

- between the *Arabian Nights* frame tale and the now-lost Persian manuscript.
- 965 Bandits murder the Arab poet al-Mutanabbi.
- c1048 Omar Khayyam, a mathematician, astronomer, and the poet of the *Rubaiyat*, is born.
- 1099 European Christians pillage Jerusalem, killing the city's Muslims and Jews; the attack, known as the First Crusade, marks the first European Christian offensive against Muslims in the Middle East.
- 1187 Jerusalem is recaptured by the Islamic general Saladin.
- 1189 Richard the Lion-Hearted leads the Third Crusade into the Holy Land.
- 1258 The Mongols, nomadic tribes from Asia, sack the city of Baghdad, ending the Abbasid dynasty. The stories in the *Arabian Nights* exist in manuscript compilations; they include folk tales, historical anecdotes, and religious legends added over time by the collector's anonymous editors.
- 1453 Ottoman Turks under Mehmed II capture Constantinople and establish the seat of the Ottoman Empire in the former Byzantine capital.
- 1520 The reign of the Ottoman sultan Suleyman the Magnificent begins.
- 1704 Antoine Galland, a French Orientalist and Louis XIV's antiquary, publishes the first European translation of the *Arabian Nights*. Galland's translation, *Les Mille et une nuits*, consists of twelve volumes based on a rare thirteenth-century Arabic manuscript.
- 1706 A "Grub Street" (that is, hack writer's) edition of the *Arabian Nights* in English is published based on the French translation by Galland; it quickly popularizes the *Arabian Nights* in England and fuels an interest in the Orient.
- 1838- Edward William Lane completes his three-volume translation of the *Arabian Nights*; in copious footnotes, he pays particular attention to contemporary Muslim culture.
- 1840 John Payne publishes the first translation into English of the complete *Arabian Nights*.
- 1884 Sir Richard Burton publishes his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, including *Supplemental Nights*; the popular book becomes the most renowned translation into English, thanks in part to its inclusion of the original's erotic episodes.
- 1944 A film version of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, directed by Arthur Lubin, opens.
- 1958 *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad the Sailor*, a popular film adaptation, opens.
- 1974 Italian auteur Pier Paolo Pasolini releases *Il Fiore dalle mille e una notte*, a film adaptation of the *Arabian Nights*.
- 1992 Disney Studios releases the animated film *Aladdin*, starring Robin Williams as the voice of the genie.

INTRODUCTION

See the *Glossary of Names and Terms on page xli* for further information on important dynasties, individuals, and Islamic terms used in this essay.

The title *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* was first given to *The Thousand and One Nights* by an anonymous Grub Street English writer who translated it from *Les Mille et une nuits, contes arabes (Thousand and One Nights, Arabian Tales)*, a French translation by Antoine Galland (1646-1715). Galland, a French Orientalist, translated most of the text from the original Arabic during the period 1704-1712, with volumes 11 and 12 appearing posthumously in 1717. Galland's collection was published almost simultaneously in French and English—there was certainly an English edition in 1706, and by 1713 there were four editions, evidence of how the tales cast a spell on the English general reader; at the same time it caught up writers, critics, philosophers, and journalists in a debate on the nature and purpose of literature. There is no better evidence concerning the vogue of these tales than their serialization in early-eighteenth-century England, a time when the publishing industry was still undeveloped and literacy was by modern standards rare. Beginning on January 6, 1723, the thrice-weekly *London News* serialized the tales for three years in 445 installments.

The tales' framing story has intrigued readers from the beginning. In it, the female storyteller Scheherazade dissuades the melancholy and ruthless sultan Shahriar from pursuing his cruel design to marry a new wife every night and kill her the next morning so as to prevent what he believes will be her inevitable betrayal. Scheherazade, the young daughter of the Sultan's vizier, surprises her father by requesting to marry the Sultan, despite the risk. As resourceful as she is courageous, Scheherazade draws upon her wit, wisdom, and store of anecdotal literature to entangle the Sultan in a web of tales that entertain him, awaken his imagination, and in the end broaden his sympathies. After the framing story's setup, each of the stories that Scheherazade tells leads to the next. By putting off each story's conclusion until the following night, Scheherazade forestalls her own murder; the Sultan is too enthralled by her storytelling to kill her. And as she concludes one story, she begins another—only to hold off its conclusion until the following night. Scheherazade's storytelling continues thus for one thousand and one nights, at the end of which Sultan Shahriar is divested of his cruelty and arrogance and given new perspectives on life, its complexity, variety, and color; convinced that Scheherazade could continue telling her stories forever, he pardons her from his original cruel condemnation. Quite literally, storytelling saves Scheherazade's life. As G. K.

Chesterton put it, "Never in any other book has such a splendid tribute been given to the pride and omnipotence of art."¹

Historical Background

The frame story around which other tales circle and cluster relates part of the history—the deception of two brothers by their wives—of the Sassanid royal house, a pre-Islamic Persian dynasty that ruled a large part of western Asia from 224 until 651 C.E. (In this essay, dates are C.E., unless noted otherwise.) In Persian, the name Scheherazade (or Shahrazad) means "descendant of a noble race," and the name of Scheherazade's younger sister, Dinarzade (or Dunyazad), means "of noble religion." The names reflect the Indo-Persian origin of the frame story. Later Arabic-speaking Abbasid bibliographers and historians mentioned this frame story and the collection in its early form. During the Abbasid dynasty, the heyday of the Islamic empire, there was geographical, economic, and enormous cultural expansion, especially during a first period of expansion and prosperity (750-945), followed by another of political, though not cultural, decline (945-1258). Arab historian Abu al-Hasan al-Mas'udi mentioned, in his *Meadows of Gold*, which he wrote in 947 (and reedited in 957) that the prototype tales for *The Thousand and One Nights* have been passed on to us as translated from the Persian, Hindi, and Greek languages. Similar works, such as *The Book of Ferzih and Simus*, contain anecdotes about the kings of India and their wives. There is also *The Book of Sindbad*, among other collections of the same type. Of no less significance is the renowned Baghdad bibliographer Ibn al-Nadim's (died 998) index of books, *Kitab al-fihrist* (written in 987); in it he wrote:

The first book to be written with this content was the book *Hazar Afsan*, which means 'A Thousand Stories'. The basis for this 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 Shahrazad and when she came to him she should begin a story, but leave off at the end of the night, which induced the king to ask for it the night following. This happened to her for a thousand nights.²

In their originating habitat, the stories were basically meant as entertainments for coffeehouse audiences and urban communities at a time when storytelling was a central entertainment. While the frame story and a few tales have a non-Arab Islamic origin, most are Islamic or Islamized, especially the ones set in Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus. The frame story was used by storytellers as a kind of magnet to draw in "one thousand and one tales"—a term that indicates an unlimited number of stories. But the elite of tenth-century Baghdad had other readings to cherish. Their bibliographer Ibn al-Nadim described the book as a collection of

loathsome and insipid tales. It seems that the educated classes of urban centers then, as 800 years later, looked down on popular literature. It is understandable that European neoclassicists rejected writing that did not correspond to their standards of composition, but their disdain did not keep the tales from becoming popular, given their appeal to perennial sentiments and human needs. Writers and poets in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and America received the tales with joy and admiration. There were, for example, the enthusiastic responses of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville in America, and of Samuel Johnson, Horace Walpole, William Beckford, Samuel T. Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, John Keats, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and George Meredith in Britain. Robert Chambers, in his 1883 article "What English Literature Gives Us," describes the collection as similar to "things of our own which constitute the national literary inheritance."³ These tales, according to critic William E. A. Axon, came at a time when the European reading public was sick "of sham classical romances of interminable and portentous unreality." The tales, he concluded, "may perhaps have had some share in encouraging the novelists when they did come to deal with homely scenes and common life."⁴ This learned response may not have been the popular one, for the tales that gathered around the frame story are full of extravagant characters, exotic locales, and impossible occurrences.

Indeed, while some tales in the *Arabian Nights* are realistic, others operate by means of magical machinery and supernatural agency. The natural and the supernatural fuse in many tales, something that appealed not only to the Romantics but also to their late-nineteenth-century descendants. *Les Mille et une nuits, contes arabes*, in its first translation in French and then in English, was next to the Bible in popularity among readers in England, France, and other countries. In 1889 C. H. Toy wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly* on the vogue of the tales in France. He emphasized their Oriental garb, their charming sentiments, the mystery they conveyed of a "strange life," and their delicacy of humor. In Galland's version of the tales "were opened the doors of unlimited and delicious romance. All Paris was full of the wonderful stories; it was a triumph resembling that achieved by the Waverley Novels [of Sir Walter Scott]."⁵ Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, for *Longman's Magazine* that the collection was "more generally loved than Shakespeare," for it "captivates in childhood, and still delights in age."⁶

Narrative Techniques

There are many sides to the enormous popularity of the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*. Its early critical and scholarly readers were aware of their multifaceted appeal. Some have commented on how the episodic plots were specifically designed to generate suspense, especially in Galland's translation—a point E. M. Forster would repeat a century later in his *As-*

pects of the Novel (1927). The episodic strategy so lends itself to melodrama that the *Times* of April 5, 1825, described the *Arabian Nights* as "a work to which our melodramatists are deeply indebted."⁸ To trap the Sultan in an enchanted web of suspense, the knowledgeable and witty Scheherazade has to intrigue the morose king not only with entertaining narratives, but also with ones that disarm him and change his negative disposition to life and women. In the introduction to the frame story, we are told that she "had successfully applied herself to philosophy, physics, history, and the liberal arts; and made verses that surpassed those of the best poets of her time." There is also a purpose behind her venture, for she would like "to stop the course of that barbarity which the Sultan exercises upon the families of this city" (p. 9). In other words, knowledge becomes power when it is exercised; Scheherazade resorts to storytelling and suspense to captivate the Sultan, keeping him thereby from further brutality.

Knowledge should address the need for security and safety in the first place, but it also works on what is behind knowledge: curiosity. Scheherazade's father warns her that she must listen to his warnings, and not risk her life, or the "same thing will happen to you that happened to the ass, who was well off, and could not keep so" (p. 9). Her father's warning becomes part of the whole design of Scheherazade, for each question leads to a story, and each story leads to another. Scheherazade knows that curiosity charges situations and is a form of suspense—as when she says to the Sultan: "But, sir, however wonderful those tales which I have related to your Majesty may be, they are not equal to that of the fisherman" (p. 24).

Warnings increase curiosity, and may interfere with clear thinking, for the propensity to satisfy one's curiosity can be more powerful than contravening considerations of comfort and security. In "The History of the Third Calender, the Son of a King," the third calender is told: "Friend, sit down upon the carpet in the centre of this room, and seek not to know anything that regards us, nor the reason why we are all blind of the right eye" (p. 100). He cannot control his curiosity, no matter what the risk may be.

Oaths and promises are effective narrative devices, too: to breach them is to invite consequences. In "The History of the Greek King and Douhan the Physician," the physician who cures the King is promised wealth but instead receives death at the hands of the King (p. 34). For breaking his promise, the King himself suffers death. The same happens to the genie rescued by the fisherman in "The Story of the Merchant and the Genie": He is imprisoned in the sealed jar again, and not released until he vows to serve the fisherman.

Finally, the *Arabian Nights* narrative celebrates the art of storytelling by celebrating itself: To tell a good story is to put yourself in the way of great rewards. The ransom motive (especially in this edition's part two, the ransom frame) is central to Scheherazade's initiative.⁹ Believing in her art, she not only encourages the Sultan to let her survive as queen and live happily ever after but also saves other women and influences a new social order of merits and punishments. Women writers noticed this

mechanism and made use of it, as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) demonstrates. Like the *Arabian Nights*'s Shahrīar, Brontë's Rochester is divested of his impiousness and admits his resignation as follows: "I never met your likeness. Jane, you please me, and you master me" (chapter 24). This primary narrative device—storytelling as an agent of change—is supported by subsidiary narratives in the *Nights*, as when the King of China tells the barber and others to tell a good story in order to save their lives (part six). A good story means survival; a bad one could mean death. Even when characters are not immediately implicated in threatening situations, and the stakes are not as high for them, a good narrative can be a valuable commodity; for example, in "The Story of the Merchant and the Genie," the genie is ready to forgive transgressions if he hears some tales from the volunteering merchants that satisfy his curiosity and thus compensate for his loss.

The presence of the wonderful and the fantastic works along with the appeal to curiosity and the evocation of suspense. It cohabits with the natural in such a way as to create a "willing suspension of disbelief," as Samuel Taylor Coleridge used to say. Indeed, Coleridge had "The Story of the Merchant and the Genie" in mind when he justified the absence of a moral in his celebrated *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, for it "ought to have had no more moral than the Arabian Nights' tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant, because one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son."¹⁰

The world of the *Arabian Nights* is a mad world, where the wonderful and the fantastic are plentiful and where causation is broken,¹¹ but it is one that is held together with the codes and systems that operate throughout its domains, from Baghdad to China. The combination and fusion of these elements have been noted by many writers. Charles Dickens, for one, "has put the spirit of the Arabian Nights into his pictures of life by the river Thames," said George Gissing.¹² And this consummate fusion of the wonderful and the mundane has become a frame of reference for writers who have argued for the need to reinvigorate literature, culture, and daily life with readings that, as Leigh Hunt said in his article on the *Arabian Nights* for his *London Journal*, "elevate our anger above trifles, incline us to assist intellectual advancement of all sorts, and keep a region of solitude and sweetness for us in which the mind may retreat and create itself, so as to return with hope and gracefulness to its labors."¹³ This invigorating return to "labors" was a given in nineteenth-century writings, for without food for the imagination there is no promise of good and rewarding daily business, as Sissy Jupe tells us in Dickens's *Hard Times*.

The Romantic Properties of the Tales

Although the tales have a composite nature that may engage the attention of any reading public, the Romantics especially found in them much to feed

their hunger for the unlimited, the boundless, and the exotic. This appeal is of great significance, not only because it reveals the Romantic mind, including its sense of abandon and freedom in the perusal of the tales, but also because it serves as an index of taste for other periods, sensibilities, and communities. While the neoclassicists of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, from Samuel Johnson to Walter Bagehot, were not ready to surrender to the imaginativeness of the *Arabian Nights*, finding them valuable instead as representations of life in the East (their term for the Middle and Near East), the Romantics found the primary appeal of the *Nights* to be their presentation of a world of dreams and desires.

A writer in *The Spectator* of November 25, 1882, touched on what it is that the Romantics found so interesting: "In the *Arabian Nights* and in them alone of published books, can grown men enjoy the pleasure which children enjoy in story-telling, the pleasure of hearing exciting narratives without being called on for thought, or reflection, or criticism." By "musing endlessly to their insatiable luxury in wonder," the tales offer the right model for "the power of Romance in its elementary form."¹⁴ American Orientalist Duncan Black Macdonald, who had one of the best collections of editions and studies of *The Thousand and One Nights*, wrote of the book as depicting "a land of enchantment, whose like never existed, never can exist";¹⁵ he added, "To the non-Arabist their world is out of space, out of time." The careers of a large number of prominent Romantics attest to this captivating power. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), for one, associated his propensity for dreaming with this power; his mind "had been habituated to the vast, and I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief," he explained in a letter of October 16, 1797, to Thomas Poole.¹⁶ He said: "I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions, not by my sight—even at that age"; thus, whenever approaching the tales, he felt a mixture of dread and desire, an "anxious and fearful eagerness."¹⁷ Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), who looked at the matter with the eye and vision of a contemporary, considered the *Nights* a Romantic initiator: "It might be said that the Romantic movement begins at the moment when someone, in Normandy or in Paris, reads the *Thousand and One Nights*. He leaves the world legislated by Boileau and enters the world of Romantic freedom."¹⁸

The exchange and fusion between the commonplace and the wonderful that distinguishes the tales is one aspect of their romantic appeal. Another is what the late Romantic critic and brilliant littérateur Arthur Henry Hallam (1811-1833) called "the position of feeling," their placing us in "one of those luxurious garden scenes, the account of which, in plain prose, used to make our mouths water for sherbet, since luckily we were too young to think about Zobeide," in a reference to the wife of Haroun Al-Raschid [Harun al-Raschid].¹⁹ This "position of feeling" became for years a mainstay of literary recollection; the late-nineteenth-century poet William Henley has said, "That animating and delectable feeling I cherish ever for such enchanted commodities as gold-dust and sandal-wood and sesame and cloth of gold and black slaves with scimitars—to whom do I

owe it but this rare and delightful artist?"²⁰ This power once held poets and artists captive in realms where they identified with scenes and people. Henley and, earlier, John Keats and Coleridge, admitted, for example, these identification processes in their poetry and letters, especially in respect to the calendar's stories (part three), their awakening from the exquisitely charming to the mundane and the real.²¹ Thus writes Henley in his poem "Arabian Nights' Entertainments" in reference to the aftermath of the second calendar's irresistible curiosity to open the forbidden door:

I was—how many a time!—
That Second Calendar, Son of a King,
On whom 't was vehemently enjoined,
Pausing at one mysterious door,
To pry no closer, but content his soul
With his kind ferry. Yet I could not rest
For idleness and ungovernable Fate
And the Black Horse, which fed on sesame
(That wonder-working world),
Vouchsafed his back to me, and spread his vans,
And soaring, soaring on
From air to air, came charging to the ground
Sheer, like a lark from the midsummer clouds,
And, shaking me out of the saddle, where I sprawled
Picked at me with his tail,
And left me blinded, miserable, distraught.²²

The pleasure gotten by both poets and the common reader from the *Arabian Nights* should be seen, too, in relation to a growing Orientalism that fed the colonial desire for lands and riches. More than any other book, the tales became for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers an unparalleled repository for images of the Orient (that is, the present Middle East) as sensuous, luxurious, rich, and dormant. Lord Byron advised Thomas Moore to "stick to the East" in order to gain popularity, and so did Dickens when he suggested to Miss Marguerite Power that she call her book *Arabian Days and Nights*.²³ More than any travel account or Orientalist piece of scholarship, Scheherazade's tales inflamed, in the age of empire, the desire for an East that could be contained, appropriated, and possessed. Indeed, the tales worked strongly on that Romantic "interior infinite" which, according to Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, rules sovereign, "unquelled and high," like Byron's Giaour.²⁴ On the other hand, this Romanticized view of the East gave way to another—an East whose life presently is nothing more than a repetition within dormancy, an invitation to a Napoleon or a Cromer to revitalize the land and bring civilization back to the domains of Scheherazade! Indeed, Scheherazade's attraction became synonymous with her habitats—rich, tantalizing, and waiting for an imperial savior. As I argued in *Scheherazade in England*, Galland's version proved popular for taking

into account those very habits and predilections. While preserving the exotic and the outlandish in the dawn of colonialism, Galland made the East an available property to be possessed, accommodated, and plundered.

Although there remained a great deal of the mysterious and the veiled, Galland's and other translations and adaptations made the East available to be analyzed, investigated, enjoyed, loved—and simultaneously repelled. While foreshadowing the Enlightenment's taste for classification, comparison, and order, the tales also met with the Romantic aspiration for freedom and change inside their closed and hierarchal societies. In both cases, early European translations of the *Nights* were not foreign to the Manichean tendency to study the other and reach for its exoticism, to view it in relation to the so-called European tradition and to simultaneously appropriate its habitat for the sake of self-fulfillment against imaginary deprivations. The two impulses—intellectual analysis and imaginative embrace—were not at variance with the growing colonialist discourse that began with early missionary efforts to convert Muslims or combat Islam. More important, they were bound to provoke philological, anthropological, and cultural studies that took the *Nights*, along with other literary and travel accounts in translation, as a starting point for the expanding imperial enterprise. The effort was so enormous that Romanics of a sensitive temper, such as Leigh Hunt, were seriously bothered by this disenchanting endeavor. They insisted, but to no avail, that the *Nights* be kept away from dissection and exacting scholarship, for it is no more than a collection of tales that manifests an "Orient of Poets," as Hunt termed this imaginary world in an editorial in his *London Journal* of October 1834.

Thematic Patterns

While Romantic properties and certain narrative techniques account for a great deal of the tales' enormous popularity, these elements work in tandem with a number of thematic patterns and cycles. First, there is in the tales a recurrent human pattern that resists borders and limits, a "charm that renders the *Arabian Nights* acceptable to all countries," emanating from the many themes that "speak of our common nature . . . a sprinkling of simpletonism in a foreign shape."²⁵ Second, there is a supernatural element, a mixture of the wonderful, the uncanny, and the fantastic. Muslim travelers and geographers used to speak of these elements as the *gharib* and *'ib*—the strange and the wonderful—a point that contemporary critics, such as Tzvetan Todorov in his study *The Fantastic*,²⁶ have examined. The borderline between the two is delicate enough to allow progression or transposition from one stage to another. In the tales the supernatural has a religious explanation, for the *jinn* (genies) are recognized in the Qur'an. Third, there are human concerns that relate to love, beauty, women, jealousy, travel, geography, business, social mobility, and culture; a feeling for these themes shapes the tales as a whole and

give a reader the sense that the unifying subject matter is something immutably human.

Love and Beauty

Love and beauty—narrative motifs that span lands and times—are major themes in the tales. Mia Gerhardt counts "twenty-odd full-length and short stories" that focus on love and beauty and "nearly as many brief pieces."²⁷ The ones with realistic detail (though they may include suggestions of magic) are of Baghdadi origin, while the ones that focus on unknown partners who are conquered by love are quite likely Persian; these tales often include a motive of aversion to men or to women that Gerhardt and others associate with a Persian origin. The aversion motive is probably a way of charging the theme and motivating the action. Tales with fainting episodes and anguish are probably of Indo-Persian origin, and storytellers may name characters as such—and such "the Persian" to emphasize this fact. Stories of anguish can be easily confused with Bedouin stories, but separation distinguishes these Arabic stories of love. There are different causes of this separation, but at times love itself entails it: The enduring passion of love itself demands separation and detachment.

There is always an association between love and beauty, for beauty in itself can arouse the lover; music and singing—the more beautiful the better—are often part of courtship. Beauty defies space and persuades supernatural agents to bring together lovers who live apart, indeed as far apart as China and Baghdad. When the young prince Qamarazaman (the "Moon of Times") resists his father's wish for him to marry in "The History of Camaralzaman, Prince of the Isle of the Children of Khaledan, and of Badoura, Princess of China" he is imprisoned in an attic, a procedure that repeats what happens to Badoura, the young princess in China, who is likewise not interested in marriage. Both suffer confinement, but two genies, a male and a female, are keen on getting these young people together, and the tale becomes a test of who will be attracted to whom, despite their early resistance to marriage. Upon waking one morning, the two find themselves lovesick and each wears a wedding band—without the presence of a partner, though both are sure there is a partner, a lover. The world of the real belies their claims until the supernatural entities ensure that they will get together.

But love can lead to death, for separation from one's partner drives a lover to languish in agony, an issue that always appealed to the Romanics. The English poet laureate Alfred Tennyson identified with these doomed lovers; in his poem "Recollections of the Arabian Nights," he captured the languish of the Beautiful Persian in "The History of Noureddin and the Beautiful Persian," in which the Persian is torn between her true love, Noureddin, and the caliph who takes her as his favorite woman singer. The poem evolves as a celebration of a land of bliss or,

as J. H. Buckley argues, a "realm of pleasure," for "Haroun's [the caliph's] Baghdad to the young Tennyson is essentially the city of eternal artifice, in a realm of self-subsistent reality beyond all movement and desire."²⁸ The topic drew the attention of many, including George Meredith, as it ends with the death of the two lovers, in line with the theory of chaste love that was popular in medieval times in the Arab-Islamic world, the caliph strives to bring the lovers together, accommodate their wishes, and enable them to overcome obstacles. Alas, however, this recognition of love, beauty, and art comes too late, and literary tradition dictates that lovers languish in agony and death as in "The History of Abouhassan Ali Ebn Becar, and of Schemselihar, the Favourite of the Caliph Haroun Al-Raschid," which can be seen as exemplary of this kind of love. The late Romanics, like George Meredith, may use the latter story differently. In his poem "Shemselihar" (1862; the name means "Sun of the Day"), George Meredith makes the Beautiful Persian pray not for the love of the caliph but for his hatred, so that she will be released from the overwhelming sense of guilt she feels, knowing she is supposed to repay the caliph's kindness and care with gratitude and love.

Beauty is exalted in terms that appear quite often in classical Arabic literature. Despite the tendency among Arab classicists to argue the beauty of all colors and races, the *Arabian Nights* is more attuned to such a description as the one in "The History of Camaralzaman, Prince of the Isle of the Children of Khaleidan, and of Badoura, Princess of China," in which the male genie Danhasch is taken by a particular type of beauty:

Her hair is of a fine brown, and of such length that it reaches below her feet. It grows in such abundance that when she wears it in curls on her head it resembles a fine bunch of grapes, with berries of extraordinary size. Under her hair appears her well-formed forehead, as smooth as the finest polished mirror; her eyes are of brilliant black, and full of fire; her nose is neither too long nor too short; her mouth small and tinted with vermilion; her teeth are like two rows of pearls, but surpass the finest of those gems in whiteness, and when she opens her mouth to speak, she utters a sweet and agreeable voice, and expresses herself in words which prove the liveliness of her wit. The most beautiful alabaster is not whiter than her neck (p. 276).

Beauty is the focus of love in Arabic and Persian literature, and love at first sight abounds in the *Arabian Nights*. For example, in "The Story Told by the Tailor," the old lady looks at the young man, and realizes he is lovesick despite the fact that he has only seen a young woman who "cast her eyes on [him]; and as she watered the flowers with a hand whiter than alabaster, she looked at [him] with a smile, which inspired [him] with as much love for her as [he] had hitherto felt aversion towards the rest of her sex." The young man had earlier argued his case as follows: "I will confess, perhaps to my shame, that I carefully avoided the society of

women." Now, he says, "I returned home, agitated by a passion all the more violent from its being the first attack" (p. 164). The old woman tells him, "You love one who delights in letting those burn with unrequited passion who suffer themselves to be charmed with her beauty" (p. 165). Despite the instances of love at first sight in many of the *Arabian Nights* tales, beauty is not just skin deep. Refinement, wit, education, and tact are always emphasized; education bears some relation to the position of both sexes; in some stories women of high station resist men for no reason other than their impression that males in general neglect their partners. Men may also build their attitudes on some ancestral authority; Camaralzaman tells us, "I am well aware of the embarrassment and trouble occasioned by women; moreover, I have frequently read in our authors of their arts, their cunning, and their pettiness" (p. 269). Though he qualifies this statement—"I may not always retain this opinion"—it speaks of a body of literature that focuses on ruse and craft. The idea, as old as stories from the Bible, conversely demonstrates the dynamic and intelligent presence of women.

A contradictory and controversial attitude in the tales shows up in a number of old women, who either mediate between young men and women as go-betweens or practice deceit. In the first instance, the old women have easy access to households, and they know most of the families around them. In "The Story Told by the Tailor," an old woman tells the young man from Baghdad: "I could mention to you an infinite number of young people of your acquaintance who have endured the same pain that you now feel, and for whom I have obtained consolation" (p. 165). In "The History of the Barber's Second Brother," an old woman accosts the brother, we are told, in a "retired street" (p. 183) and invites him to a house where he suffers robbery, beating, and attempted murder. Pretending to be dead, he escapes and plans his counter-revenge on the old woman, the mistress of the house, and her slave, the attempted murderer. Both adultery and polygamy are present in the *Arabian Nights*, and both help drive the narratives. The frame story derives its powerful cycle of trial, retribution, and reward from the garden episode, in which the King's wife and her women companions enact a hilarious sexual scene with slaves disguised as women. The frame story is thought to be of Sassanid origin, but travel and anecdotal accounts relate similar tales that end in severe punishment. Polygamy, practiced against strict Quranic rules designed to maintain justice among wives, leads in the tales to jealousy, competition, and trouble.

Politics of Intrigue: Envy and a Good Caliph

Storytellers build their narratives on basic human frailties. For instance, they may resort to male or female stereotypes to depict envy. Indeed, even such a renowned polymath as al-Jahiz of Basra (died c.868), who was well known for his balanced views, could not restrain himself from

identifying envy with women: "Someone has said, 'Envy is female because it is contemptible, enmity male because it is noble.'"²⁹ The tales do not subscribe to this view; in them envy recurs as a human frailty regardless of sex. Most of the stories of domestic life or public politics make use of the motive of envy. In "The Story Told by the Jewish Physician," the man from Mosul tells us how one of the Damascene sisters is so jealous of her young sister's love for the young man that she poisons her (p. 157). Men are no exception. In "The History of the Old Man and the Two Black Dogs," the old man's brothers, to whom he has given money, are so jealous of his great achievement and wealth that they are driven to plan his murder (p. 21). Envy becomes at times a motive for internal politics; after the King in "The History of the Greek King and Douban the Physician" listens to his envious minister's insinuations against the physician who has cured him, the King revokes his promise and instead of the reward puts the physician to death (p. 32). Such transgressions motivated by envy lead to failure and death. In "The History of Noureddin and the Beautiful Persian," a minister has a jealous hatred for a young man because his father had been the right-hand man for the governor of Basrah in the south of Iraq. Many of the guards remain loyal to the family, however, and inform Noureddin of the minister's intrigues and evil designs.

Envy seems to have been in the air. In the epistle of the great Abbasid polymath al-Jahiz, "On the Difference Between Enmity and Envy" (see note 29), we find that envy is worse than enmity; for "envy never dies except when either the envious person or the one of whom he is envious dies. Enmity is an ember fuelled by wrath but extinguished by the passing of wrath; it thus affords some hope for a reversal and recantation." Jealousy in the tales works in a similar manner, as a motive that can be quelled only by a greater power. The tales sometimes involve a dialectic between generosity and envy; in many, women or men share their wealth with their brothers or sisters, who later still envy them. Al-Jahiz quotes many authorities on the subject but concludes: "If those who envy properly are given a share of it which they can enjoy, they only grow more vexed at it and set against it."

Envy relates to political strife as well, as there is an association between selfishness and the love of power, including reluctance to share it with others. Al-Jahiz also writes on this and argues that "nations that have perished in the past have perished by reason of too much love of command, and so it will be to the end of time." He adds: "The saying goes, 'Man's downfall, from the time men first were until the Last Day, is due to love of authority, and love of being obeyed.'" On the narrative level, envy causes a disequilibrium that serves the growth and perpetuation of storytelling.

To counterbalance this disequilibrium and lead the narrative to some stability and relief, there is the recurrent mention in the tales of the good Abbasid caliph Haroun Alrashed (c.760-809), whose reputation in Europe is built on his appearances in the *Arabian Nights*. Such tales as "The History of Noureddin and the Beautiful Persian" and the stories of the

first and second calendars speak of his rule as a time of prosperity, justice, and cultural achievement.³⁰ Taxes were largely paid in products, so that in Baghdad, for instance, every kind of fruit was in abundance. Indeed, this was so much the case that "people of sophisticated taste in Baghdad were very fastidious in their choice of fruit at ceremonial meals."³¹ What remained in the recollections of Abbasid writers were the convivial and hospitable gatherings and parties attended by artists, poets, dancers, and high officials. While modern historians and political analysts are uncertain about the political side of Haroun Alrashed's reign, both the tales and medieval historians depict him as a patron of culture. In Europe, Tenyson, Meredith, and William Butler Yeats are among many whose poetic celebrations of the Caliph endeared him to the European reading public. People used to flock to Baghdad, we are told, during his reign. The first calendar describes his travels to Baghdad as follows: "I arrived in the empire of the powerful Sovereign of all true Believers, the glorious and renowned caliph Haroun Alrashed" (p. 68). The second calendar explains why he turns to Baghdad after years of misfortune: "At last I resolved to visit Baghdad, in hopes of being able to present myself to the Commander of the Faithful, and excite his compassion by the recital of my strange history" (p. 91).

Travels to the Metropolis

Travel in the tales, whether by necessity or inclination, becomes another occasion for storytelling. It is also a means to knowledge and commerce. The *Arabian Nights* often combines narrative and travelogue and, as such, makes use of a rich repository of Arabic geographical literature. The voyages of Sindbad the Sailor repeat the accounts of Abbasid travelers and geographers who roamed the world out of curiosity or in search of business and gain. Like any expanding empire, the Arab-Islamic world during the Abbasid period had its geographers and travelers, many of whom were also well-known literary figures. In 988 the geographer and traveler Ibn Hawqal related how many Baghdadi and Iraqi merchants "amassed considerable wealth, huge gains and remarkable profits, so much so that very few merchants in the world of Islam came close to their enormous riches."³² Profit, not adventure, was the sole gain from commerce with Africa; this fact about travelers to Africa generally does not show forth in the tales, and if it does it materializes into unpleasant descriptions of encounters. The accounts they give do not necessarily correspond with those we get from the tales, however. Indeed, on occasions there is a striking difference between the two, as the voyages of Sindbad show. To be good narratives, the tales required exciting adventures; profit, without obstacles and troubles of some sort, does not alone make an exciting story.

Historians know much more about ninth-century Baghdad (the setting of many of the tales) than about other cities during the same period. In

"The History of Nouredin and the Beautiful Persian," the captain of the boat that takes the two lovers along the Tigris from Basra says, upon approaching Baghdad, "Rejoice, my friends, there is the great and wonderful city, to which people from every part of the world are constantly flocking" (p. 243). The writers of the period tell us that the "last quarter of the eighth century and the first quarter of the ninth century A.D. were a period of happiness and prosperity for the people. Prices were generally low and wages fair."³³ But Baghdad, the glorious city of the Abbasids, which acquired so much fame for its prosperity and security in the ninth century, was not so well off later. In his book *The Marvels of India*, the sailor Buzung ibn Shahrivar (died 953) described the city during the period 900-953 as the "abode of troubles."³⁴ He mentioned in one account how the vizier Abu al-Hasan ibn al-Furat conspired during the reign of Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (908-932) to molest merchants, Muslims, Jews, and Christians, and how Omani merchants were so afraid that they refrained from going to the shores of Iraq.³⁵ This able financier and shrewd politician, a very educated man and an experienced financial administrator, was also the victim of circumstances when fraud was rampant. Increasing anger at the vizier led to his trial and execution in July 924. The caliph's reign, as well as the reign of some Mamluk sultans later in Egypt, has many echoes in the *Arabian Nights*. Stories that narrate vicissitudes of fate and occasions of misfortune for ministers and high officials occur mostly in Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo.

There is always a different touch in respect to these cities, and sometimes different values in every new version of the *Arabian Nights*. Perhaps written down in the thirteen or fourteen century, during the Mamluk period (1250-1517), the story of the young man from Mosul in "The Story Told by the Jewish Physician" celebrates Damascus by saying it "was in the midst of Paradise" (p. 155); earlier the physician says, "I found the city large and well fortified, populous, and inhabited by civilized people" (p. 155). In the same story, Cairo is preferred to all other cities, including Baghdad, which began to suffer destruction and neglect beginning in the eleventh century. The young man from Mosul quotes travelers who celebrate the city and the Nile: "If the account of a great number of travellers might be believed, there was not in the world a more beautiful country than Egypt on the banks of the Nile, which all agreed in praising," and then says, "All that my other uncles could say in favour of Baghdad and the Tigris, when they vaunted Baghdad as the true abode of the Mussulman religion and the metropolis of all the cities in the world, did not make half so much an impression on me" (p. 153). His father says, "The man who has not seen Egypt has not seen the greatest wonder in the world," and continues, "Is not Cairo the largest, the richest, the most populous city in the universe?" (p. 154). Indeed, geographers began to make such references to al-Fustat, present-day Cairo, by the end of the tenth century. Shams al-Din Ibn Ahmad al-Muqaddasi, writes as follows: "Al-Fustat is the capital of Egypt in the full sense of the word: that is where the administrative offices are concentrated, and where the Prince of the Believers re-

sides." He adds: "This is the capital of Egypt, a city eclipsing Baghdad, the pride of Islam, whither the whole of mankind comes to trade; more important than the City of Peace [Baghdad], it is the storehouse of the West and the harbor of the East, a thriving market-place."³⁶ Later writings build on these early impressions that constitute antecedent authority, to be sure, but there is another reason for this celebratory attitude. Many tales were written during the Mamluk period, and many writers and jurists migrated to Cairo—"the garden of the Universe, the orchard of the World," as the Tunisian social historian and judge Ibn Khaldun (died 1406) wrote.³⁷ The Egyptian jurist and chancery clerk al-Qalqashandi (died 1418) emphasized this aspect of Cairo, the hospitable metropolis, in his compendium *Dawn of the Benighted Regarding Chancery Craft*.³⁸

Business

Such historical accounts coincide with the appearance of a literary subgenre that celebrates cities and their merits.³⁹ As mercantile classes are the most conspicuous in urban centers, and as they provide also the largest audiences for oral storytelling, we may assume that the art of storytelling, always present in human life, took a great step forward between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries in urban marketplaces and assemblies. In addition to merchants, others benefited from the marketplace: its attendants, functionaries, clerks, and urban people. In these tales, the barber tells us how much he knows about the people of the marketplace: "In this I resemble Zantout, who rubs people at the bath, and Sali, who sells little burnt peas about the streets, and Salouz, who sells beans, and Akerscha, who sells herbs, and Abou Mekares, who waters the streets to lay the dust, and Cassem, who belongs to the caliph's guard" (p. 172). In "The History of Three Calenders, Sons of Kings, and of Five Ladies of Baghdad," the porter follows the lady "to a wine merchant's, to a herb-seller's, to an orange merchant's, and to shops where are sold almonds, nuts and other dried fruits. We then went to a confectioner's, and to a druggist's" (p. 62).

The most recurrent setting for these tales is the marketplace, where action unfolds in transactions, dealings, or intrigues. In "The Story Told by the Christian Merchant," the man from Baghdad is now in Cairo, attending the bazaar of the Circasians: "I was instantly surrounded by a multitude of brokers and criers, who had been informed of my arrival. I gave specimens of my different stuffs to several criers, who went and showed them all over the place" (p. 127). Transactions are carried out neatly, and the young merchant from Baghdad tells us as much: "The merchants gave me a receipt in due form, properly signed and witnessed, and stipulated that I should make no demand upon them for the first month" (p. 128). These transactions entail exactitude and neat handling according to Islamic rules, usually as set down in manuals and watched over by the *muhatabib*, the moral and judicial inspector of commerce and markets, and his officials.

There was certainly a strong judicial system, and the judiciary was obviously able to enforce law and order. Only when corrupt ministers made use of their power did the system weaken. The presence of this strong judicial system, testified to by many contemporary treatises on the subject and mentioned many times in the *Arabian Nights*, also manifests the nature of the urban center, as well as its complexity and troubles. Although in "The Story Told by the Jewish Physician" the young merchant from Mosul does not tell us what the judge, the young woman's father, looks like, he tells us what is reiterated by the barber, that the judge comes back home with an entourage of guards and subordinates. The chief justice as well as the high judges were dressed in a specific fashion, hinted at in the tales, and these practices continued during other times and in other imperial Islamic centers. During Abbasid, Ayyubid and Mamluk times a judge wore a black robe with a black linen hood and a black turban, and carried a sword.⁴⁰

Education and the Vicissitudes of Fate

The plots of many tales depend on the operations of fate in many contexts, including personal failure, but they also reflect real-life trials and tribulations of people in what we call the Near and Middle East during the ninth through the fourteenth centuries. Along with social and political change, enormous economic and structural transformations took place during the period the tales depict, and these changes were felt to be fated. The tales of the *Arabian Nights* tell of many ways to forestall adversity brought on by change. Some solutions involved magic, and others advised caution and sagacity in the spending and handling of wealth.

Economists, jurists, and other intellectuals have exerted considerable effort in explaining the reasons behind so much covetousness, wastefulness, and even hospitality in the tales. Regarding the latter, English essayist Walter Bagehot, who established the *National Review* (later the *Economist*), concluded that people knew that one day they might be in need themselves: "He who knows his turn to be stripped may at any moment arrive is willing to taste the pleasures and gain the benefits of a lavish expenditure."⁴¹ This only partially explains the matter that has drawn the attention of storytellers in so many tales. While the precariousness of politics is a reason, there is also the inclination of storytellers toward hospitable people—those who offer support and patronage to others. Often hospitality cannot claim that title if it is performed publicly; in Islam, jurists advise people to practice charity in secrecy. On the other hand, jurists advise all to be generous toward the needy. The great Abbasid jurist Ibn Qutaybah (died 889) wrote, "Every good which is freely made available to others is protected from destruction and proof against the vicissitudes of time."⁴²

Preparations for reversals of fortune predispose parents to ensure a good education for their sons. Aside from Scheherazade's own training and mastery of the arts, which enabled her to counterbalance the Sultan's dis-

trust of women in general, the second calender in "The History of the Second Calender, the Son of a King" has received rigorous training in all the elements of good education. In the elite literature of the Abbasids, parents, especially caliphs and emirs, call on people "most famous in science" with "knowledge of the fine arts" to teach their sons and daughters (p. 69). The second calender mentions six stages that correspond to this education: First, there is reading and writing as preparation for knowing the Holy Book by heart. The calender describes the Qur'an as "that admirable book, in which we find the basis, the precepts, and regulations of our religion" (p. 69). Second, there should be good grounding in works on the subject, the Qur'anic exegesis and the Prophet's tradition. He says, "That my knowledge might not be shallow and superficial, I perused the works of the most approved authors who have written on that subject, and who have explained and illustrated the Koran by their commentaries. To this study I added an acquaintance with all the traditions received from the mouth of our prophet, by those illustrious men who were his contemporaries." Third, there must be a good knowledge of history: "I made a particular study of our histories, and became master of polite literature, of poetry and versification," along with "a knowledge of our own language in its greatest purity." Fourth, there should be the knowledge of geography and other relevant sciences: "I applied myself to geography and chronology." Fifth, there should be attention to knighthood and chivalry: "I effected [this knowledge] without neglecting the many exercises in which a Prince should be proficient." Books on horsemanship, chivalry, and knighthood were many during the ninth and tenth centuries, evidence of how central was this aspect of the education of princes and high officials. Sixth, he devoted his attention to calligraphy, on which he placed great value as a man who "excelled in forming the characters of our Arabic language" (p. 69).

Certainly the *ulum* (sciences) and *rusum* (arts and auxiliary studies) are many in medieval Arab manuals of education, but in the *Arabian Nights* respect for writing is enough to prepare for the second calender's subsequent reversals of fortune: To the surprise of many merchants on the ship, he was a master of calligraphy. Preparation, of course, also has a utilitarian perspective: In "The Story Told by the Tailor," the narrator in the tale, a young merchant, tells the group of people he is dining with that when his father died, he had already received a sound education and "was old enough to manage the large possessions he had bequeathed me" (p. 164).

Society

The tales reflect a close observance of class and social differences and situations. The poor rarely harbor hatred or anger for those above them in station. Resignation to one's status runs throughout the tales, but it does not mean laziness or reluctance to better one's lot. One of the ladies of Baghdad in "The History of Three Calenders, Sons of Kings, and of Five Ladies of Baghdad" looks upon decorum as the specific sign of social dis-

unction and authority. When the calenders and others fail to show careful observance of the rules inscribed on the inner side of the door, the lady says, "I cannot believe that you are honourable men, or persons of authority or distinction in whatever country you call your own; for if that had been the case, you would have paid more attention to our condition and more respect to us" (p. 61). As they have already made clear to all: "You shall strictly observe the rules of propriety and decorum" (p. 51).

Decorum and observance of rules of conduct are not determined only by class; we are told in some tales that in certain professions there are rules that are no less binding. Loquacity is the mark of barbers in Baghdad, who boast of their knowledge in all sciences, especially astrology and medicine. In "The Story Told by the Tailor," the young man from Baghdad, infatuated by the sight of the judge's daughter, is anxious to go according to the date and timing fixed for the couple by the go-between, the old lady. The barber, however, delays him by his stories and boasts of himself as "an experienced physician, a profound chemist, a never-failing astrologer, a finished grammarian, a perfect rhetorician, a subtle logician; a mathematician, thoroughly accomplished in geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and in all the refinements of algebra; an historian, thoroughly versed in the history of all the kingdoms in the universe" (p. 169). We need not doubt him, for it was part of the barber's job not only to entertain celebrities and to mix with the highest ranks of the society, but also to offer medical help when needed. And the significant presence of barbers in the tales has a narrative role, for loquacity is another term for storytelling. The barber's intervention in this story, for instance, complicates it, causes more trouble to the protagonist, and makes him desperate to run away from the very land that harbors the barber and his like.

Whenever a person has wit and a good education, like the porter in "The History of Three Calenders, Sons of Kings, and of Five Ladies of Baghdad," the tale takes a different direction. Wit and refinement result in better sociability, for a "party of ladies without men," the porter says, "is as melancholy and stupid as a party of men without ladies" (p. 49). No wonder the swimming pool scene in which he participates is so outrageous that the squeamish Edward William Lane cut it from his translation to meet the requirements of Victorian taste. In a moment of rapture and intoxication, the porter feels that the wine "acquired a more exquisite flavour than it naturally possessed" (p. 51). A certain kind of scene, like a carnival, can turn things upside down, and humanize behavior beyond class distinction. Wine operates as a carnivalesque stimulus, though it derives its new power from the society itself, its aggregation and togetherness.

In "The Story Told by the Purveyor of the Sultan of Casgar," we are told that the young merchant, who is punished for eating ragout with garlic (p. 138) without sufficiently washing his hand, appalls his wife on her first night with him. Her attendants are not surprised at her rage; on the contrary, they say, "It is true that he is a man who does not appear to know how to conduct himself, and who seems not to understand your rank, and the respect that is due to you" (p. 148). The severance of a hand, as in the young

man's case, is a recurrent punishment in the tales whenever there is social transgression, especially in matters demanding good manners. The further implications of the punishment are more complicated—the loss of a hand has been interpreted as a symbolic emasculation—but narrative complications are many and lead to other trials, even if the outcome is usually a smooth reconciliation. We are told, for example, in other accounts that the lady requests that the caliph's wife let her leave the palace and live with her husband in the city after securing from him a binding oath not to transgress again. But, using the left, not the right hand, is so offensive that people can never condone it. Hence, his host and other attendants are shocked to notice that he uses his left hand instead of the right. The left hand, reserved for taking care of other physical needs, is considered unclean, and its use is an embarrassment to the host. The guest "led himself with his left hand, and . . . [the host] was much astonished to observe that he never made use of his right." The behavior could lead to more complications: The host ponders the issue, "It is impossible that he can act thus out of contempt for me" (p. 126).

Social manners, including table manners, are to be observed; the ladies expect as much. The tales include a large number of episodes that deal with transgressions that lead to further trouble. Abbasid literature on the subject, which is enormous, covers food, meals, the art of cooking, and table manners; it also describes the proper use of hands and spoons and the strict rules of table manners that the community expects its members to observe.⁴³ The literature on table manners abounds with examples in which caliphs and dignitaries become annoyed at the sight of one of the company touching his beard or face. Indeed, the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (813–833) was reported to ask one guest to wash his hand three times after failing to observe table manners, as an Abbasid specialist in table manners and boon companion Mahmud B. Husayn Kushajim (died 961) noticed.⁴⁴

At these gatherings, wine—more exactly, *nabidh*—is usually served, especially after meals. Those who were not disposed to wine would take other drinks, like sherbet and fruit juice, usually mixed with rose water, or musk, and always cooled with ice. In "The History of Three Calenders, Sons of Kings, and of Five Ladies of Baghdad," drinking wine is so smoothly practiced that no one in the company shows surprise.

Yet the issue of wine drinking is not so smooth among jurists and Muslim traditionalists. While fundamentalists think of it as forbidden by the religious law, or *shari'ah*, in an anecdote reported by al-Jahiz, the jurist Bisr al-Marsi thinks drinking date-liquor is "absolutely licit."⁴⁵ The idea that drinking wine is legal was stressed in the presence of the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (died 833), against the opinion of the jurist Muhammad Ibn Abbas al-Tusi. The discussion concentrates on a drink (the *nabidh*, or wine) made from boiling dates or dried raisins in water. According to the Iraqi school of law, that of Abu Hanifa (died 767), these ingredients have no bacilli, as would occur in fresh grapes, to cause strong fermentation, and thus the drink is only mildly alcoholic. All the tales of Iraqi origin treat wine in a very free manner; Abu Hanifa's advice is to drink in moderation to avoid intoxication.

Religion and Race

There is a thin line between the rules of decorum and religious precepts. Religion works delicately but persuasively in the tales, as it informs every behavior, at times imposing social conformity that can be mistaken by an outsider as binding. Victorian essayist Walter Bagehot, for one, thought of recurrent behavioral norms as constrictions that allow no space for individual action and self-trial. Writing at a time when there was in England an ongoing discussion of the tyranny of the majority and public opinion, Bagehot found in recurrent patterns of behavior evidence of a pervasive encroachment on private will. He looked on these as an "opiate" that stifles as it "preys upon the vital forces."⁴⁶ Certainly in the *Nights* there is submission to the will of God, and it is usually pronounced in times of misfortune, as in the story of "The History of the Young King of the Black Isles." After being turned half-marble and half-human by his wife, who is an adept in magic, the young King is resigned to his fate: "I submit, O powerful Creator of all things, to thy judgments, and to the decrees of thy providence" (p. 39). In "The Story of the Merchant and the Genie," the merchant advises his family to bear his fate with resignation to God's will: "Submit with fortitude to this necessity" (p. 15).

However, this submission does not exclude self-examination, judgment, and the use of one's reason, for resignation does not mean a moral void. Instead it means there are things that are at times beyond human capacity to redress. Tales that focus on vicissitudes of fate usually use the encounter between humans and supernatural beings to test issues of will and judgment. In "The History of the Fisherman," the genie, not the human, is to make a promise—to deny beneficial support or help to people who release him from the sealed jar. After failing many times to get help, the genie swears this time to kill the one who saves his life. On the other hand, the fisherman's supplications to God to reward his labor are of no avail. On the contrary, as the savior of the genie the fisherman is met with threats of imminent death. In Islamic interpretations, this is meant as a further trial of his faith. The story begins with him searching for his daily bread. In a tone of resignation, he says, "Thou knowest, O Lord, that I throw my nets only four times a day; three times have I thrown them into the sea, without any profit for my labour" (p. 27). Instead of fish, his catch is a "copper vase" with Solomon's seal, "on which the great name of Allah is engraven" (p. 29). When opening the vase and breaking the seal, he is faced with an enormous genie whose first pronouncement is to ask the fisherman which kind of death he prefers. Instead of resigned himself to the situation, the fisherman uses his mind to devise a way out. In the end he is bountifully rewarded for his patience and the use of his good sense. In other words, there are other ways and tactics to escape what looks like predestined fate.

Religion also works as a social contract, an extension of the laws and decrees that sustain business and regulate commercial transactions. In "The Story of the Merchant and the Genie," it is enough for the merchant

to tell the genie he will come back after wrapping up his family and business affairs: "I swear by the God of heaven and earth, that I will not fail to repair hither" (p. 14). An oath as such becomes a practice, no less binding than other obligations like prayers and ablution. No meeting or business transaction should replace the Friday congregational prayer—as, for instance, in "The History of the Barber." Yet there is acceptance of and resignation to the Divine Will whenever there is an understanding of retribution as ordained. In "The History of the First Calender, the Son of a King," the incestuous scene between the brother and sister ends in their being burned to become like charcoal, to the satisfaction of their father, who sees this outcome as the result of Divine Anger (p. 67).

The Islamic context for the tales should not be seen as excluding other religions. In reference to the Sassanids or to the Islamic period, there is due recognition of religious practices, especially those of people of monotheistic faiths. On many occasions, the Abbasids had their high officials and physicians from among Christians, Jews, and Sabaeans. In the tale of the bewitched king, "The History of the Young King of the Black Isles," the ponds return to their origins the moment the magic is dispelled: "The city re-appeared. The fish became men, women, and children; all arose as Mahometans, Christians, Persians, and Jews" (p. 42). The fact that these four groups are specifically mentioned stems from two different traditions that had enforced specific costumes for each. Around 358, the Sassanid Shapur II introduced a number of measures to emphasize a new legitimizing ideology built on human, not divine, presence; new table manners and court protocols were either stressed or newly introduced. Of more significance was the emergence of religious conflict and identity polemic. Poll and land taxes were imposed on Christians and Jews in return for peace, loyalty, and participation in defense. The practice continued under Islam, although there was more tolerance of religious practices.

The Umayyad caliph Omar Ibn Abd al-Aziz introduced distinctive articles of dress to prevent administrative confusion and to apply some rules according to one's faiths. But these were thought of as humiliating signs, which Islam never endorsed. Still, however, and depending on which jurist or chief justice was in power, there were times when discriminatory dress and prohibition of fine clothes and the use of noble steeds were called for. A dress code was also imposed in Baghdad during the reign of Haroun Alraschid. As "The History of the Young King of the Black Isles" is one of the many tales that were Arabized and Islamized, there is in it a Sasanid and Islamic mix. The King's reading of the Qur'an is obviously meant to indicate that he is a Muslim who is resigned to his fate, while the wife's practices fit in other traditions. The application of dress codes was limited to the metropolis, where the caliph or chief jurist might want to divert attention from pressing matters or appease other jurists who were often discontented with the sovereign. Functionaries, like judges, effectively wore specific clothing so that people would take notice of their job, function, and rank. Chief Justice Abbasid Abu Yusuf (died

798) was the first to implement the procedure, as the encyclopedic biographer Ibn Khallikan says.⁴⁷

Dress and other types of codes that signify profession are reflected in the *Arabian Nights*. The entertaining cycle of the barber and his brothers (part four) is informative about social manners and practices. It takes us away from the supernatural and from courtly life and involves us in the domains of professionals and functionaries. Even merchants—despite their enormous presence in the tales and the appreciation of their vocation in Islam—were not routinely accepted in upper-class or courtly society. They had to pass through a number of trials—including, at times, mutilation—to prove their merit, refinement, and readiness to suffer for love. Between the marketplace and the sovereign's courtiers and entourage, there is usually a physical distance, as well as social, moral, and psychological distances. Only when a maid or lady decides to come to the market, upon hearing of a charming young merchant who can make a good companion or husband, is a rite of passage possible, but never without some sacrifice on the male's part.

There are different transgressions, however, that can upset the whole order. Storytellers take their revenge upon upper-class society in various ways. Imagining the wealthy households and buildings based on the little glimpses they get from their fellow scribes who have access to these wealthy districts, storytellers write about the sumptuousness of the lives of the wealthy and the expenditures they lavish on lovers from lower stations. They also depict women from these households who cannot control their sensual appetites. Their revenge takes place whenever they depict a black slave as a companion to a queen. In the frame story this is exactly what sours the sultan's worldview and attitude to women and what brings on his melancholy and morbidity, and in "The History of the Young King of the Black Isles," the queen prefers a crippled black slave who lives among rubbish mounds to the king and his palace. Yet the tales—composite in nature, of different origins and formations—are not of one piece in the ways they exact revenge for racism or social inequality. In many narratives, there is an underlying preference for whiteness that runs counter to Islamic preaching as religion; the Prophet's last speech specifies that there is no merit for any in Islam other than piety. The young merchant from Baghdad speaks of the barber as follows, however: "Although he was born in a country where the complexion of the people is white, he looks like an Ethiopian, but his mind is of a dye deeper and more horrible than his visage" (p. 162). In the end, the stories' many redactors are of so many conflicting views and attitudes that there is no uniform treatment of race, religion, and gender. Villany, cruelty, and selfishness, as well as licentiousness, can be social aspects among all races. The same is true of other behavioral patterns, as is apparent in the barber's brothers' narrative cycle. The same cycle shows a tendency among governors to banish unwanted citizens or travelers as if to sustain an idealistic vision of their urban life. Yet, these seeming whims and idiosyncrasies on part of governors and

citizens are, after all, the whims of the storyteller who would like to move to another story and to another character of more adventures and troubles.

In a word, the *Arabian Nights* is meant to entertain, to be enjoyed as good reading, but for people who are interested in other issues, there are many details and views that invite discussion. Indeed, the tales' reading history in Europe tells us much about the unique interests and concerns of each age. Perhaps it is the kind of book that operates as a mirror where people are pleased to see reflections of their own thoughts.

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Notes

- 1 G. K. Chesterton, *The Spice of Life*, Beaconsfield, UK: Darwen Finlayson, 1967, pp. 56–60.
- 2 *The Fihrist of al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, translated by Bayard Dodge, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970, vol. 2, pp. 713–714.
- 3 Cited in Alexander Ireland's *Book Lover's Emchuridion: Thoughts on the Solace and Companionship of Books*, London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1883, p. 287.
- 4 William E. A. Axon, "The Thousand and One Nights," *Bookman* 31 (March 1907), p. 258.
- 5 C. H. Toy, "The Thousand and One Nights," *Atlantic Monthly* 63 (June 1889), pp. 756–757.
- 6 R. L. Stevenson, "A Gossip on Romance," *Longman's Magazine* 1 (1882–1883), p. 74.
- 7 See Henry Weber, "Introduction," in his *Tales of the East* (3 vols.), vol. 1: *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, New Arabian Nights, Edinburgh: J. Ballantyne, 1812, pp. xviii–xxix.
- 8 Cited in my *Scheherazade in England: A Study of Nineteenth-Century English Criticism of the Arabian Nights*, Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1981, p. 43.
- 9 Mah'Gerhardt rightly notes this in her book *The Art of Story-Telling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights*, Leiden: Brill, 1963, pp. 397, 401.
- 10 Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Table Talk" of May 31, 1830, reprinted in *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, edited by T. M. Rayson, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938, p. 405.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE chronicles of the ancient Kings of Persia, who extended their empire into the Indies, and as far as China, tell of a powerful king of that family, who dying, left two sons. The eldest, Shahriar, inherited the bulk of his empire; the younger, Shahzenan, who like his brother Shahriar was a virtuous prince, well beloved by his subjects, became King of Samarcande.

After they had been separated ten years, Shahriar resolved to send his vizier to his brother to invite him to his court. Setting out with a retinue answerable to his dignity, that officer made all possible haste to Samarcande. Shahzenan received the ambassador with the greatest demonstrations of joy. The vizier then gave him an account of his embassy. Shahzenan answered thus:—"Sage vizier, the Sultan does me too much honour; I long as passionately to see him, as he does to see me. My kingdom is in peace, and I desire no more than ten days to get myself ready to go with you; there is no necessity that you should enter the city for so short a time: I pray you to pitch your tents here, and I will order provisions in abundance for yourself and your company."

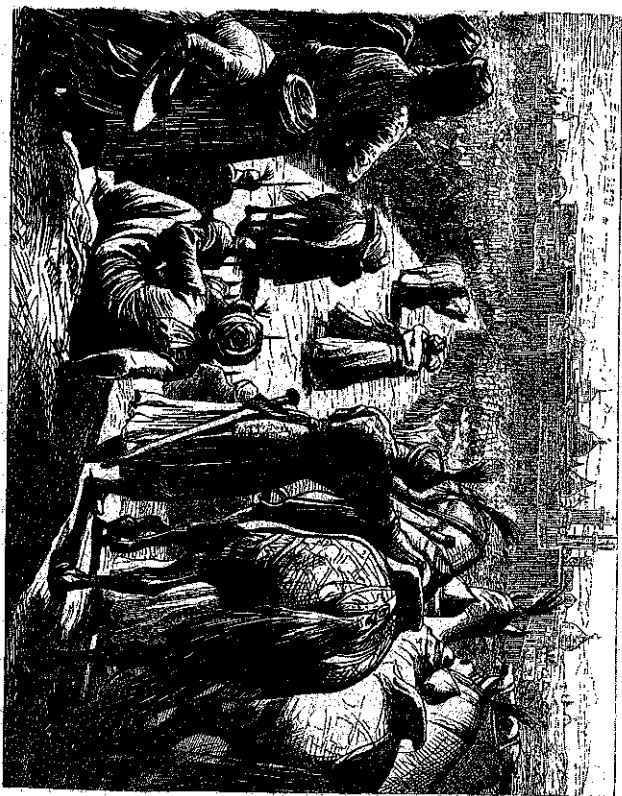
At the end of ten days, the King took his leave of his Queen, and went out of town in the evening with his retinue, pitched his royal pavilion near the vizier's tent, and discoursed with that ambassador till midnight. But willing once more to embrace the Queen, whom he loved entirely, he returned alone to his palace, and went straight to her apartment.

The King entered without any noise, and pleased himself to think how he should surprise his wife, whose affection for him he never doubted. Great was his surprise, when by the lights in the royal chamber, he saw a male slave in the Queen's apartment! He could scarcely believe his own eyes: "How!" said he to himself, "I am scarce gone from Samarcande, and they dare thus disgrace me!" And he drew his scimitar, and killed them both; and quitting the town privately, set forth on his journey.

When he drew near the capital of the Indies, the Sultan Shahriar and all the court came out to meet him: the princes, overjoyed at meeting, embraced, and entered the city together, amid the acclamations of the people; and the Sultan conducted his brother to the palace he had provided for him.

But the remembrance of his wife's disloyalty made such an impression upon the countenance of Shahzenan, that the Sultan could not but notice it. Shahriar endeavoured to divert his brother every day, by new schemes of pleasure, and the most splendid entertainments; but all his efforts only increased the King's sorrow.

One day, Shahriar had started on a great hunting match, about two days' journey from his capital; but Shahzenan, pleading ill health, was left behind. He shut himself up in his apartment, and sat down at a window that looked into the garden.



The meeting of the brothers.

Suddenly a secret gate of the palace opened, and there came out of it twenty women, in the midst of whom walked the Sultanness. The persons who accompanied the Sultanness threw off their veils and long robes, and Shahzenan was greatly surprised when he saw that ten of them were black slaves, each of whom chose a female companion. The Sultanness clapped her hands, and called: "Masoud, Masoud!" and immediately a black came running to her; and they all remained conversing familiarly together.

When Shahzenan saw this he cried: "How little reason had I, to think that no one was so unfortunate as myself!"—So, from that moment he forbore to repine. He ate and drank, and he continued in very good humour; and when the Sultan returned, he went to meet him with a shining countenance.

Shahriar was overjoyed to see his brother so cheertful; and spoke thus: "Dear brother, ever since you came to my court I have seen you afflicted with a deep melancholy; but now you are in the highest spirits. Pray tell me why you were so melancholy, and why you are now cheertful?"

Upon this, the King of Tartary continued for some time as if he had been meditating, and contriving what he should answer; but at last replied as follows: "You are my Sultan and master; but excuse me, I beseech you, from answering your question."—"No, dear brother," said the Sultan, "you must answer me; I will take no denial." Shahzenan for a time hesitated to

reply; but not being able to withstand his brother's importunity, told him the story of the Queen of Samarcande's treachery: "This," said he, "was the cause of my grief; judge, whether I had not reason enough to give myself up to it."

Then Shahriar said: "I cease now to wonder at your melancholy. But, bless Allah, who has comforted you; let me know what your comfort is, and conceal nothing from me." Obligated again to yield to the Sultan's pressing instances, Shahzenan gave him the particulars of all that he had seen from his window. Then Shahriar spoke thus: "I must see this with my own eyes; the matter is so important, that I must be satisfied of it myself."

"Dear brother," answered Shahzenan, "that you may without much difficulty, appoint another hunting match; and after our departure you and I will return alone to my apartments; the next day you will see what I saw." The Sultan, approving the stratagem, immediately appointed a new hunting match; and that same day the tents were set up at the place appointed.

Next day the two princes set out, and stayed for some time at the place of encampment. They then returned in disguise to the city, and went to Shahzenan's apartment. They had scarce placed themselves in the window, when the secret gate opened, the Sultanness and her ladies entered the garden with the blacks. Again she called Masoud; and the Sultan saw that his brother had spoken truth.

"O heavens!" cried he, "what an indignity! Alas! my brother, let us abandon our dominions and go into foreign countries, where we may lead an obscure life, and conceal our misfortune." "Dear brother," replied Shahzenan, "I am ready to follow; but promise me that you will return when we meet any one more unhappy than ourselves." So they secretly left the place. They travelled as long as it was day, and passed the first night under some trees. Next morning they went on till they came to a fair meadow on the sea-shore, and sat down under a large tree to refresh themselves.

Soon they heard a terrible noise; the sea opened, and there arose out of it a great black column, ascending towards the clouds. Then they were seized with fear, and climbed up into the tree to hide themselves. And the dark column advanced towards the shore, and there came forth from it a black genie, of prodigious stature, who carried on his head a great glass box, shut with four locks of fine steel. He came into the meadow and laid down his burden at the foot of the tree in which the two princes were hidden. The genie opened the box with four keys that he had at his girdle, and there came out a lady magnificently apparelled, and of great beauty. Then the genie said: "O lady, whom I carried off on your wedding day, let me sleep a few moments." Having spoken thus, he laid his head upon her knee and fell asleep.

The lady looking up at the tree, saw the two princes, and made a sign to them to come down without making any noise. But they were afraid of the genie, and would fain have been excused. Upon this she laid the monster's head softly on the ground, and ordered them to come down, saying, "If you hesitate, I will wake up this genie, and he shall kill you." So the



The sleeping genie and the lady.

princes came down to her. And when she had remained with them for some time, she pulled out a string of rings, of all sorts, which she showed them, and said: "These are the rings of all the men with whom I have conversed, as with you. There are full fourscore and eighteen; of them, and I ask yours to make up the hundred. This wicked genie never leaves me. But he may lock me up in this glass box, and hide me in the bottom of the

sea. I find a way to cheat his care. You may see by this, that when a woman has formed a project, no one can hinder her from putting it into execution." Then said the two kings: "This monster is more unfortunate than we." So they returned to the camp, and thence to the city.

Then Shahriar ordered that the Sultanness should be strangled; and he beheaded all her women with his own hand. After this he resolved to marry a virgin every day, and to have her killed the next morning. And thus every day a maiden was married, and every day a wife was sacrificed.

The report of this unexampled cruelty spread consternation through the city. And at length, the people who had once loaded their monarch with praise and blessings, raised one universal outcry against him.

The grand vizier, who was the unwilling agent of this horrid injustice, had two daughters, the eldest called Scheherazade, and the youngest Dinazade. The latter was a lady of very great merit; but the elder had courage, wit, and penetration in a remarkable degree. She studied much, and had such a tenacious memory, that she never forgot any thing she had once read. She had successfully applied herself to philosophy, physic, history, and the liberal arts; and made verses that surpassed those of the best poets of her time. Besides this, she was a perfect beauty; all her great qualifications were crowned by solid virtue; and the vizier passionately loved a daughter so worthy of his affection.

One day, as they were discoursing together, she said to him, "Father, I have one favour to beg of you, and most humbly pray you to grant it me."—"I will not refuse it," he answered, "provided it be just and reasonable."—"I have a design," resumed she, "to stop the course of that barbarity which the Sultan exercises upon the families of this city."—"Your design, daughter," replied the vizier, "is very commendable; but how do you intend to effect it?"—"Father," said Scheherazade, "since by your means the Sultan celebrates a new marriage, I conjure you to procure me the honour of being his bride."

This proposal filled the vizier with horror. "O heavens," replied he, "have you lost your senses, daughter, that you make such a dangerous request to me? You know the Sultan has sworn by his soul that he will never be married for two days to the same woman; and would you have me propose you to him?"—"Dear father," said the daughter, "I know the risk I run; but that does not frighten me. If I perish, at least my death will be glorious; and if I succeed, I shall do my country an important piece of service."—"No, no," said the vizier, "whatever you can represent to induce me to let you throw yourself into that horrible danger, do not think that I will agree to it. When the Sultan shall order me to strike my dagger into your heart, alas! I must obey him; what a horrible office for a father!"—"Once more, father," said Scheherazade, grant me the favour I beg."—"Your stubbornness"—replied the vizier—"will make me angry; why will you run headlong to your ruin? I am afraid the same thing will happen to you that happened to the ass, who was well off, and could not keep so."

"Father," replied Scheherazade, "I beg you will not take it ill that I

persist in my opinion." In short, the father, overcome by the resolution of his daughter, yielded to her importunity; and though he was very much grieved that he could not divert her from her fatal resolution, he went that minute to inform the Sultan that next night he would bring him Scheherazade.

The Sultan was much surprised at the sacrifice which the grand vizier proposed making. "How could you resolve," said he, "to bring me your own daughter?"—"Sir," answered the vizier, "it is her own offer." "But do not deceive yourself, vizier," said the Sultan: "to-morrow when I put Scheherazade into your hands, I expect you will take away her life; and if you fail, I swear that you shall die."

Scheherazade now set about preparing to appear before the Sultan: but before she went, she took her sister Dinarzade apart, and said to her, "My dear sister, I have need of your help in a matter of very great importance, and must pray you not to deny it me. As soon as I come to the Sultan, I will beg him to allow you to be in the bride-chamber, that I may enjoy your company for the last time. If I obtain this favour, as I hope to do, remember to awaken me to-morrow an hour before day, and to address me in words like these: 'My sister, if you be not asleep, I pray you that, till day-break, you will relate one of the delightful stories of which you have read so many.' Immediately I will begin to tell you one; and I hope, by this means, to deliver the city from the consternation it is in." Dinarzade answered that she would fulfil her sister's wishes.

When the hour for retiring came, the grand vizier conducted Scheherazade to the palace, and took his leave. As soon as the Sultan was left alone with her, he ordered her to uncover her face, and found it so beautiful, that he was charmed with her; but, perceiving her to be in tears, he asked her the reason. "Sir," answered Scheherazade, "I have a sister who loves me tenderly, and whom I love; and I could wish that she might be allowed to pass the night in this chamber, that I might see her, and bid her farewell. Will you be pleased to grant me the comfort of giving her this last testimony of my affection?" Shahriar having consented, Dinarzade was sent for, and came with all diligence. The Sultan passed the night with Scheherazade upon an elevated couch, and Dinarzade slept on a mattress prepared for her near the foot of the bed.

An hour before day, Dinarzade awoke, and failed not to speak as her sister had ordered her.

Scheherazade, instead of answering her sister, asked leave of the Sultan to grant Dinarzade's request. Shahriar consented. And, desiring her sister to attend, and addressing herself to the Sultan, Scheherazade began as follows:—

PART ONE