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Marta Mamet-Michalkiewicz

Between the Orient and the Occident

Transformations of *The Thousand and One Nights*

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UNIWERSYTETU ŚLĄSKIEGO

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Marta Mamet-Michalkiewicz

Between the Orient and the Occident
Transformations of *The Thousand and One Nights*

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego Katowice 2011

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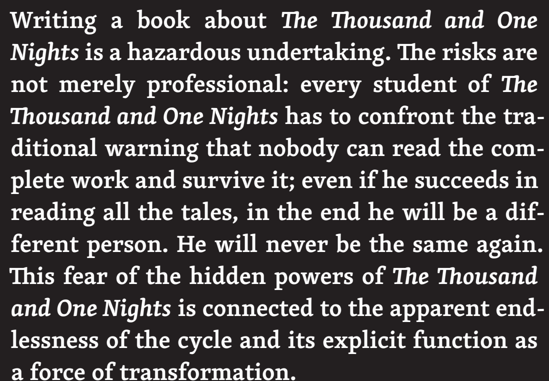

Writing a book about *The Thousand and One Nights* is a hazardous undertaking. The risks are not merely professional: every student of *The Thousand and One Nights* has to confront the traditional warning that nobody can read the complete work and survive it; even if he succeeds in reading all the tales, in the end he will be a different person. He will never be the same again. This fear of the hidden powers of *The Thousand and One Nights* is connected to the apparent endlessness of the cycle and its explicit function as a force of transformation.

R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel and Transformation*

INTRODUCTION

Averroes' Search?

> A major event in the history of the West was the discovery of the East. It would be more precise to speak of a continuing consciousness of the East, comparable to the presence of Persia in Greek history. Within this general consciousness of the Orient – something vast, immobile, magnificent, incomprehensible – there were certain high points, and I would like to mention a few. This seems to be the best approach to a subject I love so much, one I have loved since childhood, *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights* or, as it is called in the English version *The Arabian Nights*, a title that is not without mystery, but is less beautiful.
>
> J.L. Borges: *Seven Nights*

Jorge Luis Borges' writing is significantly inspired by *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights*;[1] his words are frequently used as the epigraphs in this book, as his perception of this book and also of the relation between the two cultures, the Orient and Occident, is congruent with my own. The assumption that "*The Thousand and One Nights* has not died [and] the infinite time of the thousand and one nights continues its course"[2] is a focal aspect of his essay devoted to the *Nights*. This book aims at demonstrating that not only has the *Thousand and One Nights* not died, but quite to the contrary, it has been flourishing, transforming and being transformed, seducing and enchanting writers, and translators across cultures and ages, from the time of oral culture until contemporary times. As Richard

1 There are several titles of the work interchangeably used in this book: *The Thousand and One Nights*, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, *The Arabian Nights*, and *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*.

2 J.L. Borges: "The Thousand and One Nights." In: *Seven Nights*. Trans. A. Donald. New York 1980, p. 56.

van Leeuwen points out in the excerpt which serves as a motto for this book, the "fear of the hidden powers of the *Thousand and One Nights* is connected to the apparent endlessness of the cycle and its explicit function as a force of transformation."[3] The apparent endlessness, complexity, and cross-cultural position of the book are the focal aspects discussed within the framework of contemporary interdisciplinary research. Comparatively little has been written about *The Arabian Nights* from the point of view of cultural studies, and literary criticism has concentrated mostly on analysing the book as folk or children's literature.

By discussing the complexity of *The Arabian Nights*, due to its existence between divergent cultures; and also by pinpointing multidimensional aspects of the transformations of the book, which are palpable on the level of its oral transmission, a number of culturally biased translations, and contemporary rewritings and retellings; this work attempts to fill a gap in international and also Polish critical studies. The discussion is hopefully broadened by analysis of the commonly embalmed, simplified and mythologized image of *The Thousand and One Nights* and also of Scheherazade, its narrator and most famous character. The research concerns aspects of the process of transformation of the book by inscribing the trajectory of the relations between the Orient and the Occident.

Nowadays, juxtaposing – even in simplified terms – the dichotomy Orient/Occident with the dichotomy feminine/masculine, seems to be a cliché. However, at the time when Edward Said wrote his *Orientalism* this analogy was attractive. Since the discussed nineteenth-century translations of the *Nights* are to some extent a supplement to Said's influential book, a significant part of this work is devoted to the notion of the Other, which is identified with both the feminine and the Orient. I attempt to analyse the nature of a protean dialogue between British culture, at first identified as the Same, with the Orient. *The Thousand and One Nights* serves as a point of departure for observations concerning British colonial discourse, Victorian discourse, and Orientalism understood as the Western construct.

The structure and organization of this dissertation, like that of the *Arabian Nights'* tales, follows an idea of mirror and cyclicity. The book consists of three chapters, and for the sake of clarity and coherence, each of the chapters is subdivided into four subchapters. The first chapter introduces the reader to aspects of the origins, translations, and generic space of *The Thousand and One Nights*. The first subchapter discusses a variety of theoretical stances applied in existing critical works concerning the book. By showing limitations of homogeneous approaches to the work, such as, for

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3 R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel and Transformation*. New York 2007, p. 1.

instance, folk research, and psychoanalytic, sociohistorical, and feminist critique, the book indicates that interdisciplinary research, combining cultural theory and literary analysis, allows for a broader spectrum of insight and enriches the interpretation of the work. Discarding the condescending attitude towards the cycle as folk or children's literature is a starting point for the next three subchapters of the thesis.

The second subchapter discusses the origins of the book. By indicating the existence of a number of the *Nights* already on the level of oral culture and among the first Arabic manuscripts, the absence of an author in the traditional understanding, but a presence of a polyphony of authors and editors; we can characterize the *Nights* as nomadic literature. The predicament of the *Nights* brings to mind Derrida's perception of literature which is not a place, hence it "has no 'origin,' no identifiable 'sender or decidable addressee.' The literary work never rests. It does not belong. Literature does not come home: it is strangely homeless, strangely free."[4] In this subchapter the position of the *Nights* is also analysed as the abject, in Kristeva's understanding, as the book belongs neither to Western nor Eastern culture.

The next subchapter introduces the first European translation of the book, the eighteenth-century French translation by Antoine Galland, and the subsequent English nineteenth-century translations of different Arabic manuscripts or based on Galland's translation. In this subchapter I compare these enumerated translations and also the modern English translation of Husain Haddawy, and suggest that the process of transformation of the *Arabian Nights* on the level of European translations is concomitant with mythologization, distortion and subversion of the image of the Orient. Scrutinizing the English *Nights* sheds new light on the cultural aspects of translations of the book, and also reveals the peculiar status of the translators, which is, mildly speaking, equivocal, as the "translators" of the work are simultaneously its authors, editors and narrators.

The last part of the chapter focuses on the emergence of *The Thousand and One Nights*, its significance in Western culture and its interdependence with the rise of the discourse of Orientalism in Saidian understanding. By situating Said's canonical work *Orientalism* in a broader spectrum than his own research reflection, which is eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British and French Orientalism merging with colonialism and imperialism, it is my intention to divert attention from a critique of Said's work which, like any text of culture, has its limitations. I also seek to indicate that neither does Said, in his critical study of the relations with Orient, nor do his opponents, pay ample attention to a tenacious relationship

4 N. Royle: *Jacques Derrida*. London 2003, p. 45.

between the culturally biased European translations of *The Thousand and One Nights* and the rising discourse of Orientalism.

The second chapter, entitled "In Search of Ariadne's thread: the Tales, Scheherazade(s), Odalisques and Termagants," exploring the pivotal aspects of the book, deconstructs an embalmed image of the exotic East, with its lascivious and insatiable women, paradisiacal harems, and lovely Scheherazade. The first subchapter seeks to explore the nature of the Frame Story of the *Arabian Nights*. Although the plot of the Frame Story is vaguely known even to readers uninitiated in the *Nights*, its significance for the book, its complexity, the plurality of frames in the various translations, and in particular, the peculiar position of the Frame Story, which cannot well be classified in the generic code of the frame, remain unexplored for most readers. Therefore, the Frame Story is scrutinized and the concept of Derridian *parergon* is endorsed to the Frame as it is neither inside nor outside the work: to quote Derrida, "By being placed outside, the other is placed, domesticated, kept inside."[5]

The next part of the chapter seeks to anatomize the image of Scheherazade, which is identified with the embodiment of Oriental femininity. In this part of my book, the plurality of Scheherazades is the quintessential issue, as Scheherazade, the mythical narrator and protagonist of the *Nights*, has become a cultural myth of the female subject in the Orient. The existence of many different Scheherazades coalesces with the plurality of translations of the book; therefore, I seek to depict Scheherazade's images as culturally conditioned constructs, imagined identities. Drawing on the various translations of the *Nights*, I argue that Scheherazade's indeterminacy, in Ingarden's sense, paved the way for "manipulations" and "distortions" of her image. The image of Scheherazade as exotic, mythical Oriental heroine, the doubly Other as the female and the Oriental, becomes debunked.

The female characters, which I focus on in the various translations of the *Arabian Nights*, inspired fascination with and resurgence of the Oriental female subject. What issues from this is the theme of the third subchapter of this part entitled, "Odalisques or Termagants? The female characters in the *Arabian Nights*." The Western fascination with Oriental women is palpable not only in the work of many popular writers, but also in Orientalist painting. The odalisque, a female slave, which is usually portrayed in the closed space of the harem, is a common subject in Orientalist art. The image of the odalisque is that of an exotic, Oriental woman, who is often portrayed dozing or waiting to be possessed. However, for the sake

5 J. Derrida quoted in: M. Wigley: *Derrida's Haunt: The Architecture of Deconstruction*. London 1997, p. 107.

of sameness, the odalisques depicted in the paintings are less Oriental than the Orientals, and their images illustrate Bhabha's metaphor of the Other "as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite."[6] Therefore, in this subchapter it is my intention to juxtapose the traditional homogeneous image of Oriental female characters with the true range of fascinating, vibrant, and highly diverse female characters in *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Orality and storytelling are an important part of the traditions of Eastern cultures. The idiosyncratic position of the *Thousand and One Nights* in literary discourse stems from the powerful art of storytelling evinced in seemingly endless labyrinths of stories that are locked within other stories. Scheherazade's art of storytelling has seduced many writers, translators, and editors, as well as general readers. Therefore, the last subchapter of Chapter Two explores the concept of storytelling depicted as seduction. Notwithstanding the view that any kind of storytelling, weaving a narrative, is a game between the teller/author and the listener/reader, it is my belief that in the *Nights* the inventiveness and seductiveness of the storytelling is exceptional, since the seduction is multidimensional. It concerns not only King Shahriyar, who is kept under the charm of Scheherazade's stories; it also concerns the similarly seduced translators, who concomitantly seduce their readers by taking the position of narrator/editor of the tales. Seduction also takes place between the various narrators functioning within the *Nights* since the book is an example of Chinese box narration. The work, which apparently has no author, at least in the traditional understanding, seemingly continues infinitely, and offers, depending on the translation, a variety of endings or even deprives the reader of a sense of ending, may be continuously transformed due to the cyclicity and indeterminacy that characterize it.

Therefore, the third chapter, "Entering the Labyrinth: the *Arabian Nights* in Contemporary Culture(s)," anatomizes the ongoing processes of transformation of the cycle which have taken place in contemporary times. In its first part, demonstrating the undiminished popularity of the book, *The Thousand and One Nights* is depicted as an intertext in contemporary literatures. Obviously, my choice of fiction to discuss is neither objective nor authoritative. Along with such popular books as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, I include less-known literary works, such as Anthony O'Neill's *Scheherazade* and Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days*. This collation of works analysed in this chapter reflects my desire to illustrate the most crucial aspects of *The Thousand and One Nights*: the persona of Scheherazade and the "Oriental" female subject,

6 H. K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*. London 1994, p. 86.

the significance of storytelling and nesting narratives, and the metaphor of the mirror, cyclicity, and the apparent endlessness of the cycle.

The first subchapter seeks to delineate the status of the *Nights* in the context of the chosen authors' retelling, rewriting, and transfigurating of the book, enabling the reader to create a holistic perception of its fascinating metamorphoses. By showing that the transformations of the work are not limited to its editions and translations, I explore some contemporary rewritings of the *Arabian Nights* to situate them within the context of contemporary cultural theories.

The succeeding subchapters mirror the thematic occupations of the previous chapter, as the idea of mirror and cyclicity is evinced in *The Thousand and One Nights* itself but also in the present work. Therefore, the second part of the chapter depicts the resurgence of interest in the persona of Scheherazade. It juxtaposes the plurality of contemporary Scheherazades with the mythical queen of storytelling, and anatomizes the identities of "Scheherazade's children" here calling into question the concept of "Oriental femininity." The next part of the work demonstrates how a culturally conditioned and mythologized vision of the harem and its odalisques is debunked when *The Arabian Nights* is contrasted with contemporary writing reflecting upon these images.

In the next part of the chapter "Mapping 'Oriental' Paradise: Harems and Odalisques" I discuss images of the harems and odalisques in Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, Assia Djebar's *A Sister to Scheherazade*, and Leïla Sebbar's *Shérazade*. The Western concept of the harem as a metaphor of paradisiacal permanence, illustrated in the Orientalist paintings and Victorian writings, becomes juxtaposed with contemporary writings discussed in this connection.

The last part of the chapter, entitled "Metafictional Seductions and Narrative Journeys," focuses on the deployment of *The Arabian Nights*' narrative strategies in contemporary fiction. As storytelling is one of the focal aspects in *The Thousand and One Nights*, so does it bear the same position in the writing of those contemporary authors enchanted with the cycle. It is my intention to demonstrate how significant is storytelling in constructing one's subjectivity and to depict the validity of the metaphor of storytelling as the art of seduction. For Scheherazade, as Tzvetan Todorov's writes, "Narrative equals life; the absence of narrative equals death,"[7] in this subchapter I anatomize contemporary female protagonists in terms of Scheherazadean art of storytelling.

This work seeks to indicate the richness, complexity, significance, and transcultural transformations of *The Thousand and One Nights*, to depict

7 T. Todorov: *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans. R. Howard. New York 1977, p. 74.

this book in a new light, as it has struggled through the ages with condescending attitudes, undergone a process of mythologization, and been perpetuated as a book of fairy tales or folk tales due to the popularity of bowdlerised and selected editions. The process of mythologization of the work is also palpable in Polish culture, since *The Arabian Nights*, apart from a 1974 edition translated by Władysław Kubiak, Andrzej Czapkiewicz, Anna Kmietowicz *et al.*, published by Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy entitled *Księga tysiąca i jednej nocy*, in the other editions was always published as *Baśnie tysiąca i jednej nocy* (The Fairy Tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*). The latter title, which is embedded in the cultural memory of Poles, is misleading, since it writes the book into the generic code of fairy tales; hence we can speak of a mythologized vision in *The Arabian Nights* in Polish culture.

In the present work both the translations of *The Arabian Nights* and chosen contemporary fiction to rewrite the cycle, are interpreted from a standpoint which reflects a conviction that the process of transformation of this book is multidimensional and endless. *The Thousand and One Nights* seems worth analysing due to the pervasive absence of thorough knowledge, or misapprehension of the work by readers, but first and foremost, because there is a significant gap in the humanities as regards to the cultural analysis of the book. Moreover, by analysis of the metamorphoses of the cycle, the present discussion also reflects the trajectory of the dialogue of British culture with the Orient.

CHAPTER ONE

The Origins, Translations and Generic Space of *The Arabian Nights*

Folk or Children's Literature? On the Need for Interdisciplinary Research

> There are two extremes of reaction that can arise from the confrontation between one's own world and the literary work involved: either the literary work seems fantastic, because it contradicts our own experience, or it seems trivial, because it merely echoes our own. This shows clearly the significance of our experience in the realization of the text, and here we have an initial insight into the specific nature of a literary text.
>
> W. Iser: *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*

> There was another; not quite so bad at first; but still a trying shop; where children's books were sold… and there the mighty talisman, the rare *Arabian Nights*; with Cassim Baba, divided by four, like the ghost of a dreadful sum, hanging up, all gory, in the robber's cave.
>
> C. Dickens: *Martin Chuzzlewit*

The very title *The Thousand and One Nights* is known to readers across cultures regardless of their race, gender, age, origin, or cultural background. The title itself evokes many associations, such as of Scheherazade, exoticism, and eroticism, but also of Sinbad, Aladdin, flying carpets, and jinnies. Commercialised and popularised by countless numbers of expurgated or bowdlerised versions and also by films and cartoons, the *Nights* became a mere commodity in consumer society as "mass-mediated fairy-tales have technologically produced universal voice and im-

age which impose themselves on the imagination of passive audiences."[1] However, the conspicuous popularity of the cycle and perennial interest in the tales is concomitant with only superficial (if any) knowledge of the book. Not surprisingly, then, *The Arabian Nights* is still considered by some general readers and even some scholars as either folk or children's literature. In fact, the popularity the tales have gained, especially through Walt Disney productions and many children's editions, perpetuated a conviction that the book consists of a bunch of exotic fairy tales. But contrary to the common image of *The Arabian Nights*, the collection belongs to neither folk nor children's literature; it constitutes a complex cycle which escapes coherent classification into one literary genre.

The Thousand and One Nights' structure in terms of generic classifications of the tales intermingles a variety of generic codes. Mia Gerhardt, in her elaborate study of the tales, on a basic level differentiates three blocks of tales. Block one consists mostly of "full-length stories, interspersed with some other material,"[2] the second block comprises "brief to very brief stories, almost all of them taken from erudite works, interspersed with only a few longer contributions,"[3] and the third block, "mostly full-length stories, with a mixed lot of anecdotes and short stories in the middle of it."[4] All three blocks are characterized by a variety of language registers and intertwined lines of poetry. In terms of generic codes the following types appear in the *Nights*: fairy-tales, stories (including short/long stories, travel stories, thief stories), fables, fabliaux, pious and moral tales, anecdotes, adventure stories, rhyming prose, and, last but not least, poetry.

The Arabian Nights is also a classic example of nesting stories or, in other words, Chinese box narration. Few critics have associated the narrative technique of the *Nights* with the Persian *dastan*, but the book is a classic example of the form. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica* the *dastan* is described as a term "used for written and oral genres of fictional narrative,"[5] and is briefly discussed as a form of storytelling. The encyclopaedic definition, however, does not convey the spirit of the *dastan*. In his *History of Iranian Literature* Jiři Cejpek, in the chapter *Iranian Folk-Literature*, succinctly explains the meaning and also relevance of the *dastan* to the *Arabian Nights*:

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1 J. Zipes: *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*. New York 1992, p. 17.

2 M. Gerhardt: *The Art of Storytelling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights*. Leiden 1963, p. 27.

3 Ibidem.

4 Ibidem.

5 E. Yarshater, ed.: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Costa Mesa 1996, vol. 7, p. 102.

> The dastans can properly be considered as an intermediate form between epics, narrative literature and folk-tales. [...] This narrative style, in which the main story is interspersed with episodes and poetical interludes, is still alive and continues to be productive today not only among the Iranians but also among Uzbeks and other places in the Islamic east. The best example of this narrative technique for sheer size and number of variations, is really the *Book of a Thousand and One Nights*. [...] The subjects of the dastans are noted for their considerable variety. Besides the heroic epics we often find romantic epics with a substantial share of erotic subjects. [...] In the dastans fanstasy serves only as an attractive embellishment to the tale. It is not determined by the earlier development of the subject, as in the case of fairy-tales.[6]

The Book of Thousand and One Nights, classified as having its origins mainly in the Persian and Indo-Persian tradition, is a classic example of the *dastan* form and is a part of the heritage of Iranian literature.

As for the folklorists, *The Arabian Nights* is an example of popular literature classified into the genre of folk narrative; however, it is conspicuous that many tales, as Macdonald argues, "far surpass the technical abilities of the public story-tellers, but they are anonymous as any fairy-tale, the authors just did not dare to let them appear under their own name."[7] Gerhardt, referring to Macdonald's citation, emphasizes that the *Nights* represents different literary categories and the line of demarcation between them is blurred.[8] Due to the intricacy of the tales on the level of structure, encapsulating all the simple forms being intertwined with rhyming prose and poetry, they cannot be ascribed to one literary genre and cannot be classified as "folk literature."

Corroborating Gerhard's point of view, Pinault writes that "*Alf laylah*, as revealed through the very diverse texts in which it is recorded, cannot be described only as a collection of transcribed oral folktales: for it survives as the crafted composition of authors who used various forms of written literary Arabic to capture an oral narrative tradition."[9] Due to the complexity of the cycle in terms of generic classification of the tales and also its contents (as, to quote Beaumont, "illicit sex and wine stain

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6 J. Cejpek: "History of Iranian Folk-Literature." In: *History of Iranian Literature*, Ed. K. Jahn. Dordrecht 1968, p. 642.

7 M. Gerhardt: *The Art of Storytelling...*, p. 43.

8 Ibidem.

9 D. Pinault: *Story-telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights.* Leiden 1992, p. 17.

the pages. Hashish is used frequently"[10]), although there are plenty of fairy tales in the cycle, it is inappropriate to classify *The Arabian Nights* as a collection of fairy tales and it is also erroneous to subscribe the tales into the generic code of folk literature. The cycle, comprising a medley of conventions, a heteroglossia in the Bakhtinian sense, does not conform to any generic code. The work is *sui generis*, and if it belongs to any generic space, that space is its own.

The ramification of classifying the tales into a specific genre is propitious from many standpoints for reading the tales. Formal reading, focusing on the structure of the work, is the heritage of structuralism, which still has avid proponents. As the *Nights* has been considered folk narrative, it has been predominantly studied as popular literature; however, as Marzolph argues, it had an undeniable influence on both Western literature and art and also on European folk narrative:

> Similar to the impact of the *Nights* on literature and the arts, the impact on European folk narrative and folk narrative research is considerable. In fact, the *Nights* contributed to the discipline of folk narrative research in two decisive ways. First, they introduced European narrative fantasy of a 'whole new world' (see Disney's *Aladdin*) that, due to political circumstances, had hitherto been largely experienced as hostile. In consequence, both a veritable cult of 'A Thousand and Ones' and a literary mania for Orientalist settings in the telling of folk and fairy tales was inaugurated.[11]

Marzolph emphasizes that the shape of folk narrative research, understood as a comparative historical discipline concerned with a perception of the world in terms of narrative culture, is indebted to the permanent influence of the *Arabian Nights*.[12] In his comparative folk narrative research, Marzolph notes the existence of the *Nights* in such works as Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale*, El-Shamy's *Motif-Index of the Arabian Nights*, and the self-edited *The Encyclopaedia of The Arabian Nights*. Although he acknowledges, at the end of the article, that there is another approach to the tales apart from the folklorist's one, he only briefly mentions two names, those of Mia Gerhardt and Robert Irwin, commenting that these writers

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10 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire: Sex, Love, and Death in the 1001 Nights*. London 2002, p. 30.

11 U. Marzolph: "The Arabian Nights in Comparative Folk Narrative Research." In: *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives From East & West*. Eds. Y. Yamanaka, T. Nishio. London-New York 2006, p. 5.

12 Ibidem, p. 7.

"drew attention to the *Arabian Nights* simply analysing the work as 'serious literature.'"[13] Unfortunately, neither does the author explain why he simply analyses the tales as, to use his phrase, non-serious literature nor does he give a definition or his own understanding of serious/non-serious literature nor an explanation for why the *Nights* should not be analysed as serious literature, while the inverted commas suggest his ironical attitude towards the issue. Positing a belief in a dichotomised division into serious/unserious, or high/low, literature is a bit dubious since the boundaries between them seem to be unclear.

Irwin, referring to the presence of the *Nights* in the above-mentioned *The Types of the Folktale*, elucidates:

> However, though there is some overlap between Arab popular literature and the European folk-tale, Aarne's story-type classification was designed to trace relationships of borrowing and descent from European folklore. It was not designed to accommodate works of Arab literature. [...] Returning to the story-type and motif-indices as they actually exist, their relevance to the study of the *Nights* is limited. First, the *Nights*, at best, only partly is a collection of folk-tales. It is to a significant extent a deliberate literary composition, drawing on other, older literary compositions. Secondly, the *Nights* was compiled in the Semitic culture era, and, as has been noted, Aarne's and Thompson's typology of stories was not intended for the study of Semitic folklore.[14]

Criticising the arbitrariness and limitations of the folklorists' taxonomical approach, Irwin proposes to study the *Nights* comparatively, looking for differences rather than superficial sameness of motifs. The literary folklorists, like the structuralists, studied the texts without referring to their social or cultural contexts but focusing primarily on the structure of the text itself.

Although the analytic works of Vladimir Propp are significant steps in the analysis of folk and fairy tales, his writing possesses the quality of being devoid of socio-cultural analysis of the context, which is a pivot for not only myth or fairy tales studies but also for any texts of culture, and in particular is crucial for the analysis of *The Arabian Nights* as the work is situated on the borders of cultures. In the "Introduction" to Propp's *Theory and History of Folklore*, Anatoly Liberman stresses that Propp was the first literary folklorist who in his syntagmatic structural analysis noted the

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13 Ibidem, p. 12.

14 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*. London 1994, p. 217.

need for segmenting and regrouping certain patterns.[15] Propp, according to Liberman, made an attempt to "discover the structure of the tale,"[16] but his analysis was limited to the comparison of the functions of the tales, not the tales themselves. Since the reappearance of certain motifs could only be analysed through their functions, the literary folklorist study became, to use Alan Dundes' phrase, "as sterile as motif-hunting and word-counting."[17] Drawing on Propp and Lévi-Strauss, in his introduction to the second edition to *The Morphology of the Folktale*, Dundes accentuates the major difference between syntagmatic and paradigmatic approach as "the concern or lack of concern with context,"[18] and he praises Lévi-Strauss for his attempt at collocating "the paradigms he finds in myth to the world at large, that is, to other aspects of culture such as cosmology and world view."[19] Bertel Nathorst, on the other hand, drawing on Lévi-Strauss, explains that "a myth is thus […] to be regarded as a corrupted text whose correct arrangement has to be established."[20] The foregoing definition reflects also the nineteenth-century understanding of the editors and translators of the tales who regarded the *Nights* as a corrupted text as well, and they did attempt to re-establish its arrangement, but also its contents, registers, and language.

Although Propp, as Dundes notes, "limited his analysis to only one kind of the folktale, that is to Aarne-Thompson tale types 300–749,"[21] *Morphology of the Folktale* has been used in reference to the analysis of various kinds of folk tales. One might make an attempt to analyse the *Nights* drawing on Propp's method. However, apart from a certain incongruence in that method due to the author's Eurocentrism, the idiosyncrasy of the *Nights* suggests the impossibility of making all the tales conform to Propp's categories. For instance, Propp, in referring to the functions of tales, argues that "the sequence of functions is always identical,"[22] which is not applicable to all the tales of the *Nights* that have unhappy endings. As Irwin stresses, "for example, the tales of the first, second and third dervishes are surely tales of wonder and magic, but they all end unhappily. In these sto-

15 A. Liberman: "Introduction." In: V. Propp: *Theory and History of Folklore*. Trans. A. Y. Martin. Manchester 1984, p. xxviii.

16 Ibidem, p. xxxv.

17 A. Dundes: "Introduction." In: V. Propp: *Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans. L. Scott. Austin 2003, p. xii.

18 Ibidem.

19 Ibidem, p. xiii.

20 B. Nathorst: *Formal or Traditional Studies of Traditional Tales*. Stockholm 1969, p. 43.

21 A. Dundes: "Introduction"…, p. xiv.

22 V. Propp: *Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans. L. Scott. Austin 2003, p. 22.

ries there is no return home, no happy marriage, no restitution of a lack: quite the contrary, the bearers of these stories are celibate mendicants, all of whom have lost an eye."[23] Secondly, Propp, arguing that "functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled,"[24] leaves no space for the characters whose functions change together with the development of the plot of the tale. Moreover, as Irwin notes, Propp's categories do not accommodate all the tales of the *Nights* where the protagonists are female characters, performing leading and often very active and diverse functions.[25]

Tzvetan Todorov posited a different approach than Propp, as "he sought to provide a generative grammar for restricted literary genres. *The Grammaire du Decameron* (1969) sets out to investigate the constituent parts of the 'language' of Boccaccio's stories."[26] Drawing on the formalists and the Prague School, Todorov examines the literary genre of the fantastic in which he occasionally refers to *The Arabian Nights*. In his "Foreword" to *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Robert Scholes asserts that although Todorov is called Mr. Structuralism, he is first and foremost a poetician and only after that a structuralist.[27] In the chapter "The Uncanny and the Marvellous" Todorov, elucidating the difference between the marvellous and the fairy tale, claims that the fairy tale is only one example of the marvellous and that the demarcation line between the two lies not in the supernatural but in the peculiarity of writing that characterizes fairy tales.[28] Referring to *The Arabian Nights* in terms of classifying the book in a genre, Todorov opts for classifying the *Nights* as marvellous tales rather than fairy tales.[29] This classification of the *Nights* once again only partially corresponds to the tales, as not all of them can be subscribed under the genre of the marvellous. This position is also supported by Irwin who, referring to Todorov's division into hyperbolic, exotic, instrumental, and scientific marvellous, writes:

> Todorov's typology of the marvellous fits some stories well enough, but it is difficult to see how it fits, say, 'The Tale of the Hunchback,' 'The Sleeper and the Awakened' or 'The Mock Caliph'. At times it

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23 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 224.

24 V. Propp: *Morphology of the Folktale...*, p. 21.

25 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 224.

26 Ibidem, p. 225.

27 R. Scholes: "Foreword." In: T. Todorov: *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. R. Howard. New York 1975, p. ix.

28 T. Todorov: *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach...*, p. 54.

29 Ibidem.

> is hard not to feel that Todorov gets results not so much from his methodology as from close readings intellectually conducted – as in account of 'The Second Dervish's Tale'. In this story, which Todorov characterizes as a story about metamorphoses and magical powers, Todorov interprets the jinn who turns the man into a monkey as the personification of that man's bad luck. Supernatural often stands for fate or happenstance in the *Nights* stories.[30]

A structural approach is also detectable among some works of the literary critics who analyse *The Arabian Nights* in particular, such as Ferial Ghazoul's *The Arabian Nights: A Structural Analysis*, David Pinault's *Story-telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights*, and Mia Gerhardt's *The Art of Story-telling: A Literary Study of The Thousand and One Nights*. Ghazoul attempts to analyse the *Nights* through binary pairs and bricologe;[31] Pinault concentrates on orality and storytelling, trying to find out how the story is told and what narrative techniques are used; Gerhardt, on the other hand, focuses on classifying the genres of the tales, their structure and material.

Apart from formal or structural studies of fairy tales and myths we can also differentiate a psychological and sociohistorical approach. Psychoanalysis has been used as a useful method of interpreting the fairy tales. Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, famously analyses fairy tales through the prism of a psychological approach, assuming that fairy tales can be interpreted similarly to dreams, in Freudian terms, "as having a latent as well as manifest content."[32] Bettelheim devotes two chapters in his book to *The Arabian Nights:* "'Sindbad the Seaman and Sindbad the Porter': Fancy versus Reality," and "The Frame Story of *Thousand and One Nights*."[33] In one of them he analyses the Frame Story of the cycle, showing that Scheherazade functions as a psychoanalyst and the king as her patient; in the other, he analyses the tale of Sindbad, interpreting Sindbad the Landsman as the ego and Sindbad the Seaman as the id.[34] A similar approach is taken by Daniel Beaumont who, in *Slave of Desire: Sex, Love and Death in the 1001 Nights*, analyses such issues as love, desire, sex, the double, mirrors, and death, drawing on such works as Freud's *The Pleasure Principle* and Lacan's *Écrits* and *Seminars.* His work is a fascinating insight into *The Arabian Nights*,

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30 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 228.

31 Ibidem, p. 229.

32 Ibidem, p. 232.

33 B. Bettelheim: *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales.* London 1976, pp. 83–89.

34 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 232.

however, it is heavily indebted to psychoanalysis and even an entire chapter is devoted to an overview of Lacan.[35]

Psychoanalysts tend to analyse fairy tales and myths, however, they are hardly concerned with studying specifically the *Nights*. Thus, although Erich Fromm's *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of the Fairy Tales and Myths* or Gustav Jung's *Four Archetypes* and many other important works are valuable contributions to the analysis of fairy tales and myths through psychoanalysis, these works do not analyse nor even refer to the *Nights*, and hence cannot be included in contemporary interdisciplinary research concerning the tales. However, there are some exceptions, such as Joseph Campbell who in his study *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* analyses "The tale of Kamar al-Zaman."[36] Irwin, classifying Campbell as a Jungian mythographer, suggests that he reads Kamar al-Zaman as a figure similarly to Moses or Krishna and believes that "the Jungian formation apart, the influence of Propp on Campbell is perhaps also detectable"[37]; Steven Swann Jones, on the other hand, notes that Campbell

> adopts Jung's concept of the exploration of the unconscious by fairy tale protagonists. He analyses how various fairy tales, among other narratives, illustrate the confrontation of basic fears and anxieties (about parent figures, approaching sexual maturation and responsibilities, death) through their symbolic imagery. He emphasizes how the plots of most fairy tales may be seen as depicting a psychological process (which Jung identified and labelled integration and individuation), which involves the reconciliation of the conscious and unconscious minds by means of a direct exploration by the protagonist of the hidden context of the unconscious mind. According to this theory, by symbolically facing the exaggerated fears of the unconscious, the fairy tale protagonist learns to accept and overcome them.[38]

The theory adumbrated above can be applied to many tales of the *Nights* and in particular to the Frame Story, as Shahriyar, the vengeful king, has

35 See D. Beaumont: "The Imaginary, the Symbolic, the and Real: An Overview of Lacan." In: *Slave of Desire: Sex, Love, and Death in the 1001 Nights.* London 2002, pp. 32–42 .

36 See J. Campbell: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* New York 1968, pp. 65–68, 74–77, 226–230.

37 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 234.

38 S. S. Jones: *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination*. London 2002, pp. 129–130.

to face his fears of the unconscious and Scheherazade functions as both the storyteller and the protagonist who through the art of storytelling lets the king accept and overcome his fears.

A psychological approach to the interpretation of fairy tales and myths has undeniable significance; however, to quote Irwin, "it is hard to believe that the secrets of any medieval Arab tale can only be unlocked with the help of a twentieth-century western psychological theory."[39] Additionally, ascribing only one approach to the analysis of the *Nights* would be pernicious as the beauty of its complexity may be palpably revealed through the praxis of an interdisciplinary approach. Apart from a psychological approach to the *Nights*, we can also differentiate a sociohistorical and, last but not least, a feminist approach. To quote Swann Jones referring to these approaches: "[they] are linked in that way to connect fairy tales to the value systems and cultural proclivities of the communities in which the tales circulate. From this perspective, the tales are seen as reflections of (as well as promulgators of) cultural norms."[40] Among the writers who have adopted a sociohistorical approach in studying fairy tales Jack Zipes needs to be mentioned. Although he does not analyse the *Nights* in particular, his studies are important in terms of the cultural interpretation of fairy tales. The author of such books as *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, *Fairy Tale as Myth: Myth as Fairy Tale*, and *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, Zipes is also the editor of one of the editions of Burton's translation of the tales, entitled *The Arabian Nights: The Marvels and Wonders of the Thousand and One Nights*.

Steven Swann Jones, in his book *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination*, which analyses the folklore origin, definition and also thematic core and literary history of fairy tales, occasionally refers to the *Arabian Nights*. Dividing folk narrative into myths, legends and folktales, Swann Jones defines fairy tales as magical tales and, among fables, jokes and novellas, as a subgenre of folktales.[41] He does not classify *The Arabian Nights* in any terms; he mentions the tales for the first time when referring to the tale "Alladin's Lamp" as an example of the fairy tale in which the magic element is not noticed by the protagonists.[42] The next reference to *The Arabian Nights* takes place in the chapter "The Literary History of the Fairy Tales" in which, drawing on Thompson's *One Hundred Favourite Folktales*, the author writes about the fairy tale motif in the following way: "This tricky acquisition of a magic object occurs widely in many of the classic

39 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 233.
40 S. S. Jones: *The Fairy Tale…*, p. 133.
41 Ibidem.
42 Ibidem, p. 13.

fairy tales collections, such as *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, or *The Thousand and One Nights*."[43] Here Swann Jones makes an egregious mistake by including the tales in a genre of, in his words, classic fairy tales collections, as it is clear that *The Arabian Nights* is neither a classic nor any other kind of collection of fairy tales. However, further in the same chapter, he acknowledges that *The Thousand and One Nights* "has been reworked in a decidedly literary fashion, [...] the style of the narrative and sometimes even the elements and motifs employed to relate the plots are far removed from the folk tradition and resemble more the third form of fairy tales, literary creations."[44] It is odd that this awareness does not prevent the author from misclassifying the tales as a bunch of classic fairy tales.

There are not many writers who undertake a sociohistorical approach and whose studies are devoted to *The Arabian Nights*. However, there has been a few significant contributions, such as Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, Eva Sallis's *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass: The Metamorphosis of The Thousand and One Nights*, Rana Kabbani's *Europe*'s *Myths of Orient*, Richard van Leeuwen's *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel and Transformation,* and Yuriko Yamanaka's and Tetsuo Nishio's *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from the East and West*. These writers perceive the *Nights* as a complex cycle: emphasizing intertextuality and the diversity of the tales, they do not focus on their textuality as much as on their cultural aspects. As far as a feminist approach is concerned, there are many studies devoted to fairy tales in general, and studies analysing the works of such authors as Angela Carter who, through the art of subversion, rewrite popular fairy tales. However, to my knowledge there is only one scholar who concentrates on the *Nights* with a feminist approach. Fatima Mernissi, in her book *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*, which was written after a journey across Europe to promote her memoir *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, analyses such issues as sexuality and Oriental identity. Her study, and also some studies of Islamic feminists such as Leila Ahmed, the author of *Women and Gender in Islam*, will be useful in analysis of the tales through the prism of feminist approach.

The quest for depicting the origins, numerous translations, generic space, and finally, the diverse status of *The Arabian Nights* in contemporary writing, aims at demonstrating the hybridity of the tales and also at encapsulating and collating the variety of approaches. Introducing comparative reading of the nineteenth-century translations of the tales, it is our aim to locate the book within the context of interdisciplinary research. A cul-

43 Ibidem, p. 35.

44 Ibidem, p. 38.

tural and diverse approach towards *The Thousand and One Nights*, situated between the East and West and constituting a medley of conventions and genres, seems to be an attempt to resuscitate its spirit which apparently is often suppressed by deployment of a restricted homogenous approach.

Nomadic Tales: The Origins and History of *The Thousand and One Nights*

> To erect the palace of *The Thousand and One Nights*, it took generations of men, and those men are our benefactors, as we have inherited this inexhaustible book, this book capable of so much metamorphosis.
>
> J. L. Borges: *Seven Nights*

The Book of Thousand and One Nights has inspired people since the times of its creation, which are thought to be in the ninth century. Readers of various cultural backgrounds but also storytellers, writers, and translators have fallen under the charm of the tales. The idiosyncratic feature of *The Arabian Nights* is its complexity, evinced in the aspects of the narrative and characters, but most obviously concerning its creation and the plethora of translations of the tales, as before the book appeared in the Western world it underwent many transformations on the level of oral and written transmission.

Storytelling has been a constant ritual in Arabic culture; medieval societies had a custom of gathering and sharing experience, communally listening to storytellers telling their tales, which were of two genres: "khurāhāt – fairy tales and asmār – evening narrative-recitations."[45] *The Arabian Nights* was very popular in the medieval Arabic society; it circulated among Eastern countries and constantly changed its shape. The *Nights* fostered the imagination of countless enchanted storytellers who, to quote Walter Benjamin's words, "letting the wick of [their] life be consumed by the gentle flame of [their] stories,"[46] contributed to development and metamorphoses of the cycle. Orality and storytelling laid the foundations for the emergence, transmission, and development of the tales. Being a part of oral tradition, the tales became transformed into oral literature. The "anachronistic and self-contradictory term 'oral literature'"[47] seems to fit well to the shape of the book as it is plausible to consider the

45 D. Pinault: *Story-telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights*. Leiden 1992, p. 3.
46 W. Benjamin: *Illuminations*. Trans. H. Zohn. London 1970, pp. 108–109.
47 W. J. Ong: *Orality and Literacy*. London 1995, p. 13.

literary text of the *Nights* a reflection of Eastern oral tradition. Although a complete identification of oral literature with a heritage of oral tradition would be an oversimplification. Walter Ong's viewpoint, comparing the whole concept of oral literature to "horses as automobiles without wheels,"[48] seems to be too peremptory. Interestingly enough, the *Nights* itself refers to the oral transmission of the tales, as David Pinault argues: "*The Alf laylah* text occasionally discloses other allusions to its oral performance background as in the passage from the tale of *Maryam the Christian*. It implies the presence of a reciter and an audience of listeners rather than a relationship of a writer and reader."[49]

What is interesting about the transformation of oral tradition and the first manuscript versions of the tales, is the tales' Arabic origin, supposedly based on the appropriation and transformation of a Persian collection entitled the *Hazâr Afsânah*, meaning literally the thousand stories.[50] While many critics mention only the Persian layer of the *Arabian Nights*, Eva Sallis argues that appropriation of the *Hazâr Afsânah* meant the arabisation and rewriting of the stories. Sallis' argument is significant, as it seems that *The Thousand and One Nights*, which is said to be the substantially transformed "Other," also transformed the "Other," as the *Nights* transformed the Persian text and encapsulated its contents, meaning its adaptation to medieval Arabic culture. Daniel Beaumont, on the other hand, argues that *The Arabian Nights* is *sui generis*, as there is no literature comparable to it. Elucidating this view, he emphasizes that the book "seems to have absorbed a number of once independent medieval Arabic fictions; the story of Sindbad is probably the most famous example. The borders of this text were not, it seems, ever well defined."[51] As Sallis speaks of transformation and rewriting of the Persian tales and Beaumont mentions absorptions of medieval Arabic literature, it may be argued that *The Arabian Nights* was constantly changing its shape transforming itself into the "Other," but at the same time, transforming the "Other."

It seems apparent that the transformations of *The Arabian Nights* started long before its European translations since "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 myriad authors and scribes, ages, cities and the fictionalized traces of

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48 Ibidem, p. 12.

49 D. Pinault: *Story-telling Techniques...*, p. 14.

50 After E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass: The Metamorphosis of The Thousand and One Nights*. Surrey 1999, p. 2.

51 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire: Sex, Love, and Death in the 1001 Nights*. London 2002, p. 16.

many peoples, ranging from a nomadic pre-Islamic world to the mercantile sophisticated world of the great trade and cultural interest."[52] The journey that the tales underwent from their oral transmission up to the first Arabic manuscripts commences with the first mention of *The Arabian Nights*, which dates from the ninth century, and the Frame Story with Scheherazade as the narrator of the cycle comes from the tenth century.[53] Between the ninth and fifteenth centuries several Arabic manuscripts, containing mainly Persian or Indo-Persian tales which nowadays constitute a small part of the cycle, were the pivot of *The Arabian Nights*. At the times of creating the first manuscripts the tales were still transmitted orally and underwent various transformations as there was no canonical version of them, hence many different storytellers influenced its shape by incorporating new elements or "editing" the existent ones. In unknown circumstances *The Arabian Nights* appeared in Egypt in the eleventh century and underwent subsequent changes as many tales were added to the cycle and a substantial number of tales were transformed. After the appearance of the tales in Egypt their popularity steadily grew. The *Nights* is said to have obtained its contemporary title, *Kitab alf lajla wa lajla* (*The Book of the Thousand and One Nights*), or *Alf lajla wa lajla* (*Thousand and One Nights*), in twelfth-century Egypt[54] where the book was incorporated in various manuscripts, as, to quote Pinault, "*Alf laylah* was never a static or fixed collection […] it continued to grow until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries."[55]

The critics enumerate four nineteenth-century Arabic editions of the tales: Calcutta I, Bulaq, Breslau and Calcutta II.[56] The first Arabic translation of the tales did not appear until 1835, and like most of the forthcoming editions, it was based on the Bulaq edition. However, before the famous Bulaq version edited by Zotenberg, which according to the scholars became unwarrantedly the canonical version of *The Arabian Nights*,[57] the first European translation of the tales was completed. The translator, Antoine Galland, translated the tales into French in 1704. Although Irwin states that "Galland's decorous aim in translating the *Nights* was not so much to

52 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, p. 2.

53 After T. Lewicki: "Wstęp". W: *Księga tysiąca i jednej nocy*. Warszawa 1974, t. 1, p. 15.

54 Ibidem, p. 16.

55 D. Pinault: *Story-telling Techniques…*, p. 6.

56 After R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*. London 1994, p. 6. For detailed descriptions of the editions refer to T. Lewicki: "Wstęp". W: *Księga tysiąca i jednej nocy*. Warszawa 1974, and M. Gerhardt: *The Art of Storytelling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights*. Leiden 1963.

57 See T. Lewicki: "Wstęp"…, p. 22.

transcribe accurately the real texture of medieval Arab prose, as to rescue from it items which he judged would please the salons of eighteenth-century France,"[58] Galland's translation was acclaimed by many critics as one of the best European translations of the tales until the appearance of the latest version edited by Muhsin Mahdi and translated by Husain Haddawy.

During the century before the appearance of the Bulaq first edition, Galland's Arabic manuscript and French translation aroused great interest among Arabic, but even more among European, writers and translators. To quote Tadeusz Lewicki: "The fairy-tale medieval Muslim Orient, fantastic plot and undeniable folklore of the tales, caused the nights not only to be read by the enlightened parts of the society, but they also became inseparable from European folklore, where they were repeated, rewritten, and perpetuated in simple, common literature and children's literature."[59] *The Arabian Nights* became widely popular in Western culture and from the eighteenth century both Eastern and Western translators were concurrently working on versions of translations. In the nineteenth century the number of Arabic manuscripts that laid foundations for the three Arabic editions was substantial and European translations were numerous. It is interesting to note the alleged interdependence of Arabic and European editions. A few stories, namely "The Ebony Horse," "Aladdin" and "Ali Baba," as Irwin argues, "[have] not been found in any surviving Arabic manuscript written before Galland's translation of the *Nights* was published. [They] may have been translations into Arabic of Galland's original French prose."[60] What is more, it may be argued that Arabic manuscripts were partially written for the demand of fascinated Europeans who, as Beaumont notes, "wanted a book with literally one thousand and one nights of stories. […] The result was the creation of Arabic manuscripts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that delivered more nights and more stories."[61] That would mean not only interdependence between European and Arabic versions of the tales but also Western influence on the transformation of *The Arabian Nights* even on the level of creating the Arabic manuscripts.

It may seem surprising that the Arabic editions of the *Nights* appeared a century after the first European translation. However, *The Thousand and One Nights* had an anomalous position in medieval Arabic literature[62] and

58 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 19.

59 T. Lewicki: "Wstęp"…, p. 5.

60 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, pp. 18–19.

61 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire…*, p. 22.

62 The position of *The Arabian Nights* in medieval Arabic literature is broadly discussed in: *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*. Eds. R.G.

the late appearance of a printed edition of the book is not surprising. The reception of the *Nights* was unfavourable and the book was perceived as mere folk literature. *The Nights* was not included in canonical Arabic literature. A condescending attitude towards the cycle resulted in superficial knowledge of the book. The relationship between medieval Arabic literature and *The Arabian Nights* was uncertain; it was excluded from the canon, but at the same time, it was a part of medieval Arabic tradition. The function the book performed in the Arabic society may be compared to the function of the abject in contemporary society. Kristeva defines the abject in the following way, "[it] has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*. Abject, […] the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws toward the place where the meaning collapses."[63] Her understanding of the abject correlates with the predicament of *The Arabian Nights* in Arabic literature. The book belonged to "second-rate literature, far from scholarly literature."[64] It did not fit in the medieval canons of Arabic literature, as Beaumont notes: "[…] there was no generic space for the tales as they were clearly fictional."[65] Its language was vernacular, inappropriate and sometimes vulgar, hence not surprisingly many Arabic editors and also European translators attempted to smooth out the language or replace colloquial expressions with more subtle ones. As a result, *The Arabian Nights* displays a medley of language registers, a peculiar mix of language which is indicative of considerable heterogeneity. As Beaumont notes, the *Nights* was not classified among the medieval canons of Arabic literature due to "the subject matter"[66] as some of the tales containing descriptions of sexual behaviours were found offensive. Thus, the *Nights* until recently functioned in Arabic countries as the abject, something that "does not respect the boundaries, […] beseeches and pulverizes the subject."[67] Interestingly, the *Nights*, both in the East and the West, was traditionally perceived as the "Other"; in the Arabic countries, where the book originated, it did not fit the canonical literature, hence it functioned as the abject. In Western cultures, on the other hand, it was perceived as the Other because it was Oriental, exotic, and different to

Hovaninisian, G. Sabagh. Cambridge 1997; and in J. Bielawski: *Klasyczna literatura arabska*. Warszawa 1995, pp. 292–306.

63 J. Kristeva: "Approaching Abjection." In: *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. L.S. Roudiez. New York 1982, p. 2.

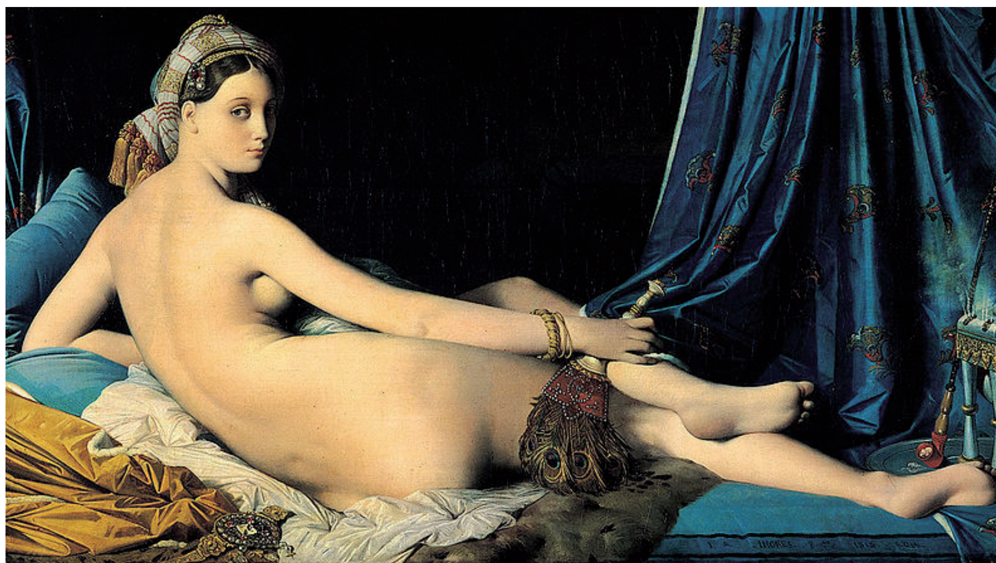
64 A. Miquel: "The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society." In: *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*. Eds. R.G. Hovaninisian, G. Sabagh. Cambridge 1997, p. 8.

65 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire…*, p. 29.

66 Ibidem, p. 30.

67 N. McAfee: *Julia Kristeva*. New York 2004, p. 46.

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque*, 1814



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the Same. Incongruence and indeterminacy have been pivotal features of *The Arabian Nights*.

At the same time, the baffling status of *The Thousand and One Nights* as the marginalized abject seems not to be a drawback for Beaumont. On the contrary, he argues that "as a marginalized work in medieval Arabic literature […] it escaped the self-censorship of more typical narrative works, and from the outset its pages are filled with desire and ideas that are rarely articulated elsewhere in literature."[68] The reception of the tales was substantially different in the West, where they appeared together with the already-mentioned first European translation. The tales, bearing no author(s) and being in a constant state of flux on a never-ending journey through cultures, can be classified as nomadic literature, as neither the East nor West has ever been their "home."

Translations of *The Arabian Nights* or Mythologization of the Orient?

> If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thru' narrow chinks of his cavern.
>
> W. Blake: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

> All English versions of the Arabian Nights, even Edward Powys Mathers's which is taken intirely from the French of J.C. Mardrus, display the same rose-water tint. French, German, Italian, English renditions of Japanese haiku are intimately related and come out in a hushed monotone. In other words: the more remote the linguistic-cultural source, the easier it is to achieve a summary penetration and a transfer of stylized, codiefied markers.
>
> G. Steiner: *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*

The emergence of the tales on the European literary stage was a cornerstone for the metamorphoses of *The Thousand and One Nights*. In order to facilitate understanding of complexity and diversity of translations of *The Arabian Nights* and also interdependence among particular translations, it is necessary to bring the reader closer to the issue by showing the idiosyncratic features of the European translations and also indicating their similarities and disparities. As the appearance of Galland's translation commenced with soaring interest in the Orient perceived as the Other, I argue that by means of several European translations

68 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire…*, p. 31.

of *The Arabian Nights* the Other was appropriated, distorted, and finally mythologized.

In his essay "On Translatability," Wolfgang Iser argues that the issue of translatability is "a key concept for understanding encounters between cultures and interactions within cultures [...] it implies translation of otherness without subsuming it under preconceived notions."[69] In the case of the *Nights* the issue of translatability is also a key concept for understanding that translations of the "Oriental" otherness subsumed variety of preconceived notions and indicated the cultural hegemony of Western culture over the invented Orient, to use Edward Said's well-known phrase. The process of transforming the *Nights* through translations was facilitated by the facts that the book has no author(s) and that there exist the three already-mentioned Arabic manuscripts which, to quote Irwin, "give vaguely similar but significantly different versions of what is presumably the same tale [...]"[70] so the field for heterogeneity of translations remains open.

The first European translation by Antoine Galland, who is considered by some to be the real author of the tales,[71] had a great impact on its later permutations. As Pinault notes, "Galland was in possession of a certain fourteenth-century text of the *Alf Laylah* known as Bibliothèque Nationale [which] was the basis for his French translation"[72]; his translation is said to have a larger number of stories than the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript contains, to contain some stories invented by Galland himself, such as "Aladdin," "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," "Prince Ahmed and his Two Sisters," and "The Ebony Horse." As has been indicated in the previous subchapter, these tales did not appear in any Arabic manuscript existing before the French translation.[73] If one adopts this view, Galland seems to have been not only a translator, but also one of the "authors" of the *Nights*. His translation of the *Nights* is representative of translating the tales by means of the appropriation and incorporation that later became a subject for subsequent changes, as Sallis remarks: "[...] 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."[74] This initial translation of the *Nights* coincided with growing fascination with the Orient, a

69 W. Iser: "On Translatability." In: *Surfaces.* Available HTTP: http://www.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/vol4/iser.html (accessed 17 February 2007).

70 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, pp. 13–14.

71 Ibidem, p. 14.

72 D. Pinault: *Story-telling Techniques...*, p. 6.

73 R. Irwin, *The Arabian Nights*, pp. 16–17.

74 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass...*, p. 2.

time when the Oriental tale became popular; hence the primary focus of translators was to romanticize and mythologize the Other. Irwin, in *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, notes similarities between the translators and "beautiful infidels":

> During the French Renaissance, humanist translators of the literature of classical antiquity – the so-called 'beautiful infidels' – had argued that good taste took precedence over strict accuracy in translation. Galland's decorous aim in translating the *Nights* was not so much to transcribe accurately the real texture of medieval Arab prose, as to rescue from it items which he judged would please the salons of eighteenth-century France. Therefore, the barbarous and the overly exotic were toned down or edited out. The gallant and the pleasing were stressed or inserted.[75]

In his elaborate study on the translations of the *Nights*, Muhsin Mahdi criticises Galland's translation as being partly fabricated; he also criticizes the beauty of infidelity of his translation, for he writes: "Infidelity to the original may result in originality and creativity, but it also may derive from ignorance, laziness, and incompetence."[76] It seems, though, that Galland's infidelity of translation is not so much indicative of ignorance and incompetence as it is an expression of originality and creativity understood as "improving" the original. Galland's translation seems to be an outcome of his journeys to the Orient, his fascination with the unknown Other and the urge to understand the Other through his own filter of perception. As Sallis emphasizes, "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."[77] Galland's translation, possessing features of appropriation, unfaithfulness, and incorporation, indeed to some extent reflects the ignorance of the translator. However, at the same time, through his ignorance and incompetence, he is in a way original and creative and his *Nights* is an example of "discovering" the Orient which, to quote Said, "was almost a European invention"[78] and thus of creation of a romanticized myth of an exotic Oriental tale. The process of translation, is characterized not only by losses but also by gains, to quote Salman Rushdie, "It is normally supposed that something gets lost

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75 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 19.

76 M. Mahdi: *The Thousand and One Nights.* Trans. H. Haddawy. Leiden 1995, p. 34.

77 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, p. 2.

78 E. Said: *Orientalism*. London 1995, p. 1.

in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained."[79] Galland's translation is very much a medley of losses and gains though. For Tadeusz Lewicki, Galland is not only the translator but also the narrator and at the same time the co-author of the tales on the level of their European transformations.

Mahdi, whose Arabic manuscript is estimated to have contained only two hundred eighty two tales, criticises Galland for his manipulations in collating precisely a thousand and one tales, and emphasizes the ramifications of Galland's work:

> This practice encouraged later generations of unscrupulous scribes, editors, and translators to follow his footsteps and fabricate originals and "more complete" translations. Taken as a whole, his twelve-volume *Nuits*, which he pretended was a translation of "the Arabic original" is in fact literary fiction, even though certain parts of it, those rendering the contents of his three-volume manuscript in particular, are more or less reasonable translations or imitations of stories from the *Nights*. He was responsible also for initiating a long tradition of translation by authors who saw fit to fabricate more and more "complete" versions of the *Nights*, not to mention charlatans seeking a reputation for themselves by duping the reading public.[80]

Mahdi, who is very harsh in his critique of Galland's translation, is right to argue that one ramification of the first European translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* was the emergence on the literary scene a of plethora of further translators. As Sallis argues, "Galland did something more than redefine the possible boundaries of the *Nights*. He stripped them down to the pleasing essentials for his times. [...] Galland built something new – so new, delightful, refreshing that it revitalized the literature of his culture and also guaranteed the ultimate renewal of the new life of the *Nights* themselves. That the *Nights* were reworked, retranslated and redefined was inevitable."[81]

Since European translations flourished after the publication of Galland's translation, the translations of the *Nights* reflect a maze of mesmerized translators who either managed to translate the tales or who only attempted to translate them; but there are also instances of fab-

79 S. Rushdie: "Imaginary Homelands." In: *Imaginary Homelands: Essays in Criticism 1981–1991*. London-New Delhi 1991, p. 17.

80 M. Mahdi: *The Thousand and One Nights...*, p. 23.

81 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass...*, pp. 49–50.

ricating the manuscripts. One of the most astonishing translations is that of Maximilian Habicht, who published the eight-volume *Tausend und Eine Nacht* between the years 1828–1838; his edition was completed with four more volumes by H.L. Fleischer in the years 1842–1843.[82] The peculiarity of his translation is due to the Arabic manuscript he allegedly collated for the purpose of translation. Most critics[83] maintain that the so-called Tunisian manuscript, which was supposedly the basis for Habicht's translation, never existed. Irwin believes that Habicht's translation is "a patch of various manuscripts […] is only one of a number of 'ghost manuscripts,' whose alleged existence has bedevilled the study of what is in any case the complex story of transmission of the *Nights*."[84] In this view a literary myth was created on the basis of an imagined manuscript from Tunis.[85]

Although there are many other peculiar translations like Habicht's, for the purpose this study we will briefly discuss only the most significant English translations of the *Nights*, starting with that of Edward William Lane. In the first place his three-volume translation, published in 1841, is not a complete edition but a selection of tales. It differs from Galland's translation because Lane used the Bulaq manuscript as his main text, and also referred to the Breslau and Calcutta texts.[86] Lane's translation is characterized by idiosyncratic quasi-scientific notes, such as the following in which the translator refers to other manuscripts:

> NOTE 1. This story is not in the edition of Cairo, nor in the MS. of the *Thousand and One Nights* from which Galland translated, though he has introduced it in his version; and I am not aware of its being found in any copy of that work, except the one from which the Breslau edition lot printed. From these circumstances, and from my having discovered that its chief and best portion is a historical anecdote, related as a fact. I am inclined to think that it is not a genuine tale of the *Thousand and One Nights*, and that it has been inserted in some copies of that work (perhaps only in one), to supply a deficiency. But as it exists in one copy, and is one of the best tales in Galland's version. I have gladly given it a place in the present col-

82 After T. Lewicki: "Wstęp"…, p. 23.

83 See T. Lewicki: "Wstęp"…; M. Gerhardt: *The Art of Storytelling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights*; and R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*.

84 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 22.

85 After T. Lewicki: "Wstęp"…, p. 23.

86 E. Sallis: *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, p. 50.

> lection. The place which it occupies in the order of the *Nights*, in the edition of Breslau, I have mentioned at the head of this chapter; but in the order of the *Tales* in that edition, it follows the story of Es-Sindibád of the Sea and Es-Sindibád of the Land.[87]

Such notes are typical of Lane's translation, as his main objective was, to quote Kabbani, "the need to appear truthful [so] he wished to present his evidence in a way that would ensure it full credence."[88] In the extensive notes to each chapter of his translation Lane often refers to other manuscripts of the *Nights* and willingly shares his knowledge with the reader on the customs and manners of the Easterners, often referring to his book *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836). The notes, in which Lane tries to enlighten the Western reader with his historical or sociological remarks, seem to be just numerous as the tales. To give an example, chapter ten of the second volume of Lane's translation, consisting of three stories and a conclusion, is about one hundred-thirty pages long and includes one hundred-fifty seven notes which take up twenty-three pages.

Lane's translation was another step in discovering the Orient; as Kabbani argues, his contribution to the tradition of conceptualizing the Orient is vital.[89] Lane attempts to be an expert on the Eastern culture; he often explains various issues with reference to his own experience or opinion, as here:

> NOTE 17. The Egyptian thieves are notorious for their dexterity, and often escape by plunging with their booty into the Nile. Of this trick I experienced an instance.[90]
>
> NOTE 142. Thy whole description of the costume, manners, and expressions, of the hypocritical old woman in this tale is admirably just.[91]

Apart from an urge to share with the reader his opinion, Lane also informs us of his knowledge concerning various sociological aspects even when he himself admits to not knowing certain issues: "NOTE 2. So in the

87 E. W. LANE, trans.: *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments.* Ed. E. S. POOLE. London 1883, vol. 2, p. 335, Questia. Available HTTP: http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=58360779 (accessed 28 August 2007).

88 R. KABBANI: *Europe's Myths of Orient...*, p. 38.

89 Ibidem, p. 39.

90 E. W. LANE: *The Thousand and One Nights...*, vol. 2, p. 449.

91 Ibidem, p. 220.

two editions of Cairo and Breslau; but what a white emerald is I know not. Perhaps the word which I have rendered 'white' may here signify 'bright.'"[92]

Kabbani, arguing that his translation is only a pretext for a long sociological discourse on the East,[93] is right to claim that "Lane could not help falling victim to the common distortion of selectivity – of choosing to stress mainly what would interest a Western reader."[94] Lane rewrote the tales in such a way that they would not "offend" a Victorian reader, and also omitted certain fragments in case they might have been perceived as too vulgar or insulting. His narrative, to paraphrase Kabbani, is relatively genteel, conforming to the ethical codes of middle class morality;[95] there are many instances when Lane not only omits certain fragments of the manuscript, but he also informs the reader of this practise:

> FOOTNOTE 9. In the original are a few introductory words, which I omit because they are inappropriate.[96]
>
> FOOTNOTE 10. I think it [is] right to omit a description of the particulars of this case, respecting which there are various different assertions.[97]
>
> NOTE 40. As I am not desirous of expatiating here on this subject [divorce], if any reader require further information respecting it, I beg to refer him to my work on the Modern Egyptians, vol. i. ch. vi.[98]
>
> NOTE 117. Here it becomes necessary to mention, that many anecdotes are inserted among the longer stories of the *Thousand and One Nights*. They are chiefly, I believe, extracted from other works, and many are historical; but most of them are very inferior in interest to the longer stories; and, from a hasty perusal of them, I found that it would be advisable to omit, in my translation, the greater number; introducing the rest in their proper places, but appending them to my notes.[99]

The fragments omitted by Lane often concerned such issues as sexual practices, protagonists' immoral behaviour, and descriptions of cruelty. Irwin notes that Lane "rewrote or expurgated sections which he thought

92 Ibidem, p. 380.
93 R. Kabbani: *Europe's Myths of Orient…*, p. 37.
94 Ibidem, p. 38.
95 Ibidem, p. 45.
96 E. W. Lane: *The Thousand and One Nights…*, vol. 2, p. 360.
97 Ibidem, p. 360.
98 Ibidem, p. 288.
99 Ibidem, p. 294.

unsuitable for childish or virginal ears. Not only did he prudishly censor his text, but in cases where he considered stories to be boring, repetitive or incomprehensible he omitted them too."[100] Sallis, arguing that although Lane's translation is readable and clear in style, it is substantially edited and bowdlerised, also notes that "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. Hence, in Lane's translation the voice of Sheherazade herself is seen 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."[101] His translation is not only deprived of the narrator's voice and division of nights but it is also characterized by a lack of the poetry that is prevalent in the *Nights* as all the poems are rendered in prose.

Lane's successor in English translation of the *Nights* was John Payne, who in the years 1882–1884 published a nine-volume text based on the Macnaghten, so-called Calcutta II text, though he also referred to the Bulaq and the Breslau texts.[102] Payne's translation, which is well regarded by critics, among other features retains the division of nights and translates the poetry. Sallis, claiming that Payne "sadly leaves off the formal division of nights,"[103] is mistaken since as the following citations indicate, unlike Lane's translation, Payne's text does contain the division of nights:

> And when it was the second night
> Dunyazad said to her sister Shehrzad, "O my sister, finish us thy story of the merchant and the genie." "With all my heart," answered she, "if the King give me leave." The king bade her "Say on."[104]

> When it was the hundred and forty-sixth night, Shehrzad began as follows: "I have heard tell, O August King, that
> STORY OF THE BIRDS AND BEASTS AND THE SON OF ADAM.
> A peacock once abode with his mate on the sea-shore, [...]."[105]

100 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 25.

101 E. Sallis: *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass...*, p. 51.

102 Ibidem, p. 53.

103 Ibidem, p. 54.

104 J. Payne, trans.: *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights and a Night*. London 1901, vol. 1, p. 16, Project Gutenberg. Available HTTP: http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/8655 (accessed 23 August 2007).

105 Ibidem, vol. 3, p. 3.

As can be seen, there is a division of nights in Payne's translation. The outline of the cited fragments was not changed in order to indicate that the nights' sequence is either sectioned of from the main text, as in the first citation, or is incorporated into the text for the sake of the title of the story, but in neither case it is not omitted.

Payne does not display a marked propensity for explicating things, as Irwin writes: "[he] thought of his translation as a work of literature, and not some kind of encyclopaedia of oriental manners and customs. Therefore he did not trouble to provide any annotations."[106] In his preface to the translation, Payne corroborates Irwin's view, writing that his intention is "a purely literary work produced with the sole object of supplying the general body of a fairly representative and characteristic version of the most famous work of narrative fiction in existence."[107] Sallis, who believes that Payne's is the best full English translation, emphasizes that although his translation is not a complete version, it is governed by the principle of inclusion and not selection.[108] Although Payne's translation is generally appreciated by scholars as accurate, the translator has been criticised for indulging a passion for obscure and archaic words and for cutting out the erotic scenes unless they were found in all three Arabic manuscripts.[109] This passion for unusual words was shared by Sir Richard Francis Burton, who not only helped Payne to translate parts of the text, but also made his own translation based to some degree on plagiarization of Payne.[110] Burton's translation gained substantial popularity. If the translator did not have access to Payne's work, his translation could have been the most popular English text of the *Nights*.

In his prefatory note, Payne expresses his gratitude to Burton for his knowledge of the language and customs of the Arabs and for revising his translation;[111] he also places his name at the head of his last volume of translation of the *Nights*. Burton, on the other hand, does not express gratitude to Payne; he refers to him with the following words:

> I wrote to the "Athenaeum" and to Mr. Payne, who was wholly unconscious that we were engaged on the same work, and freely offered him precedence and possession of the field till no longer

106 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 27.

107 J. Payne: *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights and a Night…*, vol. 1, p. 1.

108 E. Sallis: *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, p. 54.

109 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 28.

110 E. Sallis: *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, p. 55.

111 J. Payne: "Prefatory Note." In: *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights and a Night…*, vol. 1, p. 1.

> wanted. He accepted my offer frankly. [...] Mr. John Payne has printed for the Villon Society and for private circulation only, the first and sole complete translation of the great compendium, 'comprising about four times as much matter as that of Galland, and three times as much as that of any other translator';[112] and I cannot but feel proud that he has honoured me with the dedication of *The Book of The Thousand Nights and One Night.*[113]

According to critics, Burton's text is very much dependent on Payne's, but surprisingly it was Payne who felt indebted to Burton. Sallis notes a dependency between the two translations but sees also positive aspects of Burton's translation, that of "recreating the *saj*, or rhymed prose, in English."[114] Irwin, on the other hand, emphasizes that Burton's, as he writes, "translation depends closely on Payne's earlier version, though Burton went to tiresome lengths to conceal this."[115] Irwin's comparative analysis of the two translations indicates that there are stories translated by Burton which are not included in Payne's text, and it seems that translating these stories was difficult for Burton. As Payne's text was translated before Burton's, it appears that it is the latter who with an effort at concealment tries to imitate the predecessor's translations. On the other hand, Burton translated some supplementary nights before Payne and Irwin argues that those stories in Payne's text are very similar to Burton's translations. It seems evident that the two translations are interdependent and although it was Burton who imitated Payne, the latter's was not an independent translation either.

Burton's translation, apart from the question of its authenticity and its likely derivative nature, is characterized by a number of peculiarities. First of all, the reader's attention is riveted to the text's language. His language seems to be difficult and strange; his predilection for the use of archaic words is explicit. The process of reading his translation of the *Nights* is almost Sisyphean labour. His language has been severely criticised, described by Sallis as "mock archaic,"[116] by Irwin as "mock-Gothic, combining elements from Middle English, the Authorized Version of the Bible and

112 Burton quotes here Payne's words from his "Prefatory Note," however, he does not acknowledge the fact.

113 R.F. Burton: "The Translator's Foreword." In: *The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night*, vol. 1, pp. 7–9, Project Gutenberg. Available http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3435 (accessed 23 August 2007).

114 E. Sallis: *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass...*, p. 55.

115 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 30.

116 E. Sallis: *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass...*, p. 58.

Jacobean drama."[117] There are similarities between Payne's and Burton's language; however, the language used by the translator of the *Kama Sutra* employs a broader spectrum of vocabulary and is also more exaggerated.

Like Lane, and in contrast to Payne, Burton wrote extensive footnotes and he also sustained the division of nights. Sallis proposes that his footnotes function as an expression of his personality, his own authorial presence, "as Burton creates his own identity and place in the text."[118] Burton's footnotes, however, do not constitute a sociological discourse in the sense that Lane's do. His annotations largely focus on the spheres of eroticism, sexuality, racism, and misogyny as Kabbani argues:

> Burton had broken the Victorian taboo of masking sexuality. Yet he managed to do so only by speaking of sexuality in a removed setting – the East. His was a language of enumeration of perversions, deviations, excesses. [...] His footnotes to the *Arabian Nights* were often irrelevant to the text they were annotating, mere additions for the purposes of entertainment, erotic highlights of a sort. [...] Burton used the *Arabian Nights* to express himself, to articulate his sexual preoccupation. He made it serve as an occasion for documenting all manner of sexual deviation.[119]

Through his notes Burton himself became popular, as mesmerized readers were curious who the author of this "translation" was. His readers were, to quote Kabbani, "a leisured male audience desiring erudite titillation."[120] Burton, who thought of himself as an expert on sex and the Orient (for him somehow intertwined issues), has also been severely criticised as the "translator" of the *Nights*. Irwin, for example, describes Burton's notes as obtrusive and often supernumerary; he accentuates the translator's prejudice, racism, and misogyny.[121] To give a brief sample of the translator's racism and prejudice we will present one excerpt of Burton's translation and one footnote. The first is well-known among the scholars studying the *Nights*; it is a citation from the Frame Story portraying the king's wife's lover, who is described in most translations as "a black slave." Burton, however, writes the following: "a big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous

117 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 30.

118 E. Sallis: *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass...*, p. 56.

119 R. Kabbani: *Europe's Myths of Orient...*, pp. 53–60.

120 Ibidem, p. 55.

121 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, pp. 34–35.

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque with a Slave*, 1839–1840

Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museum, USA © Bridgeman Art Library

sight."[122] Burton's evident racism is conflated with often-expressed misogyny, as is indicated by the following footnote:

> [FN#7] Debauched women prefer negroes on account of the size of their parts. I measured one man in Somali-land who, when quiescent, numbered nearly six inches. This is a characteristic of the negro race and of African animals; e.g. the horse; whereas the pure Arab, man and beast, is below the average of Europe; one of the best proofs by the by, that the Egyptian is not an Asiatic, but a negro partially white-washed. Moreover, these imposing parts do not increase proportionally during erection; consequently, the "deed of kind" takes a much longer time and adds greatly to the woman's enjoyment. In my time no honest Hindi Moslem would take his women-folk to Zanzibar on account of the huge attractions and enormous temptations there and thereby offered to them. Upon the subject of Imsák (retention of semen and "prolongation of pleasure"), I shall find it necessary to say more.[123]

Burton's translation, which is saturated with similar annotations, was a cornerstone of the "discovery" of the Orient and fuelled the Victorian society with the myth of the exotic, sexually insatiable, and perverted Other. Kabbani notes that the *Nights* "helped to perpetuate the Victorian notion of promiscuous Eastern women, and Burton's translation in particular gave added substance to the myth,"[124] The citations from Burton's translation and his footnotes indicate that his perception of the Orient was that of a sexual domain that was to be colonized. Burton's translation, which is to a great degree responsible for mythologizing the Orient, reshaping the Other for the sake of indulgence of the translator's fantasy, is crucial for the present argument.

From a chronological point of view Burton's successor, among European translators, was J.C. Mardrus, who in the years 1900–1904 published his sixteen-volume French translation (translated into English by Powys Mathers in 1923). Mardrus's translation is characterized by the division of nights, translated poetry and a continuation of Burton's perception of the Orient. His translation is held to be a free interpretation, as it possesses the features of exaggerating, inventing, and reshaping, and even inserting whole new stories.[125] Irwin argues that "his version of the Arabian tales

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122 R.F. Burton: *The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night…*, vol. 1, p. 15.
123 Ibidem, p. 157.
124 R. Kabbani: *Europe's Myths of Orient…*, p. 51.
125 After R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 37.

was a belated product of *fin-de-siècle* taste, a portrait of a fantasy Orient, compounded of opium reveries, jewelled dissipation, lost paradises, melancholy opulence and odalisques pining in gilded cages."[126] Sallis, who excoriates Mardrus's translation, writes that his text is soft pornography and that "the translations speaks to a culture and gender-specific club, offering sexual titillation and pleasure along with an unsubtle cultural sneer."[127] Irwin, on the other hand, notes that Mathers made a good English translation of Mardrus's text; however, he doubts whether the effort was worthwile.

Last to be considered here is Muhsin Mahdi's edition of the ninth century manuscript (the antecedent of Galland's manuscript) and its English translation, rendered by Husain Haddawy. Mahdi, who considers his edition the stable core of the *Nights*, deploys his argument in order to criticise previous editors and translators. In his study devoted to *The Arabian Nights*, Mahdi argues for establishing the archetype and the original derived from it.[128] A strategy of finding a so-called archetype and expunging all divergent editions and translations is problematic. A search for the archetype of *The Arabian Nights*, which never possessed an unquestionable pivot, or permanent shape, appeared in various countries in different manuscripts, seems futile. What sort of archetype could it be, when the *Nights*, before being permuted as editions, appeared often simultaneously in different Arabic countries, and transformed and appropriated other tales already on the level of manuscripts? Likewise, it is risky to take for granted the position that the oldest manuscript of the *Nights* is its archetype. Hence, to dispense with the search for an archetype for the sake of discovering similarities and disparities between the translations, accentuating the texts' multiculturality, complexity and heterogeneity, and also tracing the influence of the *Nights* on Occidental culture, is an approach which has been taken by many critics whose attitude towards Mahdi's viewpoint is polemical. Since *The Thousand and One Nights* is a book without authors and has been in a constant state of flux from the era of oral transmission down to the present, I share the position of Sallis, Kabbani, Irwin and other critics, who argue that all existing editions and translations should be taken into account. Sallis, for example, commenting on Mahdi's viewpoint, doubts whether "we should look for a pure prototype at all in a textual history in which impurity and chaotic growth seem to be the only constant features."[129]

126 Ibidem, p. 38.

127 E. Sallis: *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass*..., p. 61.

128 M. Mahdi: *The Thousand and One Nights*..., p. 3.

129 E. Sallis: *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass*..., p. 36.

Haddawy's translation, based on the so-called original manuscript edited by Mahdi, is esteemed by critics as highly readable. Irwin calls it accurate and a pleasure to read but does not recommend it for readers searching for a true impression of the style or art of the stories.[130] The translation consists of only two hundred seventy-one stories; however, there is a division of the nights. The number of tales retained in the cycle is a ramification of Mahdi's view that the longer versions of *The Thousand and One Nights* were forged or fabricated for the purpose of European demand. As has been indicated earlier in this book, it is unquestionable that European culture influenced the shape of Arabic manuscripts published after Galland's translation. Hence I would argue whether the *Nights* is, as Andrè Miquel suggests in his article, "the product of a society over several centuries."[131] It is much more, as *The Arabian Nights* is a product not only of various societies (as it is difficult to speak of all Arabic countries as a homogenous society), but also, to a certain extent, of both Eastern and Western cultures.

As has been indicated, *The Arabian Nights* is an example of idiosyncrasies with its complexity and heterogeneity on the level of oral transmission, edition and translations. The translations of the *Nights* were cornerstones in the process of the metamorphoses of the tales. *The Arabian Nights*, being a medley of conventions, registers, and styles, can be summarised as an exceptional work of literature. Although, as it has been emphasized, the translations of the *Nights* are indicative of appropriation, distortion and finally mythologization of the Other, all the translations should be acknowledged, as through a comparative analysis of the versions it is attainable to accentuate the work's plurality, diversity, and complexity, and finally to trace some multicultural influences. We can speak of intertextuality of translations of *The Arabian Nights*, as particular translations refer to or depend on one another.

Taking into consideration the main interest or aim of the translators, regarding the effect they meant to achieve, the translations have been depicted in the following way: "Galland is for the nursery, Lane is for the library, Payne for the study and Burton for the sewers."[132] In *Translation Studies* Susan Bassnett, analysing Victorian translations, writes that they are indicative of "a deliberately contrived foreignness to the target

130 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 41.

131 A. Miquel: "The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic literature and society." In: *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*. Eds. R.C. Hovanissian, G. Sabagh. Cambridge 1989, p. 9.

132 H. Reeve: "Edinburgh Review." In: The *Arabian Nights: A Companion*. Ed. R. Irwin. London 1994, p. 36.

language text, […] and [are] full of archaisms of forms and language."[133] Bassnett, referring to J.M. Cohen's[134] idea of "a fundamental error" in the theory of Victorian translation based on "conveying remoteness of time and place through the use of a mock antique language,"[135] compares the archaising principle to an attempt to "colonize" the past.[136] The nineteenth-century English translations of *The Arabian Nights* painstakingly colonize and to a great extent orientalize the Other. However, instead of trying to express a conjecture as to which translation and manuscript are the prototypes of the book, I shall attempt rather to anatomize its complex status and trace its permutations.

The Thousand and One Nights and Orientalism

> The world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident.
>
> E. W. Said: *Orientalism*

> *The Arabian Nights* played a decisive role in forming the general image of the Islamic Middle East in Europe. It was three hundred years ago that the *Nights* left its homeland to be regenerated and transformed in the Orientalist climate of Europe, and subsequently, to become one of the masterpieces of world literature.
>
> Y. Yamanaka, T. Nishio: *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West*

The previous subchapter raises the issue of cultural aspects of the European translations of *The Arabian Nights*. By adumbrating the heterogeneity and plurality of the translations, it was my intention to indicate that European translations of the *Nights* were cultural constructs providing their readers with a mythologized vision of the Orient. This subchapter intends to indicate that the translations of *The Thousand and One Nights* are intrinsically bound up with the rise of the discourse of Orientalism. A comparative analysis of the translations of the *Nights* and nineteenth-century fiction and poetry inspired by the book reveals interdependence between the European *Nights* and Orientalism. However, scholars studying the *Nights* seem not to have noticed the pervasive cultural influence of the translations on Orientalist discourse. Moreover, critics engaged in

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133 S. Bassnett: *The Translation Studies Reader*. London 1998, pp. 71–72.
134 Refer to J.M. Cohen: *English Translators and Translations*. London 1962.
135 S. Bassnett: *The Translation Studies Reader…*, p. 72.
136 Ibidem.

the debate on Orientalism overlook some significant issues of direct relationship between nineteenth-century Orientalism and resuscitation of the spirit of the *Nights*.

Anticipating the discussion of the interrelation between the *Nights* and Orientalism, it is first necessary to introduce the issue of Orientalism itself. It is not our intention to provide the reader with a history of Orientalism, as the discourse itself has been analysed by a host of literary theorists, sociologists, and historians. However, as our focal interest is to analyse the propinquity of the *Nights* and Orientalism, it will be helpful to refer to some critics who have written about Orientalism in connection with *The Arabian Nights*. The very term "Orientalism" is almost subconsciously linked with the name of Edward Said, author of canonical work *Orientalism* which has inspired a myriad critics and drawn enormous interest. Although thirty years after its first edition appeared, the book has still many avid proponents, with passing of years it has attracted incremental criticism. Maya Jasanoff, reviewing Robert Irwin's book *Dangerous Knowledge*, a critique of Said's work, writes at the end of her review that "It is hard to imagine that any serious scholar in the humanities or social science today would embrace orientalism wholesale – in part for reasons Irwin suggests, but in part also because so many of its insights have been absorbed, developed and in some ways surpassed."[137] One can encounter a plethora of criticisms ranging from mild to very hostile comments on Said's book. Ibn Warraq, in his *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism*, inveighs against Said, accusing him of charlatanry and dishonesty,[138] and writing numerous critical and sometimes erroneous comments such as the following one: "His method derives from the work of French intellectual and theorists. Existentialists, structuralists, deconstructionists, and postmodernists all postulate grandiose theories, but, unfortunately these are based on flimsy historical or empirical foundations. […] This tradition was carried on by Michel Foucault, surely one of the great charlatans of modern times."[139] The latter remark is controversial, to put it mildly, and there are many similar surprising remarks in Warraq's book. On the other hand, Bill Ashroft and Pal Ahluwalia, in the book *Edward Said*, discuss *Orientalism*, declaring that "to historians he [Said] is unhistorical;

137 M. Jassanoff: "Review of Robert Irwin Dangerous Knowledge." In: *Middle East Studies in the News Before and After Said*. London 2006, p. 3, Middle East Studies. Available http://www.campus-watch.org/article/id/2997 (accessed 1 August 2008).

138 I. Warraq: *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism*. New York 2007, p. 299.

139 Ibidem, p. 245.

to social scientists he conflates theories; to scholars he is unscholarly; to literary theorists he is unreflective and indiscriminate; to Foucaultians he misuses Foucault; to professional Marxists he is anti-revolutionary; to professional conservatives he is a terrorist."[140]

Among the perennial criticisms of Said's work are several often discussed issues. The points of convergence concern, first of all, Said's understanding of the Orient and Occident as homogenous constructs, his perception of the two cultures in terms of a binary pair; his inconsistency in assuming that Orientalism and the Orient are a set of representations or misrepresentations, endorsement of an idea of a "real" Orient intertwined with implications that there is not such a phenomenon; misuse of Foucault's notion of a discourse, espousing criticism of Orientalism, however, without offering an alternative discourse; and perceiving Orientalism through the lens of imperialism and colonialism, and focusing only on European eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalism.[141] These assertions delineate some fallacious arguments in Said's theory; however, his work still inspires and motivates the interest of such renowned scholars as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Bhabha, instead of confining himself to criticism of Said's work, uses his theory and goes further than his predecessor, introducing the notion of ambivalence to the colonial discourse theory.[142] Bhabha perceives Said's analysis as "revealing of, and relevant to, colonial discourse."[143] Said's concept of the Other is also congruent with Spivak's notion of the "Other as the Self shadow"[144] and with her understanding of the subaltern. Criticised by his opponents, nevertheless Said is classified as, apart from Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the most important figures in colonial discourse theory.

The author of *Culture and Imperialism*, in attempting to delineate the scope of Orientalism and Orientalist structures and restructures, as critics emphasize, focuses his interest only on British and French eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalism. He analyses the works of well-known Orientalists, and often refers to Burton and Lane, not as the translators of the *Nights* but as the authors of other books, such as Burton's

140 B. Ashcroft, P. Ahluwalia: *Edward Said*. New York 2001, p. 70.

141 For a detailed criticism of Edward Said's *Orientalism* refer to: B.B. Mohanty: *Edward W. Said's Orientalism: A Critique*. New Delhi 2005; A.L. Macfie: *Orientalism*. London 2002; A.L. Macfie, ed.: *Orientalism: A Reader*. Edinburgh 2000; J. Mackenzie: *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*. Manchester 1995.

142 H.K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*. London 1994, p. 86.

143 Ibidem, p. 71.

144 G.C. Spivak: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In: *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Eds. P. Williams, L. Chrisman. New York 1994, p. 75.

Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madinah and Meccah and Lane's *Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians*.[145] He perceives these works and also Flaubert's *Salammbô*, Lamartine's *Voyage en Orient* and Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire* as offspring of the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt.[146] Warraq, in his *Defending the West: A Critique of Said's Orientalism*, does not see a point of convergence between these works and Napoleon's occupation of Egypt. For him the works of Burton and Lane are "both highly accurate accounts based on personal, firsthand experience. They are not imitations of anything. [...] Burton's observations are still quoted for their scientific value in such scholarly works as F.E. Peter's *The Hajj*."[147] The "scientific value" of Burton's observations expressed in *The Arabian Nights* and in its footnotes has been already discussed in the previous subchapter. However, it is tempting to share with the reader the author's subsequent observation concerning Eastern culture, divulged in his "Terminal Essay," found in the tenth volume of the *Nights*. There Burton writes:

> Our Arab at his worst is a mere barbarian who has not forgotten the savage. He is a model mixture of childishness and astuteness, of simplicity and cunning, concealing levity of mind under solemnity of aspect. His stolid instinctive conservatism grovels before the tyrant rule of routine, despite that turbulent and licentious independence which ever suggests revolt against the ruler; his mental torpidity, founded upon physical indolence, renders immediate action and all manner of exertion distasteful; his conscious weakness shows itself in overweening arrogance and intolerance. His crass and self-satisfied ignorance makes him glorify the most ignoble superstitions, while acts of revolting savagery are the natural results of a malignant fanatism and a furious hatred of every creed beyond the pale of Al-Islam.[148]

The scientific value of the translator of *Kama Sutra* observations are, mildly speaking, dubious, but surprisingly both Said and his avid critic, Warraq, praise Burton and Lane, and also neither writer observes propinquity between the *Nights* and Orientalism.

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145 E. W. Said: *Orientalism*. London 2003, p. 88.

146 Ibidem.

147 I. Warraq: *Defending the West...*, pp. 20–21.

148 R. F. Burton: "Terminal Essay." In: *The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night*, vol. 10, pp. 33–34, Project Gutenberg. Available http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3435 (accessed 23 August 2007).

Ferdinand Victor Eugene Delacroix, *The Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, 1834

Louvre, Paris, France © Bridgeman Art Library

In his *Orientalism,* drawing on Raymond Schwab and Pierro Martino, A.L. Macfie assumes that "the rise of Orientalism as a profession may be dated from the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century, when a number of British and French scholars [...] began the translation of a series of Hindu texts, many from the original Sanskrit."[149] In the subchapter devoted to the rise of Oriental studies in France, he writes that "in 1704–08 Antoine Galland published a translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, a work which, more than any other, promoted an exotic image of the orient in Europe."[150] The significance of the translations of the *Nights* is also noted by Mohammed Sharafuddin, the author of *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient*. Sharaffudin, drawing on Landor's *Gebir*, Southey's *Thalaba*, Moore's *Lalla Rookh*, and Byron's "Turkish Tales," examines the emergence of Orientalism, but as he emphasizes, "in an opposing approach to Said's 'realistic Orientalism.'"[151] Analysing the rise and scope of Romantic Orientalism, he refers to the tradition of translation and, as he notes, "two texts in particular need to be mentioned: the *Koran* and the *Arabian Nights*, both of which played a major part in defining the cultural and religious relations between West and East."[152] Sharafuddin posits that the *Nights* rejuvenated European literature and resuscitated a myriad of "Oriental tales":

> Admittedly, Galland's work tailored the original of European taste: but the character of the original could not be suppressed – notably its emotional and erotic freedom, its oriental 'pagan' settings, its use of magic narratives. It certainly helps to explain the rapid growth of the 'oriental tale' genre in the 18th century: for example, Petis de la Croix's *Turkish Tales* (1770), and *The Persian Tales*, Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), Jean-Paul Bignon's *The Adventures of Abdalla, Son of Hanif* (1729), Voltaire's *Zadig* (1749), and across the Channel, Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) and Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* (1762).[153]

The interdependence between eighteenth-century European literature and *The Arabian Nights* is noted by Barfoot, who, in the article "English Romantic Poets and the 'Free-Floating Orient,'" writes:

149 A.L. Macfie: *Orientalism...*, p. 25.

150 Ibidem, p. 32.

151 M. Sharafuddin: "Introduction." In: *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient*. London 1994, p. xviii.

152 Ibidem, p. xxviii.

153 Ibidem, p. xxx.

> The English Romantic poets, writing in the 1790s and the first two decades of the nineteenth century, were familiar with, receptive to and influenced by a great deal of the 'oriental' literature, mainly prose, which had become so popular at all levels in the eighteenth century. The first key date is 1704 when the appearance of the first part of *Les Mille et une nuits* made the tales from *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* available to Western readers for the first time in Antoine Galland's French translation. [...] There followed in the eighteenth century many Arabic and oriental tales, either influenced directly by the French or English versions of the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, or by the French fashion for exotic tales from the East.[154]

The Arabian Nights' three idiosyncratic features has always been its fluidity, the ineluctable metamorphosis of the cycle, and its incontestable influence on Western literature and culture. Although some of the literary critics studying the *Nights* or works inspired by it, such as Barfoot or Sharafuddin, observe its pervasive influence on the perception and image of the Orient, the scholars, tackling the trajectory of Orientalist discourse, tend not to acknowledge the interdependence between upsurging interest in the European translations of the *Nights* and the rise of nineteenth-century Orientalism.

In *Orientalism* Said overlooks the significance of the translations of *The Arabian Nights*. Occasionally referring only to *Modern Egyptians*, Said locates Lane's book within the space of Orientalist discourse and describes it as influential. Elucidating the book's popularity and reckoning Lane as an important author, Said belittles the *Nights'* influence, although the heralds of literary activity and fascination with the Orient were the translation of this book and the *Koran*. In the context of Lane and *The Arabian Nights*, Said writes only the following:

> Lane's two other major works, his never-completed Arabic lexicon and his uninspired translation of the *Arabian Nights*, consolidated the system of knowledge inaugurated by *Modern Egyptians*. In both of his later works his individuality has disappeared entirely as a creative presence, as of course has the very idea of a narrative work. Lane the man appears only in the official persona of annotator and retranslator (the *Nights*) and impersonal lexicographer. From being an author contemporary with his subject matter, Lane

154 C. C. Barfoot: "English Romantic Poets and the 'Free-Floating Orient.'" In: *Oriental Prospects: Western Literature and the Lure of the East*. Eds. C. C. Barfoot, T. D'haen. Amsterdam 1998, pp. 65–66.

> became – as Orientalist scholar of classical Arabic and classical Islam – its survivor.[155]

Minimising the significance of Lane as the translator of the canonical and influential book, Said espouses the trajectory of analysis of Orientalist discourse without entering a debate on the significance of the *Nights*. Analysing the works of Sir Richard Burton, Said treats his readers to similar succinct comments concerning Burton as the translator of the *Nights* to the remarks he devoted to Lane. Encapsulating information about Burton's *Nights* in a few sentences, Said asserts only the following:

> Everything Burton wrote testifies to his combativeness, rarely with more candid attempt for his opponents than in the preface to his translation of the *Arabian Nights*. He seems to have taken a special sort of infantile pleasure in demonstrating that he knew more than any professional scholar, that he had acquired many more details than they had, that he could handle the material with more wit and tact and freshness than they. […] Every one of Burton's footnotes, whether in the *Pilgrimage* or in his translation of the *Arabian Nights* (the same is true of his "Terminal Essay" for it) was meant to be testimony to his victory over the sometimes scandalous system of Oriental knowledge, a system he had mastered himself.[156]

Although Said acknowledges Burton's authorial presence in the *Nights*, he does not note a point of convergence between the popularity of the book, the personas of the narrators and its impact on Orientalism. Said's decision not to inscribe in his analysis the *Nights*, a book with such a strong influence in creating the image of the East, may have been an egregious mistake, but it conforms with his theory of Orientalist discourse as a Western construct.

To our knowledge, the only book wholly concerned with the relationship between the tales and Orientalist discourse is *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West*. The book comprises three parts: "Motifs and Formulas," "Sources and Influences," and "Text and Image." Yuriko Yamanaka and Tetsuo Nishio, the editors of the book, emphasize in their introduction, "The Imagined Other and the Reflected Self," that: "the translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, later more commonly called *The Arabian Nights*, was an epochal event which triggered of the European fascination for *orientalia*, and consequently the phenomenon of

155 E. W. Said: *Orientalism…*, p. 164.

156 Ibidem, pp. 194–196.

what is now termed 'Orientalism.'"[157] Nevertheless, the articles contained in the book do not completely reflect this apt observation. Although the contents of the book include the neglected discourse of Oriental Orientalism, especially a Japanese perspective,[158] examples of Western Orientalism, and analyses of several motifs of the *Nights*, the contributors fail to depict the *Nights* holistically in Orientalist discourse.

In the introduction to the book Irwin posits that "a reading of *Arabian Nights and Orientalism* is likely to suggest that the relationship between Orientalism and the *Arabian Nights* and between Western Orientalism and Oriental Orientalism has been more nuanced and more complex and, perhaps, less wholly malign than the critics quoted above have suggested."[159] The critics Irwin refers to are Rana Kabbani, the author of *Europe's Myths of Orient* and Ziauddin Sardar, the author of *Orientalism: Concept of Social Sciences*. Irwin, alluding to Kabbani's concept of the Orient as a product of the Western imagination, and Sardar's assumption that *The Arabian Nights* legitimised and institutionalised Orientalism,[160] asserts that these views are "attractive in their simplicity."[161] Although Irwin, positing that the relationship between *The Arabian Nights* and Orientalism, and between Western Orientalism and Oriental Orientalism, is nuanced and complex, observes that Orientalism is a heterogeneous construct and intermingles different discourses, he seems not to collate the rise of nineteenth-century Western Orientalism with the European translations of the *Nights*.

In his *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, Irwin writes that "neglected until modern times in the Near East *The Arabian Nights* has been so widely and frequently translated into western languages that, despite the Arab antecedents of the tales, it is a little tempting to consider the *Nights* as primarily a work of European literature."[162] In his new book *For Lust of Knowing: the Orientalists and their Enemies*, Irwin also raises the issue of Orientalism and *The Arabian Nights* but once again only perfunctorily. For instance, he acknowledges that, "Galland's subsequent publication of a translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* into French further increased

157 Y. Yamanaka, T. Nishio, eds.: "Introduction: The Imagined Other and the Reflected Self." In: *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West*. London 2006, p. xv.

158 See H. Sugita: "The Arabian Nights in Modern Japan: A Brief Historical Sketch" and T. Nishio: "The Arabian Nights and Orientalism from a Japanese Perspective." In: *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West*. Eds. Y. Yamanaka, T. Nishio. London 2006.

159 R. Irwin: "Preface"..., pp. xi–xii.

160 Ibidem, p. xi.

161 Ibidem.

162 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights*..., p. 9.

general awareness of and in interest in Oriental culture."[163] Being aware that the translations of the *Nights* are an almost entirely Western construct, functioning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as one of the most popular books concerning the Orient, Irwin does not ascribe the rise of the Orientalist discourse to the tales although he notes that "the publication of the *Nights* inaugurated a mania for oriental stories, whether translated or made up."[164]

Said belittles both traditional Western Orientalism (existing before the post-Enlightenment period) and Oriental Orientalism. Adumbrating his monolithic vision of the Orient as a homogenous construct of the West, he limits his research to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalist discourse but avoids analysis of a work canonical for the discourse itself. Margaret Sironval, on the other hand, in her article "The Image of Scheherazade in French and English Editions of the *Thousand and one Nights*," writes in the following way about the image of Eastern culture in the West:

> Then came the *Nights*, which happily reunited the two components of this early Orientalism: reality and fiction. […] The East in fiction or in the *Nights* has been used as an image of the East. Now, it is Galland himself who introduces these two ways of looking. In his preface to the first volume of the *Nights*, Galland strongly contributes to mixing the two components. He writes, 'Thus without suffering the fatigue of going to look for these people in their countries, the reader will have the pleasure here, of seeing them act and hearing them speak.' […] The imagination is appealed to and confronted not with the reality of life in the East, but with one's own reality: that of a Western reader. We are already at the beginning of exoticism here. The invitation to the journey is left to the initiative of the reader and his own imagination.[165]

Having inaugurated an Oriental mania but neglected by Said and the critics of his *Orientalism*, the translations of *The Arabian Nights* had significant influence on Orientalist discourse. Said explains his understanding of the Orient and Orientalist discourse in the following way: "but the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study here deals principally, not with a

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163 R. Irwin: *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalist and Their Enemies.* London 2007, p. 114.

164 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 18.

165 M. Sironval: "The Image of Scheherazade in French and English Editions of the Thousand and One Nights." In: *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism*. Eds. Y. Yamanaka, T. Nishio. London 2006, p. 239.

correspondence between Orientalism and the Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient."[166] The translations of the *Nights* abound in ideas and images of the Orient, hence their correspondence to the Orient is parallel to the correspondence of Orientalism to the ideas about the Orient in its Saidian understanding. Notwithstanding Said's notion of a "real" Orient, we can summarise that the *Nights* has been a metaphor of the Orient with a strong influence and its significance for the rise of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western Orientalist discourse deserves greater attention.

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166 E. W. Said: *Orientalism…*, p. 5.

CHAPTER TWO

In Search of Ariadne's Thread: The Tales, Scheherazade(s), Odalisques and Termagants

The Frame Story as the Parergon

> The *Nights* is a maze, a web, a network, a river with infinite tributaries, a series of boxes within boxes, a bottomless pool. It turns endlessly on itself, a story about storytelling. And yet we feel it has to do with our essential nature, and just a need for idle entertainment.
>
> A.S. Byatt: *Narrate or Die: Why Scheherezade Keeps on Talking*

The Book of The Thousand and One Nights has been a source of inspiration for many Eastern and Western writers. As Daniel Beaumont notes, "The Frame Story of *The Thousand and One Nights*, The Story of King Shahriyar and the woman named Scheherazade, has probably drawn more comment and analysis in Western literary criticism than any other single piece of Arabic writing, including the Qur'an."[1] The Frame Story, which begins as a folktale describing the lives of two kings, focuses upon sex, power relations, debauchery, betrayal, and vengeance. Therefore it is not surprising that interest in *The Arabian Nights* is perennial, since the comic elements of the narrative, its indecency and an obsession with sexuality and power relations are already visible after reading the very first pages of the *Nights*.

The Frame Story, which is the first among an abundance of incipits in the *Nights*, is a foretaste of oceans of stories narrated by Scheherazade. In her book *The Art of Storytelling: A Literary Study of The Thousand and One*

1 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire: Sex, Love and Death in the 1001 Nights*. London 2002, p. 42.

Nights, Mia Gerhardt, differentiating between three types of frame stories (the entertaining frame, the time-gaining frame and the ransom frame), classifies the *Nights'* Frame Story as the time-gaining frame: "This pattern, apparently of Indian origin, is not indigenous in the '1001 Nights'; it is found only in a few stories that were adapted from the Persian. Nevertheless it occupies a place of unique importance, as it furnished the framework for the collection itself; Shahrazad temporizes by making one story follow another until at last she has gained her victory."[2] Drawing on similarities between the *Nights* and Jan Potocki's *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*, Leeuwen refers to the tradition of frame stories which "can be traced to the very beginnings of Arabic prose literature, in re-workings of collections of fables such as *Kalila wa-Dimma* and in *adab*-collections of various kinds."[3] Leeuwen also emphasizes that the frame gives a reader a perspective, a point of reference to read the enframed tales as a repetition or a transition of the frame story.

Pondering upon the tradition and significance of frame stories, it is necessary to discuss the relationship between the frame and enframed stories. In her view of *The Arabian Nights*, Gerhardt endorses the idea that the Frame Story has no firm structure because the framework does not function. According to her, Scheherazade's stories are "ill-adapted to the dangerous situation she had put herself in."[4] Gerhardt also believes that stories with the motif of infidelity with the negro slave prove that the enframed stories bear no relevance to the Frame Story; they result from the compilers' lack of effort "to interrelate stories and frame, [or] to keep alive the interest in the framing story itself."[5] This subchapter aims to show that, contrary to Gerhardt's view, the repetition of stories with an infidelity motif is an attempt to relate, to transform the Frame Story by means of ambivalence (in Bhabha's understanding of the term as repetition with difference). In his *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context*, Ferial Ghazoul, writing about reproducing the Frame Story, raises the concept of a runaway metonym. The runaway metonym refers to both the frame and enframed stories as "even when a story comes to an end, we see that the same issues are transferred to another, giving the impression of rotative symmetry. The relationship between the enframed and the fram-

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2 M. Gerhardt: *The Art of Storytelling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights*. Leiden 1963, p. 397.

3 R. Leeuwen: "The Art of Interruption: The Thousand and One Nights and Jan Potocki." In: *New Perspectives on Arabian Nights: Ideological Variations and Narrative Horizons*. Eds. W. O. Geert, J. Gelder. New York 2005, p. 52.

4 M. Gerhardt: *The Art of Storytelling…*, p. 399.

5 Ibidem.

ing is based on borrowing entire motifs, with hardly any elaboration. The relationship can be summed up as a figure which cannot be contained and keeps slipping from one narrative to another under the auspices of contiguity. The runaway metonym is both a technique of stretching and repetition, where the reader is allowed to move both forward and backward."[6] Sallis, drawing on Ghazoul's idea that the frame is more a filter for the enframed stories than a receptacle, writes that "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."[7] Sallis argues that both attitudes, ignoring the frame story or perceiving the tales as direct response to the tales, are equally false.[8]

The relationship between the frame and enframed stories seems to be more nuanced and complex than some scholars tend to admit. Therefore, if one adopts the view of reading the Frame Story and its relation to the enframed stories in terms of the Derridian parergon,[9] an interesting taxonomy appears in which the Frame Story does not function as mere literary replenishment. Derrida devotes substantial attention to the notion of the parergon in *The Truth in Painting*, where he defines it in the following way, "The parergon stands out both from the *ergon* (the work) and from the milieu, it stands out first of all like a figure on a ground. But it does not stand out in the same way as the work. The latter also stands out against the ground. But the parergonal frame stands out against two grounds [fonds], but with respect to each of those two grounds, it merges [se fond] into the other."[10] Just as the parergon is "the border or frame being both beside the work and part of the work,"[11] the Frame Story is, to a certain point, an independent narrative beside the *Nights*, but as the most important incipit, it is also a part of the *Nights*.

The Frame Story, as Ghazoul notes, comprises four independent narrative blocks: The Story of Shahriyar, The Voyage, The Story of Shahrzad and The Fable.[12] The plot is not a complex one; however, as was indicated in the subchapter on the translations of the *Nights*, significant differences between the translations are to be found already in the Frame Story. As far as the plot is concerned, the translations convey a similar story. The

6 F. J. Ghazoul: *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context*. Cairo 1996, p. 87.

7 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, p. 83.

8 Ibidem, p. 84.

9 For a detailed analysis of the notion of the parergon refer to J. Derrida: *The Truth in Painting*. Trans. G. Bennigton, I. McLeod. Chicago 1987, pp. 15–148.

10 J. Derrida: *The Truth in Painting…*, p. 61.

11 N. Royle: *Jacques Derrida*. New York 2004, p. 15.

12 F. Ghazoul: *Nocturnal Poetics…*, p. 19.

first narrative block tells a story about two brothers, King Shah Zaman and Shahriyar. The kings, both being betrayed by their unfaithful wives, slaughter the women and seek vengeance against women's malice. Infidelity, sexual triangles, and master-slave relationships are the key elements of the story which is "articulated primarily in the erotic code."[13] The differences occur in the language used in describing sexual behaviour and the lovers themselves. In Haddawy's translation, King Shah Zaman's wife is found in bed "lying in the arms of one of the kitchen boys,"[14] in Payne's text "in the arms of one of his black slaves,"[15] and in Burton's version with "a black cook of loathsome aspect and foul with kitchen grease and grime."[16] King Shahriyar's wife is observed by the two kings during sexual intercourse in the garden, where in Haddawy's translation,

> They made their ways under the trees until they stood below the palace window when the two kings sat. Then they took off their women's clothes, and suddenly there were ten slaves, who mounted the ten girls and made love to them. As for the lady, she called "Mas'ud, Mas'ud," and a black slave jumped from the tree to the ground, came to her, and said, "What do you want, you slut? Here is Mas'ud." She laughed and fell on her back, while the slave mounted her and like the others did business with her.[17]

Payne's description is very similar to Haddawy's. However, Burton's translation is again racist and exaggerated, as he writes: "[…] and then sprang with a drop leap from one of the trees a big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight. He walked boldly up to her and threw his arms round her neck while she embraced him warmly."[18] Apart from inscribing racist elements in this description, Burton also added the already-mentioned footnote 7, in which he explains the debauched women's preferences in size of the male penis.[19]

In all the translations infidelity takes place between the queen and a black slave, which adds an exotic attraction to the act of betrayal. Ghazoul proposes a symbolic reading of the incident as both the queens and the

13 Ibidem, p. 32.

14 M. Mahdi: *The Arabian Night.* Trans. H. Haddawy. New York 1995, p. 3.

15 J. Payne: *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night…*, vol. 1, p. 6.

16 R. F. Burton: *Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night…*, vol. 1, p. 15.

17 M. Mahdi: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 8.

18 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights…*, vol. 1, p. 15.

19 See page 46 for the complete footnote.

black slaves bear no names: "The anonymity here diminishes identity and makes a character more liable to be understood allegorically. […] The slave lover of Shahrayar's wife is called Mas'ud. But Mas'ud hardly functions as a personal name – an appellation that gives an individual identity to the character – since Mas'ud is the stereotypical name for a black person. In Arabic literature, and especially in oral traditions, blacks tend to have a form of 'Mas'ud' as a name."[20]

Central to the act of infidelity is also the place where it happens, which in the case of Shah Zaman is his own chamber in the palace. Shah Zaman's wife, having sex with another man, enclosed in the space of the palace chamber, deprives the king of his authority and destroys his ego when the king "[finds] the Queen, his wife, asleep on his own carpet bed embracing with both arms a black cook."[21] Shah Zaman's wife shows courage inviting a black cook to the king's chamber, a space permitted only for the king and his harem women. The second act of infidelity, involving Shahriyar's wife, takes place in the garden. The garden, which belongs to the palace, is situated outdoors. It is an open space permitted for the queen and the harem women, but also for the male slaves and eunuchs, hence it offers conducive conditions for seduction and fornication. In his appraising the significance of the garden as a place, Leeuwen, emphasizing that it is one space where women are allowed to enter without constraints, writes:

> As in the European tradition, in Islam gardens are considered as the representation of paradise on earth, with plenty of water, aromatic plants, an abundance of fruits and tamed animals. They are explicitly described as *locus amoenus*, or 'place of delight,' as opposed to the hardships of nature, especially the desert. It is from this context that the garden derives its significance as a narrative motif. It is a place of beauty, where man's senses are pleased by delicious smells and sounds, where his mind is refreshed by the sight of trees, ripe fruits, and carefully designed flower beds.[22]

Situating the act of infidelity in the palace garden evokes the biblical garden of Eden, in which Adam and Eve, after eating a forbidden apple, have sexual intercourse. Like Eve, the seductress who convinces Adam to eat the apple, King Shahriyar's wife seduces a black slave, crying in

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20 F. Ghazoul: *Nocturnal Poetics…*, p. 32.

21 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights…*, vol. 1, p. 15.

22 R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel and Transformation*. London 2007, p. 104.

a loud voice, "Here to me, O my lord Saeed!"[23] Counterexamples to the prevailing assumption of passivity of the Eastern femininity, the kings' wives are the first significant active and seductive female characters in the *Nights*.

Drawing on the fragment of the infidelity in the palace garden in the European translations of the *Nights*, it is conspicuous that the Frame Story begins to surpass the convention of a folktale. The infidelity between the queen and the black slave turns into a mass infidelity where comic elements and a carnivalesque reality are to be observed, to give an example from Burton's translation:

> [T]hen he [a black slave] bussed her [the queen] and winding her legs round his, as a button loop clasps a button, he threw her and enjoyed her. Likewise did the other slaves with the girls till all had satisfied their passions, and they ceased not from kissing and clipping, coupling and carousing till day began to wane; when the Mamelukes rose from the damsels' bosoms and the blackamoor slave dismounted from the Queen's breast; the men resumed their disguises and all, except the negro who swarmed up the tree, entered the palace and closed the postern door as before.[24]

Sallis, in the chapter "Sheherazade/Shahrzad," believing that up to this point the Frame Story is very serious, writes: "However, mass infidelity is also ludic, carnivalesque, impossibly, even painfully funny. Shahriyar's queen and twenty other slaves fornicate in company in his garden for a whole day and, terrible and serious as his misfortune is, it is also ludicrous."[25]

The first narrative block of the Frame Story mingles various aspects of human relationships among which power relations between the characters are crucial. In the triangle of the husband, wife, and the lover, it is the woman who is the master, whereas the male lover is the slave. However, the master-slave relation between the queen and her lover is more complex, since on the one hand, the queen is "the master to whom the slave must submit,"[26] and on the other hand, she is also a slave as she is "possessed" by the king and her position as "the wife in marriage correlates to a degree with that of the slave."[27]

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23 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...*, vol. 1, p. 15.

24 Ibidem, p. 16.

25 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass...*, p. 91.

26 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire...*, p. 49.

27 Ibidem.

The second narrative block of the Frame Story begins when both kings, having murdered their unfaithful wives, set out on a journey aimed at self-recovery. During the journey the brothers notice, depending on the translation, "a black demon, carrying on his head a large glass chest with four steel locks,"[28] or "a Jinni, huge of height and burly of breast and bulk, broad of brow and black of blee, bearing on his head a coffer of crystal."[29] The black demon or Jinni turns out to be in possession of a young lady whom he snatched away to prevent anyone from, as Burton puts, "tumbling her."[30] Since then he has kept the female captive, in Burton's translation, in "a casket, with seven padlocks of steel, which he unlocked with seven keys of steel,"[31] and in Haddawy's text, in "a large glass chest with four steel locks."[32] After the possessor unlocks the casket/chest he falls asleep, while the young woman attempts to seduce the kings, threatening to wake up the vengeful Jinni/demon if they refuse to fornicate with her. The woman's attempts at seduction stem from a desire to control, to possess the two kings.

It is explicitly indicated in the translations of *The Arabian Nights* that the demon's/Jinni's captive is actively seducing and threatening the kings. The female protagonist expresses her urge to have sex openly, threatening the kings at the same time, as Haddawy writes: "Make love to me and satisfy my need, or else I shall wake the demon, and he will kill you."[33] In Burton's version the lady's words are more exaggerated and perverse, as he writes: "Stroke me a strong stroke, without stay or delay, otherwise will I arouse and set upon you this Ifrit who shall slay you straightaway."[34] This protagonist is an example of a medieval Muslim heroine who is like a termagant. Kahf, writing about the transformation of the image of Eastern femininity, writes: "they [Muslim heroines] are not merely passively seductive; they are active seducers. Thus their sexual confidence is often linked to superior scientific, technical, and supernatural knowledge. It is an active sexual quality rather than one which would render them objects of the gaze."[35]

After the two kings have had sexual intercourse with the woman, she orders them to give her their rings, explaining that the other rings she

28 M. Mahdi: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 8.
29 R.F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...*, vol. 1, p. 17.
30 Ibidem, p. 18.
31 Ibidem.
32 M. Mahdi: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 8.
33 Ibidem, p. 9.
34 R.F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...*, vol. 1, p. 18.
35 M. Kahf: *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman...*, p. 36.

possesses are "the signets of five hundred and seventy men who have all fluttered [her] upon the horns of this foul, this foolish, this filthy Ifrit."[36] In Haddawy's translation there are one hundred such rings, but Burton, aware that in other editions the number of rings is smaller, explains in the footnote: "So in the Mac. Edit.; in others 'ninety.' I prefer the greater number as exaggeration is a part of the humour."[37] As has been said, Burton emphasizes the sexual aspects of the *Nights*, and exaggerating issues concerned with sexuality, ethnicity and gender, he seems to put the book within the spectrum of racist, sexist and misogynist writing. On the other hand, purposefully rejecting a transparent translation, he also winks humorously at his readers each time when he exaggerates or "mistranslates" fragments of the *Nights*.

The kings' encounter with the female seductresses is associated with the issue of power, which is central to the *Nights*' thematic preoccupations. The woman's collection of rings, as Beaumont notes, "has a particular significance [...] as she is the appropriator of the phallus,"[38] hence she is an example of a sexually insatiable castrating female. In Lacanian theory, a woman is not endowed with the phallus, hence she is the phallus. The Jinni's captive, through the appropriation of the phallus compensates for its absence. In the subsequent triangle of black male (the demon/Jinni), white woman slave and two white lovers (the kings), the master-slave relation reappears. The white woman functions as a slave/captive of the black demon/Jinni, but on the other hand, she performs the role of a master over the hundred(s) of men who were made to have sex with her. The two kings are the woman's victims and also the black Jinni's slaves as he is the woman's master. The hierarchy seems to be distorted, as "the black slave is on top now, the master, and the white male is at the bottom, the slave,"[39] which is an inversion of the master-slave dichotomy.

After his wife's adultery and the incident with the demon's/Jinni's female slave, King Shahriyar, convinced that only "Allah [could] help and save men from women's malice and cunning [...] as nothing can surpass their power,"[40] in an act of desperation decides to marry a young bride every day and each new day at dawn, after having sexual intercourse, to kill his new wife. Scheherazade's father, the Vizier, is appointed to find every day a new bride for the king. Shahriyar's conduct is often

36 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...*, vol. 1, p. 18.

37 Ibidem, p. 158.

38 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire...*, p. 54.

39 Ibidem, p. 52.

40 R. F. Burton, trans. *The Arabian Nights*. London 1997, p. 11.

described to be a sign of madness. Alienated and lost in delirium, the king chooses aggression towards the Other. The female, which functions here as the Other, has escaped the position of slave, the possessed, which causes Shahriyar to feel hatred and fear. In medieval texts, Kahf writes, "the sexuality of Muslim women is not a state of objectification for male pleasure. [...] Here the Muslim woman's sexuality is an indication of her outrageous liberty and a part of the permissive, orgiastic morality."[41]A conviction that in Islam femininity is felt to constitute a threat is prevalent among Eastern feminists. This viewpoint is shared by Fatima Mernissi, an Islamic feminist, who maintains that "Islam, both as a legal and cultural system, is imbued with the idea that the feminine is an uncontrollable power – and therefore the unknowable 'other.'"[42]

The king's fear of the castrating female is associated with his alienation in a distorted master-slave dichotomy. Beaumont understands Shahriyar's plight in the Lacanian sense as alienation in the mirror stage, which has a twofold dimension: "First the subject is alienated due to the fact that he cannot conceive his unity with the other; secondly and even more importantly perhaps – the subject is alienated insofar as the imaginary unity, his ego, is only formed by excluding from it, by alienating, that is – a considerable portion of the subject himself."[43] Beaumont argues that "the subject is alienated not only from the other but also from himself,"[44] and hence, it is alienation that causes the king's delirium.

The third narrative block, The Story of Scheherazade, begins when the Vizier, Scheherazade's father, has problems finding new brides for the king and his daughter decides voluntarily to marry Shahriyar. The fourth narrative block is a fable told by the Vizier which aim is to divert Scheherazade from her idea of marrying the vengeful king. The Story of Scheherazade is to be analysed in detail in the next subchapter as it primarily concern Scheherazade who is the crucial figure of *The Arabian Nights* and deserves special attention. However, at this point it is necessary to acknowledge that Scheherazade, not put off by her father's fable, marries Shahriyar and by means of telling every night a story to the king she tries to defer indefinitely the time of her murder and to survive.

The Frame Story ends after one thousand and one nights of Scheherazade's storytelling. In Burton's translation Scheherazade, the mother of three of Shahriyar's children, in weaving the story "Ma'aruf the Cobbler"

41 M. Kahf: *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman...*, p. 36.

42 F. Mernissi: *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*. New York 2002, p. 21.

43 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire...*, p. 56.

44 Ibidem.

makes Shahriyar notice a parallel situation between the story and their life. The story finishes with a happy ending, as Scheherazade narrates:

> After this, King Ma'aruf sent for the husbandman, whose guest he had been, when he was a fugitive, and made him his Wazir of the Right and his Chief Counsellor. Then, learning that he had a daughter of passing beauty and loveliness, ennobled at birth and exalted of worth, he took her to wife. So they abode awhile in all solace of life and its delight and their days were serene and their joys untroubled, till there came to them the Destroyer of delights and the Sunderer of societies, the Depopulator of populous places and the Orphaner of sons and daughters. And glory be to the Living who dieth not and in whose hand are the Keys of the Seen and the Unseen![45]

Shahriyar recognises parallels between himself and King Ma'aruf and also the Wazir's daughter, Scheherazade. Before the king utters a word, Scheherazade, having finished her last story, addresses the king with the following words: "O King of the time and unique one of the age and the tide, I am thine handmaid and these thousand nights and a night have I entertained thee with stories of folk gone before and admonitory instances of the men of yore. May I then make bold to crave a boon of Thy Highness?"[46] Shahriyar, transformed and now drained of aggression towards the female Other, answers: "By Allah, O Shahrazad, I pardoned thee before the coming of these children, for that I found thee chaste, pure, ingenuous and pious! Allah bless thee and thy father and thy mother and thy root and thy branch! I take the Almighty to witness against me that I exempt thee from aught that can harm thee. So she kissed his hands and feet and rejoiced with exceeding joy, saying, The Lord make thy life long and increase thee in dignity and majesty!"[47] Beaumont notes that Scheherazade, telling about the Destroyer of delights and the Orphaner of sons and daughters, prepares Shahriyar for having motherless sons.[48] Analysing the end of the Frame Story, Beaumont believes it is disappointing[49] and Leeuwen claims it gives a sense of ending.[50] None of the scholars, however, compare the Frame Story in Burton's text with other translations. Lane provides the

45 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...*, vol. 10, p. 29.

46 Ibidem.

47 Ibidem.

48 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire...*, p. 166.

49 Ibidem.

50 R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights...*, p. 8

reader with "The Story of Maaroof,"[51] which, being the last story of the *Arabian Nights*, is quite similar to Burton's "Ma'aruf the Cobbler"; however there is no conclusion, no ending of the Frame Story in Lane's text. Haddawy's translation is similar to Lane's, as there is also no conclusion nor the end of the Frame Story; moreover, "The Story of Maaroof" (or "Ma'aruf the Cobbler") is not included in Haddawy's translation. The last story in Haddawy's text is "The Story of Jullanar and the Sea."[52]

What are the consequence of Burton's, Haddawy's, and Lane's treatments of the Frame Story of the *Nights*? The manipulations seem to result from the translators' attitude to the so-called "original" of the *Nights* and their understanding of Scheherazade's position as the protagonist and narrator of the cycle. Haddawy's text, based on Mahdi's Arabic manuscript, as we have noted in the subchapter devoted to the translations of the *Nights*, postulates a nonexistent prototype of the cycle and omits those stories that he believes are not integral parts of the manuscript, hence the absence of a conclusion or an end to the Frame Story. Lane, on the other hand, erases Scheherazade already on the level of the narrative, as he omits from his translation of the intrusion of the Vizier's daughter's voice. Lane's text is a model of the erasure of the female Other.

In examining the formulas of the frame stories, it is important to acknowledge that the Frame Story in *The Arabian Nights* does not comfort the reader with the traditional structure of the frames. First of all, among the analysed translations, the end of the Frame Story in the form of a conclusion exists only in Burton's text. Secondly, Burton's "Ma'aruf the Cobbler" and Lane's "The Story of Maaroof" can be read as the mirror or double of the story of Shahriyar and Scheherazade. By inherence, it is plausible to assume that the end of the Frame Story is included in the last enframed story. Similarly, the story of Shahriyar and Scheherazade is also only a part of the Frame Story, as Sallis observes: "As the framing story of Sheherazade and Shahriyar is told as an enframed story, it is transformed."[53] In a similar fashion, their story is transformed in the story of Maaroof/Ma'aruf. In a way, the last enframed story (that of Maaroof/Ma'aruf) is a closure to the cycle. A more interesting closure seems to be Burton's conclusion, as collated with the last enframed story, because it gives the king a foretaste of the future. Moreover, since Scheherazade's stories are repetitions and doublings of Shahriyar's traumatic experience with unfaithful women, it seems convincing that a vision of

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51 E. W. Lane: "The Story of Maaroof." In: *The Thousand and One Nights*, vol. 3, pp. 671–728.

52 M. Mahdi: *The Thousand and One Nights…*, pp. 383–428.

53 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, p. 91.

the couple's future life should also be smuggled in by Scheherazade in the form of the enframed tale. Since in the translation of Haddawy the last story is not a mirror of Shahriyar and Scheherazade's story, we can speak in this case of an absence of an end of the cycle: Haddawy's translation deprives the reader of a sense of ending in both forms, as an enframed story or as a conclusion.

If we consider the peculiarity of the *Nights*, which is a cycle of stories within stories narrated by Scheherazade and other intradiegetic narrators, Mahdi's Arabic manuscript, without a sense of ending, seems disappointing. Sallis, analysing the Frame Story in the *Nights*, emphasizes:

> 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 Scheherazade had children and, if so, how many. The general features of the frame tale close have become legendary; subject to dispute but having powerful currency.[54]

Encapsulating the cycle of the *Nights*, the Frame Story requires a beginning and an end, an incipit and excipit, to sustain the labyrinthine structure of the book, to give "the enframed stories their reason to be and set up a stimulating unresolved tension and doubling of meanings for the long sequence to follow."[55] Juxtaposing the translations providing a variety of endings or dislodging a sense of ending, reinscribes the Frame Story of *The Arabian Nights* in a Derridian parergon. The Frame Story, both set beside the work and a part of the work, is situated on the border of inside and outside. In a similar way to the Derridian parergon, it fits another role, that of a supplement. Derrida understands a supplement as being, like the Frame Story, "neither inside nor outside and/or both inside and outside at the same time. It forms part without being part, it belongs without belonging."[56] The concept of the supplement, which is not an exterior addition, is described by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*:

> For the concept of the supplement – which here determines that of the representative image – harbors within itself two significations

54 Ibidem, p. 98.

55 Ibidem, p. 107.

56 N. Royle: *Jacques Derrida…*, p. 49.

> whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplement to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function.[57]

Being both and neither inside or outside is characteristic not only of the Frame Story but also of the book itself. The intricacy of the *Nights* lies in its predicament of being a part of both the Eastern and Western cultures but belonging exclusively to neither of them. Scheherazade, weaving her enchanting tales, is also situated inside and outside of the *Nights*; she is the protagonist only in the Frame Story because in the cycle she appears only as the narrator of the Stories. Being in between the Frame Story and the cycle, Scheherazade is the crucial figure of the *Nights*, and her significance as the most popular storyteller and also the mythical image of "Oriental femininity" is analysed in the subsequent subchapters.

Scheherazade in the Magic Mirror of Representation

> The world is made of correspondences, is full of magic mirrors – that in small things is the cipher of the large.
>
> J. L. Borges: *Seven Nights*

> Representation constitutes the dominant theme of Orientalism. The growth of modern or scientific Orientalism as a systematic body of knowledge and discourse with the objective of creating the Orient, are all very much sustained by the idea of 'representation'.
>
> B. B. Mohanty: *Edward W. Said's Orientalism: A Critique*

Since the first appearance of European translations, the *Thousand and One Nights* has served as a metaphor of the Orient. Drawing on Burton, Lane, and Payne's translations, mesmerized European writers conflated a flurry of depictions of the Orient and in particular of "Oriental femininity" in literature and art. The Orient became systematically portrayed and represented as the Other which is subverted and distorted in a medley of myths, presuppositions, stereotypes, and generalisations, as Said writes: "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiq-

57 J. Derrida: "The Dangerous Supplement." In: *Of Grammatology*. Trans. G. C. Spivak. Baltimore 1997, p. 145.

uity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences."[58]

The image of Scheherazade, which became identified with the metaphor of the Orient, is a fascinating example of the trajectory of creating the Other. The mythical Oriental woman, who is exotic, voluptuous, and sexually insatiable appeared in Occidental discourse in the eighteenth century as a result of fascination with the mysterious Other. As Kabbani writes, "Europe was charmed by an Orient that shimmered with possibilities that promised a sexual space, a voyage away from the self, an escape from the dictates of the bourgeois morality of the metropolis."[59] Occidental visions of harem women, pinpointed by Kiernan as "Europe's collective daydream of the Orient,"[60] are visible in colonial travel writing, in the translations of the *Arabian Nights* and also in the paintings by such artists as Eugène Delacroix, Jean Auguste Domonique Ingres and Jean-Léon Gérôme.

The Orient becomes tainted with mystery and exoticism, as "the European was led into the East by sexuality, by the embodiment of it in a woman or a young boy. He entered an imaginary harem when entering the metaphor of the Orient, weighed down by inexpressible longings."[61] Scheherazade, weaving her tales while being locked in Shahriyar's harem, drew specific interest and has became the mythical image of "Oriental femininity." The female storyteller, trapped in the seemingly paradisiacal imaginary harem, offered a promise, a partial escape from Victorian reality. Through the art of storytelling, she implied a deviation from the accepted European norms. The myth of the harem helped to perpetuate the idea of the voluptuous East; to quote Kabbani, "the West inflated the Quranic idea of Paradise, arguing that Muslims were not only lewd in everyday life, but had conceived of a heaven that would permit endless sensual gratification, ignoring the fact that the Christian Paradise itself promised rivers, milk and honey."[62]

Scheherazade, narrator and protagonist of *The Arabian Nights*, embodies the image of "Oriental femininity," since through the ages she has been a recurrent subject in literature and art of the Eastern and Western cultures. As Margaret Sironval, analysing Scheherazade's images in French and English editions of the *Nights*, notes:

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58 E. W. Said: *Orientalism...*, p. 1.

59 R. Kabbani: *Europe's Myths of Orient...*, p. 67.

60 V. G. Kiernan: *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes Towards Outside World in the Imperial Age*. Harmondsworth 1972, quoted by R. Kabbani in: *Europe's Myth of Orient...*, p. 73.

61 R. Kabbani: *Europe's Myths of Orient...*, p. 67.

62 Ibidem, p. 17.

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *The Turkish Bath*, 1863

Louvre, Paris, France © Bridgeman Art Library

> The frame story of the *Nights* is without doubt one of the most powerful narratives in world literature. This lies in the unique relationship it seals between sexual and narrative desire. Scheherazade is the principal character in the inaugural account: every night she risks death. Scheherazade has become the literary myth of the collection at the beginning of the twentieth century. Scheherazade has inspired all sorts of musical, dance, theatrical and film adaptations since the early nineteenth century.[63]

Referring to Victorian illustrations to the Frame Story, Sironval acknowledges the existence of two Scheherazades. A juxtaposition of illustrations to the editions of the *Nights* by Houghton and by the Dalziel brothers presents in the first case "a Victorian representation of Scheherazade figuring on the frontispiece of the book. She appears as a European image of femininity, an admirable figure,"[64] but in the second case there is "the Eastern version of the famous threesome (King Shahriyar, Sheherazade and Dinarzade). [...] The scene looks like an Orientalist painting."[65] More interestingly, in Lane's, Mardrus' and Burton's translations there are no illustrations depicting Scheherazade. Not only did the latter translator omit the illustration of Scheherazade, but he replaced it with a picture of himself. To quote Sironval, "in Sir Richard Burton's translation, his hull-length photo is to be found in the first volume. Sheherazade has again disappeared and is replaced by Sir Richard Burton, storyteller, translator and author."[66] By inference, it may be concluded that the Vizier's daughter's was "misrepresented" either as a Victorian heroine, or as an exotic Oriental woman, or it was utterly erased.

Scheherazade's popularity, initiated by Galland's translation, was the result of Occidental enchantment with the mysterious and exotic Other. The Other, understood as the Oriental, was systematically misrepresented by the ascription of a number of idiosyncratic features. The predilection for understanding the Orient as the Other echoes the Western propensity for dichotomous thinking, e.g. Cartesian dualism of mind and body. As Toril Moi observes, "Western philosophy and literary thought is and has always been caught up in this endless series of hierarchical binary oppositions, which always in the end come back to the fundamental 'cou-

63 M. Sironval: "The Image of Scheherazade in French and English Editions of the Thousand and One Nights." In: *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism*. Eds. Y. Yamanaka, T. Nishio. London 2006, p. 220.

64 Ibidem, p. 235.

65 Ibidem.

66 Ibidem, p. 237.

ple' male-female."[67] By way of simplification, the Orient is stereotypically juxtaposed with the Occident just as the feminine is juxtaposed with the masculine. Said, quoting Lord Cromer in *Orientalism*, points out the condescending attitude of the West towards the Orient – an inferior part of the dichotomy, for he writes:

> Accuracy is abhorrent to the Oriental mind. [...] The European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of ambiguity; he is a natural logician, albeit he may not have studied logic; he is by nature sceptical and requires proof before he can accept the truth of any proposition; his trained intelligence works like a piece of mechanism. The mind of the Oriental, on the other hand, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is of the most slipshod description.[68]

Features ascribed by Cromer to the West, such as accuracy, reasoning, and logic, were also stereotypically ascribed to men in contrast to women, who were said to have, just like the Orient, the opposite features. The East-West and feminine-masculine dichotomies correspond with the dichotomies proposed in Hélène Cixous's essay "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" in which the author enumerates binary pairs such as activity/passivity, culture/nature, man/woman, and logos/pathos in order to deconstruct them.[69] This is why in patriarchal and colonial discourses alike the woman and the Oriental were equally perceived as the Other and "Oriental femininity" came to be seen as doubly Other. Its image was created and imposed also by the European translators of the *Nights* and consequently by many writers referring to the tales and to their Oriental female protagonists. In consequence, if we can speak of a concept of "Oriental female identity," we can speak of a "pure" sexual fiction sustained by the mythologization of the Orient.

This is why it is our aim to "rediscover" the abundance of Scheherazade's images and also to analyse sexual and power relations between the characters of the tales through a comparative analysis of the nineteenth-century translations. Sex and sexuality permeate *The Arabian Nights,* and

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67 T. Moi: "Feminist, Female, Feminine." In: *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Eds. C. Belsey, J. Moore. London 1999, p. 110.

68 E. B. Cromer quoted by E. W. Said in: *Orientalism...*, p. 38.

69 H. Cixous: "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays." In: *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Eds. C. Belsey, J. Moore. London 1999, p. 91.

the world depicted in it overflows with kings' wives, concubines, and slaves – all bounded by the space of the harem. Nevertheless, *The Thousand and One Nights*, which is an extraordinary example of constantly interweaving issues of sex, sexuality, sexual initiation, power relations and transgender movements, is frequently associated only with the most popular tales such as "Sindbad," "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" and "Aladdin," which do not have a sexual theme.

Scheherazade, who has become an inspiration for hundreds of writers and artists, is described in the *Nights* with unadorned succinctness. The cultural artefact of the Oriental Other appears only a few times at the end of the Frame Story. Scheherazade is mentioned for the first time in the third narrative block of the Frame Story, during a conversation with her father, the Vizier responsible for finding new wives for the vengeful king. The translations of Burton, Lane, Payne and Haddawy to a certain extent portray Scheherazade in a similar way, accentuating her intelligence, wit and versatility. Their descriptions make no conjectures concerning the heroine's physical features; even though Scheherazade's image serves as a repository of "Oriental femininity," she is not described in physical terms at any point in the *Nights*. Burton writes about her in the following way:

> […] Shahrazad and Dunyazad hight, of whom the elder had perused the books, annals and legends of preceding Kings, and the stories, examples and instances of men and things; indeed it was said that she had collected a thousand books of histories relating to 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, and she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred.[70]

When referring to Scheherazade and Dunyazad, Burton adds a footnote in which he explains his choice concerning the names of the protagonists:

> [FN#21] "Shahrázád" (Persian) = City-freer, in the older version Scheherazade (probably both from Shirzád = lion-born). "Dunyázád"=World-freer. The Bres. Edit. corrupts former to Sháhrzád or Sháhrazád, and the Mac. and Calc. to Shahrzád or Shehrzád. I have ventured to restore the name as it should be. Galland for the second prefers Dinarzade (?) and Richardson Dinazade

70 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights…*, vol. 1, p. 19.

> (Dinázád = Religion-freer): here I have followed Lane and Payne; though in "First Footsteps" I was misled by Galland. See Vol. ii. p. 1.[71]

This footnote displays one of the translator's attempts to, on the one hand, belittle previous translations, and on the other, conceal recurring similarities between his and Lane's texts. Haddawy's translation is similar; however, his words are less euphemistic. He does not mention that Scheherazade collected a thousand books, and at the end of the description he writes about the heroine in the following way: "She was intelligent, knowledgeable, wise, and refined. She had read and learned."[72] His version conveys an image of the protagonist which is less vivid and appealing that in Burton's translation, an effect of Haddawy's unadorned and succinct style. Burton's style, although often archaic and composed of exaggerated and idiosyncratic language, is not, however, without charm.

In depicting Scheherazade, the significant differences between the translations occur in the passage when the protagonist is having a conversation with her father concerning her will to marry the king. Lane's translation, to quote Sallis, "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. [...] This leaves Sheherazade as a willing victim with only one relatively unlikely plan."[73] Lane's translation is a purposeful mistranslation, as he writes in a 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.'"[74] Sallis argues, that Lane "reconstructs Scheherazade subtextually 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."[75] Burton's translation, on the other hand, is divergent of Lane's version, for he writes:

> "By Allah, O my father, how long shall this slaughter of women endure? Shall I tell thee what is in my mind in order to save both sides from destruction?" "Say on, O my daughter," quoth he, and quoth she, "I wish thou wouldst give me in marriage to this King Shahryar; either I shall live or I shall be a ransom for the virgin daughters

71 Ibidem, vol. 1, p. 159, fn. 21.

72 M. Mahdi: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 11.

73 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass...*, p. 104.

74 Ibidem.

75 Ibidem.

> of Moslems and the cause of their deliverance from his hands and thine." [FN#22][76]
>
> [FN#22] Probably she proposed to "Judith" the King. These learned and clever young ladies are very dangerous in the East.[77]

In this translation there is an implication that Scheherazade may kill herself and the king as well. Drawing on this fragment and also Burton's footnote, which on the one hand suggests the possibility of killing the king, and on the other, conveys a generalisation concerning Eastern femininity, it may be concluded that the Burtonian image of Scheherazade does not intersect with Lane's. Contrary to Lane's Scheherazade, resembling rather a Victorian lady, or to quote Sallis, "a Victorian Miss yearning to be either noble or a martyr, whereas the 'real' [inverted commas added by me] Scheherazade is a woman determined to end an intolerable situation by persuasion, cunning, or force,"[78] Burton conveys the image of an active and intrepid heroine, as "if she is prepared to kill the king in the event she cannot change him, then his life is as much in danger as hers."[79] The Scheherazade described by Payne and Haddawy reflects the image of the heroine adumbrated by Lane. Her conspicuous wish to marry the king is emphasized but the female protagonist is in both translations portrayed as the one who will either succeed or die, the plan of the assassination of the king does not appear. The described fragment is crucial because it introduces the relationship between Scheherazade and the king and each translation significantly alters the context of the situation the couple have placed themselves in. Scheherazade's role is vital, as she tells fragmented narratives in order to, as Malti-Douglas points out, "change the dynamics of the male/female sexual relations, in redefining sexual politics. When she consciously takes on her shoulders the burden of saving womankind from the royal serial murderer, she had taken on a much more arduous task: educating this ruler in the ways of a nonproblematic heterosexual relationship."[80]

Since the relationship between the king and his wife is another example of the master-slave dialectic, a disturbing question appears: who is the master and who is the slave in this complex relationship? The answer

76 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights…*, vol. 1, p. 159, fn. 22.

77 Ibidem, p. 19.

78 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, p. 105.

79 Ibidem.

80 F. Malti-Douglas: "Shahrazad Feminist." In: *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*. Eds. R.C. Hovanissian, G. Sabagh. Cambridge 1997, p. 52.

partially depends on the translation of *The Arabian Nights* chosen by the reader. If we assume Burton's fragment to be closest to the original, Scheherazade, rejecting the position of slave and willing victim, to a certain extent, appears as the master: her superiority, to paraphrase Beaumont, stems from the willingness to risk life which is the recognition of her right.[81] Hence, it may be concluded that both Scheherazade and Shahriyar risk their lives every night in the game that is played between them. Shahriyar, the king, is only seemingly the master whereas Scheherazade, the Other, is not utterly a slave. The master-slave relation between the king and his storyteller is blurred.

Beaumont argues that feminist readings incorrectly portray Scheherazade as a prototypical feminist. However, taking into consideration various translations of *The Arabian Nights*, one cannot fail to note that Scheherazade, regardless whether depicted as a willing victim or a powerful woman, is courageous, determined, cunning, and strong enough to achieve her aim. Thus, her image resembles to a certain extent active and independent femininity. Beaumont, analysing the position of Scheherazade, also maintains that she does not constitute a counter-example to the Eastern prevailing cultural ideal of a submissive woman. Meanwhile, Fatima Mernissi, in her article "The Muslim Concept of Active Female Sexuality," writes: "in societies in which seclusion and surveillance of women prevail, the implicit concept of female sexuality is active."[82] Mernissi, referring to Imam Ghazali's interpretation of the Koran, explains that "the woman [is seen] as the hunter and the man as the passive victim."[83] She argues that "Ghazali sees woman's power as the most destructive element to the social order, in which the feminine is regarded as synonymous with the satanic."[84] Leila Ahmed, on the other hand, in her study, *Women and Gender in Islam*, writes: "Muslim women were not, after all, the passive creatures, wholly without material resources or legal rights, that the Western world imagined them to be. But women were active, let me emphasize, within the very limited parameters permitted by their society."[85] There is an abundance of such female protagonists in *The Arabian Nights*, apart from the Vizier's daughter numerous Scheherazadean female characters occur in the tales.

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81 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire…*, p. 51.

82 F. Mernissi: "The Muslim Concept of Female Sexuality." In: *Sexuality and Gender*. Eds. C.L. Williams, A. Stein. Oxford 2002, p. 298.

83 Ibidem, p. 299.

84 Ibidem.

85 L. Ahmed: *Women and Gender in Islam*. London 1992, p. 111.

Since Scheherazade is not described in physical terms,[86] it is not known whether she was a beautiful heroine, as she is so frequently presented by Western painters and writers. However, as has been said, contrary to Occidental representations of the heroine as a submissive, weak and passive odalisque, Scheherazade embodies an active and powerful femininity. The power of her image is perhaps caused by her indeterminacy. After the Frame Story is finished she vanishes as a protagonist and appears as a narrator. She oscillates between being a narrator (subject) of the tales and a protagonist (object) as her status in not determined. Her image is characterized by spots of indeterminacy, to use Roman Ingarden's term.[87] Ingarden, in his study *The Literary Work of Art*, differentiating between real and intentional objects, writes that intentional objects are not determined: "Thus, in the given object, its qualification is *totally absent*: there is an 'empty' spot here, a 'spot of indeterminacy.' As we have said, such empty spots are impossible in the case of the real objects."[88] Scheherazade's image is an example of an intentional object which becomes determined through concretizations. As well as Scheherazade, *The Arabian Nights* itself has been an object of various concretizations. Differentiating between the literary work and its concretizations, Ingarden writes: "The concretization not only contains various elements that are not really part of the work, though allowed by it, but it also frequently shows elements that are foreign to it and which more or less obscure it. These facts compel us to draw a consistent and detailed line of distinction between the literary work itself and its various concretizations."[89] As was indicated in the analysis of Scheherazade's image and also the nineteenth-century translations of the *Nights*, the translated book encompasses an abundance of diverse concretizations.

The propensity for fantasized concretizations of Scheherazade's image conflates with Homi Bhabha's idea of mimicry. In his essay "Of Mimicry and Man," Bhabha conjoins mimicry with indeterminacy, writing: "[...] then colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indetermi-

86 After E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass...*, p. 101.

87 Refer to R. Ingarden: *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*. Trans. G.G. Grabowicz. Evanston 1973, pp. 246–254.

88 Ibidem, p. 252.

89 Ibidem, p. 337.

nacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal."[90] Bhabha's idea of mimicry in creating the Other blends, on the other hand, with Spivak's concept of "Other as the Self's shadow"[91] as the shadow is almost the same as the Self but not quite. Scheherazade's image represented in the nineteenth-century translations is distorted by the discourse of colonial mimicry which is explicitly indicated in particular in Lane's translation. In Lane's text Scheherazade resembles a shadow of a Victorian noble lady who is a willing martyr. The discourse of colonial mimicry is not as applicable to Burton's translation because his Scheherazade is a cultural construct of another type; she is the Other who is juxtaposed to the Self by means of difference. Drawing on Said's ideas in *Orientalism*, it seems that Burton's text depicts the East as imaginative geography and it orientalizes the Oriental. As Said writes, "For the Orient is corrected, even penalized, for lying outside the boundaries of European society, 'our' world; the Orient is thus Orientalized, a process that not only marks the Orient as the province of the Orientalist but also forces the uninitiated Western reader to accept Orientalist codifications as the *true* Orient."[92] Burton's translation is a fascinating trajectory of relations between the Self (Victorian England) and the Other (the feminine, the Orient).

The emergence of Scheherazade or Scheherazades in Western discourse anticipated her inspiring image in literature, art and even music. As Sironval points out, "the choice of the English translators, their comments and notes have contributed to the varied images of Scheherazade, from a brave woman who has decided on a plan to save herself and the other women of the kingdom, to a self-sacrificing woman offering herself as a willing victim ready to immolate herself."[93] Juxtaposing Scheherazade's images in literature and art, Sironval emphasizes that misrepresentation of her image is also found in music, for Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Scheherazade* is alike "Mardrus' erotic interpolations and Burton's own obsession with black male sexuality."[94] According to Sironval, also Michel George-Michel's *Libretto* misrepresents Scheherazade as it portrays her as "an adulterous, treacherous wife [who] in the final act kills herself with a knife because in the end she feels guilty."[95] Although we agree with Sironval's view that the English translators contributed to the

90 H. K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*. London 1994, p. 86.
91 G. C. Spivak: *Can the Subaltern Speak?...*, p. 66.
92 E. W. Said: *Orientalism...*, p. 67.
93 M. Sironval: *The Image of Scheherazade...*, p. 237.
94 Ibidem.
95 Ibidem.

varied images of Scheherazade, it seems irrelevant to speak of misrepresentations of her image, since there is no "real" representation of Scheherazade. Therefore, we assume that we can only speak of "misrepresentations" Scheherazade's image.

Scheherazade functions as a repository of imaginary Oriental construct(s). Since imaginary identification, to quote Slavoj Žižek, is "identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing what we would like to be,"[96] we can speak of a polyphony of Scheherazade images composing an abundance of cultural constructs. Her images are dependent on the Western gaze of the observer/reader/writer, whose imaginary identifications differ. This subchapter intended to posit that there is neither a "real" representation of Scheherazade nor an archetypal image of her, as it seems to be as unattainable as the search for the prototype of *The Arabian Nights*, since the book, having "a strong metaphorical potential, [...] forming an image and even creating images,"[97] undergoes a continuous process of metamorphosis.

Odalisques or Termagants? The Female Characters in *The Arabian Nights*

> What, then is fantasy? One should always bear in mind that the desire "realized" (staged) in fantasy is not subject's own but the other's desire.
>
> S. Žižek: *I Hear You with My Eyes; or, The Invisible Master*

> Zuleika, mute and motionless, stood like the statue of distress, When, her last hope forever gone, the mother harden'd into stone; all in the maid that eye could see was but a younger Niobe.
>
> G. G. Byron: *Bride of Abydos*

In contrast to the prevailing image of "Oriental femininity" in Western literature and art as submissive and passive, *The Arabian Nights* portrays many fascinating female characters who do not mirror the Western understanding of Eastern femininity. As has been indicated in the previous subchapter, there are active and dominant female characters in the *Nights*, contrary to stereotypically portrayed in Western culture passive creatures. Kabbani, arguing that the female characters in the *Nights* are represented through a prejudiced Victorian filter of perception, emphasizes:

96 S. Žižek: *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London 1989, p. 105.
97 M. Sironval: *The Image of Scheherazade*..., p. 238.

> Burton's ideas about Eastern women never gained in depth even after he had spent decades in the East. [...] The woman was chattel and sexual convenience. Burton's fascination with the *Arabian Nights* was greatly enhanced by the fact they upheld his own views, race and class. The tales of the *Arabian Nights* were originally recounted to an all male audience desiring bawdy entertainment. [...] All women were inferior to men, Eastern women were doubly inferior, being women and Easterners. [...] Burton always retained his age's polarised view of women. They were either sexual beings who were whorish, or caring companions in the home, untinged by sexual ardour.[98]

Irwin, on the other hand, in his polemical response to Kabbani's thesis, writes:

> How could Kabbani have missed Tawaddud, who defeats the court sages in an intellectual form of a strip poker; Dunya, who kicks the vizier in the groin; Budur, who, having become a king (*sic*), revenges herself on her enemies and threatens her lover with sodomization; Marjana, who rescues Ali Baba and engineers the death of the forty thieves; or Miriam the Girgle-Girl, who rescued her lover from captivity in Christendom – not to mention such warrior-princesses as Princess al-Datma and Abriza and legions of Amazon warrior-women who troop through the pages of the *Nights*, as well as the specialized variant *kahramat* (armed female harem guards)?[99]

We share Irwin's viewpoint, positing active and courageous female characters in the *Nights* as essential in constructing the image of female identities. Kabbani reasons that Eastern women were doubly inferior since they were a subject of double colonization as women and Orientals. However, in her classification of the portrayed women as either whorish tramps or caring companions in the home, Kabbani writes at the same time about women in general in the East, and the *Nights*' female characters. It seems unreasonable to posit the portrayed female characters in the *Nights* as the "real" representation of femininity in the East, what is more, in her classification of women Kabbani has indeed missed many fascinating female protagonists of the *Nights*.

In "The Cultural Politics of Hybridity" Robert Young writes, "[...] a central assumption and paranoid fantasy was endlessly repeated: the uncon-

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98 R. Kabbani: *Europe's Myths of Orient...*, pp. 48–51.

99 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, pp. 167–168.

trollable sexual drive of the non-white races and their limitless fertility. […] Nineteenth-century theories of race did not just consist of essentializing differentiations between self and other, they were also about a fascination with people having sex – interminable, adultering, aleatory, illicit, inter-racial sex."[100] In the same manner did some of the translators "misrepresent" the female characters, trying to conform them to the image of the sexually insatiable Oriental female Other, as in Burton's example. At the same time, however, such translators as Lane, for instance, reinscribed into the image of Oriental female characters the Victorian female ideal, the shadow of the Same, which is supposed to reflect, to be a mirror of, the Self. Western writers and artists, drawing on the translations of *The Arabian Nights*, in their attempt at feminizing Oriental women, portray them as "erotic objects of male visual pleasure"[101] and accentuate their "helplessness and increasingly subdued speech, [in which] textual presence becomes to shrink."[102] Nonetheless, the manipulated and subverted portrayal of the Oriental female identity became an inseparable part of the modes of expression of Western discourse. The odalisque, usually depicted as a helpless, passive, dozing nude female, was a very popular subject in Orientalist paintings. Commenting on the nature of paintings of odalisques collected in the European museums, Mernissi explains the etymology of the word. "Odalisque is the word most commonly used in the West for a harem slave. It is a Turkish word, and has a spatial connotation, as it comes from the word *oda*, which means 'room.' 'Literally,' explains Alev Lytly Croutier, a Turkish author born in a house that had previously been occupied by the harem of a pasha, 'Odalisque means the woman of the room,' implying a general status of servant."[103]

The female characters in *The Thousand and One Nights* do not resemble odalisques and are portrayed neither in terms of simple dichotomies nor in any other uniform way. The reader may encounter women of different ages, religions, and sexual preferences, ranging from positive to negative characters, either main protagonists or just playing minor parts in the stories, good wives, mothers, but also witches, and sexually insatiable lovers, promiscuous, but also religious women. One could enumerate the features of the female characters at length. However, *The Arabian Nights*,

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100 R. Young: "The Cultural Politics of Hybridity." In: *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin. London 2006, p. 159.

101 M. Kahf: *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque*. Austin 2002, p. 112.

102 Ibidem, p. 113.

103 F. Mernissi: *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*. New York 2002, p. 36.

instead of being treated as a repository of knowledge about femininity in Oriental medieval discourse, served only as a source of inspiration for the West, which had a predilection for "discovery" of the Orient. And the portrayal of Scheherazade and many other Eastern female characters in literature and art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries resembles a sexualised fiction of a mythical "Oriental femininity." Negotiating the space between the representation of Oriental femininity in Occidental discourse and the images of the female characters appearing in *The Arabian Nights* requires a rereading of the tales, possibly by a comparative analysis of the diverse translations.

The translations differ significantly in terms of portrayal of femininity and sexuality. There are stories with significant female characters which are not included in some of the translations, and stories that have different titles or contents although they supposedly relate "the same" tales. In contrast to the many passive and idle male heroes of the *Nights*, the cycle includes a variety of active, vigorous, and intelligent female characters who resemble its storyteller. One of them is the story about Tawaddud, which is included neither in Lane's nor Haddawy's translations. Lane, as Burton writes in a footnote, "omits this tale, 'as it would not only require a volume of commentary but be extremely tiresome to most readers.' Quite true; but it is valuable to Oriental Students who are beginning their studies, as an excellent compendium of doctrine and practice according to the Shafi'í School."[104]

As the story of "Abu Al-Husin and His Slave-Girl Tawaddud" appears only in Burton's translation, the tale cannot be compared to other English translations. According to Margaret A. Parker, the story about Tawaddud was written in Baghdad and rewritten in Egypt between the tenth and the thirteenth century.[105] Tawaddud, a female slave, is in many ways similar to Scheherazade. Firstly, she shows courage and wit, proposing that her master sell her to Harun al-Rashid for the exorbitant price of ten thousand dinars. Tawaddud, having a well-developed sense of marketing, performs a self-advertising campaign. The slave's position and her desire to be well sold to such a famous and wealthy master as Harun al-Rashid mirrors a depiction of a woman as an object that may be purchased and sold just like other commodities. Ahmed, drawing on the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, points out that in the early Islamic societies "the distinctions between concubine, woman for sexual use, and object must inevitably have

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104 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...*, vol. 5, p. 196.

105 See M. R. Parker: *The Story of a Story Across Cultures: The Case of the Doncella Teodor*. London 1996, p. 1.

blurred."[106] Although Scheherazade, as the Vizier's daughter, was not an object to be sold, her situation was even worse as she was an object that might be disposed of at any time.

To speak of other differences between the two protagonists, there is the question of their depiction. Tawaddud, in contrast to Scheherazade, is described in physical terms. Burton writes: "Eyes like gazelles' eyne; and nose like the edge of scimitar fine and cheeks like anemones of blood – red shine, and mouth like Solomon's seal and sign [...] She captivated all who saw her, with the excellence of her beauty and the sweetness of her smile, and shot them down with the shafts she launched from her eyes; and withal she was eloquent of speech and excellently skilled in verse."[107] Parker, in her analysis of the story of the Doncella Teodor (the Spanish equivalent of Tawaddud's story), also compares the protagonist to Scheherazade. However, after a remark concerning the reproduction of the motifs of the Frame Story, such as exchange, use of wits and words, and mediation, Parker writes: "Like Shahrazad, she is beautiful enough to attract the king's interest, and has been well educated and thus has the confidence to suggest and carry out a strategy of survival."[108] With this unsubstantiated remark, Parker gives credence to the myth of Scheherazade as a beautiful heroine who, as has been pointed out, is in none of the translations and manuscripts described as beautiful.

As far as similarities between the two female characters are concerned, through her wit and the art of storytelling and mediation Tawaddud resembles Scheherazade because "both women invert the master/subject relationship by means of wit and words. Shahrazad's stories and Tawaddud's verbal examination have the power to change the course of events, saving the lives of women in the former situation and the situation of the master in the latter."[109] Tawaddud is also aware of the seducing power of words, as, having convinced her master to be brought to Harun al-Rashid's court, and being asked in what sort of accomplishments she excels, she answers in the following way:

> Oh my lord, I am versed in syntax and poetry and jurisprudence and exegesis and philosophy; and I am skilled in music and the knowledge of the Divine ordinances and in arithmetic and geodesy and geometry and the fables of the ancients. I know the Sublime Koran by heart [...] I know the Holy Traditions of the Apostle's sayings,

106 L. Ahmed: *Women and Gender in Islam...*, p. 85.
107 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...*, vol. 5, p. 89.
108 M. R. Parker: *The Story of a Story Across Cultures...*, p. 115.
109 Ibidem.

> historical and legendary, the established and those whose ascription is doubtful; and I have studied the exact sciences, geometry and philosophy and medicine and logic and rhetoric and composition; and I have learnt many things by rote and am passionately fond of poetry. I can play the lute and know its gamut and notes and notation and the crescendo and diminuendo. If I sing and dance, I seduce, and if I dress and scent myself I slay.[110]

The protagonist's words turn out to be truthful, for she "defeats the court sages in an intellectual form of strip-poker."[111] Seducing with her words, showing vast knowledge of philosophy, law, and religion, and answering correctly all the sages' questions, she becomes herself an interrogator and wins, as each sage leaves the court naked and ashamed. Tawaddud represents one of the recurrent female characters in the *Nights*, that of active, intelligent, and also beautiful women. The tale also indicates that the stories of the *Nights* are not a cluster of miscellaneous stories, because it is another tale which refers to the Frame Story and mirrors the situation of Scheherazade.

Kabbani, in her chapter "The Text as Pretext," explains that for both Lane and Burton, the *Arabian Nights* manuscripts served as an occasion for their own conjectures and manipulations. However, Kabbani endorses a false claim that the female characters are portrayed in terms of dichotomies only, and she writes:

> The depictions of women in the *Arabian Nights* can be arranged in two classic categories. The first category is by far the larger one, containing the negative stereotypes who embody the vices traditionally associated with the female (associations that crop up in every almost every culture) and ones which are supposedly peculiar to her. The women are demonesses, procuresses, sorceresses, witches. They are fickle, faithless and lewd. [...] The second category (and the less important one) contains women who are pious and prudent. They are usually well-brought up virgins who fall victim to a cruel fate before being corrupted (for all women are corruptible) or pious wives or mothers who are not disturbingly sexual.[112]

The tale about Tawaddud belongs to the broad branch of tales in which the protagonists are neither pious virgins or wives nor lewd demonesses

110 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...,* vol. 4, p. 90.

111 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 168.

112 R. Kabbani: *Europe's Myths of Orient...*, pp. 48–52.

or witches. Tawaddud is a slave, who is not described in terms of her sexuality or moral values: she is an example of an intelligent female character. Being seductive but not lewd, like Scheherazade, she does not function as a negative female character.

There are many female characters, like Tawaddud, who transgress the conventional and stereotypical perception of Eastern femininity, so that it is not possible to assign them to the odalisque-termagant dichotomy. Contrary to Kabbani's view, the female characters are often portrayed as sexually active or sometimes even lewd but it is often a positive portrayal. For instance, the story of "The Young Woman and Her Five Lovers" describes a cunning young married woman who, in order to set her lover free from jail, proposes sexual favours to five men. Each time a man comes to her house and is told that the lady's husband is unexpectedly coming back home. All the men, unaware of the deceit and the presence of other men, have to hide in a different compartment of a cabinet made especially for the purpose of hiding and locking in men. In the end, all the male captives remain motionless and speechless in the cabinet, until a carpenter, who occupies the top drawer of the cabinet, cannot control his bladder any longer. His urine leaks on the king, who is situated under him, the king's bladder also does not hold out, and the king's urine leaks on the vizier, then the vizier's on the governor, and the governor's on the judge. This comic tale displays a reversion of the hierarchy as the carpenter, who occupies the lowest social stratum, is at the top of the cabinet. The tale, presenting a carnivalesque reality, depicts women's ability to achieve their aims, their courage, ingenuity and also cunning. Interestingly, the female protagonist is not depicted pejoratively.

The motif of infidelity and power relations between man and woman, which is the cornerstone of the Frame Story, is mirrored in a large number of tales. Again only in Burton's translation there is another tale with infidelity motif entitled "Tale of Kamar al-Zaman." The tale focuses on Princess Budur, another significant female character, who reciprocally falls in love with Kamar al-Zaman. Because of an insidious trick played by two ifrits, the lovers spend only one night together. The next day they wake up alone in their beds and no one believes in their story of love at first sight. Budur, outraged when her duenna explains that no man could have possibly entered her room, utters the following words: "Woe to thee, thou accursed! Thou traitress! Wilt thou lie to me and tell me that none lay with me last night and swear to me falsehood in the name of the Lord?"[113] After the duenna assures Budur of her loyalty and sincerity she is slain by the infuriated princess. Budur decides to find her beloved regardless of the

113 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights…*, vol. 3, p. 118.

consequences. She cross-dresses and travels in search of Kamar al-Zaman, and due to unexpected circumstances becomes a king. Princess Budur without difficulty manages to perform the king's duties and successfully reigns over the country. After some time the couple is reunited and it is Budur who performs the role of the master while Kamar resembles a slave-like partner. Her passion is described as stronger than her lover's. Eventually, she betrays her husband with his son by his second wife. This tale is one among many stories which shows a recurrence of the motif of women's infidelity presented in the Frame Story. The appearance of the tales with an infidelity motif or tales resembling and mirroring the Frame Story illustrates the storyteller's attempt to cure the king's delirium. Scheherazade, through the repetition of the tales with infidelity motif, helps the king to overcome his disturbed condition.

Among the active female characters it is important to mention Princess Abriza, who in Burton's translation, is "portrayed as a staunch Amazon, with a strong will and a free spirit and matching physical strength with beauty,"[114] also cross-dresses and fiercely opposes with the opposite sex. Princess Abriza, who is a Christian woman, fights with Sharrkan, a Muslim man. Having won the fight with her rival, the Princess addresses the king with the following words: "Verily, if Sharrkan fell into my hands, I would go forth to him in a habit of a man and drag him from his saddle seat and make him my captive and lay him in bilboes."[115] Her behaviour explicitly indicates that she is aware of her power and dominant position over her male captive; at the same time she is courageous enough to address the king directly and inform him about her wishes. Leeuwen, describing Abriza as "a heroine of the Amazone type, [who] casts off the burden of patriarchal authority and takes control of her own sexuality and life,"[116] accentuates her tragic fate and the high price she has to pay for her dauntless personality. The motif of the fighting woman prevails in *The Arabian Nights*. Apart from man-woman fights, there are images of masculine women, Amazon warrior-women and groups of naked women fighting.

The tales referred to above present various images of "Oriental femininity" adumbrated through Burton's perspective. Unfortunately, none of these tales are included in Lane's and Haddawy's modern translations. However, as the stories are significant for mirroring the Frame Story and because they conflate the issues of power relations between men and women and also the image of Eastern femininity, they have to be included

114 R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel and Transformation*. London 2007, p. 100.

115 R.F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...*, vol. 2, p. 46.

116 R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights...*, pp. 92–93.

in this work. There are different reasons for the absence of many tales in Haddawy's and Lane's translations. In Haddawy's version, based on Mahdi's edition, there is a limited number of tales, since Mahdi includes only those tales, that belong to the so-called "archetype" of the *Nights*; hence there are only two volumes of his *Arabian Nights*. In Lane's case the reason for omission is not the archetypical version but his conviction that "East was full of strange apparitions, and some were too erotic or too violent even to be evoked in language."[117] Hence Lane chose the tales that were "suitable" for his Western readers or edited or commented heavily on the tales he considered to be perverted. To quote Kabbani, "Reticent prudery marked many of the anecdotes that Lane offered to his readers; often, when describing a mode of behaviour he wished to imply existed in the East – and only there – he would interrupt his own account as being too risqué for an erudite European to write, or a respectable European to read."[118] Lane's portrayals of the *Nights*' characters are governed by the aforementioned idea of the Other as the Self shadow. His text for the most part includes only the tales in which female characters are able to be depicted as Victorian ladies.

Lane's prudery is conspicuous in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad" which is also included in Burton and Haddawy's translations. These two translators convey a similar story. Burton's language is more archaic than Haddawy's but in terms of the plot both versions share more similarities than disparities. The tale, describing a porter who, having helped the ladies carry the shopping, is invited to dine with them, is a trajectory of feminine-masculine power and sexual relations depicted through a game the four characters get involved in. The game begins when the first naked lady sits on the porter's lap and pointing to her slit asks:

> "My lord and my love, what is this?" "Your womb," said he, and she replied, "Pooh, pooh, you have no shame," and slapped him on the neck. "Your vulva," said he, and the other sister pinched him, shouting, "Bah, this is an ugly word." "Your cunt," said he, and the third sister boxed him on the chest and knocked him over, saying, "Fie, have some shame," "Your clitoris," said he, and again the naked girl slapped him, saying, "No." "Your pudenda, your pussy, your sex tool," said he, and she kept replying, "No, no." He kept giving various names, but every time he uttered a name, one of the girls hit him and asked, "What do you call this?"[119]

117 R. Kabbani: *Europe's Myths of Orient...*, p. 40.

118 Ibidem.

119 M. Mahdi: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 73.

The game, which takes place three times as each of the girls interrogates the porter about the proper name of her genitalia, conveys the simple lesson that a man can never know the right answer to the question. However, in the end the porter takes revenge as he also takes off his clothes and asks the women the same question, proving that they also do not know the answer.

But for Burton's extensive footnotes, these two versions would be quite parallel. However, the translator of *Kama Sutra* could not resist the temptation to sharing his beliefs with the readers of the *Nights*. Burton is eager to express his knowledge about the Easterners and in particular Eastern women. When referring to the women setting up the rules of the game for the porter, the translator writes: "[FN#155] 'Nothing for nothing' is a fixed idea with the Eastern woman: not so much for greed as for a sexual point d'honneur when dealing with the adversary-man."[120] Not taking into account that every game needs rules and a stake, the translator willingly writes derogatory remarks about the female characters, taking for granted that the fictitious characters of the *Nights* serve as a metaphor for Easterners, to use his word. Burton is also known among critics for writing footnotes that bear no relevance to the tale they annotate, but serve his aim of teaching enlightened Western readers about the Orient, such as the following footnote, which apparently refers to striking one's son with a slipper:

> [FN#197] Striking with the shoe, the pipe-stick and similar articles is highly insulting, because they are not made, like whips and scourges, for such purpose. Here the East and the West differ diametrically. "Wounds which are given by instruments which are in one's hands by chance do not disgrace a man," says Cervantes (D. Q. i., chaps. 15), and goes on to prove that if a Zapatero (cobbler) cudgels another with his form or last, the latter must not consider himself cudgelled. The reverse in the East where a blow of a pipe stick cost Mahommed Ali Pasha's son his life: Ishmail Pasha was burned to death by Malik Nimr, chief of Shendy (Pilgrimage, i., 203). Moreover, the actual wound is less considered in Moslem law than the instrument which caused it: so sticks and stones are venial weapons, whilst sword and dagger, gun and pistol are felonious. See ibid. (i., 336) for a note upon the weapons with which nations are policed.[121]

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120 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...*, vol. 1, p. 170.

121 Ibidem, p. 173.

Comparative analysis of the story of the porter and the ladies becomes more stimulating when it is contrasted with Lane's version of the tale. Jassim Ali, in his study of nineteenth-century English criticism of the *Nights*, points out that Lane appreciates the tales mainly due to their informative nature of the customs of the Easterners and thus he substantially omits most of the "licentious scenes such as the one in the story of the porter and three ladies of Baghdad, which he [Lane] described as giving 'a very erroneous idea of the manners of Arab ladies.'"[122] Unlike Burton, who plays with sexuality and erotic subtexts, Lane, perceiving the East as characteristic of perverted sexuality and decadence,[123] avoids referring to sexuality in his footnotes. He also writes extensively about Easterners; however, his notes to the aforementioned tale surprisingly focus on the architecture of the building in which the four spent their curious evening. Kabbani, having scrutinised his comments, writes: "Lane informs his readers in his footnote that windows 'commonly project outwards, and are furnished with mattresses and cushions. [...] The ceiling is of wood and certain portions of it, which are carved, or otherwise ornamented by fanciful carpentry, are usually painted with bright colours.'"[124] Burton also refers to Lane's version of the tale, as he mentions that when the rules of the game are established:

> [FN#165] Lane (i. 124) is scandalised and naturally enough by this scene, which is the only blot in an admirable tale admirably told. Yet even here the grossness is but little more pronounced than what we find in our old drama (e.g., Shakespeare's King Henry V.) written for the stage, whereas tales like *The Nights* are not read or recited before both sexes. Lastly "nothing follows all this palming work": in Europe the orgie would end very differently. These "nuns of Theleme" are physically pure: their debauchery is of the mind, not the body. Galland makes them five, including the two doggesses.[125]

Thus, as has been delineated, each of the translators only seem to convey the same story, as behind the spectrum of the plot, because of their comments and footnotes, Burton's and Lane's translations possess an eerie quality of creating the Other, the mythical Orient.

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122 M. J. Ali: *Scheherazade in England: A Study of Nineteenth-Century English Criticism of the Arabian Nights.* Washington 1981, p. 93.

123 After R. Kabbani: *Europe's Myths of Orient...*, p. 43.

124 Ibidem, p. 44.

125 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights...*, vol. 1, p. 171.

Persian School, *Khusrau sees Shirin bathing in a stream* (from the *Khamsa of Nizami*), 1539–1543

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Another tale, contradicting Kabbani's view of the female characters of the *Nights* as either lewd and debauched or pious and well-brought up wives, is the tale of "Hassan of Bassorah," the tale which is also known in the Islamic world as "The Lady with the Feather Dress."[126] However, it does not appear under that title in any translations known to me. The fairy tale is included in Burton's and Lane's translations. Burton compares the tale to the "Arabian Odyssey" of Sindbad the Seaman but accentuates that the marvellous travels take place in Jin-land and Japan.[127] The tale depicts the story of a goldsmith named Hassan who falls in love with one of a number of beautiful virgins who resemble birds and are able to fly with the help of their feather dresses. As Burton writes:

> He stood gazing at them from afar as they entered the pavilion and perched on the couch; after which each bird rent open its neck-skin with its claws and issued out of it; and lo! it was but a garment of feathers, and there came forth ten virgins, maids whose beauty shamed the brilliancy of the moon. They all doffed their clothes and plunging into the basin, washed and fell to playing and sporting one with other; […][128]

Having finished bathing, the virgins put on their feather dresses and fly away to their homeland which is known to be a far away Jin-land. Hassan, who feels very lonely and miserable, cannot eat or drink, and anxiously waits for the next month for the girls to fly again to his country. When he finally sees his beloved again, with the help of his sister, he snatches the beautiful girl's feather dress. In consequence, the Sitt al-Manar, deprived of her wings, is unable to fly back to Jin-land. Although Hassan feeds the girl, gives her clothes and takes care of her, she does not fall in love with him but feels miserable and lonely. The "damsel," as Burton refers to her, has to marry the goldsmith, bear him children and live with her husband until she finds an opportunity to snatch her feather dress, take her children and go back to her homeland.

This fairy tale is interpreted by Mernissi as depicting an oppressed, dependent woman contrasted with the male protagonist, who is dominant, oppressive, and possessive.[129] However, the tale fits this pattern only in its

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126 Refer to F. Mernissi: "The Tale of the Lady with the Feather Dress." In: *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems.* New York 2002, p. 21.

127 Refer to R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights…*, vol. 8, p. 160.

128 R. F. Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights…*, vol. 8, p. 19.

129 Refer to F. Mernissi: *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems.* New York 2003, pp. 5–7.

first part. After the woman's escape, Hassan, feeling devastated, decides to set out on a quest to find his beloved in a far-away and dangerous land of Ifrits with the seemingly unattainable aim of convincing his wife to come back with him and trust him. After a long, dangerous, and adventurous quest Hassan finds his wife and the fairy tale ends happily, as the woman also falls in love with the hero and believes that she understood his worth when she lost him. However, Leeuwen argues that although "it is suggested that Sitt al-Manar has defied the authority of both Hasan, her husband, and her father, and makes her final decision of her own will, [...] her decision is motivated by the conventional argument that a wife should be loyal to her husband and obey him."[130] Leeuwen's reading of Sitt al-Manar seems to be inconsistent with the depicted character of the woman, since she has proved several times, when escaping from her husband and defending her own will, that she is able to defy both father and husband and disregard accepted norms and conventions. All in all, although the tale of Hassan and the princess is depicted by Burton via a distorted Victorian looking glass, the story indicates that, unlike in traditional fairy tales, the characters are able to change, and perform neither purely positive nor negative functions.

Notwithstanding his attempt at assiduous explication and commentary, Burton depicts his attitude towards the Oriental Other as being inferior in comparison to the West and the Victorian England in particular. As Ahmed, discussing the significance of Britain as the colonial power, says: "in the colonial era the colonial powers, especially Britain, developed their theories of races and cultures and of a social evolutionary sequence according to which middle-class Victorian England, and its beliefs and practices, stood at the culminating point of the evolutionary process and represented the model of ultimate civilisation."[131] For Burton, Victorian England indeed was the model of ultimate civilisation. His view of the Orient is thus an illusory concept of the Other standing in opposition to the Same. Although the *Nights* originated in Arab Mesopotamia and Persia which were then not in any sense colonies, the Arab world was colonized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at the time of emergence of the European translations of the *Nights*. Therefore, the notion of colonial Other, which parallels the Oriental Other, is applicable to the image of the Other emerging through the European translations of the *Nights*.

The stories are intertwined with depictions of distorted Englishness resulting in creation of the Other as the reflected Self which becomes a travesty of the Oriental Other. The translations of the *Nights* contain sub-

130 R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights...*, p. 92.

131 L. Ahmed: *Women and Gender in Islam...*, p. 151.

stantially different discourses on Oriental femininity. Yet, regardless of the choice of translation – whether it is Burton's version with accentuated femininity and feminine sexuality, or Lane's with its edited and effaced femininity in the tales – the reader can fully appreciate the diversity and abundance of the female protagonists. What is more, analysis of the translations on the one hand helps to adumbrate the translators' authorial intrusion, and on the other enriches and accentuates the plenitude of the women of the *Nights*, depicted neither as odalisques nor termagants nor in any other dichotomous traps. Although *The Arabian Nights* is a repository of "Oriental female identities," these identities are the consequences of the translators' manipulations of the perception of Oriental femininity.

As has been discussed, there is neither "real" representation of Scheherazade nor of the *Arabian Nights*, comparative analysis of several translations reveals the translators' attempts to manipulate the image of the *Nights* and its famous narrator. The manipulations, which involve changing the text, editing, deleting, and arduous noting, are the ramification of the translators', to use Žižek's phrase, ideological fantasies.[132] The translations of the *Nights* are ideological fantasies not only of Oriental femininity, but of the Orient itself. However, as the analysis in this subchapter indicates, the trajectory of the metamorphosis of the images of the female characters of the *Nights* indicates that the "misrepresented" and to some extent subverted images of "Oriental" female identities are fascinating examples of colonizing, recreating and establishing the subjectivity of the Other.

Storytelling as the Art of Seduction

> Narrative equals life; the absence of narrative, death.
>
> T. Todorov: *The Poetics of Prose*

> And Scheherazade noticed the dawn was approaching and stopped telling her story. When the next night arrived, however, she received the king's permission to continue her tale and said, [...].
>
> R. F. Burton: *The Arabian Nights: A Selection*

The Book of Thousand and One Nights possesses an eerie quality of seducing its editors, translators, and likewise its readers. Scheherazade's voice rejuvenates the stories of many diverse number of protagonists enmeshed in a variety of complicated circumstances. A perpetual resuscitation of the spirit of the *Nights* results from an apparent entropy of the cycle. Lost in the proliferation of the tales and a medley of incipients, the reader in vain can

132 Refer to S. Žižek: *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London 1989, pp. 30–33.

search for an excipit which is constantly deferred. Therefore, this subchapter is an attempt at analysis Scheherazade's art of storytelling as seduction, as a textual play with Shahriyar that consists deferral of gratification.

Storytelling is one of the most significant aspects of *The Arabian Nights*; it gives an enticing charm to the tales. It has been often suggested that the book itself derives from storytelling, which is an oversimplification because many stories of the *Nights* surpass the abilities of storytellers. In his *Arabian Nights: A Companion*, Irwin says that it is only partially true that the *Nights* are derived from storytelling and that "the relationship between oral narrative and written fiction is more complex than it at first appears."[133] It has been also often assumed that the *Nights* is just a bunch of unrelated stories and Scheherazade is only one of the protagonists of the cycle. The first chapter of this work argues that this assumption is false. It is our intention in this subchapter to present Scheherazadean art of storytelling as seduction and also to highlight the differences between the translations of the *Nights* in terms of Scheherazade's and the translators' positions as the narrators.

The *Nights* escapes the traditional understanding of a literary work; it has no single author but presents a polyphony of anonymous authors. Its protean identity also results from another polyphony, that of the translators who so palpably mark their authorial presence. Assuming that any meaning is mediated by a cultural context, we can approach the book from various contexts and receive different meanings of the tales. Since the reception of *The Arabian Nights* has been created by author(s), translators, and finally its readers, it is possible to grasp the *Nights*' meaning by their horizons. Apart from the traditional fusion of the horizon of the author and the reader, the horizon of the translator is crucial here. Pondering on the nature of the horizons, Rui Sampaio, in "The Hermeneutic Conception of Culture," writes:

> From Gadamer's perspective, if all meaning is context-dependent, then understanding is not primarily a relation between a subject and an object, but a relation between horizons. Since it is not possible to ignore and to jump out of one's own horizon, understanding operates through an integration of a strange horizon. Such an integration means, on the one hand, that our own horizon is transformed and, on the other hand, that the other horizon, being illuminated by a new perspective, transfigurates itself. Understanding consists therefore in a process of fusions of horizons.[134]

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133 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights…*, p. 103.

134 R. Sampaio: "The Hermeneutic Conception of Culture." In: *Philosophy*

Understanding of the *Nights* is mediated by the fusion of horizons. The horizons of the *Nights'* author(s), translators and readers substantially differ as their cultural codes are different as well. Whereas Irwin posits that the *Nights* is "a cultural amphibian,"[135] Sallis emphasizes its "very fluid concept of identity"[136] and also espouses the idea that "there is a dynamic flow between a written text and the selves who read it 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."[137]

The discrepancies of the translators' horizons are evident in their perception of Scheherazade's role in the storytelling. To begin with, there is Burton, whose authorial presence in the book suggests the reader that his *Nights* is a figment of his imagination. Rejecting transparent translation and interrupting the flow of narrative with his quasi-scientific footnotes, Burton assumes the position of the narrator; he tries to influence the reader's responses. Sallis, speaking of the nature of his *Nights*, espouses the idea of "the author as parasite, the text as host,"[138] and she writes, "His [Burton's] 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 remainders of his views at the foot of nearly every page."[139] Although Burton's translation retains Scheherazade as the narrator, and the intrusion of her formula asking the king for permission to continue the tale is sustained in the text, it is the translator who is the focal interest of the reader. In a way the translator assumes the position of the narrator, Scheherazade; and the reader assumes the position of the listener, King Shahriyar.

Lane's attempt to become the narrator/storyteller of the *Nights* is even more explicit. Lacking the division of nights and Scheherazade's voice, the intrusion of the mistress of storytelling, his *Nights* has become a bunch of tales interspersed with the translator's ubiquitous notes. Alike Burton, he assumes the position of the narrator. Sallis, analysing Lane's text, observes that even the publication of subsequent serial pamphlets was aimed at attracting the readers' attention:

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of Culture, The Paideia Project Online. Available HTTP: http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Cult/CultSamp.html (accessed 10 September 2008).

135 R. Irwin: *The Arabian Nights...*, p. 113.

136 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass...*, p. 1.

137 Ibidem, p. 84.

138 Ibidem.

139 Ibidem, p. 56.

> 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 the pamphlets occurs sometimes even in mid-sentence. Readers would have had to wait nearly a month for the continuation. Lane and his publishers became the tangible manipulators of suspense and expectation, unwittingly 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.[140]

Assuming the positions of the narrators, both Lane and Burton locate the book within the spectrum of self-reflective work, a kind of meta-narration, as Ghazoul stresses: "The *Arabian Nights* is clearly a narrative about an act of narration, and this makes it an involuted and introspective work."[141] In his *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Gérard Genette, analysing the levels of narrative, writes: "Scheherazade is an intradiegetic narrator because before uttering a single word she is already a character in a narrative that is not of her own; but since the story she tells is not about herself, she is at the same time a heterodiegetic narrator."[142] Further on in his work, Genette writes about nesting narratives as balloons within balloons with their diegesis, describing *The Thousand and One Nights* as an example of polyphony of diegesis within diegesis and of a multiplicity of intradiegetic narrators and of metadiegetic characters and narratives.[143] Positing that the *Nights* bestows the reader with, in terms of the levels of the narrative, "the invisible extradiegetic narrator" who is embodied in the persona of the translator, it is plausible to assume that contrary to Genette's classification, the first proper narrator of the *Nights* is already intradiegetic, as he is subsequent narrator. Consequently Scheherazade becomes a metadiegetic character and/or (depending on the translation) narrator. Positing that storytelling is essential in constructing subjectivity, it is conspicuous how the translators construct their subjectivity as "invisible narrators" and deprive Scheherazade of her focal position as the storyteller. The modality of seduction in the *Nights* operates simultane-

140 Ibidem, p. 51.

141 F. Ghazoul: *Nocturnal Poetics...*, p. 35.

142 G. Genette: *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Trans. J.E. Lewin. New York 1988, p. 84.

143 Ibidem, p. 85.

ously on two levels. The first level concerns the translators, who seduce their readers, and the second level concerns Scheherazade who seduces the king with her storytelling.

Collating the translations of the *Nights* reveals that Scheherazade's position as the narrator of the tales significantly varies. Her image is very different in Lane's version from that in, Burton's, Payne's and Haddawy's, because of Lane's effacement of the mistress of storytelling from his version of the *Nights*. The ramification of this translator's expunging the division of nights is that Scheherazade disappears from the cycle as a whole and survives only as one of the key protagonists of the Frame Story. Since Lane has expunged Scheherazade's voice from the text, Burton's translation is the focus of our interest in terms of the role of Scheherazade as the storyteller.

Burton's translation presents Scheherazade as the storyteller who understands that she has to rewrite the king's past, to open him up to the present. Voluntarily marrying the king, the Vizier's daughter is intelligent enough to understand Shahriyar's state of mind. Cognizant of the king's encounter with unfaithful women, she explores the idea of seducing him textually instead of sexually. By means of wit and her extraordinary art of storytelling she wants to show him "the desire for something else – of metonymy"[144] or to quote Beaumont, "desire in its displacements."[145] Therefore, each night she tells the husband a story, interrupts it at dawn, the time appointed for her murder, and finishes the next night. In this way she avoids death at the hand of the king and manages to show him the nature of his desire by means of language. Telling stories such as those in the Frame Story, the narrator establishes the importance of the king's experience by "appearance and recurrence in the experiences of others, through thematic repetitions."[146] As Sallis argues, to tell the king stories with an infidelity motif, especially those concerning infidelity with black slaves, stands for an attempt to test the king's endurance.[147] Since Scheherazade's cogito is: "I narrate, therefore I am,"[148] she has to narrate the stories until the king trusts her and that might mean narrating *ad infinitum*. Indeed, Scheherazade does, in a sense, narrate the tales *ad infinitum* as Ghazoul notes: "[…] one thousand and one can be recast as 1000 + 1, or the maximum number imaginable plus one which in algebra is called infinity."[149]

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144 J. Lacan: *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. A. Sheridan. London-New York 2006, p. 184.

145 D. Beaumont: *Slave of Desire…*, p. 56.

146 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, p. 86.

147 Ibidem, p. 105.

148 F. Ghazoul: *Nocturnal Poetics…*, p. 36.

149 Ibidem, p. 39.

Mughal School, *Portrait of a lady holding a lotus petal* (from the Small Clive Album), 1750–1760

The Stapleton Collection © Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK / Bridgeman Art Library

Todorov's famous words, "Narrative equals life; absence of narrative equals death,"[150] concisely describe Scheherazade's predicament.

Scheherazade does not attempt to seduce the king sexually because she knows that "any concept of conquest by flirtation and deferral is void from the start."[151] She manipulates desire but "it is not sexual, it is narrative substituted for the sexual."[152] Sironval, corroborating this view, argues that "her beauty is not mentioned because the female body and physical seduction play no part in her performance."[153] Like Sallis, he emphasizes that the desire she is to awaken in the king is not sexual but rather textual. Drawing on Žižek's interpretation of Lacan, Leeuwen states that Scheherazade "restores the functioning of the symbolic order in Shahriyar's mind and life"[154]; through storytelling she seduces the king by the art of interruption and a permanent deferral of gratification. Leeuwen posits that "Shahriyar incorrectly identifies the Real with 'woman,' confuses 'desire' with sexual gratification and constructs a new reality from which the feminine Real is eliminated. Woman is an object of desire, which, when it is attained, must be destroyed before it can disrupt the symbolic order."[155] Enticing the king with storytelling and restoring his symbolic order, Scheherazade becomes an unattainable object of desire, or to quote Wright, "the Object attainable only by way of an incessant postponement."[156] Both Leeuwen and Sallis perceive Shahriyar's process of transformation as an outcome of Scheherazade's storytelling. However, for Sallis, the recurrence of the tales with an infidelity motif is a means of testing the king's endurance, and for Leeuwen, "storytelling is a therapy, a verbal weapon against Shahriyar's violent aberration."[157]

Not only does storytelling signify testing the king's endurance and helping him overcome aberration, but it is also a significant element in the construction of Scheherazade's subjectivity. As she is transparent as the protagonist after the opening part of the Frame Story ends, it is plausible to establish Scheherazade's subjectivity only through the prism of her tales. Hence, inclusion or exclusion of her voice from storytelling means that she possesses or lacks subjectivity. Sallis also notes the significance of the intrusion of the voice of the mistress of storytelling:

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150 T. Todorov: *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans. R. Howard. New York 1977, p. 74.

151 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, p. 102.

152 Ibidem.

153 M. Sironval: *The Image of Scheherazade…*, p. 223.

154 R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights…*, p. 133.

155 Ibidem.

156 E. Wright, ed.: *The Žižek Reader*. London 1999, quoted by R. Leeuwen in: *The Thousand and One Nights…*, p. 141.

157 R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights…*, p. 46.

> 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 Scheherazade's tale is important, as Burton, for one, fully appreciates. However, even without the necessary reiteration, there are other remainders 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 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 possible outcome of the delayed veiled narrative: will the speaking voice be silenced? Will Scheherazade also die violently? This motif, like that of infidelity, functions also on the level of reminding, goading and reproaching Shahriyar, as well as stimulating the reader's sense of suspense.[158]

As this citation indicates, Scheherazade's fragmented storytelling, apart from the already enumerated features, stimulates suspense in Shahriyar. Constant deferral of gratification creates in the king an aura of anxiety conflated with unfulfilled desire. This leads to a seemingly infinite act of weaving narrative, which is the last feature of storytelling discussed in this book. The reader is confronted with an apparently endless storytelling which is a meticulously crafted labyrinth. The reader has to transgress the perfectly organised nesting stories which constitute a labyrinthine structure since the tales are constantly interrupted. Scheherazade's storytelling, which is based on the idea of art of interruption, aims not to fulfil but to prolong Shahriyar's desire, as Leeuwen argues:

> What Shahrazad teaches Shahriyar, too, through her inventive technique of storytelling, is that the purpose of life, of the drive of desire, is not the fulfilment of desire, but its perpetuation. Desire is aimed at a constructed object, but it is the constructing of the object, not the object itself, which is essential. Desire exists in order to reproduce itself within a continual process of construction, without approaching its fulfilment, because fulfilment is linked to death and the triumph of the Real. By postponing her own death, Shahrazad postpones the gratification of Shahriyar's desire; she defers the disclosure of the meaning of her stories to teach Shahriyar that the gratification inherent in stories is not the denouement, but the

158 E. Sallis: *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass…*, pp. 95–96.

> telling of the story itself, the process by which the denouement is separated from the beginning of the story.[159]

Being in a state of fear of her life during the day, at night Scheherazade regains control and seduces the king with her interrupted narratives. In his article "The Art of Interruption: *The Thousand and One Nights* and Jan Potocki," Leeuwen writes that "Shaharazad makes full use of the possibilities offered by the dialogic mechanism of interruption. In fact, the whole text of *The Thousand and One Nights* is nothing more than account of interruption, a long dialogic confrontation with the readers. Stories are interruptions, which place us in another perspective *vis-à-vis* our reality and experiences."[160]

Scheherazade's art of storytelling is characterized by fragmentation, deferral of gratification, seduction, and apparent infinity. This leads to the conjoining aspect of the above characteristics which is the power of imagination. In his introduction to *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard considers "the imagination as a major power of human nature."[161] Scheherazade's power of imagination permits her to go beyond the enclosed space of her husband's chamber and enables her to see the outside world; the world of magic, fantasy, and mystery; the world of symbols and metaphors. Shahriyar, lost in the labyrinths of nesting stories, tries to follow Scheherazade's tales; his desire for completion, for finishing the storytelling, makes him unable to kill his wife. Searching for the thread in the labyrinths of the *Nights*' stories leads to an aura of impossibility of completion and thus brings to mind the metaphor of the Tower of Babel. In his conclusions to his *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel, Transformation*, Leeuwen, drawing on the metaphor of the Tower of Babel, quotes Derrida:

> The "Tower of Babel" does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics. […] There is then something like an internal limit to formalization, an incompleteness of the construction.[162]

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159 R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights…*, p. 134.

160 R. Leeuwen: "The Art of Interruption: The Thousand and One Nights and Jan Potocki." In: *New Perspectives on Arabian Nights: Ideological Variations and Narrative Horizons*. Eds. W. Ouyang, G.J. Gelder. New York 2005, p. 58.

161 G. Bachelard: "Introduction." In: *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. M. Jolas. Boston 1964, p. viii.

162 J. Derrida quoted in R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights…*, p. 134.

The metaphor of the Tower of Babel perfectly reinscribes itself in the *Arabian Nights'* predicament. The aura of incompletion, of the impossibility of finishing, is the significant feature of the book. Shahriyar, whom the tales are curing of his aberration, awaits fulfilment of his desire but is kept in suspense and taught to relish the prolongation of desire. The reader, seduced by Scheherazade's words, in vain tries to read the book from cover to cover and to gain a sense of completion and ending. The translators, or in other words "the invisible narrators," paved the way for a protean identity of the work, which consists of a multiplicity of tongues and transcultural values. Finally, the seductive power of storytelling as the art of interruption affects not only the *Nights'* readers and translators but also various critics from different cultural backgrounds and historical epochs who have been fascinated by *The Thousand and One Nights*.

CHAPTER THREE

Entering the Labyrinth: *The Thousand and One Nights* in Contemporary Literature(s)

The Thousand and One Nights as the Intertext in Contemporary Literatures: An Outline

> Before unearthing this letter, I had questioned myself about the ways in which a book can be infinite. I could think of nothing other than a cyclic volume, a circular one. A book whose last page was identical with the first, a book which had the possibility of continuing indefinitely. I remembered too that night which is at the middle of *The Thousand and One Nights* when Scheherazade (through magical oversight of the copyist) begins to relate word for word the story of *The Thousand and One Nights*, establishing the risk of coming once again to the night when she must repeat it, and thus to infinity.
>
> J. L. Borges: *The Garden of Forking Paths*

Jorge Luis Borges, whose words are frequently used as epigraphs to the chapters of this book, is not the only contemporary writer to have been inspired by the spell of *The Book of Thousand and One Nights*. As Irwin succinctly points out in his "Introduction" to *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives From East and West*, "I discussed the influence of the *Nights* on European and American literature and suggested, at the risk of hyperbole, that that influence was so all-pervasive that it might have been an easier, shorter chapter if I had discussed those writers who were not influenced by the *Nights*."[1] The list of the writers who have rewritten,

1 R. Irwin: "Introduction." In: *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West*. Eds. Y. Yamanaka, T. Nishio. London 2006, p. iv.

recast, or referred to the *Nights* in their *oeuvre* may seem almost infinite. Since the process of metamorphosis of the *Nights* is ongoing, probing into the role of *The Arabian Nights* in contemporary literatures is what we shall focus on in this chapter.

Despite many years in which critics have displayed a condescending and patronising attitude towards the cycle, the book has been a rich source of inspiration for writers regardless of their cultural background, ethnic origin, or sex. The traces of the *Nights* in contemporary literatures and cultures resemble a labyrinthine structure. In order to find our own path in the labyrinths, we intend rather than solely concentrate on presenting the rewritings of the *Nights* through the frame imposed by the postcolonial and postmodern theories, to understand the process of transformation of the book by comparative analysis with the selected writing. Our primary interest is to probe into the transformations of Scheherazadean images in contemporary discourse. Secondly, we propose a reading of selected contemporary novels evoking the most seductive aspects of the Orient: the harem and the Odalisque. Thirdly, this study is committed to investigating the modality of the Scheherazadean art of storytelling as a means of constructing subjectivity.

To use an interdisciplinary approach which encompasses both philological comparative research and contemporary literary and cultural theories seems to allow for broader insight. In the previous chapters I have sought to emphasize transcultural values of *The Arabian Nights*, as the book is situated on the border of two cultures, the Orient and the Occident, which, permeating the cycle, create the hybrid features of the tales. In a similar way the Orient and the Occident permeate contemporary novels referring to the *Nights*; hybridity, transculturality, and a passion for storytelling are features that may be ascribed to the novels whose authors have been influenced by the *Nights*.

Borges is one of the authors whose writings about the *Nights* are the most prolific; he refers to the *Nights* in several stories, including "The Garden of Forking Paths," "The Zahir," "The Man on the Threshold" and "Averröes' search." The last story discusses the relationships between the two cultures and swiftly enters into *The Arabian Nights*' predicament. "Averröes' search," Evelyn Fishburn writes, "can be read as a self-ironic fictional elaboration of this situation: the attempt to cross cultural boundaries with the limited tools of one's culture. Seduced by his reading of Burton and Lane and some other Orientalists, the Borgesian narrator of 'Averröes' search' thinks he can dream up an Islamic scholar's vain efforts to comprehend a culture other than his own, but in the end he realizes that he has created merely a self-reflecting false image of an Islamic scholar

(Averröes), on a self-deluding endeavour such as his own."[2] The short story illustrates the impossibility of understanding the Other seen as if through the prism of one's cultural tools.

Borges' stories seem like infinite texts, as do the stories of the *Nights*. We may find similarities in his stories and *The Arabian Nights* as these similarities are the logical consequence of the writer's strong fascination with the book. The so–called infinite text of the *Nights* and of Borges' stories undergoes a series of resemblances, just to mention a few by Stephanie Jones. In her article "Emboldening Dinarzad: the *Thousand and One Nights* in contemporary fiction," Jones finds similarities between Borges' and the *Nights*' stories, writing that they are "vulnerable to a hyper-abstraction that glosses the specificity of the tales themselves."[3] Elsewhere in her article, analysing the story "Garden of Forking Paths," Jones proposes understanding the infinite-text in terms of Lacanian "symbolic object."[4] For Jones, "the grip of Borges' story is not in the trajectory of text within text, but in literary tension between ideas of the infinite and this extraordinary sense of predestination."[5] Drawing on Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Jones observes that "the infinite text is precisely a 'leftover': it is that which is both 'radically contingent' to the plot and also the 'pure material element' which 'guarantees [...] the structure of symbolic exchange' between the characters."[6] The metaphor of the infinite text as a contingent leftover to the plot is applicable to both *The Arabian Nights* and to the novels that use the *Nights* as its intertext.

The inifinite text, storytelling, and the labyrinthine structure are central concepts which are visible not only in Borges' fiction. In his prolific *oeuvre*, Salman Rushdie, one of the most popular contemporary writers in English, often refers to or draws on *The Arabian Nights* by means of storytelling and labyrinthine structures in his infinite-like novels and collections of short stories. This author, whose novels have generated a host of critical rereadings, has been long associated with the *fatwa* that in 1989 was proclaimed by Ayatollah Khomeini in response to *The Satanic Verses*, a novel controversial for many Muslims. Rushdie has been widely read and also criticised; however most of the criticism has revolved around the po-

2 E. Fishburn: "Traces of the *Thousand and One Nights* in Borges." In: *New Perspectives on Arabian Nights: Ideological Variation and Narrative Horizons.* Eds. W. Ouang, G.J. Gelder. New York 2005, p. 82.

3 P. Jones: "Emboldening Dinarzad: the Thousand and One Nights in Contemporary Fiction." In: *New Perspectives on the Arabian Nights.* Eds. W. Ouang, G.J. Gelder. New York 2005, p. 13.

4 Ibidem.

5 Ibidem.

6 Ibidem.

litical aspects of his writings and the relevance of his fiction to the condition of postcolonial studies. Scholars who take into account such concepts as orality and storytelling in Rushdie's fiction, with few exceptions,[7] only briefly mention *The Arabian Nights* as the source of inspiration. However, two of his novels, *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, draw significantly on *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights*. Moreover, the collection of short stories *East, West* may be listed in connection with the tales of the *Nights*, as can the fairy tale *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. References to *The Arabian Nights* are also found in *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, as in both novels appears the well-known tale of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*.

In her book, *Contaminations: Magic Realism in Contemporary British Fiction*, Barbara Klonowska devotes one chapter to Rushdie's fiction. Acknowledging the elements of subversiveness, irony, and a self-referential function in Rushdie's discourse, Klonowska notes the author's use or even abuse of conventions, for instance that he introduces the fairy-tale convention in order to destabilise it afterwards.[8] Although the author acknowledges the connection between Rushdie's fiction and the *Nights* and comments upon the intertextuality of his writings, her remarks concerning the connections with the *Nights* are rather cursory and unspecific. In Klonowska's understanding, Rushdie,

> […] juxtaposing European literary realism with Indian oral storytelling can indeed be interpreted as a voice in a postcolonial debate. Another reason for this narrative structure might be the postmodern wish to involve the reader in a textual game with the text; to force him or her into a more active participation in the act of reading. Finally the purpose might be a wish to make the narrative situation more credible pretending that these are long conversations in the *Arabian Nights* style and thus, paradoxically, to make them more psychologically realistic.[9]

As much as I can agree with the first part of the quotation, the last sentence suggests a dialogic nature to storytelling in the *Nights* and what is

7 See: B. Klonowska: *Contaminations: Magic Realism in Contemporary British Fiction*. Lublin 2006; G. Maziarczyk: "Saleem and the Reader: Metafictional Seduction in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*." In: Pase *Papers*. Eds. E. Gussman, B. Szymanek. Lublin 1998, pp. 287–294; J. Deszcz: "Włos Proroka Salmana Rushdiego jako kolejna baśń z Tysiąca i jednej nocy. O twórczości Rushdiego w kontekście Szeherezady". W: *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis* xl. Red. A. Michońska-Stadnik. Wrocław 2003, pp. 81–91.

8 B. Klonowska: *Contaminations: Magic Realism…*, p. 165.

9 Ibidem, p. 171.

more, the supposed credibility of such narrative situations. First of all, as has been indicated previously, a dialogue between Scheherazade and the king does not appear until the close of the Frame Story, which for some translations means there is no situational dialogue at all, since the end of the Frame Story is not included in all translations. The king only grants permission for continuing the tale; hence we can speak only of a myriad monologues interrupted by the dawn. Secondly, it seems dubious in what way "long conversations in the *Arabian Nights* style" would ensure credence to the narrative situations in Rushdie's fiction. Drawing on the complex, transcultural, essentially, fictitious nature of the *Nights,* we assume that the deployment of the cycle as an intertext deprives the narrative situations of credibility and enriches it with a fairy-tale like, magical, and even sexual aura.

The cursory general knowledge of *The Arabian Nights* is perhaps the reason that this fascinating literary work is not widely critiqued. What is more, beyond the fact there are only a modest number of articles analysing the *Nights* as an intertext in contemporary literatures, and apart from some interesting remarks these articles are not without error. In her article on the possibility of inscribing the short story "The Prophet's Hair" into the cycle of the *Nights*, Justyna Deszcz elucidates the stereotypical understanding of the East as the opposition to the West and notes the pluralistic nature of Rushdie's fiction as corresponding to the multicultural past of the *Nights*.[10] However, several times in the article she refers to *The Thousand and One Nights* as "fairy tales," for instance:

> Just as one cannot indicate once source of origin of Oriental fairy tales, which not only do exist in many translations, but also in a few Arabic versions, one cannot speak of a homogenous identity of the East.[11]
>
> It is true that in Scheherazade's fairy tales the protagonist's wonderful way out of the oppression is at stake [...][12].

Deszcz's article indicates a stereotypical understanding of the Eastern culture and illustrates Rushdie's attempts to demystify the perception of the Orient. However, in a way Deszcz, by classifying the tales into the generic code of fairy tales, mythologizes the Orient herself.

Demythologization of stereotypes about Eastern culture and the perception of the women of Orient are the pivotal aspects in Fatima Mernis-

10 J. Deszcz: *Włos Proroka Salmana Rushdiego*..., p. 82.
11 Ibidem, p. 83 [translation mine].
12 Ibidem, p. 89.

si's writings. Mernissi, a professor of sociology at the University of Mohammed V in Morocco and an Islamic feminist, is one of the contemporary female writers who, being enchanted with the spell of the *Nights*, focus their writings on the predicament of women in Islamic societies through the creation of the female protagonists who are contemporary transfigurations of Scheherazade. The author of a popular memoir *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, is also a prolific nonfiction writer. She publishes in the field of women's studies and sociology, and is the author of such books as *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, and *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*.

In *Scheherazade Goes West*, Mernissi, drawing on her experiences of Western culture, demystifies the myth of the exotic Orient. *Scheherazade Goes West*, a mixture of autobiography with meta-fiction, was written after the writer's trip to Europe to promote *Dreams of Trespass*. Mernissi humorously ponders the nature of Western culture in her remarks and observations after her encounter with the Occident. Negotiating a space within strict Muslim society, young Fatima tells the story of her life in *Dreams of Trespass*. Seeking to anatomise the complex identities of Muslim women, she superimposes Scheherazade's trajectory of life on her own and that of her female relatives. For the author, *The Thousand and One Nights* has been a book permanently present in her life. Propinquity to the cycle is tangible in the memoir, as she often refers to the *Nights*, not only to Scheherazade but also to her favourite tales. Apart from the many allusions and references to the *Nights*, in the memoir, two of its twenty-two chapters are entirely devoted to the *Nights*: "Scheherazade, the King, and the Words," referring to the Frame Story, and "Princess Budur's Fate," a tale which has also been discussed in the previous chapter. In *Scheherazade Goes West*, on the other hand, the author compares herself to Scheherazade and sees her own journey through Western culture as a parallel of the journeys of the *Nights*' translations. Mernissi, a contemporary Scheherazadean storyteller with an artistic storytelling gift, rereads and rewrites the *Nights* into contemporary fiction.

Enchantment with *The Arabian Nights*, involvement in the situation of women in Islamic societies and a feminist stance is also evident for two Algerian female writers, Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar. Djebar, the author of many books of which two have been so far translated into English, *A Sister to Scheherazade* and *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, is one of the most influential North African female writers. Through her novels Djebar portraits the lives of Maghrebian women. In the sequel to *Fantasia*, *A Sister to Scheherazade*, Djebar recasts Scheherazade and her silent sister Dunazayde in the contemporary Maghreb, in the personas of Hajila and

Isma. The latter character, Isma, performs the role of Scheherazade, an independent woman and a storyteller. Hajila, the future wife of the man abandoned by Isma, functions like Dunazyade, the silent sister. Weaving her tales to Hajila, who is also going to be the mother to her child, Isma depicts the harsh reality of Muslim women's life and meticulously describes her daily struggle for independence.

In *Shérazade* Leïla Sebbar, another Algerian female writer, also writes about contemporary Algerian women. She portrays her young protagonist, Shérazade, on the border of the two cultures; African and European. Searching for her true identity, Shérazade leaves Algeria and goes to France, to Paris. Oscillating between the two cultures, she tries to understand her past and present. In her novel Sebbar demonstrates the clash of the two cultures, their interdependence and their transcultural aspects. Unlike the female protagonist in the previously described novel, Shérazade is not a Scheherazadean storytelling-like character. She is the antithesis of Isma; however, she is not the antithesis of Scheherazade. Although reticent and only sometimes interested in telling stories, just like Scheherazade from the *Nights* Shérazade is characterized by indeterminacy. Sebbar, drawing on Scheherazade, recasts the queen of storytelling in the persona of the eponymous character, whose name even reconciles similarity and difference, a Scheherazadean recasting by means of, to use Deleueze's term, "repetition with difference."[13]

Repetition with difference is also a distinctive feature of Githa Hariharan's writings. Hariharan, an Indian female writer, the author of *When Dreams Travel*, *The Thousand Faces of Nights*, and *The Art of Dying*, is also the winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. However, so far as well Hariharan's fiction, like that of Djebar's and Sebbar's, has not been criticised, and what is more, criticism of their works usually centres on a feminist stance. Hariharan's writing shares qualities with Mernissi's due to the art of storytelling vibrating in their works, their vivid imagination and inventiveness. In *When Dreams Travel* Hariharan portrays Dunyazad as the detective in Shahriyar's court, trying to solve the mystery of the alleged death of her famous sister. The first part of the novel is a continuation of *The Arabian Nights* focusing on the mystery of Scheherazade's sudden and unexpected alleged death. The first part ends when Dunyazad and her female roommate, Dilshad, escape Shahriyar's palace and roam for seven days and nights. In this part of the novel Hariharan employs an interesting twist in which Dunyazad, the silent sister from the *Nights*, assumes the proactive role of Scheherazade, whereas her roommate, Dilshad, per-

13 See G. Deleuze: *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. P. Patton. New York 1994.

forms the same function Dunyazad used to have in relation with her sister. This interesting shift of roles, when the listener becomes the teller, and the teller dies in unknown circumstances or disappears, becomes even more gripping in the second part of the novel entitled "Seven Nights and Days." First of all, the title is significant as it refers to Borges' collection of essays entitled *Seven Nights*. In one of his essays, the already-mentioned "The Thousand and One Nights," Borges refers to the infiniteness of the cycle, repetition of the stories by means of "a sort of vertigo."[14] An idea of the infiniteness of *The Arabian Nights* stories seems to be close also to Hariharan herself, as in the second part of the novel when Dunyazad and Dilshad become two storytellers. Drawing on the art of storytelling in the *Nights*, Hariharan deploys one more narrative shift as both characters become interchangeably tellers and listeners. In her inventively crafted novel, recasting Dunyazad and retelling the story of Shahriyar and Scheherazade, Hariharan's storytelling seems to be as infinite as in the *Nights*.

The infinity of the cycle and seductive storytelling are also features of Anthony O'Neill's *Scheherazade*, the debut novel of an Australian writer. In this novel, O'Neill, who subsequently wrote *The Lamplighter* and *The Empire of Eternity*, continues the story of Shahriyar and Scheherazade. The story, set in ninth-century Baghdad, is characterized by an inventive, suspenseful and gripping plot. With a Scheherazadean gift, O'Neill crafts the story of the eponymous character's life. What is more, he makes the queen of storytelling speak again in order to save her life. Thus, in O'Neill's novel Scheherazade functions on many levels, as the key protagonist in the novel, a cultural and literary myth, a gifted storyteller and narrator, and finally as a metafictional character of her own stories. O'Neill's novel escapes coherent generic classification just as does *The Arabian Nights*. The author plays with literary conventions, and he deploys a postmodern strategy of introducing conventions in order to destabilise them. In this exuberant novel, enriched with adventure, abduction, and mystery, there is a medley of fictitious tales about magic and miraculous events, lines of poetry, philosophical remarks, and descriptions of the realities of Arab life. The gripping plot, revealing the trajectory of Scheherazade's image on the level of a cultural myth, depicting the story of her life as an abducted character in the novel, is interwoven with ubiquitous tales showing the power of the imagination parallel to the power of the imaginations of *The Arabian Nights* editors and translators.

The power of the imagination conflated with a fascination with the *Nights* is shared by Naguib Mahfouz, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. The prolific Egyptian writer, the author of *The Cairo Trilogy*, *The*

14 J. L. Borges: *Seven Nights…*, p. 53.

Thief and the Dogs, *Miramar*, and many other novels, wrote a book influenced by the spell of the *Nights*, entitled *Arabian Nights and Days*. Similarly to the *Nights*, Mahfouz's book is rather a collection of related tales, having its starting point in the revision of the Frame Story and Scheherazade's predicament. Mahfouz, using the narrative convention of the *Nights*, portrays human conflicts, love, intrigue, and injustice. As a gifted storyteller, he mixes reality and fantasy; his novel is enriched with fantastic and magical elements, hence the appearance of genies and Sindbad. Like O'Neill, Mahfouz mixes his fantastic stories with poetry, philosophy, and eroticism, which, while a significant element in the *Nights* itself, is not always a leading theme in contemporary fiction retelling of *The Arabian Nights*.

Finally, I would like to mention briefly the novel of a South African writer, Wilma Stockenström, entitled *The Expedition to the Baobab Tree*. Stockenström, who is a novelist, poet, and actress, is the author of several books, however so far only this novel has been translated into English. Although the novel is neither a retelling, recasting, nor a revision of *The Arabian Nights*, one can read the unnamed female protagonist as a typical Scheherazadean storyteller. A passion for storytelling conflated with a willingness to survive and compulsory obedience to male authority are some of the features the unnamed protagonist has in common with Scheherazade. Storytelling is a major theme in *The Expedition to the Baobab Tree*, as it is crucial for the protagonist's survival, establishing her female identity, and reliving her life again and again. The protagonist's tales encompass seemingly an infinite number of circulating tales within tales.

This subchapter aimed only to introduce the reader to selected contemporary fiction among a plethora of writing, retelling, recasting, or referring to *The Arabian Nights*. The choice of the authors and novels to be noted in this chapter is naturally subjective and there may be other, different selections. The following subchapters are to juxtapose the novels of contemporary writers coming from different cultures. Thus the chosen authors differ culturally and ethnically. They come from Africa (Algeria, Morocco, the Republic of South Africa), Asia Minor (Egypt), South America (Mexico), Asia (India), and Australia. The diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the authors whose novels are analysed corresponds with the cultural and ethnic diversity of *The Arabian Nights*, situated between the Occident and the Orient. Although it is not possible to speak of South America, Africa, or Australia in terms of the Orient, it is still possible to speak of those continents as the former colonies, in terms of the Other that was subjected to the First. Instead of enclosing the novels within the frame of postcolonial theory or proving their relevance to the postcolonial condition, the book begins a discussion of the selected literary works in which the interweaving themes are: the passion for storytelling, the

power of the imagination, metaphorical and narrative seductions, and the quest for one's identity.

Scheherazade's Successors: "Oriental" Femininity Regained?

> Sherazade had felt like breaking it all… This accumulation of Orientalish stuff had exasperated her, not Marie. "This Orient is straight out of K-Mart… He must have found it in a cereal box…" Sherazade said, laughing, before she wrapped herself in silk for her exotic night.
>
> L. Sebbar: *Les Carnets Shérazade*

> The exotic Scheherazade, a name that means nothing more than pretty tinsel in a child's treasure chest. But this name, unpacked and reconstructed by men overseas, is persistent. Sometimes it is coupled with the rumour that Shahrzad was beautiful; or that she was simple-minded; or that she told innocuous bedtime stories dressed in fabulous clothes.
>
> G. Hariharan: *When Dreams Travel*

In the second part of the previous chapter I analysed the position of Scheherazade in various translations of *The Arabian Nights*. The idea of the "magic mirror" in representing the Other adumbrated the prolific image of the female character in the book. This subchapter discusses the representation(s) of Scheherazade, who is the common aspect of contemporary novels retelling *The Thousand and One Nights*.

The authors recast Scheherazade in a plenitude of ways. She reappears as a character in various cultures and historic times, equally the protagonist and/or storyteller in novels with a contemporary setting as the protagonist in novels set in distant times. Drawing on the Scheherazadean transfigurations in the chosen literatures, it is my intention to analyse the metamorphoses of the Scheherazadean image and significance of the queen of storytelling and to scrutinise fluctuations in the perceptions of so-called Oriental femininity. To posit that Oriental femininity has been regained through the writings of the authors originating from the former colonies, requires at first that we ask whether the image of Oriental femininity had been previously taken away. To introduce a discussion of the perception of Oriental femininity, we will quote Rushdie's words in *The Moor's Last Sigh*:

> I repeat: the pepper, if you please; for had it not been for peppercorns, then what is ending now in East and West might never have begun. Pepper it was that brought Vasco da Gama's tall ships across

> the ocean, from Lisbon's Tower of Belém to the Malabar Coast: first to Calicut and later, for its lagoony harbour, to Cochin. English and French sailed in the wake of that first-arrived Portugee, so that in the period called Discovery-of-India – but how could we be discovered when we were not covered before? – we were not so much subcontinent as sub-condiment, as my distinguished mother had it.[15]

The "discovery" of India is parallel to the discovery of Oriental femininity. The image of Oriental femininity was discovered by the West although it was not covered by the East; the fictitious re-presentation was shown in Orientalist discourse, but the representation depicted in Eastern literatures remained unknown to most writers.

In *Orientalism* Said used Marx's words in the epigraph: "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented,"[16] as a motto in which the relationship between the Same and the Other is categorized. The West as Subject represented the Other, the Object. Since as Spivak points out, "the subaltern cannot speak"[17]; the subaltern was represented by Western culture by means of contrast between the Same and the Other. Thus, can we speak of the loss of the image Oriental femininity if the "real" image of femininity in the East was unknown to Western writers? Since the "knowledge" of Western writers was dependent on either the far from unprejudiced and transparent translations of the *Nights,* or on the journeys of Enlightened Westerners to the land of the distant and exotic Orient, the Other was approached by Westerners as a colonized space and was understood only in dichotomous terms as a part of a binary pair. Said writes about a typical dichotomous representation of the Oriental as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different,'"[18] and the European as "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal.'"[19] Since the analysis of selected contemporary novels in English and French often requires speaking of the postcolonial subject, it is necessary to, first of all, discard the modality of thinking conditioned by dichotomies. Even Bhabha's notion of hybridity is not sufficient as although it conflates variety of dichotomies, it does not go beyond them.[20] Therefore, as far as contemporary literatures are concerned, it seems more

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15 S. Rushdie: *The Moor's Last Sigh*. London 1996, p. 4.

16 E.W. Said: *Orientalism…*, p. xiii.

17 G.C. Spivak: "Can the Subaltern Speak?"…, p. 104.

18 E.W. Said: *Orientalism…*, p. 40.

19 Ibidem.

20 More on the need for revisionism in postcolonial studies can be found in the article by Z. Białas: "Mniej niż ćwierć? O pilnej potrzebie rewizjonizmu w studiach postkolonialnych". W: *ER(R)GO Teoria, Literatura, Kultura*. Red. W. Kalaga. Katowice 2005, nr 10, p. 166.

suitable to speak of the image of "Oriental femininity" in inverted commas, as it signifies a construct culturally conditioned by the Western modality of thinking. What is more, it is necessary to posit rejection of the term Oriental femininity, as the term will always imply a contrast, an opposition to "Occidental" or "Western" femininity. Since the Orient and Oriental female identity has functioned as a Western construct created for the demand of a growing interest in all kinds of, to use Shérazade's words, "Orientalish stuff," the image of Oriental femininity has been a simulacrum resembling the nineteenth-century European translations of the *Nights*.

What kind of reading of Scheherazade's transfigurations can be proposed when the notions of the Oriental Other, hybrid identity, and the colonial subject unable to speak, are rejected? First of all, contemporary identities are characterized by plurality and diversity in ethnic and cultural terms, hence they are constituted by layers of identities, to quote Berndt: "Postcolonial female identity has to be negotiated outside such stereotypical structures and must be acknowledged as hyphenated identity. […] The process of understanding female identity also requires that one be placed outside of the restricted space ascribed to the oppressed group. A hyphenated identity consists of Self and Other that are not opposites but fragments/layers of one personality."[21] Secondly, similarly to the endless process of transformation of the *Nights*, we posit that the process of identity construction is an ongoing process as well. Since the hyphenated postcolonial female identity is multilayered and undergoes constant metamorphoses, we would like to propose a reading of Scheherazadean transfigurations as palimpsest identities. Katrin Berndt defines a palimpsest as "a piece of parchment that has been written on more than once but still shows traces of its original inscription."[22] The palimpsest female identity conjoins its fluctuations in terms of gender, ethnicity, and culture.

Scrutinising the chosen contemporary novels referring to, rewriting or recasting *The Arabian Nights*, it is our aim to trace the transformations of Scheherazadean images as Scheherazade is a repository for metamorphoses, as Hariharan notes:

> Shahrazad, like her own story is a survivor. The travelling tale undergoes a change of costume, language and setting at each serai on its way. It adapts itself to local conditions, to this century or that, a permanent fugitive from its officious parent, legitimate story. Shahrazad is now a myth that must be sought in many places, fle-

21 K. Berndt: *Female Identity in Contemporary Zimbabwean Fiction*. Bayreuth 2005, p. 70.

22 Ibidem, p. 71.

> shed in different bodies, before her dreams let go of Dunyazad or her descendants.[23]

The Arabian Nights together with Scheherazade functions as a cultural myth of the Orient and has been a literary survivor. In contemporary times the tales are being rediscovered and rewritten not only by postcolonial writers but also by contemporary British or American writers. Rediscovery sheds new light on the perception of *The Thousand and One Nights* and also on the so-called regained "Oriental" female identity. The life of the *Nights* resembles the life of the word, in its Bakhtinian understanding, as "a transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of those concrete contexts into which it has entered."[24] Rewritings of *The Arabian Nights* understood as transfers between cultures, generations, and contexts create a polyphony, or Bakhtinian heteroglossia of voices. Since Bakhtin understands language as "the individual consciousness [which] lies on the borderline between self and other,"[25] rewritings and recasting of the *Nights* are rendered as a heteroglossia of languages between Selves and Others. The term heteroglossia, which leads to Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, can also be endorsed on the level of a single novel, as Graham Allen writes: "In the polyphonic novel, for example, the speech of individual characters is always heteroglot, doublevoiced. [...] The discourse of characters in a polyphonic novel, we might say, exemplifies the intertextual or dialogic nature of language."[26] The novels analysed in this subchapter are polyphonic in nature as they render the intertextual nature of the word. Hence, all the novels analysed are rendered as texts in Kristeva's sense, as any text is: "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text."[27]

Among the permutations of *The Arabian Nights* it is possible to trace novels recasting Scheherazade by rewriting or/and continuing her story, as in the case of Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*, Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days*, and Anthony O'Neill's *Scheherazade*. Some of these

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23 G. Hariharan: *When Dreams Travel*. London 1999, p. 25.

24 M.H. Bakhtin: *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*. Trans. C. Emerson. Minneapolis 1984, p. 291.

25 M.H. Bakhtin: *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. C. Emerson. Austin 1981, p. 293.

26 G. Allen: *Intertextuality*. New York 2005, p. 29.

27 After G. Allen: *Intertextuality...*, p. 35.

writers, inspired by the mistress of storytelling, create contemporary Scheherazadean protagonists, such as Leïla Sebbar in *Sherazade*, Fatima Mernissi in *Dreams of Tresspass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, Assia Djebar in *A Sister to Scheherazade*, and Salman Rushdie in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. These contemporary writers create a variety of Scheherazadean identities. As female identity is culturally conditioned, multilayered identity of a palimpsest nature, the identity is fluid due to metamorphoses of identity construction. My aim, though, is not to search for a fixed, static female identity of contemporary Scheherazade as "femininity is a cultural construct."[28] Following Kristeva's view, we argue that "Oriental" femininity is a cultural construct imposed by patriarchy which is parallel to Orientalism as a cultural construct imposed by imperialism. Kristeva, unwilling to define femininity, perceives it as a *position* and believes that all women are marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order.[29] Hence, the female protagonists and their palimpsest identities are analysed through the prism of mythical Scheherazade, through their similarities to or differences from the mistress of storytelling. Instead of ascribing to them any kind of static identity, such as feminine, Oriental, or postcolonial, I endeavour to focus on the palimpsest, fluid identities of the characters and the issue of rewriting and recasting *The Arabian Nights*.

In the subchapter "Scheherazade in the Magic Mirror of Representation" Scheherazade's sexuality is associated with textuality and the issues of indeterminacy, binary oppositions, and power relations, her disappearance from the text as the protagonist, and, finally, fluid identity. The same notions, however, as repetition with a difference, appear in contemporary novels where, among other aspects, Scheherazade's indeterminacy is the conjoining element. Scheherazade's image is analysed in the previous subchapter through the spots of indeterminacy in Ingarden's sense. The indeterminacy of contemporary Scheherazadean protagonists appears in a variety of ways and on different levels. Hence, in the case of contemporary novels, Ingarden's understanding of indeterminacy seems not to suffice since, as Iser succinctly puts it, "he [Ingarden] is unable to accept the possibility that a work may be concretized in different, equally valid, ways; and second, because of this blind spot he overlooks the fact that the reception of many works of art would be blocked if they could only be concretized according to the norms of classical aesthetics."[30] Appreciating Ingarden's ideas of spots of indeterminacy and concretiza-

28 T. Moi: *Feminist, Female, Feminine…*, p. 108.

29 After T. Moi: *Feminist, Female, Feminine…*, p. 111.

30 W. Iser: *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. London 1976, p. 178.

tion as going beyond representation of a literary work in the traditional sense, Iser emphasizes that concretization, understood as true or false, is a one-dimensional and "thoroughly mechanistic concept of the filling-in process."[31] Emphasizing the significance of the textual level of the gaps of indeterminacy and its frequency, Iser differentiates between three textual levels of indeterminacy: "*the syntactic level of the text* – that is, in the recognizable systems of rules responsible for marshalling the textual patterns into a premeditated order. They may predominate on *the pragmatic level of the text* – that is, in the intention pursued by it. Or they may ultimately predominate on *the semantic level of the text* – that is, in the generating of meaning, which is the readers' foremost task [italics mine]."[32]

The indeterminacy of *The Arabian Nights* and its contemporary rewritings deploys all three textual levels; however, due to the positioning of this subchapter on the Scheherazadean images, it is to be explored only in the aspects referring to the indeterminacy of "Oriental femininity." In her article "Shahrazad Feminist," Fedra Malti-Douglas, writing about Scheherazade's transformation, claims: "Rejuvenated, manipulated, and redefined, she [Scheherazade] and her cohorts from the frame of the *Nights*, Shahriyar, Shahzaman, and Dunyazad, have now transcended their original environment to become major players on the world literary scene. And just as Shahrazad found herself caught in a delicate game of sexual politics in the frame of the *Nights*, so does she now find herself the pawn in an equal game of gender and creativity, but this time on a universal scale."[33] It seems surprising that Malti-Douglas, analysing two feminist rewritings of Scheherazade, "Scheherazade Retold" by Ethel Johnston Phelps and *The Fall of the Imam* by Nawal El Saadawi, defining the first one as a folk tale and the second as "a highly postmodern novel,"[34] writes about the manipulation of her image. We can speak of the manipulation of the original if we encounter representations/copies aspiring to be originals as well. However, to speak of a manipulation in the case of postmodern or postcolonial literary works which so often function as retellings, rewritings, and recastings of other literary works, is unjustified. Secondly, writing about Scheherazade's plight in terms of "a delicate game of sexual politics" is incorrect, as her existence on the border of life and death is definitely a challenging and risky game.

31 W. Iser: *The Act of Reading…*, p. 176.

32 W. Iser: *Prospecting: From Reader's Response to Literary Anthropology*. Baltimore-London 1989, p. 15.

33 F. Malti-Douglas: *Shahrazad Feminist…*, p. 347.

34 Ibidem.

Scheherazade's indeterminacy and rewritings of her story most often appear in contemporary women's writings. Drawing on the novels of Leïla Sebbar and Assia Djebar, one can trace the deployment of Scheherazadean images in their writings. Although both novels are written by Algerian feminist writers and in both, *Shérazade* and *A Sister of Scheherazade*, the *Arabian Nights*' mythical female protagonist appears, the rewritings are quite distinct. First of all, the question of the titles of the novels is significant, as both titles in a different way refer to *The Arabian Nights*. As in the name Shérazade one syllable is missing, it is a name which signifies at the same time resemblance to and difference from the Scheherazade from the *Nights*. In her study *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds*, Anne Donadey asserts that "Shérazade's first name embodies a hybridity that inscribes within itself the dynamics of loss and excess. As an Orientalist marker for the exotic woman, the name is too much – too good to be true. […] Shérazade's name is a perfect metaphor for France's assimilation policy with regard to immigrants. What is most representative for other cultures must be cut off for the other to be accepted and assimilated into the fabric of French life."[35] The protagonist's name is a significant aspect of the novel; the question of Shérazade's name is raised in the very beginning when Julien, one of the main characters, asks the protagonist about her name:

> 'Your name's really Shérazade?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'Really? It's so… it's so… How can I put it? You know who Scheherazade was?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'And that doesn't mean anything to you?'
> 'No.'
> 'You think you can be called Sherazade, just like that?'
> 'No idea.'[36]

The short conversation between the characters is a harbinger of the future relationship between Julien and Shérazade, in which the latter is a mysterious young girl who, walking only her own paths, is unwilling to open herself up to a dialogue with Julien and other characters as well. For Sebbar, Shérazade is a "cultural métisse. Her name functions as a sign of in-betweenness that metaphorically gives her some margin for

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35 A. Donadey: *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds*. Portsmouth 2001, p. 133.

36 L. Sebbar: *Shérazade*. Trans. D. S. Blair. London 1991, p. 1.

manoeuvre."[37] Shérazade's in-betweenness parallels the in-betweennes of *The Arabian Nights*; being part of France and Algeria she does not exclusively belong to one of the countries and cultures.

In the case of Djebar's novel the title *A Sister to Scheherazade* may signify both the protagonist's similarity to Scheherazade from the *Nights*, or situating Dunyazad, the silent sister, in the centre of attention. In fact both renderings of the title are appropriate as in Djebar's novel there are two female protagonists, Hajila and Isma, where Isma performs the function of Scheherazade and Hajila of Dunyazad. Isma, the more liberated woman, has chosen Hajila as the next wife of her husband. Indeterminacy, one of the most significant features of Scheherazade, is common also for Isma, as, performing the role of the narrator in the novel, she occasionally speaks about herself. Although it is a first-person narrative, Isma focuses on Hajila, constantly directing the narrative toward her. In rewriting the past Isma tries to open herself to the present. After leaving her husband and daughter Meriem (who is to be brought up by Hajila), Isma felt disburdened; with hindsight she says: "Eventually, I left the man I thought I loved. I was surfeited; or had been exposed to too much sun. I forgot him straight away. Only now, long after we split up, I realize that it was essential for me to disburden myself; what primal injury risked reappearing?"[38] In her rewritings of *The Arabian Nights* through recasting the two sisters and the deployment of Isma's storytelling and Hajila's silence, Djebar discusses contemporary Muslim women's plight. As Donadey notes, "*Ombre Sultane* (*A Sister to Scheherazade*) explores complex issues of women's situations in contemporary Algeria by centring on the characters of two cowives, the 'liberated' Isma (cast as narrator) and the more 'traditional' Hajila (addressed by Isma)."[39]

Scheherazade's indeterminacy is also indicative of her absence in the text as a protagonist or narrator and simultaneous presence through the discourse of other protagonists; her disappearance from the text at a certain point of the plot, and aura of mystery and unwillingness. The latter two features are idiosyncratic traits of Sebbar's *Shérazade*. The protagonist, who is a seventeen-year-old girl, has run away from home and is squatting with other teenagers in an abandoned building in Paris, trying to redefine her Algerian-French identity. Although the reader knows that she had a loving family, did not have any problems at school, and was a good student and avid reader, it is not explained in the novel why Shérazade has run away from home. Her sibling and parents in vain keep

37 A. Donadey: *Recasting Postcolonialism…*, p. 133.

38 A. Djebar: *A Sister to Scheherazade…*, p. 134.

39 A. Donadey: *Recasting Postcolonialism…*, p. 63.

looking for her but none of them understands her escape, which is as undetermined as the protagonist herself. The people Shérazade lives with and her friend Julien do not know her well. When once the protagonist starts crying her squat-mates are so perplexed that they do not know how to behave or what to do, as crying is untypical of her. The situation is commented on by the narrator in the following way: "They knew nothing about her. Her first name. And they weren't sure of that. One day, she'd said her name was Camille Z. Pierrot had asked her to produce her identity papers. She'd flown into rage."[40] A similar description of Shérazade's indeterminacy is rendered by Julien, the man who falls in love with her: "She talked to him more about what she'd read than about herself. He didn't even know where she worked or what she did."[41] Donadey does not write about Shérazade's indeterminacy; however, she makes an interesting point describing her relationship with Julien: "Shérazade and Julien's relationship is a love story marked by mediation of absence. It is punctuated by Shérazade's repeated disappearing acts. […] Both characters are in-between, neither completely exiled nor totally at home."[42] Mediation by absence, disappearing acts, and Shérazade's in-betweenness create aura of indeterminacy. Just as Scheherazade from the *Nights* is in-between the Orient and the Occident, Shérazade is in-between France and Algeria. However, unlike Scheherazade, Sebbar's protagonist is described in physical terms. Julien describes Shérazade's physical appearance as resembling his favourite odalisques in paintings such as *Reclining Odalisque*, *The Turkish Bath*, and *The Women of Algiers*. He also takes Shérazade to the museum to show her that his favourite odalisque in *The Women of Algiers*, in which one of the women has green eyes as Shérazade does.[43] Since Shérazade is also described in detail by her father for the purpose of creating a police report of her being missing, the question of physical indeterminacy does not occur in Sebbar's novel.

Physical indeterminacy also does not apply to Shahrazad in Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* who, at the very beginning of the novel, is described in the following way: "Shahrazad, the woman who is talking for her life, does not look frightened. She must be tough, how can she not be terrified? […] Shahrazad appears to be the only person in the world gifted with movement. The three other figures in the scene hold still as if bewitched into their waiting, listening postures. But Shahrazad, though solidly built – her breasts heavy domes, her legs palatial pillars – flows

40 L. Sebbar: *Shérazade…*, p. 47.

41 Ibidem, p. 157.

42 A. Donadey: *Recasting Postcolonialism…*, p. 125.

43 See L. Sebbar: *Shérazade…*, pp. 8–9.

in one continuous glimmer of movement."[44] In the first part of the book Hariharan rewrites the Frame Story, however, there are only four characters in the frame, the two brothers Shahriyar and Shah Zaman and two sisters Scheherazade and Dunyazad. Hariharan focuses on the characters' identities and, similarly to *The Arabian Nights*, on the power relations between them, as the author says in an interview with Joel Kuorrti: "Even if I'm writing about a fictional place called Shahabad, and a myth called Shahrzad, I'm actually writing about power. And there are also all those stories in the novel which are set in present times."[45] In *When Dreams Travel* the power relations between all the characters are central, between the brothers, the sisters and also in female-male relations. Scheherazade, who is at the centre of the plot, at the end of the Frame Story is pinpointed in the following way:

> Her father called her the cityborn, Shahrazad. But there are other names that attach themselves to this story woman. There is, for instance, the exotic Scheherazade, a name that means nothing more than a pretty tinsel in a child's treasure chest. But this name, unpacked and reconstructed by men across the seas, is persistent. Sometimes it is coupled with the rumour that Shahrazad was beautiful; or that she was simple-minded; or that she told innocuous bedtime stories dressed in fabulous clothes.[46]

This passage is one of the last paragraphs of the first part of the novel. The Scheherazadean protagonist, described physically and situated in the context of complexity concerning different names and myths about her, disappears from the novel with the end of its first part. In the second part it is Dunyazad who plays the main part, as she arrives in Shahabad and tries to unravel the mystery of Scheherazade's disappearance. Wandering around the palace, she tries to avoid meeting with Shahriyar and in vain attempts to understand what happened to her sister. Shahriyar, claiming that she fell ill and died abruptly, seems not to be telling the truth as only he and "a few trusted men slaves claim to have been there when the queen suddenly took ill. The rest saw the sealed coffin; the sultan could not bear to see, or display, the beloved face dead."[47] This might indicate

44 G. Hariharan: *When Dreams Travel*. London 1999, p. 7.

45 J. Kuorrti, G. Hariharan: "The Double Burden: The Continual Contesting of Tradition and Modernity." In: *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 2001: 36 : 7, p. 14.

46 G. Hariharan: *When Dreams Travel…*, p. 25.

47 Ibidem, p. 81.

that since no one was able to see Scheherazade dead, she might have had traces of murder on her body, or quite the opposite, she might not have been in the coffin. As her supposed death is surrounded with unravelled questions, it may be a masquerade invented by Shahriyar to conceal her actual disappearance from the palace. Although Dunyazad is taken by Shahriyar to his wife's tomb where he says in a soft voice: "This is where she will wait for me,"[48] the sister cannot believe him and becomes even more suspicious when she receives a note written by the king, saying: "two royal heads can sleep on the same pillow, but two rulers cannot live in the same kingdom."[49]

Scheherazade's absence from the text gives substance to her indeterminacy, as she is only present in the book through Dunyazad's memories and stories. The mystery of her disappearance and placing Dunyazad, the silent sister, as the protagonist of the novel is an interesting shift in rewriting *The Arabian Nights*. Hariharan reconstructs the *Nights* through retellings but also enriches the novel with tellings. Sonia Jain, in her study *Women and Indian Society in Feminist Fiction*, remarks that "her [Hariharan's] novels are in themselves a metaphor of deconstruction, for in deconstruction reconstruction is inherent."[50] However, she limits her analysis by grouping Hariharan's novels with feminist fiction, which is to a certain extent a derogatory attitude as not only *When Dreams Travel* but also *The Thousand Faces of Night* contain beauty of imagery and storytelling which might be analysed in a broader context than that of feminist issues.

Scheherazade's indeterminacy as a result of her mysterious absence from a novel appears also in Anthony O'Neill's debut, *Scheherazade*. Apart from *Arabian Nights and Days* by Naguib Mahfouz, *Scheherazade* is the fourth, and to my knowledge, the most recent book referring to *The Arabian Nights* in its title. O'Neill, choosing the Anglicised version of the protagonist's name for his title, retells and also continues *The Thousand and One Nights*. O'Neill's novel in many aspects is different from Hariharan's and the protagonist is not so undetermined as in the previously mentioned novels. O'Neill begins his narrative with Scheherazade and Shahriyar's arrival in Baghdad in AD 806 which is said to be twenty years after the Frame Story was finished. Although Shahriyar is the king, it is his wife's persona that is always in the centre. Venerated, respected, and loved, it is Scheherazade who is mostly welcomed by Harun al-Rashid and his subjects. Shahriyar seems to function as her decoration only, which is explicit in the citation:

48 Ibidem, p. 101.

49 Ibidem, p. 104.

50 S. Jain: *Women and Indian Society in Feminist Fiction*. Udaipur-Delhi 2006, p. 95.

> Shahriyar the Tyrant became Shahriyar the Indecisive: unfocused, soporific and hypochondriacal. Scheherazade the Maiden became Scheherazade the Goddess of Plenty: empowered with authority, indispensability, and her own effusive sexuality. The yearly tributes said it all: jewels, dyes, ointments, adornments, shoes and chemises, all aimed exclusively at her. She was the kingdom's true matriarch, the exemplar, and one of the few women of her generation, for that matter, still alive. Where once her name had been unique, there was [sic] now ten thousand infant Scheherazades.[51]

O'Neill's Scheherazade is powerful, physically determined as beautiful and, which is interesting, sexually seductive. As in the *Nights* she seduced the king with words, in O'Neill's retelling she seduces Harun al-Rashid textually, through telling a story that parallels their situation, and also sexually. Before being abducted, she is also said to have been unfaithful to Shahriyar and to have some secret lovers. Her persona evokes associations of sexuality with textuality which may be read as her double-edged weapon for seducing and controlling men. Scheherazade is the main character of the novel until she disappears in mysterious circumstances. In contrast to Hariharan's novel, here her disappearance is explained after some time. Abducted for a ransom, the queen of storytelling is made to speak again to save her life. Hence, at some point, Scheherazade once again becomes both the protagonist and the narrator of the tales, which mirrors her plight in the *Nights* as the character who is constantly in between.

In O'Neill's postmodern fiction intertextual views of the *Nights* appear on many levels such as: continuation of the cycle, recurrence of the elements from the Frame Tale, retelling of the cycle, levels of narrative, and Scheherazade's own indeterminacy, complexity, and the power of her image. The queen of storytelling is omnipresent as she appears in the discourse of all characters in the novel. Some of them do not believe in her existence, however, as is indicated in the conversation between the members of her rescue crew:

> 'It's for the ransom for Scheherazade that we bear,' Zill offered again.
>
> 'It will do you no good to mistake me for one of the bandits of your stories. I have heard of Scheherazade. I know that she does not exist.'

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51 A. O'Neill: *Scheherazade*. London 2001, p. 13.

> ‘She *does* exist,’ Zill insisted.
> ‘She is a myth. No more real than her stories.’
> ‘She is as real as Harun al-Rashid.’[52]

This conversation reveals Yusuf’s (the second character) perception of Scheherazade as a myth, a fairy-tale character. Scheherazade’s omnipresence is accentuated to a greater extent than in *The Arabian Nights*, as she is much more present in the text as the protagonist and interestingly enough, she casts her own character in one of the stories she tells to Hamid, the assassin who threatens to kill her if he does not receive the ransom for her. The narrator’s tale mirrors her plight in the novel, as she tells her story to Hamid:

> ‘I seek Queen Scheherazade,’ Khalis explained, ‘a famous storyteller who was abducted from a bathhouse in Baghdad and taken to the ruins of some ancient city. It is the name of this city that I must discover before I can proceed.’
> ‘You say she is a queen?’ the man asked. ‘And a storyteller?’
> ‘A Goddess.’[53]

By storytelling she once again tries to avoid death at the hands of a cruel oppressor. By describing a rescuer, Khalis, she tries to soften the assassin’s heart and to survive. As in Hariharan’s novel it was implied that Shahriyar might have killed Scheherazade, in O’Neill’s novel it is explicitly stated that it is Shahriyar who paid for his wife’s abduction and possible death. O’Neill’s Scheherazade is a remarkable example of a palimpsest identity as she is reinscribed in the novel on many levels, as the protagonist, the storyteller, the protagonist of her own storytelling and a myth. Although Scheherazade is present on many levels in the book, she is still undetermined as her palimpsest identity means that O’Neill’s mistress of storytelling escapes homogeneous classification in cultural and also generic terms.

Analysing Shahriyar’s behaviour as one of the characters in *The Arabian Nights*, we referred to his delirium in the Lacanian sense as alienation in the mirror stage and to Scheherazade’s role in curing the king of his madness by means of repetition of tales with infidelity motifs. But while in the *Nights* the king becomes cured and the cycle ends happily, O’Neill portrays the king as a mad and jealous assassin who has not found the story-telling therapy beneficial. Telling the king stories, O’Neill’s Scheherazade became his obsession and remained the female Other, possessing uncontrollable

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52 Ibidem, p. 438.
53 Ibidem, p. 323.

power. She remained a challenge for the king and corroborated Mernissi's view of femininity as constituting danger and threat for the man.

Comparing O'Neill's Shahriyar and Scheherazade with *Arabian Nights and Days* by Mahfouz gives quite a disparate perception of the couple. His book includes seventeen tales in which most of the popular *Arabian Nights'* protagonists appear, such as Shahriyar and Scheherazade, Dunyazad, Sindbad, Ma'rouf the Cobbler, Alladin, the Porter, and many others. Mahfouz, drawing on the *Nights'* popular stories, weaves his own tales in which love, intrigue, conflicts, and folly are the leading aspects. The first two stories are entitled "Shahriyar" and "Shahrzad." In the first one Shahriyar informs Scheherazade's father that he wants her to remain his wife and that he pardons her. In the second tale Scheherazade, hearing the news from her father, feels unhappy and full of rage. Unlike Scheherazade from the *Nights*, Mahfouz's Shahrzad does not trust the sultan and does not believe in the change of his character: she says to her father: "I was saved from a bloody fate by our Lord's mercy. […] I sacrificed myself in order to stem the torrent of blood. […] Whenever he approaches me I breathe the smell of blood."[54] In the next parts of *Arabian Nights and Days* Scheherazade performs the role of neither storyteller nor key protagonist. Her stories are remembered, but she is just one of the figures in the sultan's court. However, at the end of the book, in the story "Sindbad," Scheherazade becomes once again in the centre of attention when summoned by her husband; she fears for her life again. Shahriyar, informing his terrified wife that he has been all the time aware of her contempt and aversion towards him, utters the following words: "[…] I found in your aversion a continued torment that I deserved. What saddens me is that I believe that I deserve punishment. […] The palace is yours and that of your son who will be ruling the city tomorrow. It is I who must go, bearing my bloody past."[55] Contrary to O'Neill's Shahriyar, Mahfouz's sultan overcomes his aberration and, in Lacanian terms, he progresses from the position of alienation in the mirror stage to unity with his own ego. Deciding to leave his palace and Scheherazade, the sultan begins a new stage in his life, as he says: "Rather I am opening to it the door of purity, while I wander about aimlessly seeking my salvation."[56] Interestingly, at the point in which *The Thousand and One Nights* ends, *Arabian Nights and Days* begins, but here Shahriyar's final repentance is not caused by Scheherazade's storytelling but by coexistence with her as a wife who has already

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54 N. Mahfouz: *Arabian Nights and Days.* Trans. D. Johnson-Davies. New York 1995, pp. 3–4.

55 Ibidem, p. 217.

56 Ibidem, p. 218.

been pardoned, and whose aversion and contempt towards the husband make him wish to purify his bloodstained past.

Scheherazade in *Arabian Nights and Days* is neither the queen of storytelling nor the mythical seductive heroine, but her persona is significant as it conjoins the gripping plot of the chapters of the book. In Mahfouz's novel intertextuality and *The Arabian Nights* play a vital role. The same is true of the author of *Midnight's Children*. In Rushdie's work there are striking traces leading to *The Arabian Nights* among which the palimpsest identity is an idiosyncratic feature of his characters. The palimpsest is a common feature of Rushdie's fiction which can be employed not only on the level of the protagonists' identities. Rushdie applies the notion of the palimpsest to the trajectory of life itself, as he writes in *The Moor's Last Sigh*: "The city itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black market beneath white; when the whole life was like this, when as invisible reality moved phantomwise beneath a visible fiction, subverting all its meaning, how then could Abraham's career have been any different? How could any of us have escaped that deadly layering?"[57] *The Moor's Last Sigh* belongs to the process of transformation of the *Nights* in at least two ways, due to the Scheherazadean art of storytelling and also due to fascinating, strong, and to some extent, Scheherazadean-like characters.

However, in Rushdie's fiction, both in *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Midnight's Children*, it is the male character who plays the vital role and also is the storyteller, whereas the woman is the listener or the reader of the stories. Although female characters are significant in Rushdie's novels, they are mostly negatively portrayed secondary characters. The transfiguration of Scheherazade into the male storyteller in the persona of Moor Zogoiby in *The Moor's Last Sigh* and Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* is discussed in the following chapter.

Female characters such as Uma Sarasvati from *The Moor's Last Sigh* and Padma from *Midnight's Children*, to a certain extent are parallel to Scheherazade from the *Nights*. Most of the female characters in *The Moor's Last Sigh* bring disaster and despair upon man. Aurora, an artist and Moor's unfaithful mother, drives her husband to delirium and eventually is killed by him. Ina, Moor's sister, "the greatest beauty of the trio [who] blocked her ears against her mother, and competed with her in the only way she could; by using her looks,"[58] causes unhappiness, disgrace and also dies. Uma Sarasvati, Moor's greatest love, is the key protagonist in terms of the transfigurations of Scheherazade's image. Uma, a woman, as Moor

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57 S. Rushdie: *The Moor's Last Sigh*. London 1995, p. 184.

58 Ibidem, p. 207.

says, "who transformed, exalted and ruined [his] life."[59] She made him fall in love with her and eventually caused his fall. Uma exemplifies the plurality of identities: she is able to transform herself in any direction, as Moor notes: "All of us who walked with Uma Sarasvati around Mahalaxmi racecourse that morning came away with a different view of her."[60] The identity of Rushdie's characters is usually complex and fragmentary. As the author writes in *Imaginary Homelands*: "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not infertile territory for a writer to occupy."[61]

Uma's palimpsest identity, like that of Scheherazade, is undetermined; there are certain facts known about her, but her persona radiates an aura of mystery. Her personality comprises hidden layers of identities. Like Scheherazade she is seductive, but it is not textual seduction that interests Uma. She purposefully seduces Moor, makes him fall in love with her, and eventually destroys him and his family, and tries to kill him. Uma resembles a typical *femme fatale*, a woman who brings disaster on man and causes his fall. Moor himself describes loving as falling: "Ignorantly is how we all fall in love; for it is a kind of fall."[62] Thus, Uma partially resembles O'Neill's Scheherazade. O'Neill's character was sexually and textually seductive. Uma focuses only on sexual seduction aimed at Moor's destruction. Seducing him with lies, being unfaithful, and pretending to love him, Uma causes the protagonist's fall. She may be compared to the Scheherazade from George-Michel's *Libretto* who is "identified with an adulterous [and] treacherous wife."[63] Like Scheherazade she is characterized by inner strength, the power of her image, and a proactive role. Moor's love for Uma blinds the storyteller; he "refuses to see facts as obvious as his lover's physical resemblance to his mother; he also refuses to see her crimes and is even able to explain her madness away. Love, on the one hand, and the unconscious Oedipus complex on the other, make Moor select the facts and write a highly personalised version of events."[64]

In *Midnight's Children*, of the female characters who are significant for the present discussion, Padma, the hearer of Saleem's stories, is the vital one. Women are important in Saleem's life but not crucial. In his own words:

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59 Ibidem, p. 237.

60 Ibidem, p. 242.

61 S. Rushdie: *Imaginary Homelands*…, p. 15.

62 S. Rushdie: *The Moor's Last Sigh*…, p. 289.

63 M. Sironval: *The Image of Sheherazade*…, p. 237.

64 B. Klonowska: *Contaminations*…, p. 168.

> Women have always been the ones to change my life: Mary Pereira, Evie Burns, Jamila Singer, Parvati-the-witch must answer for who I am; and the Widow, who I'm keeping for the end; and after the end, Padma, my goddess of dung. Women have fixed me all right, but perhaps they were never central – perhaps the place they should have filled, the hole in the centre of me which was my inheritance from my grandfather Aadam Aziz, was occupied for too long by my voices. Or perhaps – one must consider all possibilities – they always made me a little afraid.[65]

The relationship between Saleem and Padma evokes the Scheherazade-Shahriyar situation. Saleem is the Scheherazadean narrator, and Padma, the hearer. However, Padma, unlike Shahriyar, is an avid, active, and impatient listener. The relationship between the two, to Padma's disappointment, is also rather textual than sexual. Saleem, sometimes criticising Padma's impatience and sexual drive towards him, writes: "Is it possible to be jealous of written words? To resent nocturnal scribblings as though they were the very flesh and blood of a sexual rival? I can think of no other reason for Padma's bizarre behaviour. [...] Distressed perhaps, by the futility of her midnight attempts at resuscitating my 'other pencil,' the useless cucumber hidden in my pants, she has been waxing grouchy."[66] In this respect, Padma resembles the lady from the Frame Story who collected the rings of the men she had sex with; she was the appropriator of the phallus. Padma also desires to appropriate the phallus, and unable to resuscitate the "other pencil," she is jealous of Saleem's concentration on the "first pencil" which causes the "other pencil" to be inactive.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh* the reader also encounters the teller-writer/listener-reader couple in the persons of Moor and Aoi Ue. Both characters, held in one of the rooms of Vasco Miranda's fortress, are forced to coexist. In these circumstances Moor begins to write his life story and Aoi listens to or reads his stories. The reader, however, is introduced to this situation only at the end of the novel; formerly it has seemed that it was only the reader to whom Moor is addressing his story. Hence the relation teller-hearer is not as crucial as in *Midnight's Children*, since is revealed at the very end. Interestingly, at some point Aoi avoids reading Moor's stories, as Moor writes: "Towards the end, she retreated from me, she said she did not want to read me any more; but read it, nevertheless, and filled

65 S. Rushdie: *Midnight's Children*. London 1982, p. 192.

66 Ibidem, p. 121.

up, each day, with a little more horror, a little more disgust."[67] Whereas Scheherazade's role is to cure the king's madness via textual seduction, Moor only needs Aoi's forgiveness and absolution, and Saleem searches for the meaning of life.

In *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, there reappears a substantially different relation between the teller, who is the contemporary Scheherazade, and the listener who is the reader. Mernissi evokes a female Scheherazadean storyteller, who is identified with the author herself, due to autobiographical elements in the memoir. Like O'Neill's *Scheherazade*, Mernissi's protagonist functions on many levels. First, she is the contemporary female Scheherazadean storyteller, secondly, for the women in the Mernissi's household, she is one of the most popular characters from *The Arabian Nights*. And thirdly, she functions as a myth, an invincible heroine who offers a promise of a better life to the characters of *Dreams of Trespass*.

Two chapters of *Dreams of Trespass* are entirely devoted to *The Arabian Nights*, and in the remaining chapters there are numerous references to the tales. The speaking persona is fascinated with Scheherazade, her courage, cunning, and the art of storytelling. In *Dreams of Trespass* we note significant similarities between Scheherazade and the female characters in the novel. The power relations between the queen of storytelling and the king recurs between the female and male characters of Mernissi's memoir. All the female characters, just like Scheherazade, are confined within the space of the harem. The women are cognizant of the seclusion and the imposed harem rules; nevertheless they try to disturb the imposed social order. The speaking persona and the female characters of *Dreams of Trespass* identify themselves closely with Scheherazade, hence, like her storytelling, they are examples of active and to a certain degree independent female characters. Their images are counter-examples of the prevailing cultural ideal of a submissive Eastern woman.

The plurality of Scheherazades in contemporary literatures must influence the possibility of various concretizations of *The Arabian Nights* in Iser's sense. Considering the images of contemporary Scheherazades, it can be assumed that they combine several features characteristic of the queen of storytelling, such as indeterminacy in different respects, the proactive role of storyteller or protagonist, absence alternating with presence in the text, and the art of textual and/or sexual seduction. Negotiating space beyond the dichotomous reception of the female position demands a different modality of thinking which is based on intertextual synthesis. The text does not exist in a unified space, and as Stanisław Ja-

67 S. Rushdie: *The Moor's Last Sigh...*, p. 428.

sionowicz writes, intertextual space "enables understanding the work through its plurality."[68] Plurality and diversity of intertextual space is visible in Rushdie's fiction, which indicates that the queen of storytelling can successfully transform into a male character. Juxtaposing the images of the contemporary Scheherazades leads one to question the Western perception of "Oriental femininity," which is illustrated, for instance, in the discussed Orientalist paintings, and reveals diversity of the contemporary Scheherazadean images.

Mapping "Oriental" Paradise: Harems and Odalisques

> In his truck, on the docks in Marseille, there is a woman asleep, a stranger.... Her mouth is barely visible, bulging from the position of her face against the stuffed vinyl seat. She has long eyelids, bister, Oriental... He watched half of a girl, a half face, a body [...] cut in two, exposed on the right side. His glance stops anew at the bare hands crossed at the far end of the seat, in the same position, open and fragile.
>
> L. Sebbar: *Les Carnets de Shérazade*

> Apparently, the Westerner's harem was an orgiastic feast where men benefited from a true miracle: receiving sexual pleasure without resistance or trouble from the women they had reduced to slaves. In Muslim harems, men expect their enslaved women to fight back ferociously and abort their schemes for pleasure.
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> F. Mernissi: *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*

In the previous subchapter I analysed the contemporary Scheherazadean protagonists with a comparative look to the Scheherazade(s) from *The Arabian Nights*. The persona of Scheherazade and the female characters are undoubtedly one of the most significant aspects of the tales. Therefore, the issues analysed in the part "Odalisques or Termagants? The Female Characters in the *Arabian Nights*" are also mirrored in this subchapter. The images of harem and its women as presented in selected contemporary fiction are analysed and contrasted with relevant images from *The Thousand and One Nights*.

68 S. Jasionowicz: "Intertekstualność w świetle badań nad wyobraźnią twórczą". W: *Intertekstualność i wyobraźniowość*. Kraków 2003, p. 29 [translation mine].

The notion of the harem has a strong metaphorical potential. In Western culture it has drawn significant interest ever since the period of the European expansion and the renewal of fascination with the Orient. The Western image of the harem is imbued with a vision of an exotic paradise. The harem is also a recurring aspect in the contemporary novels that rewrite *The Arabian Nights*, since Scheherazade belongs to King Shahriyar’s harem. The harem women are reoccurring figures among the literary works analysed in this book; therefore the typology of the harem imagery needs recognition.

The visions of the harem in contemporary writing suggest interesting collations. In O’Neill’s and Mahfouz’s fiction, set in distant times, the harem, as is in the *Nights*, is an inseparable part of Muslim society. Its existence is neither questioned nor given too much attention. And as in the harem in *The Arabian Nights*, it is briefly mentioned several times, usually in the context of Haroun al-Rashid’s court, in *Scheherazade* and *Arabian Nights and Days* the harem has a secondary significance. In Rushdie’s fiction the reader encounters the harem in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, in Vasco Miranda’s fortress; however, its existence is only cursorily mentioned. On the contrary, contemporary female writers draw substantially on the metaphor of the harem. Exploring the concept of the harem, it is necessary to superimpose it on the depiction of harem odalisques. The fiction analysed in this work often portrays odalisques. They are present in and emblematize Sebbar’s *Shérazade*; the harem is one of the most significant aspects of Djebar’s *A Sister to Scheherazade* and Merniss’s *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, and these works demonstrate the discrepancy between the Western vision and the harem reality.

The perception of the harem as paradise is shown to be an ideological fantasy when it is compared with the reality of the harem life as depicted contemporary writings, such as in Fatima Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* and Sebbar’s *Shérazade*. In her memoir, Mernissi explores concepts such as the harem, boundary, oral culture, female sexuality and identity in the Muslim world. With a storyteller’s gift, she depicts an East that stands in opposition to the Western understanding of the Orient. She deconstructs the myth of the harem as paradise, an exotic place surrounded by nude/voluptuous women, that was perpetuated in Orientalist literature and paintings. The novel advances fantasies of mobility diametrically opposed to Western notions of paradisiacal permanence.

In reference to Said’s famous remark, “The Orient was almost a European invention,”[69] it can also be stated that the Western perception of the

69 E. W. Said: *Orientalism*. London 2003, p. 1.

harem has been a similar invention. The Western image of Oriental paradise is, to quote Žižek, "identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing 'what we would like to be.'"[70] The analysis in this part of the book aims at debunking the Western myth of the harem as paradise and at indicating the discrepancy between the Occidental vision and Oriental reality.

The Occidental vision of the harem as paradise can be described as an exclusively Western creation in which the Orientals themselves had no part. Unable to represent themselves they assume the position of subalterns. As Spivak argues, the subaltern, defined as being different from the elite, cannot speak.[71] Therefore the West which, according to Spivak, is the Subject,[72] speaks on behalf of the subalterns. The European perception of the East can be traced back to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings. There are certain common features among the variety of paintings depicting the harem. First of all, the paintings showing the harem women emphasize their nudity, eroticism and exoticism. A woman is usually situated in the interior of a harem, in a closed space; she functions as an "isolated object […] as an object that is usually hidden, cloaked, clothed, masked, the woman's revealed body becomes startling and arousing in contrast with a well-dressed room."[73] The women portrayed are mostly passive and idle, and seem to be waiting to be possessed, a vision that seems to be a sheer projection of the observer, a stereotypical phallic gaze. However, some of the women portrayed by the Western artists seem to be seductive, which makes them an active side.

The Western fantasy of the harem women functions as a mere simulacrum which does not reflect the reality of harem life; it belongs to the imaginary. As Mernissi, in *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*, notes:

> Ironically, in the Orient – land of harems, polygamy and veils – Muslim men have always fantasized, in both literature and paintings, about self-assertive, strong-minded, uncontrollable, and mobile women. The Arabs fantasized about Scheherazade of *The Thousand and One Nights*; the Persians painted adventurous princesses like Shirin, who hunted wild animals across continents on horse-

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70 S. Žižek: *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London 1989, p. 105.

71 G.C. Spivak: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In: *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Eds. P. Williams, L. Chrisman. New York 1994, p. 104.

72 Ibidem, p. 66.

73 R. Kabbani: *Europe's Myths of Orient…*, p. 70.

> back; and the Mughals, or Turco-Mongols, from central Asia, gave the Muslim world wonderful erotic paintings filled with strong, independent-looking women and fragile, insecure looking men.[74]

There is an abundance of such strong, active, and mobile female protagonists in *Scheherazade Goes West* and in *Dreams of Trespass*. Mernissi’s heightened interest in the *Nights* is perhaps caused by her fascination with Scheherazade.

Images of Eastern women substantially differ also in visual art. In Persian and Indian miniatures the women tend to be situated outdoors in harmony with nature; they are singing, dancing or playing music instruments. Miniatures usually depict fully clothed women. The harem women look androgynous, as they wear clothes similar to men comprising three layers of robes, or four layers when they go out in public.[75] A few images depicting harem women can be found as illustrations to Penzer’s *The Harem*, for example Plate XII, *An Accouchement in the Harem* and Plate XXIV, *The Women’s Bath*.[76] *An Accouchement in the Harem* is an example of women’s solidarity: attendants are united with the woman who is giving birth. The plate, portraying an intimate scene, does not seem to have a sexual undertone. Similarly, *The Women’s Bath*, although depicting half nude women having a bath, focuses on women’s shared experience of bathing; it depicts their relaxation and satisfaction. The juxtaposition of such images with portrayals of harem women, in particular the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings, is striking. The most popular harem images portray women indoors as fully- or half-nude odalisques. Contained in the space of the harem, they tend to recline and doze. Jean Dominique Ingres depicts harem women in famous paintings such as *Odalisque with a Slave*, *Little Bather*, *Inside a Harem*, *Odalisque*, and *Turkish Bath*. In a similar manner, Eugène Delacroix portrays an *Odalisque Lying on a Couch*.[77] These Orientalist painters share a propensity to depict exotic, nude women as if they were falling into a doze. The Occidental portrayals

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74 F. Mernissi: *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*. New York 2001, p. 164.

75 F. Mernissi: *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*. New York 1995, p. 29.

76 See N. M. Penzer: *The Harem*. London 1967. Plate XII. *An Accouchement in the Harem*, pp. 122–123; Plate XXIV. *The Women’s Bath*, pp. 184–185.

77 It may be surprising that all the discussed images of odalisques in this book were painted by French artists. Although there were some British and American Orientalist painters, female slaves and odalisques in particular, were mostly represented by the French artists. To learn more on Orientalism in Western art, refer to G. G. Lemaire: *The Orient in Western Art*. Paris 2005.

of the harem women remain an illusively collective dream, far removed from the reality of the harem life.

In *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*, Mernissi, drawing on the nature of Western paintings depicting harem women, demystifies the myth of the harem. In this book, she ponders the nature of the Western culture via her remarks and observations after her encounter with the Occident. In the chapter *Jacques Harem: Unveiled but Silent Beauties*, Mernissi, surprised to see women's nudity in Orientalists paintings, writes:

> Yet I found the odalisque's nudity to be troublesome. In Muslim harems […] women are not nude. Only crazy people go about naked. Not only do women in harems keep their clothes on all the time – except to go to the hammam – but they often dress like men, in trousers and short tunics. And in fact, the first Europeans who were lucky enough to glimpse a sultan's court were very surprised by the androgynous silhouettes of the women.[78]

The issue of harem life and harem women is a focal point in Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood.* Introducing the reader to recollections of Fatima's formative life, Mernissi interweaves realistic autobiographical elements with magic and storytelling. In a spiralling style, she depicts her early life in Fez, Morocco. Consisting of storytelling, recollections, and vivid and witty remarks, the book is a commentary on human relations, as Mernissi scrutinises the relationships between the harem women, between men and women, and also between children and adults. The memoir, which is a fascinating insight into the reality of harem life, begins with the persona's declaring: "I was born in a harem in 1940 in Fez, a ninth-century Moroccan city some five thousand kilometres west of Mecca, and one thousand kilometres south of Madrid, one of the dangerous capitals of the Christians."[79] After a brief description of her place of origin the persona proceeds to dwell on the notion of the boundary[80] which is a significant theme of the memoir. *Dreams of Trespass* is full of boundaries, first and foremost the boundary of the harem. The harem is understood as both place and space, a boundary between Christians and Muslims, men and women, and children and adults. The harem imposes a set of boundaries or rules that women have to obey, as the persona ob-

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78 F. Mernissi: *Scheherazade Goes West…*, pp. 104–105.

79 F. Mernissi: *Dreams of Trespass…*, p. 1.

80 F. Mernissi uses the term "frontier," however, I use the term "boundary," as it seems more adequate in the context of this study.

serves: “The problems with the [women] start when the *hudud*, or sacred frontier, is not respected.”[81] The harem women are brought up to obey the rules; a particular code of behaviour is entrenched in their minds.

The women portrayed in *Dreams of Trespass* are confined to the space of the harem and suppressed by its rules; they function almost as slaves even though, superficially, they are respected wives, mothers, or daughters. Mernissi’s women are brought up in a domestic harem which in practice meant an extended household where a few families live together. Mernissi’s harem is monogamous; however, domestic harems were often polygamous, especially in villages and among less educated families. The household delineated by Mernissi resembles a jail. Even the etymology of the word harem metaphorically refers to a jail, as *harām* means “the forbidden” in Arabic, while *seraglio*, the alternate word, which is Italian, literally means “a cage for wild animals.”[82] Regardless of whether we speak of impressive seraglios[83] or small domestic harems, the place is always structured in a similar way: the harem comprises a house or set of houses surrounded by gates (in the case of the imperial harems guarded by doorkeepers who were usually black eunuchs). As Penzer, in his study *The Harem*, writes, “the gate was most important both architecturally and politically.”[84] Mernissi refers to the gate of their harem in *Dreams of Trespass* in this way:

> Our gate was a gigantic stone arch with impressive wooden doors. It separated the women’s harem from the male strangers walking in the streets. Children could step out of the gate, if their parents permitted it, but not grownup women. “I would wake up at dawn,” Mother would say now and then. “If I only could go for a walk in the early morning when the streets are deserted. The lights must be blue then, or maybe pink, like sunset. What is the colour of the morning in the deserted, silent streets?” No one answered her questions. In a harem, you don’t necessarily ask questions to get answers. You ask questions just to understand what is happening to you. Roaming freely in the streets was every woman’s dream.[85]

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81 F. Mernissi: *Dreams of Trespass…*, p. 3.

82 N. M. Penzer: *The Harem…*, p. 16.

83 Imperial harems began to be built in the sixteenth century at the time of the Ottoman Empire. The seraglios were usually huge palaces with several protecting gates. Refer to N. M. Penzer: *The Harem*, to learn more about imperial harems.

84 N. M. Penzer: *The Harem…*, p. 18.

85 F. Mernissi: *Dreams of Trespass…*, p. 22.

The women in *Dreams of Trespass* are not allowed to go into the city without protection. Girls, after they have completed their education, are confined within the harem together with their mothers and other female relatives. Dreams of mobility are recurrent subjects of the persona's conversations with her mother and aunt Habiba. Contrary to the prevailing Western fantasy of passive, exotic women living happily under the wings of their benefactors, the actual women are aware of injustice and some of them, in particular the persona, her mother, and aunt Habiba, are determined to rebel against the imposed rules.

The harem women, retelling tales from *The Thousand and One Nights*, are preoccupied with motifs therein that are relevant to their situation. Frequently enough, their wish to escape the harem, to leave the "paradise" in which they are kept finds expression in narratives of abduction. As Mernissi writes: "Tales of abductions by slave traders were common in *A Thousand and One Nights*, where many of the heroines who began life as princesses were kidnapped and sold as slaves when their royal caravans, heading towards Mecca for the pilgrimage, were attacked."[86] One of the most interesting tales of abduction in the *Nights* is the "Tale of King Omar Bin Al Nu'uman and His Sons Sharrkan and Zau Al Makan." Princess Nuzhat al-Zaman, the heroine of the tale, is abducted and after some time sold as a slave to King Sharkan, who, unaware of the fact that she is his half sister, frees and marries her.[87] Mernissi notes parallels between princess Nuzhat al-Zaman and Mina, an abducted woman living in the Mernissi's household. The persona is fascinated with Mina's story of abduction and often asks her to retell her life story. Both Nuzhat al-Zaman and Mina were abducted as girls, cut off from their roots and taken into an unknown "other" world. However, there are differences in their stories, as Mina "was kidnapped one day when she was strolling just a bit farther than usual from her parents' house,"[88] whereas Nuzhat al-Zaman disappears after she leaves her sick brother with the intention to earn some money. The sibling, Sharrkan and Nuzhat al-Zaman, due to unexpected circumstances, is made to live alone in a foreign country and hence suffers from poverty. The endings of the stories of Mina and Nuzhat al-Zaman also differ as, in contrast to Nuzhat, Mina has not been freed and has the position of a slave in Mernissi's depicted household. Repeatedly weaving

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86 Ibidem, p. 169.

87 Refer to R. F. Burton: "Tale of King Omar Bin Al Nu'uman and His Sons Sharrkan and Zau Al Makan." In: *The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night*, vol. 2, pp. 38–148, Project Gutenberg. Available HTTP: http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3435 (accessed 23 August 2007).

88 F. Mernissi: *Dreams of Trespass…*, p. 166.

her tale of abduction, Mina, along with being the persona's friend, is a second storyteller in *Dreams of Trespass*.

Conspicuous in the women's tales and also in their embroidery, the motif of wings is a further significant theme in Mernissi's memoir. A desire to have wings is explicitly associated with the desire to be able to break the harem boundaries, see the world behind the gate and be self-sufficient and independent. The harem women are enthralled by the tale "A Lady with a Feather Dress,"[89] which was discussed in the second chapter of this book. The women of Mernissi's household feel as if they have been abducted and deprived of their feather dresses. As a result, a ritual of storytelling allows the women to "find something which would make [them] happy when [they] were discontented with what [they] had."[90] Aunt Habiba explains, "everyone could develop wings. It was only a matter of concentration. The wings need not be visible like birds'; invisible ones were just as good, and the earlier you started focusing on the flight, the better."[91]

The desire to have wings is connected with a desire to go beyond the harem gate, to live in nature. Once a year the Mernissi family goes for a one-day picnic trip to the farm of Fatima's grandmother Yasmina. Yasmina's farm is also a harem, however, a different one from Mernissi's. Because it is in the country, the women live together in their houses without barriers and gatekeepers. They have a certain amount of freedom in comparison with the life of Mernissi's family. However, they have similar problems and dreams, as

> a harem was about private space and the rules regulating it. It did not need walls. Once you knew what was forbidden you carried the harem within. You had it in your head, 'inscribed under your forehead and under your skin,' an invisible harem, a law tattooed in the mind.[92]

Hence, even on a seemingly frontierless harem farm, the same rules regulate women's lives. Mernissi's harem, which is an example of an extended family living together, is a harem of women helping themselves, comforting one another and uniting against imposed constraints. However, Yasmina's farm is a typical polygamous harem where the wives of

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89 Refer to F. Mernissi: "The Tale of the Lady with the Feather Dress." In: *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems.* New York 2002, pp. 1–11.

90 F. Mernissi: *Dreams of Trespass…*, p. 208.

91 Ibidem, p. 204.

92 Ibidem, p. 61.

the protagonist's grandfather live together. Not surprisingly, then, some of the women compete with each other for their husband's favours and they all hate his first wife, who has a privileged position in the harem.

The images depicted in Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass* indicate that harems were extended, monogamous or polygamous households. As Mernissi writes, "what defines a harem is not polygamy but the men's desire to seclude their wives, and their wish to maintain an extended household rather than to break into nuclear units."[93] The harem women in Mernissi's memoir do not resemble the nude and passive odalisques painted by Western artists. For the characters in *Dreams of Trespass*, being in a harem meant, as the persona's mother explains, "being prevented from becoming too smart. Running around the planet is what makes the brain race and to put our brains to sleep is the idea behind the locks and the walls."[94] Women's inability to, as Mernissi writes, run around the planet makes them unequal to men and defiant of the imposed rules. Suffering from physical confinement, the harem women are mesmerized by storytelling. Interweaving their stories with such motifs as abduction and wings, the women seek to transcend material existence and physical confinement. Aunt Habiba explains to her niece the nature of invisible wings: "You just keep alert, so as to capture the sizzling silk of the winged dream. [...] There are two prerequisites to growing wings: the first is to feel encircled and the second is to believe that you can break the circle."[95] With invisible wings, harem women feel that they gain unrestricted mobility. The power of storytelling, enabling women to "fly" with the invisible wings, is the only way to "travel," to experience a journey. Narrative journeys are characteristic of the female characters in *Dreams of Trespass*, but also of other female characters in the novels considered here.

The theme of the harem and storytelling is not as crucial in Sebbar's fiction as in Mernissi's, however it is also significant. The contrast between the Western fantasy of the harem and the reality of harem life is depicted through Julien's fascination with odalisques. Julien, a writer and scholar, falls in love with the eponymous Shérazade, whom he identifies with one of his favourite odalisques. From the very beginning of his acquaintance with her it is striking how painstakingly Julien attempts to reinscribe her among his ideological fantasises and how Shérazade is unwilling to be so identified. When he meets Shérazade, he tells her the story of "Aziyade [who] belonged to the harem of an old Turk. She was a young Circassian

93 Ibidem, p. 35.
94 Ibidem, p. 186.
95 Ibidem, p. 204.

slave, converted to Islam."[96] Irritated, Shérazade answers, "Why you telling me about this woman? She's got nothing to do with me."[97] "She had green eyes, like you,"[98] Julien answers. When the two visit the Louvre, Julien shows Shérazade his favourite paintings while the reader is informed that Julien

> thought of the picture he liked to linger in front of, all by himself, as no one ever stopped to look at these women who couldn't have been mentioned in the foreigners, among the works of art that you have seen if you visited Paris of the Louvre. No one in front of the *Reclining Odalisque* either, or *The Turkish Bath*. But he preferred *The Women of Algiers*. [...] Several times they'd both hurried in to see the Delacroix, then out again without seeing anything except these women because that was what they came for, just for them. When they walked along the embankments, Julien talked of the pink in the hair of the woman with the hookah, the *kanoun* on the floor between the three women, the gold bracelets on their naked ankles, the beautiful Negress's hand, the black and red *fouta* with the narrow stripes round her hips below a short midnight-blue bolero, the way the standing Negress looked at her indolent white mistress. He told Shérazade about the women of the harems, Delacroix's and Fromentin's North Africa, the Arab farmworkers and the poor-white settlers he'd known in Algeria, the street children he'd always played with.[99]

Shérazade, unwilling to be identified as one of the Odalisques, constructs her identity through creating her own discourse. As Françoise Lionnet writes, "The narrative becomes the site of a mediation and subversion of the visual representations that assign Shérazade her place in the discourses held by European cultures on the subject of the Oriental woman. The dialogue sparked between Shérazade and this order of representations becomes a driving force of a story that allows her to question and unravel the Orientalist myths in order to weave a new tale, one better suited to her own discoveries."[100] The relationship between Shérazade

96 L. Sebbar: *Shérazade...*, p. 2.

97 Ibidem.

98 Ibidem.

99 Ibidem, pp. 8–10.

100 F. Lionnet: "Narrative Journeys: The Reconstruction of Histories in Leila Sebbar's *Les Carnets de Shérazade*." In: *Postcolonial Representations*. Ithaca-London 1995, p. 168.

and Julien is based on the cultural interchange between the two; Shérazade tells Julien popular Algerian stories and Julien teaches her "words of literary Arabic and Shérazade makes him repeat after her expression in the Algerian dialect."[101] However, as Donadey suggests, "Because of its colonial and neo-colonial context, the exchange between Shérazade and Julien is fraught with danger and must be constantly renegotiated. This explains why Shérazade leaves Julien each time he is about to incorporate her into one of his colonial fantasies. Their relationship is not to be read as an apology of colonization as fruitful encounter or as the site of an unproblematic multiculturalism but rather as the realization that the colonial encounter, in its violence, created a hybridization that can never be erased."[102]

Shérazade often becomes an object of a phallic gaze which is also a colonial gaze. She is observed when sleeping by Julien and by another male protagonist, Pierrot. The descriptions of the sleeping Shérazade are like the descriptions of dozing odalisques. Apart from being fully clothed, Shérazade resembles an odalisque. Contained in the space of the room, dozing on the bed, and wearing vivid clothes, she attracts male attention. But not only does Shérazade distance herself from images of women in Orientalist paintings, she also violently objects to being represented as an Oriental woman. When compared to the Grand Vizier's daughter by one of the men observing her, Shérazade snatches and breaks the photographer's camera, to quote the man addressing her: "hold me up, hold me up or I'll pass out… Is someone putting on an act or what… The Grand Vizier's daughter under a palm tree… I must be dreaming…"[103] Resorting to violence is Shérazade's means of negotiating her identity and escape from the dominant hegemonic representation of the odalisque, for Donadey writes, "By attacking the camera, Shérazade hits where it hurts the most – literally below the belt. Her violence, as a response to violence of sexual nature exerted against her, is experienced as sexually castrating. By breaking the camera, she effectively neutralizes Orientalist desire, a desire that is perceived as violent because the camera, like the phallus, can be used as a weapon."[104]

Sebbar's fiction is often grouped with Djebar's, not only due to an engagement with the feminist outlook and postcolonial condition, but also to their common fascination with Scheherazade, *The Arabian Nights*, and the odalisques in Orientalist paintings. Drawing on these paintings, both

101 L. Sebbar: *Shérazade…*, p. 157.
102 A. Donadey: *Recasting Postcolonialism…*, p. 126.
103 L. Sebbar: *Shérazade…*, p. 133.
104 A. Donadey: *Recasting Postcolonialism…*, p. 131.

Sebbar and Djebar weave stories of contemporary Algerian women. To quote Donadey, “Both writers sometimes refer to the same paintings; their protagonists take on the Orientalist tradition and lucidly assess both their fascination with and their distance from it. The main characters insist on the essentially ambiguous nature of their fascination. They feel deep ambivalence towards these representations of Algerian women.”[105] Interestingly, Djebar uses Pierre Bonnard’s words, “Never did the light seem so beautiful to me,”[106] as the epigraph to her novel. Bonnard, a French post-impressionist painter, was also a non-Orientalist painter, hence Djebar’s engagement with paintings is broader than Sebbar’s, whose interest is apparently to Orientalist paintings. Analysing similarities between Djebar’s fiction and Bonnard’s paintings, Donadey asserts that “Just as Djebar is the writer of the palimpsest, Bonnard could be called a palimpsestic painter; critics recount that he took years to finish some of his paintings and used to retouch them even years after having sold them.”[107]

A Sister to Scheherazade comprises three parts; next to the title of the first part “Every woman’s name is ‘wound,’” Djebar places the words of a female French anthropologist describing the harem,

> Around the house: high windowless walls surmounted by broken glass: around the village: every kind of natural protection, ditches, hedges of prickly pear; around the tent: a pack of half-wild dogs, but – rendered even more impregnable than by the dogs – the whole vicinity has been “sacralized” and cannot be violated without violating the most sacred of all concepts: *horma* – honour.[108]

In the beginning of the second part there is a quotation from *The Thousand and One Nights*, a fragment of Scheherazade’s conversation with her sister, and in the third part Djebar quotes, a passage from *Les Orientales* by Victor Hugo. The harem and the odalisque are not tangible elements in *A Sister to Scheherazade*; however, as is indicated in the quotation given above, it is a source of Djebar’s of inspiration and fascination. Although the reader does not confront Orientalist paintings or odalisques as in *Shérazade*, the metaphor of the harem and the odalisque is an important facet of the novel.

Djebar’s method of writing resembles the painter’s work; she slowly sketches the plot of the novel just as if she were starting to paint. Sketch-

105 Ibidem, p. 96.

106 A. Djebar: *A Sister to Scheherazade…*, p. viii.

107 A. Donadey: *Recasting Postcolonialism…*, p. 97.

108 G. Tillion: “The Harem and Its Cousins.” In: A. Djebar: *A Sister to Scheherazade…*, p. 6.

ing her palimpsest narrative, alike Bonnard's palimpsestic painting, she covers her work with layers of such aspects as the space, the border, the frame, and the mirror are key elements of her writing. Setting forth the line of demarcation between Hajila and Isma, the writer/teller and the listener, allows distance from the plot, and it is refigured to describe a circular, palimpsestic narrative. Introducing the myriad borders in the lives of women in Arabic societies, Djebar consistently subverts and deconstructs them: "These borders are then methodically deconstructed; the frontier between inside and outside, past and present, personal story and collective story, emancipated and traditional women, is purposefully blurred. In *Ombre Sultane*, she subverts the opposition between inside and outside by insisting on threshold. […] Just as Hajila moves outside the traditional frame of the house and veil into public space, Bonnard's women, because of their marginal position, seem to be moving outside the frames of the paintings."[109]

Another point of convergence between the interests of Djebar, Bonnard and Orientalist painters is the *hammam*, known as the Turkish bath. "*Hammam*, refuge where time stands still. The very concept of enclosure and thus of imprisonment, dissolves or disintegrates. *Hammam*, the only temporary reprieve from the harem… The Turkish bath offers a secret consolation to sequestered woman."[110] Donadey proposes a reading of the *hammam* in Djebar's work as a metaphor for a feminine space, as she writes, "the dark and moist *hammam* is described as 'a harem in reverse' that allows rebirth through a symbolic return to the womb."[111] The metaphor for a feminine space is also visible in the discussed miniatures, such as *An Accouchement in the Harem* and the *Turkish Bath*, where rebirth is also characterized by a symbolic return to the womb.

Mernissi, Sebbar, and Djebar, cognizant of the hegemony of Western subjectivity, discuss the issue of the depiction of Oriental woman, using the strategy of the mirror, as repetition with difference, in order to depict their own stance towards the harem and the odalisque. Speaking of representation of Orientalism, Donadey asserts that writing "becomes a way of facing one's ambivalence toward Western representation by probing the question of reciprocal fascination, that is, by dealing with one's response (as a woman from Algeria) to what Edward Said has called Orientalism."[112] The Occidental vision of the harem as paradise, just like Scheherazade's many images, functions as a repository of imaginary Oriental construct(s).

109 A. Donadey: *Recasting Postcolonialism…*, pp. 98–99.

110 A. Djebar: *A Sister to Scheherazade…*, p. 152.

111 A. Donadey: *Recasting Postcolonialism…*, p. 102.

112 Ibidem.

Imaginary depiction of the harem results from the hegemonic, phallic gaze of the observer/reader/writer. As has been indicated in this subchapter, the Occidental fantasy of the Orient and the paradisiacal harem, suggesting mystery, sensuality and lasciviousness, needs to be contextualized. The Occidental projection of the harem as paradise is a "pure" ideological fantasy concerning the mythologized Other, the Orient.

Metafictional Seductions and Narrative Journeys

> But I have no hope of saving my life, nor can I count on having even a thousand nights and a night. I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning – yes, meaning – something.
>
> S. Rushdie: *Midnight's Children*

The Scheherazadean-like narrators and the art of storytelling appear in the selected contemporary rewritings inspired by *The Thousand and One Nights*. In the subchapter "Storytelling as the Art of Seduction" we discussed storytelling in the various translations of the *Nights*, emphasizing its apparent infiniteness, cyclicity, fragmentariness, and seductiveness. In this subchapter, storytelling in the chosen novels is discussed and compared to storytelling in the *Nights*. The idea of storytelling as seduction becomes broadened by the spectrum of a narrative journey, palimpsestic fiction, metafiction, and metanarrative.

Contemporary rewritings of *The Arabian Nights* are characterized by fragmentation. Fragmented and cyclical storytelling, embedded in a polyphony of narratives, is indicative of rewriting the *Nights*. The idea of fragmentation is inventively crafted in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* through the metaphor of "discovery" of different parts of a woman's body by means of peeping through a torn sheet:

> Aadam Aziz's visits to the bedroom with the shaft of sunlight and the three ladies wrestlers became weekly visits; and on each occasion he was vouchsafed a glimpse, through the mutilated sheet, of a different seven-inch circle of the young woman's body. […] So gradually Doctor Aziz came to have a picture of Naseem in his mind, a badly-fitting collage of her severally-inspected parts. This phantasm of a partitioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams.[113]

113 S. Rushdie: *Midnight's Children…*, pp. 24–25.

Like doctor Aziz, who is constructing a picture of Naseem in a fragmentary way, the reader is made to perceive not only Rushdie's fiction but also other novels analysed here in a similar fashion. The modality of holistic representation is replaced by fragmentary narratives by means of deployment of a loop structure instead of a linear one. Fragmentation of the narrative has been described in the previous subchapter in Freudian terms as an incessant postponement, a deferral of gratification, and one of Scheherazade tools of textual seduction. In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie draws on Scheherazadean strategy of storytelling, for instance when the narrator informs his reader:

> In the renewed silence, I return to sheets of paper which smell just a little of turmeric, ready and willing to put out of its misery a narrative which I left yesterday hanging in mid-air – just as Scheherazade, depending for her survival on leaving Prince Shahryar eaten up by curiosity, used to do night after night! I'll begin at once: by revealing that my grandfather's premonitions in the corridor were not without foundation.[114]

Rushdie wilfully plays with a Scheherazadean convention of storytelling. The logic of fragmentation is also significant in Djebar and Sebbar's novels. As Lionnet writes,

> […] this fragmentation is not necessarily a fatal breakdown and dispersion; for them, the attempt to deconstruct tradition is oriented toward a moment of insight, a *prise de conscience*, that leads to renewal and affirmation. Its objective is a practice of difference that targets not only fictional domain, the telling of the story and the narration of the history – what Tzvetan Todorov calls *l'histoire racontante* and Linda Hutcheon, "historiographic metafiction" – but also the cultural context of narrative, the broad domain of everyday practices, the symbolic realms of our pluralistic, polyphonic and intertwined societies.[115]

In the logic of fragmentation is ascribed an idea of the deconstruction of linear structure, bringing renewal and affirmation, as Lionnet puts it, and a practice of difference which is coined under a term "metafiction." Among the definitions of the term "metafiction," Hutcheon's seems to correlate best with the present study. For Hutcheon, metafiction is "fiction

114 Ibidem, p. 24.

115 F. Lionnet: *Narrative Journeys…*, p. 173.

Muhammadi; *Hamza Mirza Entertained*, second half of the 16th century

Francis Barlett Donation of 1912 and Picture Fund 14.587 Photograph © 2011 Museum of Fine Arts Boston. All rights reserved / Bridgeman Art Library

about fiction – that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity."[116]

The novels analysed in this work belong to the genre of metafiction. Mernissi creates a mixture of autobiography with metafiction in the memoir *Dreams of Trespass*; she identifies herself with Scheherazade as the female subject and the storyteller, but she also situates her as a metafictional character in the memoir. *Scheherazade Goes West*, which is also an example of Mernissi's non-fiction writing, is yet another combination of autobiography with metafiction. An example of Mernissi's identification with Scheherazade is when in one passage of the book she writes: "I was personally identifying with Scheherazade's horrible situation. A Muslim woman today is much like her: Words are the only arms she has to fight with the violence targeted against her."[117] In O'Neill's *Scheherazade*, the storyteller's life is continued after the Frame Story is finished. The metafictional character of the queen of storytelling is evident in his novel since O'Neill casts the already metafictional Scheherazade as both the storyteller and the meta-metafictional character of her own stories.

The metafictional quality of Hariharan's writing is also evident in *When Dreams Travel*, as W.S. Kottiswari writes in *Postmodern Feminist Writers*, "The novel uses *The Thousand and One Nights* as Intertext. The novel can be termed Historiographic Metafiction as it signifies on History. It refutes natural or commonsense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction."[118] Hariharan herself does not cover the issue of metafiction; however, in an interview, she emphasizes the significance of *The Arabian Nights* and storytelling in *When Dreams Travel*:

> I don't think storytelling is a kind of a direct subject in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, as it is, say, in *When Dreams Travel*, where I look quite directly at the mutability of stories. So the shifting of narratives is not only dependent on time but who's refashioning the narrative, for what purpose and so on. I think storytelling there, in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is much more a narrative strategy than it is, say, in *When Dreams Travel*. There too it is a narrative strategy, but it is much more. Dunyazad's stories are all about *The Thousand and One Nights:* they are formal, they are written in a particular way

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116 L. Hutcheon: *Narcissistic Narrative. The Metafictional Paradox*. London 1984, p. 6.

117 F. Mernissi: *Scheherazade Goes West…*, p. 81.

118 W.S. Kottiswari: *Postmodern Feminist Writers*. New Delhi 2008, p. 96.

> whereas the slave-girl Dilshad's stories are all the subversive ones, they wander in time and they undercut Dunyazad's tales. The vital part of the novel is how all these stories are actually taking you a little closer to understanding the way in which power is coveted and manipulated and desired and abused.[119]

Scheherazadean storytelling powerfully reverberates in contemporary fiction, thus becoming an art of seduction on a metafictional level. *The Thousand and One Nights* as an intertext, metanarratives and metafiction permeates Rushdie's fiction. Rushdie constantly inscribes his writing into a convention of fiction about fiction. He uses the postmodern convention of introducing certain categories, such as a literary genre or narrative situations, in order to destabilise them. As Klonowska notes, "The tendency to install and subvert the realistic convention of narration seems to be a general feature of Rushdie's fiction. […] The realistic convention and its implied 'truthfulness' is broken either with the help of the fairy tale convention, or via the unreliable narrators and their seemingly 'oral' narratives."[120] Rushdie plays with the conventions by creating a pastiche, as Klonowska puts it, "not of a particular text but a whole novel form."[121] The following citation is one among numerous examples of deployment of metanarratives by Rushdie: "No, that won't do, I shall have to write the future as I have written the past, to set it down with the absolute certainty of the prophet. But the future cannot be preserved in a jar; a jar must remain empty…"[122] Analysing Rushdie's unreliability of narration and his attempts to play with and subvert the literary conventions, Klonowska maintains:

> This unreliability and manipulation is seen in one more feature of the narratives in question. All of them are interesting because they employ the form of the *skaz* convention, that is, they are addressed to a potential listener whose presence is implied in the text. In this sense, they try to imitate oral discourse with its characteristic features: the central figure of the narrator – the storyteller; the often archaic and rambling plot sequence subordinated to the narrator's way of 'remembering' events; improvised speech, repetitions, the

119 J. Kuorrti, G. Hariharan: *The Double Burden…*, pp. 17–18.

120 B. Klonowska: *Contaminations…*, p. 171.

121 Ibidem, p. 172.

122 S. Rushdie: *Midnight's Children…*, p. 462.

> use of lower language registers, common words, slang; or the clear addresses to the listener.[123]

Klonowska's point may seem convincing in generic terms, as Rushdie's narratives are characterized by the enumerated features; however it seems doubtful that assigning the writing of the author of *Midnight's Children* into the category of the Russian *skaz* convention is helpful in cultural terms. Is not the *skaz* convention too Eurocentric to be implied in analysing fiction of a writer of Indian origin? Wouldn't the author himself be surprised by classification of his oral narratives and fragmented storytelling as an example of the *skaz* convention, a convention which is probably quite unknown to Rushdie? The author of *The Moor's Last Sigh* intentionally draws on *The Thousand and One Nights*, a book which serves as an intertext in many of his novels and which is an important point of reference for his writing in terms of Scheherazadean storytelling, female characters, orality, fairy tales, and magic. In the first chapter of this discussion it has been emphasised that the critics tend not to associate the narrative techniques of the *Nights* with the Persian *dastan*,[124] but the book, like most Rushdie's fiction, is a classic example of the form, as well as of Chinese box narration. What may follow from this is the conviction of Rushdie's closeness with orality and storytelling can be understood as a ramification of his cultural background. Discerning multicultural influences in Rushdie's fiction, we may see connections in his writing, in terms of the endorsement of narrative strategies, with the Eastern oral tradition.

Intertextuality and repetition with difference seem to appear in fictions modelled on the Scheherazadean art of storytelling. To John Erickson, author of the influential book *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative*, intertextuality "has much to do with the phenomenon of *métissage* – the bastardized or culturally/artistically/racially mixed or diluted. It bespeaks the interpenetration of cultures, the use made of other ideas and cultural positionings. It inveighs against any notion of a literary or cultural imperialism that rules by exclusivity. Such activity as we have seen in the works of the writers studied as nomadic, in the sense given to that term by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari."[125] Implicit in the assumption of intertextuality conflated with the phenomenon of *métissage* in contemporary writing,

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123 B. Klonowska: *Contaminations…*, p. 169.

124 See page 18 to learn more about the *dastan*.

125 J. Erickson: *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative*. Cambridge 1998, p. 165.

since "any telling has become bound up with retelling,"[126] is an emergence of retelling, which is an amalgamation of difference with repetition. Deleuze defines repetition in the following manner:

> Repetition as a conduct and as a point of view concerns nonexchangeable and non-substitutable singularities. Reflections, echoes, doubles and souls do not belong to the domain of resemblance or equivalence; and it is no more possible to exchange one's soul than it is to substitute real twins for one another. If exchange is the criterion of generality, theft and gift are those of repetition. There is, therefore, an economic difference between the two. To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent.[127]

In the analysis of the transformations of *The Thousand and One Nights* into an intertext, the notions of difference and repetition are the idiosyncratic and common features of fiction retelling the tales. Difference and repetition, alike theft and gift, correspond to the previously analysed ideas of mirror and cyclicity. Retelling is characterized by mirrors and doublings, but also by cyclicity and polyphony. Cyclicity involves permanent referring, looking back at the "stolen" text. Mirroring, on the other hand, stems from similarities and/or disparities, juxtapositions and correlations between the "stolen" text and its retelling; it also means the mirror reflection of the former text in the emerging text. Plurality is inscribed in the categories of theft and gift because the acts of "stealing" and bestowing is not a one-dimensional substitution, but, as this chapter attempts to demonstrate, are characterized by various alterations and modifications. In *The Arabian Nights*, the criterion of theft in most respects applies to Scheherazade and her inventive storytelling.

In Rushdie's fiction the criterion of theft applies to the *Nights* in many respects. In *Midnight's Children* the relationship between Saleem and Padma has a metafictional character and clearly evokes Scheherazade telling stories to the king. Grzegorz Maziarczyk writes, "The employment of the frame of the Saleem-Padma exchange and the apparent exposure and condemnation of narrative seduction can be interpreted as Rushdie's metafictional seduction of his self-conscious readers in which he appar-

126 S. Connor: "Rewriting Wrong: On the Ethics of Literary Revision." In: *Postmodern Literary Theory. An Anthology*. Ed. L. Niall. Oxford 2000, p. 123.

127 G. Deleuze: *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. P. Patton. London 1994, p. 1.

ently disarms himself through the closure of authorial manipulation."[128] Although Maziarczyk depicts the metafictional character of the narrative seduction, he does not acknowledge the resemblance between the Saleem-Padma and Scheherazade-King Shahriyar frames. In his article *The Thousand and One Nights* is only cursorily mentioned as a book to which Rushdie alludes: "His [Rushdie's] use of literary allusions to the *Arabian Nights* and Indian myths, and above all, his metafictional comments suggest that Saleem not only '[wishes] for a more discerning audience' but also assumes that the readers of his narrative will display a much larger capacity for understanding than Padma."[129] The same narrative situation modelled on the Frame Story is deployed in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, where a parallel situation appears between the speaking Moor and the listening Aoi. Although in both works Rushdie introduces a male Scheherazadean storyteller, he models his storytellers on the queen of storytelling and confirms that an act of stealing can be modified in various ways.

The metafictional character of storytelling has been discussed in O'Neill's and Rushdie's fiction. In the case of the female writers the persona of Scheherazade is more central and thus seems more vital. In *When Dreams Travel* she is the root of fascination; a reflection of her storytelling is mirrored in both Dunyazad and Dilshad's stories. Hariharan invokes two female storytellers who exchange the roles of listener and teller. Implying the criteria of theft and gift, Hariharan "steals" from the *Nights* and presents her readers with a novel in which storytelling is imbued with Scheherazadean imagery.

The criteria of theft and gift also seem to characterize the Frame Story of the *Nights*. The Frame Story has an exceptional significance for contemporary fiction retelling the book because it is the most often stolen element of the book, in the Deleuzean sense, and therefore is associated with many of refigurations. In the analysis of the Frame Story in terms of the notion of the Derridian *parergon*, we depicted the significance and relevance to the enframed tales. For the analysis of the categories of theft and gift in contemporary rewritings of the tales and the metafictional characters of the novels, it is worth quoting Leeuwen's comment on metanarrative in *The Arabian Nights* itself:

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128 G. Maziarczyk: "Saleem and the Reader: Metafictional Seduction in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*." In: *PASE Papers in Literature, Language and Culture*. Eds. E. Gussmann, B. Szymanek. Lublin 1998, p. 294.

129 Ibidem, p. 290.

> The framing story forms a link between reality and the fictional world of the inserted stories. The inserted stories contain an allegorical representation of the world, which acquires its meanings by associating it with a realistic 'metanarrative'. [...] The framing story anchors the metaphorical representations in 'real life'. Here, the technique of interruption is used to fulfil one of the main functions of literature: the linking of fictional worlds to a realistic world, of representation of reality, of allegory to the experience of life.[130]

It is plausible to search for metafictional seduction not only in contemporary writing but also in the *Nights* by perceiving Scheherazade's storytelling as metanarrative. Lionnet's description of Sebbar's novels in terms of Derrida's *parole soufflée* can be applied to all the novels analysed in this chapter novels and to the *Nights* as well, to quote Lionnet: "*parole soufflé*: hybrid speech, impure speech, always already borrowed from others and retransmitted by textual means."[131] Hybrid speech, which emerges in the *Arabian Nights* and its retellings, is indeed impure, borrowed, and retransmitted not only by besides textual, but by cultural means as well.

The trajectories outlined by the narrative journeys and metafictional seductions emerging in contemporary fiction help to construct the characters' subjectivities. Among many contemporary Scheherazades the common feature is the concept of a *pensée nomade*, in Deleuze's understanding.[132] Analysing Sebbar's *Shérazade*, Lionnet writes,

> While Shérazade is the nomadic fugitive, she also becomes all the historical and fictional characters whose adventures she recounts. Instead of erecting an artificial partition between the self and the other, the narrative shows how the narrator is transformed, step by step, with every story told, at every new stage of the voyage. She is at once the subject who speaks and the one whose story is reconstituted and absorbed in the text. Intertextuality thereby points toward a nomadism that is, in the end, only a problematization or *mise en abyme* of the very process of interpreting and decoding cultural ideologies.[133]

130 R. Leeuwen: *The Thousand and One Nights...*, p. 7.

131 F. Lionnet: *Narrative Journeys...*, p. 177.

132 For a broader analysis of the term *pensée nomade* refer to F. Lionnet: *Narrative Journeys...*, pp. 179–180.

133 F. Lionnet: *Narrative Journeys...*, p. 180.

Lionnet's argument coherently describes Sebbar's *Shérazade* as her nomadic identity is visible from the very beginning of the novel. Not only Sebbar's *Shérazade*, but also other characters in the analysed fiction are examples of Deleuzean *pensée nomade*. It seems evident that nomadism is not only a distinctive feature of *The Thousand and One Nights* but also of its contemporary retellings. Modern fiction rewriting the *Book of the Thousand and One Nights* creates new labyrinths, (dis)harmonising with the polyphony of the labyrinthine structures created by the book itself, as Borges writes: "One feels like getting lost in *The Thousand and One Nights*, one knows that entering that book one can forget one's own poor human fate; one can enter a world made up of archetypal figures but also of individuals."[134]

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134 J.L. Borges: *Seven Nights…*, p. 50.

Conclusions

> I thought of a labyrinth of labyrinths, of one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars.
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> J. L. Borges: *The Garden of Forking Paths*

> But I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, choose, choose. I buck, I snort, I whinny, I rear, I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoes, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose.
>
> S. Rushdie: *The Courter* in *East, West*

The convention of writing a book requires an incipit and excipit in the form of an introduction and conclusion. As Salman Rushdie writes in *Midnight's Children*, "The process of revision should be constant and endless; don't think I'm satisfied with what I've done!"[1] The process of revision which is constant and endless cannot result in finishing the study. Let us therefore provide a conclusion beginning with a statement that the process of revision Rushdie mentions in *Midnight's Children* parallels the process of the *Nights* transformation. A discussion containing reflections on the ongoing literary, (trans)cultural, and generic transformations of the tales, alike the *Nights*' metamorphoses, eschews closure, the sense of completion.

Probing the transcultural transformations of *The Arabian Nights* is a focal aspect of interest in this book. Undiminished fascination with the *Nights* has been visible in High and Low cultures since the *Nights* has appeared in contemporary fiction, music, art, and, also in film. This work endeavours to scrutinise the *Nights*' transformations; however, in a broader context, it is also a study of trajectory of relations between East and West. Analysing complexity, polyphony of translations, and mythologization of

1 S. Rushdie: *Midnight's Children…*, p. 460.

The Arabian Nights, we situate the book in a context of a dialogue of British culture with the Orient. Depicting the book as the Other, existing as culturally conditioned construct in the awareness of Western culture, we debunk a mythical image of the *Nights* as a collection of fairy or folk tales abound in images of insatiable and sensual female characters living in the paradisiacal space of harem. The analysis of *The Arabian Nights* as the intertext in selected contemporary fiction leads to a juxtaposition in the Western perception of the Orient with its image shaped by contemporary literatures in English written by authors who originate, in most respects, from the former British colonies. Such a juxtaposition enables us to perceive the tales in the new light and to revise a dialogue with the Orient. As a result, it leads to an emergence of the Third category. The contemporary Scheherazade and *The Thousand and One Nights*, being neither the Same nor the Other, belong to the Third category, which is *sui generis*, it is a category of its own.

The Thousand and One Nights has undergone continuous process of metamorphosis, which began in the East in the time of oral cultures, and continued in Western culture when the book appeared in European translations. The process of transformations is still taking place as the *Nights* reappears as the intertext in contemporary cultures. This book offers a chronological overview of literary and cultural transformations of *The Thousand and One Nights*; however, at the same time its aim is an attempt at defining the mutable relationship of the British culture with the Orient, and also an attempt at depicting the Book in a new light of cultural criticism. Rendered in the work depictions of the *The Arabian Nights* as an embodiment of nomadic literature, its literary and transcultural situatedness between the Orient and the Occident, the plurality of mythologized Scheherazades, their indeterminacy, and the significance of the Frame Story, understood in terms of Derridian parergon, are just some of the suggested hopefully innovative conceptions. Pinpointing interdependences between European translations and also between Arabic manuscripts, questions the commonly accepted perception of the book as a homogenous collection of Eastern fables or fairy tales.

The Thousand and One Nights appears as a canonical work for both Eastern and Western cultures and of both Eastern and paradoxically Western origins. The comparative analysis of the nineteenth-century translations of the tales, apart from its (trans)cultural features, the beauty of storytelling, richness of motives and literary characters, reveals the translators' imperialistic, colonial, and prejudiced attitude towards the East. Therefore, the translations are analysed through the colonial discourse and cultural theories. The comparative stance towards the *Nights*' contemporary clones aims at presenting the reader with an outline of literary

works referring to or rewriting *The Arabian Nights*. The last chapter of this study, analysing the aspects of contemporary Scheherazade(s), harems and odalisques, and narrative journeys, on the one hand indicates resemblances to the *Nights*, since the same themes are significant for the analysis of both the *Nights* and its clones. On the other hand, the present study, besides indicating that the process of the *Nights*' metamorphoses is endless and much more complicated than some general readers tend to think, presents a striking discrepancy between the image of the culture of the Orient in the colonial translations of the tales and their contemporary rewritings. In a way, the *Nights*' transformation process through the Eastern and Western cultures, parallels the significant changes that have taken place in the dialogue of the British culture with the Orient.

The Arabian Nights and its contemporary rewritings constitute myriad of labyrinths. This study proposes, instead of looking for Ariadne's thread in these labyrinths, to relish the multiplicity of possibilities offered by the book and the dialogic nature of the cycle. We seek to sketch a trajectory of movement in the labyrinthine structure of the *Nights*, and to provide the reader with a thread enabling him/her to follow our research, which hopefully sheds new light on *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Therefore, instead of devoting more attention to the already assumptions already made in the dissertation, pinpointing the cultural, literary, and generic transformations of the *Nights* and also the protean relations between East and West, it seems more interesting to depict the ways, the new possible labyrinths, in which the discussion might be further broadened. *The Thousand and One Nights* has become an integral part of today's culture. Since, to quote Borges, "the world is made of correspondences, is full of magic mirrors – that in small things is the cipher of the large,"[2] the discussion in the context of an idea of mirror and cyclicity of the *Nights* may also involve the issue of Polish translations of the book, and the mythologization palpable already on the level of the title, since *Księga tysiąca i jednej nocy* (*The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*) has been transformed in Polish culture into *Baśnie tysiąca i jednej nocy* (*Fairy Tales of The Thousand and One Nights*). This misleading title is so culturally pervasive that it is not only used by uninitiated readers but also by Polish scholars and translators.[3]

2 J.L. Borges: *Seven Nights...*, p. 56.

3 J. Deszcz analyses *The Prophet's Hair* by S. Rushdie in the context of *The Arabian Nights* perceived as the Oriental fairy tales. Is *Harun i morze opowieści*, M. Kłobukowski translates the title *The Arabian Nights* into *Baśnie z tysiąca i jednej nocy*. See: S. Rushdie: *Harun i morze opowieści*. Przeł. M. Kłobukowski. Warszawa 1993, p. 47.

Since Salman Rushdie's fiction is characterized by an eerie quality of rewriting of and references to *The Thousand and One Nights*, therefore the analysis of orality and storytelling through the prism of the *Nights* in his writing would encompass a whole new study. The discussion may be also extended without the deployment of ideas stemming from our assumptions, such as of transformations, cyclicity and the seemingly endless process of repetition. The modality of rewriting the tales could be also explored in American literatures, for instance, by endorsement of the discourse of neoorientalism in America.

The Thousand and One Nights, as noted in the study, is an embodiment of "nomadic literature"[4] which does not belong, and has no home. *The Arabian Nights* is situated in an exceptional space in between contemporary and past cultures, in between the Orient and the Occident. Constituting labyrinths itself, it incessantly creates new paths and subsequent labyrinths. Oscillating between the subject and the object of study in both Western and Eastern cultures, the jettisoned *abject*, to paraphrase Julia Kristeva, belongs to Oriental as well as Occidental literary thought. The *Nights* has had a pervasive influence on Eastern and Western cultures, and at the same time, it was substantially transformed by these cultures.

The emerging from contemporary fiction rewriting of *The Arabian Nights* assume the shape of the Third category. The Third, which is an amalgamation of the Same and the Other, goes beyond the hybridization of the former categories and gains a subjectivity of its own. Contemporary rewriting of *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights* reveals the plurality of Scheherazades and female characters, destabilises the mythologized and colonial concept of "Oriental femininity" and finally the myth of the Orient. In the resurgence of interest in the book evinced in the polyphony of its rewritings, contemporary fiction reflects *The Arabian Nights* potential.

We began this study by introducing Borges' ideas as regards to the discovery of the East and *The Thousand and One Nights*. Thus, finishing our discussions analysing the ongoing metamorphoses of *The Arabian Nights*, we will refer to Borges' words once again, quoting his words from *Seven Nights*: "*The Thousand and One Nights* is not something which has died. It is a book so vast that it is not necessary to have read it, for it is a part of our memory – and also, now, a part of tonight."[5]

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4 N. Royle: *Jacques Derrida...*, p. 45.

5 J.L. Borges: *Seven Nights...*, p. 57.

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Marta Mamet-Michalkiewicz

Pomiędzy Orientem a Okcydentem: przeobrażenia *Księgi tysiąca i jednej nocy*

Streszczenie

Przedmiotem pracy *Pomiędzy Orientem a Okcydentem: przeobrażenia „Księgi tysiąca i jednej nocy”* jest proces literackich, (między)kulturowych oraz gatunkowych przekształceń, jakim poddana została *Księga*. Chronologiczne spojrzenie na analizę owych metamorfoz obejmuje datowany na około IX w. n.e. etap powstawania *Księgi*, jej istnienie w kulturze oralnej krajów arabskich, kolejne arabskie edycje dzieła oraz pierwsze tłumaczenia na języki europejskie dokonywane w XVIII i XIX w.

Jedna z tez niniejszej książki zawiera się w założeniu, że *Księga tysiąca i jednej nocy* poddawana jest procesowi niekończących się przekształceń, stąd kolejnym omawianym etapem transformacji jest istnienie *Księgi* jako intertekstu w kulturach współczesnych. Niesłabnąca fascynacja *Księgą tysiąca i jednej nocy* przekłada się na popularność tego dzieła i jego przenikanie zarówno do kultury wysokiej, jak i masowej, na co wskazuje fakt, że *Tysiąc i jedna noc* obecna jest nie tylko we współczesnej prozie, ale również muzyce, sztuce i filmie.

Książka skupia się na prześledzeniu zmian, jakim poddane zostały tzw. *Baśnie tysiąca i jednej nocy*, natomiast w szerszym kontekście stanowi również studium badające trajektorie zmieniających się relacji pomiędzy kulturą Wschodu i Zachodu. Z uwagi na złożoność i polifoniczność tłumaczeń, a również mitologizację, której obiektem stały się opowieści tysiąca i jednej nocy, *Księga* i jej współczesne permutacje analizowane są w kontekście dialogu kultury brytyjskiej z Orientem.

Autorka wykazuje, że w świadomości kultury Zachodu *Księga* wciąż jeszcze istnieje jako kulturowo uwarunkowany konstrukt, stanowiąc uosobienie koncepcji Innego, który nadal funkcjonuje w dychotomicznej relacji z Pierwszym. Odrzucając owo myślenie binarnymi opozycjami, autorka podważa zmitologizowaną wizję *Księgi*, która zazwyczaj przybiera w wyobrażeniach człowieka Zachodu postać egzotycznego zbioru baśni czy też opowiadań ludowych. *Księga tysiąca i jednej nocy* to dla wielu czytelników synonim tajemniczego i zarazem magicznego Orientu; Orientu, który, będąc pełnym nienasyconych seksualnie kobiet haremu, wciąż uwodzi niezliczonymi opowiadaniami Szeherezady oraz bogactwem występujących w tym utworze postaci i motywów. Co więcej, fascynująca różnorodność wersji oraz tłumaczeń tego wyjątkowego dzieła, zło-

żony proces jego powstawania, (między)kulturowe usytuowanie oraz mnogość nawiązań do tradycji *Księgi* w literaturze współczesnej, dla wielu czytelników pozostają nieznanymi.

Analiza *Księgi* jako intertekstu w literaturach współczesnych pozwala na zestawienie zachodniej wizji Orientu z jego wizerunkiem obecnym w twórczości pisarzy anglojęzycznych, którzy wywodzą się głównie z byłych brytyjskich kolonii. Takie zestawienie pozwala na poszerzenie spektrum recepcji *Księgi*, rewizję dialogu z Orientem, a w konsekwencji niesie za sobą wyłonienie się nowej kategorii – Trzeciego, który, nie będąc ani Piewszym, ani Innym, wpisuje się we współczesną sytuację kryzysu i hybrydyzacji tożsamości.

Książka składa się z trzech rozdziałów. Dla przejrzystości oraz spójności wywodu każdy z nich podzielony został na cztery części, co daje w sumie dwanaście odrębnych analiz, których lejtmotywami są idee lustra i cykliczności oraz sam proces transformacji. Rozdział pierwszy koncentruje się na zagadnieniach powstania, tłumaczeń oraz gatunkowej przynależności *Księgi*. Analizując „nomadyczność" omawianego dzieła, jego (między)kulturowe usytuowanie na styku Orientu i Okcydentu, funkcjonowanie jako *abjectu* w rozumieniu Julii Kristevy, a także niedoceniony przez krytyków wpływ, jaki europejskie tłumaczenia *Księgi* miały na rozwijający się dyskurs opisanego krytycznie przez Edwarda W. Saida „orientalizmu"; autorka wykazuje, że *Księga tysiąca i jednej nocy* może być określona jako gatunek literacki *sui genesis*. Wniosek ten przekłada się bezpośrednio na stanowisko metodologiczne przyjęte w pracy. Odrzuciwszy jednowymiarowe i banalizujące spojrzenia na dzieło, autorka próbuje w swojej interpretacji połączyć studia kulturowe z komparatystyką literacką, promując idee interdyscyplinarnej analizy *Księgi*.

W rozdziale drugim, na podstawie wybranych tłumaczeń *Księgi tysiąca i jednej nocy*, autorka porównuje i poddaje analizie najważniejsze aspekty utworu, jakimi są: narracja ramowa, kluczowa rola Szeherezady, tożsamość kobiety Orientu oraz proces opowiadania (ang. *story-telling*) rozumiany jako sztuka uwodzenia. Odnosząc się do Derridiańskiego pojęcia *parergonu*, autorka udowadnia, że opowieść ramowa *Księgi* w sposób zdecydowany różni się od konwencjonalnej narracji tego typu. Uwaga czytelnika skierowana zostaje również na sposób funkcjonowania opowieści ramowej tak wewnątrz, jak i na zewnątrz dzieła, w szczególności zaś uwypuklona zostaje niebagatelna rola odgrywana przez ową ramę narracyjną w całym cyklu opowieści *Tysiąca i jednej nocy*.

Fascynująca badaczy takich jak Roman Ingarden oraz Wolfgang Iser tożsamość Szeherezady stanowi kolejny wątek rozważań w książce. Autorka ukazuje drastyczny, ale jednocześnie fascynujący, proces kulturowego warunkowania reprezentacji Szeherezady, którego rezultatem jest polifoniczność w wytwarzaniu jej wizerunków. Obrazy Szeherezady oraz innych budzących fascynację postaci kobiecych, które możemy znaleźć w analizowanych tłumaczeniach, stanowią uosobienie zachodniego mitu kobiety Orientu. Odnosząc się do refleksji krytycznych Homiego Bhabhy, który wykazał ambiwalencje dyskursu kolonialnego (obecną w nim potrzebę istnienia „rozpoznawalnego" Innego), oraz w nawiązaniu do teorii postkolonialnej Gayatri C. Spivak; autorka ukazuje mechanizmy kształtujące postrzeganie *Księgi* oraz tożsamości kobiety Orientu. Owe wizerunki zostają

zdekonstruowane, ponieważ, jak wykazuje autorka, stanowią tylko zideologizowane fantazje. W końcowej części drugiego rozdziału ukazana została wielowymiarowość narracji *Księgi tysiąca i jednej nocy* w kontekście samego procesu opowiadania rozumianego jako wielopoziomowe uwodzenie czytelnika.

W rozdziale trzecim autorka przedmiotem swojej refleksji badawczej czyni funkcjonowanie *Księgi* jako intertekstu w kulturach współczesnych. Czytelnik wprowadzony zostaje w swoisty labirynt, który tworzą nawiązania, transfiguracje oraz próby ponownego pisania i odczytywania samej *Księgi*. W początkowym fragmencie trzeciego rozdziału autorka uzasadnia również kryteria, którymi kierowała się przy wyborze powieści nawiązujących do tradycji *Tysiąca i jednej nocy*. Złożony kształt występujących w tych utworach tożsamości Szeherezad(y) poddany zostaje dogłębnej analizie, która jednak wolna jest od odwołań czy porównań do Pierwszego utożsamianego z kulturą Zachodu. Wyłaniający się ze współczesnego pisarstwa anglojęzycznego obraz haremu i odalisek również stanowi tu przedmiot analizy. Część końcowa trzeciego rozdziału to próba scalenia całej rozprawy. Autorka, analizując współczesne powieści i nawiązując jednocześnie do tradycji narracyjnych *Księgi*, zamyka swoją dysertację, sugerując jednak nieskończoność procesu przeobrażeń samej *Księgi tysiąca i jednej nocy*. Dzieło to zostaje bowiem umieszczone w kontekście nieustających prób konstruowania go na nowo za pomocą współczesnych metafikcji i metanarracji.

Marta Mamet-Michalkiewicz

Entre l'Orient et l'Occident : métamorphoses des *Mille et Une Nuits*

Résumé

Le sujet de la dissertation *Entre l'Orient et l'Occident : métamorphoses des Mille et Une Nuits* est le processus des métamorphoses littéraires, (trans)culturelles et génériques du recueil. Un regard chronologique sur l'analyse de ces métamorphoses embrasse la période de la génèse du *Livre* au IXe siècle, sa présence dans la culture orale des pays arabes, des éditions suivantes arabes et les premières traductions vers des langues européennes au XVIIIe et XIXe siècles.

Une des thèses de ce livre repose sur la conception que l'oeuvre *Les Mille et Une Nuit* subit des métamorphoses incessantes, d'où la présentation de l'étape suivant de la transformation du texte comme un intertexte dans les cultures contemporaines. Une réelle fascination par les *Mille et Une Nuit* se reflète dans la popularité constante de cette oeuvre et ses interférences également dans la culture haute que de masse, ce que prouve le fait que les *Mille et Une Nuit* sont présentes non seulement dans la prose moderne mais aussi dans la musique, l'art et le cinéma.

Le livre se concentre sur les changements des *Mille et Une Nuit*, et dans un contexte plus large constitue aussi une étude examinant les trajectoires des relations changeant entre la culture occidentale et orientale. A cause de la complexité et le caractère polyphonique des traductions ainsi que la mitologisation qu'est devenu ce recueil, les contes sont analysés dans le contexte du dialogue entre la culture britannique et l'Orient.

L'auteur démontre que dans l'optique de la culture occidentale les *Mille et Une Nuit* existent comme une création conditionnée culturellement, en exprimant la conception de l'Autre qui fonctionne toujours dans une relation dichotomique avec le Premier. En rejetant cette division binaire, l'auteur questionne la vision mythologisée des *Mille et Une Nuit*, qui embrasse le plus souvent dans l'imagination du l'homme de l'Occident la forme d'un recueil exotique des contes ou des nouvelles folkloriques.

Les Mille et Une Nuit sont pour de nombreux lecteurs un synonyme de l'Orient mystérieux et magique à la fois, qui, plein de femmes inassouvies sexuellement, enchante toujours grâce aux contes de Shéhérazade et à la richesse des motifs et des personnages.

Ce qui plus est, la multitude fascinante des versions et des traductions de cette oeuvre exceptionnelle, le processus complexe de sa genèse, sa position entre les cultures et le nombre des allusions aux *Mille et Une Nuits* dans la littérature contemporaine restent inconnus pour de nombreux lecteurs.

L'analyse des *Mille*... comme intertexte dans les littératures contemporaines permet de confronter la vision occidentale de l'Orient avec son image dans la production littéraire des écrivains anglophones, issus généralement d'anciennes colonies britanniques. Ce rapprochement permet d'élargir le spectre de la réception du recueil, de la révision du dialogue avec l'Orient, et, en conséquence, il provoque l'apparition de la troisième catégorie – le Troisième – qui, sans être le Premier ni l'Autre, s'inscrit dans la situation actuelle de la crise et de l'hybridation d'identité.

Le livre se compose de trois chapitres. Pour garder la clarté et la cohérence du raisonnement chaque chapitre est divisé en quatre parties ce qui donne en somme douze analyses distinctes dont les leitmotivs sont les idées de miroir et de cycles ainsi que de processus de transformation. Le premier chapitre se concentre sur la genèse, les traductions et la classification générique du recueil. En analysant le caractère nomade de l'oeuvre, sa position (trans)culturelle à la charnière de l'Occident et de l'Orient, le fonctionnement comme *abjection* selon la conception de Julia Kristeva, ainsi qu'une influence, sous-estimée par les critiques, des traductions vers des langues européennes sur le discours d'« orientalisme », décrit par Edward W. Said ; l'auteur démontre que les *Mille et Une Nuit* peuvent être définies comme un genre littéraire *sui genesis*. Cette conclusion agit directement sur la méthodologie de la thèse. En rejetant des regards banalisant et unidimentionnels sur l'oeuvre, l'auteur essaie d'unir dans son interprétation des études culturels avec la litterature comparée, en promouvant l'idée de l'analyse interdisciplinaire du recueil.

Dans le deuxième chapitre, à l'exemple des traductions choisies, l'auteur compare et analyse des aspects les plus importants de l'oeuvre, à savoir : la narration du récit enchâssant, le rôle primordial de Schéhérazade, l'identité de la femme d'Orient et le processus de narration (ang. *story-telling*) compris comme l'art de séduction. En se référant à la notion de derridienne de *Parergon* l'auteur prouve que le récit enchâssé des *Mille et Une Nuit* diffère considérablement de la narration conventionnelle de ce type. L'attention du lecteur est dirigée vers la façon de fonctionner du récit enchâssé à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de l'oeuvre, et particulièrement sur le rôle crucial du récit-cadre dans le cycle entier des contes de *Mille et Une Nuit*.

L'identité de Shéhérazade, qui fascinait des chercheurs comme Roman Ingarden et Wolfgang Iser constitue le sujet suivant de la réflexion de l'auteur. Elle montre de manière drastique mais frappante le processus du conditionnement culturel de la représentation de Shéhérazade, dont le résultat est la polyphonie de ses images. Les images de Shéhérazade, et d'autres femmes inspirant la fascination que nous pouvons trouver dans les traductions analysées, constituent la personnalisation du mythe occidental de la femme d'Orient. En se referant à la réflexion critique d'Homi Bhabha qui démontre les ambivalences du discours colonial (le besoin de l'existence de l'Autre « reconnaissable »), ainsi que la théorie

postcoloniale de Gayatri C. Spivak, l'auteur explique des mécanismes formant la perception du recueil et de l'identité de la femme d'Orient. Ces images sont déconstruites car, comme le démontre l'auteur, elles ne constituent que des fantaisies idéologisées. Dans la partie finale du deuxième chapitre l'auteur prouve la complexité de la narration des *Mille et Une Nuit* dans le contexte du processus de conter compris comme une séduction multidimensionnelle du lecteur.

Dans le troisième chapitre l'auteur analyse le fonctionnement du recueil comme intertexte dans les cultures contemporaines. Le lecteur est introduit dans un labyrinthe constitué par des allusions, des transfigurations et des tentatives d'écrire et d'interpréter ce texte de nouveau. Dans la partie initiale du troisième chapitre l'auteur justifie les critères de choix des romans qui se réfèrent à la tradition des *Mille et Une Nuit.* La forme complexe d'identité de Shéhérazade(s) de ces écrits est soumise à une analyse minutieuse, qui pourtant n'est pas libre des allusions ou des comparaisons au Premier, identifié à la culture occidentale.

L'image du harem et des odalisques, sortant de l'écriture moderne anglophone constitue un autre point d'analyse. La partie finale du troisième chapitre est une tentative d'unir toute la dissertation. L'auteur, en analysant des romans modernes et en se référant également à la tradition narrative des *Mille et Une Nuit*, achève son mémoire en suggérant en même temps l'infinité du processus de transformations de l'oeuvre. Ce récit est situé dans le contexte des essais incessants de le reconstruire à nouveau, à l'aide des meta-fictions et des meta-narrations modernes.

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“By discussing the complexity of *The Arabian Nights*, due to its existence between divergent cultures; and also by pinpointing multidimensional aspects of the transformations of the book, which are palpable on the level of its oral transmission, a number of culturally biased translations, and contemporary rewritings and retellings; this book attempts to fill a gap in international and also Polish critical studies. The discussion is hopefully broadened by analysis of the commonly embalmed, simplified and mythologized image of *The Thousand and One Nights* and also of Scheherazade, its narrator and most famous character. The research concerns aspects of the process of transformation of the book by inscribing the trajectory of the relations between the Orient and the Occident.”

(From the “Introduction”)

Marta Mamet-Michalkiewicz is an assistant professor at the University of Silesia, in the Institute of English Cultures and Literatures, Department of American Literature and Culture. Her main research interests include postcolonial literature and theory, contemporary literatures in English, and cultural aspects of translation.

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