm.

Maʿrūf manages to fill and parody the roles of several stock heroes in sequence, without for a moment losing his own personality. Street kid, hustler, story-teller, tradesman, merchant, prince and bridegroom, separated from Dunyā he becomes the lovestruck hero and of course, when the distraught lover, he is the poet.

Maʿrūf manages to become carnival king for life (or for a tale), ending a very satisfactory peasant tale with a dream of good government and egalitarian recognition of human worth (in the ploughing scene). In the end cobbler king takes peasant wife with peasant first minister, righting the

wrongs of the previous irreligious, dishonourable and ungenerous government. This is an interesting parallel to the stories where women rule, for it is a similar inversion. A powerless and exploited class is ideally posited as both in power and better at it, a fantasy born of oppression but modelled on archetypes of what is enjoyable in a story: unlikely hero makes good against odds. It is also the carnival pleasure in story, where the good man is the simple, sweet, generous scoundrel, the peasant hero.

Afterword

The *Nights* gives us a world constructed not so much of a sequence of human emotions, motives, and responses, as of objects which create the forum upon which emotions or states in the protagonist or the reader are played out. It is a world of gardens, buildings, faces, lips and of objects which are described as like the moon, ambergris or pearls, which all have an evocative power in their role as set pieces or which offer a tangible, tactile adventure for reader or listener and protagonist.

The *Nights* is a world of abundance, enriched or rather multiplied by the cumulative and repetitious use of the similes. Nearly every girl or boy is the wonder of the age, the most beautiful, the pinnacle of elegance and eloquence. Each is a rarity amongst such an abundance of rarities that they become commonplace. It is a world of similes, in which each person is refracted through things, in which each thing is like another equally concrete although perhaps more precious thing. Each tale becomes, or resembles or duplicates a multitude of others. The unique rarity is constantly outdone or equalled by itself, multiplied with each successive tale. Despite generic differences between types of tales and the collection's irresolvable heterogeneity, the cumulative effect of this infinite repetition of narrative imagery is a kind of ennui, a surfeit of rarities. The *Nights* is rather like a week of television; watch it without intervals, and it forms a meaningless soup and all the differences between the good, the bad and the ridiculous cease to feature. The *Nights* resists being read as a scholar reads. It is amenable, indeed appreciable, only through sessions; arrestation, delay, hiatus and cessation are as essential to the reader as they are to Sheherazade and to the tales themselves. It must be read indulgently, with a readiness for

the recursive and a delight in delay. Sessional immersion transforms the stock descriptions, the repetition and the, at times, predictable narratives. They become the signature pieces of the read (or heard) world and these insignias activate the state required for reading. We, the readers, are Adults in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass.

I will close with one striking response to the *Nights*, in which this poet understood the reading experience to be self-interpretation at least as much as it was interpretation of a literary text:

> Then, as the Book was glassed
> In Life as in some olden mirror's quaint,
> Bewildering angles, so would Life
> Flash light on light back on the Book; and both
> Were changed.
>
> (W. E. Henley "Arabian Nights Entertainments" Qtd. in Ali 57).

Appendix

Major Arabic Printed Editions

First Calcutta 1814-18/1229-33, 2 volumes and 200 nights. Edited by Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Shīrwānī al-Yamanī, based on a MS of between 1750/1163 and 1771/1185, and other souces.

Breslau 1824-1843/1239-1259, 1001 nights, volumes 1-8 edited and compiled by Maximilian Habicht, 9-12 by Heinrich Fleischer, based on several MSS and other sources collected by Habicht.

First Bulaq 1835/1251, 1001 nights, 2 volumes, MS no longer extant.

Macnaghten (Second Calcutta) 1839-42/1255-58. 4 volumes, 1001 nights, edited by W. H. Macnaghten, primary MS no longer extant.

Leiden 1984/1405, 1 volume, 282 nights, edited by Muhsin Mahdi, based on the 14th/8th century MS used by Galland.

Translations

Antoine Galland. 12 volumes, published between 1704/1116-1717/1129, with innumerable editions in English from 1706/1118. based on a 14th/8th Century MS edited in 1984/1405 by Muhsin Mahdi (the Leiden text).

Edward William Lane. Published 1838-41/1254-57 in serial form, also bound in three volumes, based on the First Bulaq edition of 1835/1251, supplemented from the Breslau and the First Calcutta.

John Payne. 9 volumes published 1882-84/1299-1301. Based on the Macnaghten, supplemented with additions from the First Bulaq and the Breslau.

Richard Burton. 10 volumes published 1885/1302, based on Payne and the Macnaghten, supplemented with additions from the First Bulaq and the Breslau.

Joseph Charles Mardrus. 1899-1904/1317-1322, translated into English by Powys Mathers, 1923/1341, falsely claims to be an accurate translation of the First Bulaq.

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