

# Metamorphoses of Scheherazade in literature and film

WEN-CHIN OUYANG

School of Oriental and African Studies

The world has been fascinated with *The Thousand and One Nights* since Antoine Galland discovered it and translated it into French in the early eighteenth century (1704–1717). It has been an infinite source of inspiration both within and outside the cultures that produced it. In fact, the *Nights*' influence has been so pervasive in the arts over the last three centuries that, according to Robert Irwin,<sup>1</sup> it is easier to name those who have not been influenced than those who have. Its narrative techniques are constantly emulated, its stories adapted and retold, miniatures are created to illustrate the luxurious editions of the book, music is composed in honour of Scheherazade,<sup>2</sup> and films based on scripts adapted from its stories are made. The immense popularity of the *Nights* has led to increasing critical attention to interpretations of the stories and of their reincarnations in modern fiction and film, as well as an obsessive search for the authoritative 'authentic' text. Criticism of the *Nights* has thus far been disparate, coming from various disciplines and subjects; each defined by its own priorities, concerns and critical tools. Research in the field of Arabic literature, for example, has focused on the 'origin', the 'original text'<sup>3</sup> and 'influence' on<sup>4</sup> and by<sup>5</sup> the *Nights*. Re-writings of the *Nights* stories in contemporary Arabic fiction have in the main been interpreted as political allegory subversive of the current Arab political and cultural institutions. Adaptations of similar stories in 'Western' fiction and film tend to be discussed as part of the development of fiction writing or film-making in Europe or America. The extra-'Western' context of the stories is rarely seen as relevant to an understanding of the re-formulated stories. Distortions of literary texts in the particular case of film have become the subject of many familiar complaints and debates.

The questions raised concerning the 'authenticity' of *Nights* text or adaptations of *Nights* stories, 'influence' on or by *Nights*, and changing sensibilities in fiction, seem unable to provide genuine insights into the human desire to narrate, the workings of narrative in story, and the culture that produces the story. Would posing new questions from a different perspective shed more light on story and narrative? Looking at 'story' in an intercultural and

<sup>1</sup> Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: a companion* (London: Allen Lane Press, 1994), 237–92. Irwin himself has written a novel inspired by the *Nights*: *The Arabian nightmare* (London: Dedalus, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> The Westernized spelling of the name of the main protagonist of the *Nights*' frame-tale is used to denote the fictional persona of the character as well as to reflect the ways the character's named is spelt in particular re-written versions of the tale. The spelling of the names of all characters of the frame-tale varies from one text to another. I use the variant renditions (of the same names) as they appear in the specific texts under discussion in order to indicate these texts.

<sup>3</sup> The problem of the text is a key issue in any study of the *Nights*. Robert Irwin provides the most accessible rendition of the problem and the history of *Nights* textual scholarship in *The Arabian Nights*.

<sup>4</sup> Titles like, *Researches respecting the Book of Sindbad* by Domenico Comparetti (ed.) and *The origin of the Book of Sindbad* by B. E. Perry, make the issue of the origins of *Sindbad the Wise—al-'aqil* (not the Sailor) a priority, tracing *Nights* stories to Ancient Greek, Indian or Persian 'origins'. Perry in fact painstakingly tried to prove that the stories originated in classical Greek literature!

<sup>5</sup> Works such as *The Arabian Nights in English literature* by Peter Caracciolo (ed.) and *Scheherazade in England: a study of nineteenth-century English criticism of the Arabian Nights* by Muḥsin al-Mūsawī look at the pervasive evocation of the *Nights* stories in English literature.

interdisciplinary context may provide interesting findings about the ways in which story takes shape. What determines the ways in which story transforms as it travels across time, place, genre and medium? Do we locate the change in generic expectations, ideologies external to but which necessarily inform a genre, or subjectivities of the 'auteurs'? In other words, in what ways do paradigms of knowledge inherent in narrative genres inform and shape cultural and literary texts? Does narrative in turn generate new paradigms of knowledge? What can answers to these questions tell us about culture, its products, and processes of production? And, more important, do paradigms of knowledge perceived as inherent in genres in turn affect our reading of literary and cultural texts? The *Nights* stories, which have been continually scrutinized and revised so as to yield an 'authentic' text, translated and re-translated into almost every language in the world, tirelessly re-written in modern fiction, and adapted and re-adapted for film, seem a fertile ground for asking new questions about story and narrative. The various metamorphoses of the *Nights* frame-tale in particular present some vital landmarks that open up new vistas for a critical inquiry into narrative and into the ingredients that go towards transforming narrative into story, and one story into another. The following analysis of the metamorphoses of Scheherazade and the *Nights*' famous frame-tale across literature and film is an attempt to examine the relationship of genre, ideology and subjectivity to the formation of story and to the ways in which we read texts.

#### *Scheherazade goes Hollywood*

In 2000 BBC 2 broadcast in two segments a new film version of the *Thousand and One Nights* produced by the Warner Vision International. The publicity literature emphasized the 'magic, mystery and epic adventure' of this new product and, more importantly, located it in a genre of film-making identifiable by its origin in literary texts and reliance on fantasy and adventure, such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *Merlin* and *Gulliver's Travels*. 'Arabian Nights', the blurb appearing on the back cover of the video version released later asserts, 'is based on the classic Sir Richard Burton's translation of "*The Thousand and One Nights*"'. This publicity blurb, what Genette would call a 'paratext',<sup>6</sup> activates generic expectations and, in fact, guides viewers to understand the film in a certain way. The title, the films cited as belonging to the same genre, and the mention of Burton, all allude to the body of 'Hollywood' features inspired by the *Nights* and invariably dubbed as 'Arabian Nights Fantasy'. The main purpose of these films, suggested by Burton's famous exoticized and eroticized translation, known as *Arabian Nights entertainment*, is to entertain. 'Classic and much-loved tales like "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp" and "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves"', the blurb announces, 'are brought magically to life in this epic production which will both amuse and amaze'. However, the mention for the first time in Hollywood literature of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the original Arabic title of the body of stories, points to a new departure in Hollywood film-making. It implies a kind of 'authenticity' that has thus far eluded Hollywood.

*Arabian Nights* (2000) is only the second film in the history of 'Hollywood' to bear the title of English translations of the Arabic stories.<sup>7</sup> However, it

<sup>6</sup> Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: thresholds of interpretation*, tr. Jan E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini's film, known in English as *Arabian Nights* (1974), does not conform to Hollywood formulae and deserves special treatment that goes beyond the concerns of this paper.

simultaneously locates itself in and interrogates the genre of Hollywood *Arabian Nights* films in its interpretation of literary texts and representations of 'other' cultures. The first *Arabian Nights*, directed by John Rawlins and released in 1942, distorts the 'original' Arabic in such a way that the stories, characters and locales of the *Nights* stories are no longer recognizable.<sup>8</sup> It resembles less the Arabic tales and their English translations and more other Hollywood films inspired by the *Nights*. These Hollywood films, the earliest Raoul Walsh's 1924 silent masterpiece, *The Thief of Bagdad*<sup>9</sup> and latterly the series of B class 'costumers' set in Baghdad revolving around the adventures of Sindbad,<sup>10</sup> Aladdin<sup>11</sup> and Ali Baba,<sup>12</sup> pay more attention to costume—which looks uniform from one film to another—and fantasy. *Arabian Nights* (2000) provides a corrective in more ways than one. While retaining fantasy, an essential part of the *Nights*, it restores diversity to the *Nights* stories, the cultures they evoke, the geographical span they cover, and more importantly, the purpose of storytelling.

*Arabian Nights* (2000) re-creates three *Nights* stories: 'Ali Baba and the forty thieves', 'Aladdin and the magic lamp' and 'The hunchback', and inserts a repackaged familiar story about three princes who learn to work together in 'The three brothers'. The film also restores the frame-within-frame structure of *The Thousand and One Nights* and the purpose of storytelling. The story of Shahriyar and Scheherazade frames these other stories; and Scheherazade tells stories in order to save life and country. The film follows more closely the storylines, geographies and atmospheres created in the literary text. 'Aladdin and the magic lamp', for example, is now set in China, as the *Nights* story has it. Oriental, Asian and Middle Eastern actors donning pre-modern Chinese costumes play the main characters, and the visual details, including clay figurines discovered recently in an emperor's tomb, conjure up a pre-modern China imagined on the basis of up-to-date historical findings. In its re-telling of the story of Aladdin the emphasis, significantly, focuses on the human dimensions of the story rather than the fantastic. The fantastic components, even as they 'amuse and amaze', are subordinated to the human desires, which drive the stories here as in the *Nights*. This film reflects, for the first time in Hollywood interpretation of the *Nights*, the relationship between the tales and the frame-tale. As the film comes to an end, we are shown how well Shahriyar has learned his lessons. The timely flashbacks imply that Scheherazade's stories inform his actions.

On closer scrutiny, however, each story seems to have lost an important piece of its original *Nights* identity. *Arabian Nights* (2000) transforms each of the stories into something new. This transformation is not effected, it seems, on the visual representation of the characters, locales or material cultures;

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *Kismet* (1944; dir. William Dieterle), *Siren of Bagdad* (1953; dir. Richard Quine), and *Veils of Bagdad* (1953; dir. George Sherman).

<sup>9</sup> The success of this film inspired several remakes, including *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940, British; dir. Ludwig Berger), *Thief of Bagdad* (1961, Italian; dir. Arthur Lubin), British-French television film, *The thief of Bagdad* (1978; dir. Clive Donner), *Thief of Damascus* (1952; dir. Will Jason), and *The Prince who was a thief* (1951; dir. Rudolph Maté).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., *Sinbad the sailor* (1947; dir. Richard Wallace), *Son of Sinbad* (1955; dir. Ted Teztlaff), *The 7<sup>th</sup> voyage of Sinbad* (1958; dir. Nathan Juran), *The golden voyage of Sinbad* (1974, British; dir. Gordon Hessler), and *Sinbad and the eye of the tiger* (1977, British; dir. Sam Wanamaker).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., *Aladdin and His Lamp* (1952; dir. Lew Landers) and Disney's animated films: *Aladdin* (1992; dir. John Musker and Ron Clements) and *The return of Jafar* (1994; dir. Toby Shelton, Tad Stones and Alan Zaslove).

<sup>12</sup> E.g., *Ali Baba goes to town* (1937; dir. David Butler), *Ali Baba and forty thieves* (1944; dir. Arthur Rubin), *Son of Ali Baba* (1952; dir. Kurt Neumann) and *The sword of Ali Baba* (1965; dir. Virgil Vogel). The story of 'Ali Baba and the forty thieves' is integrated in the second Disney *Aladdin* film, *The return of Jafar* (mentioned above).

rather, it seems to be located in the ways in which the plot of the story is played out in the narrative. The famous *Nights* frame-tale may serve as an example of the transformation of a story when it travels. In this film, the frame-tale is rendered as a story of sibling rivalry complicated by the protagonists' involvement in power politics. The film opens with King Shahriyar's encounter with the princess kidnapped by a genie on her wedding night. She is now sex slave to the genie and spends her days and nights entertaining her captor. She spots Shahriyar voyeuristically watching her dance in the genie's palm and summons him when the genie takes a nap. She avenges her captivity by forcing Shahriyar to have sex with her. When the genie awakes suddenly and is about to slaughter him, Shahriyar wakes, startled, from his nightmare. The crucial part of the plot of *Nights* frame-tale is reduced to the king's nightmare, which instead of driving the story now implies the state of Shahriyar's psychological distress. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the king is traumatized by the betrayal of his wife and brother. His younger brother, Shahzaman, covets Shahriyar's kingship and conspires with the queen to assassinate the king. On his return to his bedchamber one night, Shahriyar finds his queen in bed with his brother and, more alarmingly, the scene is part of a plan hatched by his brother to kill him. By some miracle, Shahriyar manages to confront both, killing his wife but only injuring his brother, who immediately flees the palace. This episode throws Shahriyar into paranoia and melancholy ('darkness' in his own terms), which find expression in his bedding a virgin each night and having her killed at dawn. Scheherazade enters the scene at this critical moment, and by telling 'fantastic' stories to the king night after night saves herself, all the women in the Kingdom, and the Kingdom. She restores the king to psychological health and helps him to face Shahzaman. The two brothers, supported by their armies, confront each other on the outskirts of the capital and Shahriyar kills his brother and saves his Kingdom from a bloodthirsty tyrant.

The film's frame-tale is not the same as that of the *Nights*. In the *Nights*, there is no power struggle between the two brothers. Aside from the fact that they are both kings in their own right, theirs are parallel stories, one complementing the other. Shahrayār (companion of the city) and Shāhzamān (king of time) have been separated by the span of their kingdoms for twenty years when the story begins in the *Nights*. Missing his brother, Shahrayār sends for Shāhzamān. Shāhzamān departs on a journey to visit his brother but returns to his palace at night to retrieve a gift he has left behind. He finds his wife in the arms of a black slave in the royal bed. He kills both and leaves silently. He arrives at Shahrayār's palace an unhappy man. One night, when Shahrayār goes out hunting, Shāhzamān witnesses his sister-in-law having sex with a black slave in the royal gardens. He visibly brightens up, feeling that he is no longer alone in his marital misfortune. When Shahrayār returns, he notices Shāhzamān's improved mood and demands an explanation. Shāhzamān reluctantly tells his brother about his sister-in-law. Shahrayār pretends to leave and returns to the palace to spy on his wife. When he witnesses his wife's infidelity he abandons his kingdom and leaves with Shāhzamān. They come upon the princess held captive by the genie and are forced to have sex with her. They realize that women may never be trusted. Both kings then return their kingdoms. Shahrayār kills his wife and her lover and resolves to bed a virgin every night then have her killed in the morning. The kingdom is in turmoil. Shahrazād (born of the city), the learned daughter of Shahrayār's loyal vizier, volunteers to wed the King. On her wedding night she asks the king for permission to send for her sister Dunyāzād (born of this world) and installs her under the

royal bed. Duniyāzād, on cue, asks Shahrazād to tell her a story. Shahrazād obliges. She begins the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*, making sure to pause at a critical juncture of the story at the crack of dawn. She captivates the King's attention night after night for three years. In the meantime, she gives birth to three sons, heals the King, wins his love, marries him and saves the kingdom. In longer versions of the frame-tale, Duniyāzād is married off to Shāhzamān. In celebration of this happiness, Shahrayār commissions the stories to be written down and preserved for posterity.

*Arabian Nights* (2000), which seems to reflect the understanding of storytelling as an instrument of psychological healing, found in modern scholarship on the *Nights*, has radically altered the conditions and consequences of illness and healing. Illness is presented in the film as being the result of a double betrayal, by wife and brother, and the loss of the ability to act rationally. The executioner, who lurks in the ante-chamber to the royal bedroom, tires of waiting for the king to take decisive action, ordering him to strangle Scheherazade at dawn, and conspires to bring Shahzaman back to the palace and help him usurp power. Scheherazade, who has loved Shahriyar since childhood, puts her neck on the line and tries to help Shahriyar overcome his anger, grief and inaction, and motivate him to defend his right to kingship and his kingdom from impending tyranny. As Scheherazade tells Shahriyar the final story of the film, we see Shahriyar preparing himself to confront Shahzaman, who has set up camp on the outskirts of the city, ready to invade, kill Shahriyar and crown himself king, of course, with the help of the executioner. Indeed, Shahriyar comes face-to-face with the enemy, his brother, and after a fierce duel he kills his brother and restores harmony to his kingdom. The film ends with a scene of domestic bliss. Scheherazade is telling their two sons the story of their father's victory on the royal bed while Shahriyar is busy running his kingdom. *Arabian Nights* (2000) in its story line and plot resembles more *Arabian Nights* (1942) than the frame-tale of the *Arabic Nights*.

In the earlier film, Scheherazade is a famous street dancer working in Baghdad. She is the object of desire of Kamar al-Zaman, an elder brother of the king who is not entitled to kingship because he is the son of a slave-woman. When Scheherazade tells him in jest that she will marry him if he becomes king (she believes that it is her destiny to be queen), he attempts to assassinate his brother the king, Haroun al-Rasheed. He fails miserably and is sentenced to slow death—he is hung out to die in a public square. Haroun al-Rasheed comes to inspect with his vizier and is ambushed by the vizier and his cohorts. His vizier, as it turns out, has tired of Haroun al-Rasheed's compassion, as evidenced by his readiness to forgive Kamar al-Zaman at the eleventh hour, and plotted to replace Haroun al-Rasheed with Kamar al-Zaman. Haroun al-Rasheed, injured in his flight, is rescued by Scheherazade's troupe. They fall in love. Kamar al-Zaman finally catches up with them. Scheherazade and her troupe, including disguised Haroun al-Rasheed, are brought to Kamar al-Zaman's camp. The vizier, having detected the love between Haroun al-Rasheed and Scheherazade, blackmails Scheherazade into agreeing to poison Kamar al-Zaman. In the meantime, he orders Haroun al-Rasheed to be taken away and killed. All turns out well, however, and Haroun al-Rasheed escapes death with the help of the troupe and returns to camp with military support, kills both the vizier and his brother and saves his kingdom.

The struggle between two potential heirs to the throne is a familiar motif in a genre of Hollywood storytelling that may be broadly defined as 'action adventure costumer'. This genre of films, from 'Robin Hood' to 'Arabian

Nights', typically sports a historical setting and tells stories of kings, queens, princes and princesses, and the contest between two contenders to power, one good and the other evil. A villain, who covets power, provides heightened dramatic effect for the film. This villain can only achieve power by controlling the actual ruler. He lurks behind doors and walls, spies, schemes, manipulates, makes love, blackmails, consorts with the enemy, and kills as often as he needs to, all to maintain his indirect power. When the ruler is recalcitrant, he plots to replace him with a compliant one. The struggle for power usually spills over into the arena of love, where a beautiful woman invariably serves as a contested object of desire. However, she inevitably falls in love with the right/ful ruler and her love somehow always provides the impetus for the often beleaguered rightful ruler to win back his power and marry his beloved. *Arabian Nights* (1942) epitomizes this genre of Hollywood film.<sup>13</sup> The majority of the *Arabian Nights* films made in Hollywood, including the recent Disney animated series based on the story of Aladdin,<sup>14</sup> seem unable to transcend the expectations of the genre in which they are cast.

*Arabian Nights* (2000) seems to fall prey to the tight grip of the genre from which it derives its paradigmatic plot, a formula clearly borrowed from Western stories found in a specific type of historical romance that defers negotiations of legitimacy, justice and benevolence of political authority to the past. Its attention to authenticity of representation in the recent culture of political correctness, and its integration of new insights regarding the function of storytelling in the *Nights*, cannot disguise its essentially Western identity. The *Nights* frame-tale is further stretched and its characters fleshed out in the film to meet the melodramatic requisites of a modern-day suspense-ridden action adventure. Shahrazād is an active storyteller in the Arabic text. Her presence is, however, innocuous—felt only at night when she spins her tales and at dawn when she stops. Scheherazade is, on the contrary, subjected to fear and suspense in her rescue mission. She must first win Shahriyar's trust, and his violent mood swings keep her on the edge. On the occasions he wavers between having her killed and letting her continue to tell her stories we see the executioner testing his rope preparing to stretch her neck. In fact, the executioner drapes his rope around her neck ready to snuff the life out of her when the king has her reprieved at the last minute. Shahriyar is a tortured soul, who weeps, throws angry fits, stays awake at night besieged by insomnia, wavers between compassion and cruelty, and falls in love. Scheherazade is brave, intelligent and wise, but is often afraid and uncertain of her skills. Their courtship, which begins with her entry into the royal bedroom and continues as she tells the king stories on the bed, in the royal bath tub, during meals, while dancing for the king, follows closely the formula of Hollywood love stories: attraction, antagonism and union. The final epic battle scene between Shahriyar and Shahzaman is the invention of Hollywood and finds no textual corroboration in the *Nights*.

When the story travels, from 'East' to 'West', past to present and literature to film, in this particular case, its shape is defined by the patterns current in the host culture, but its 'local' colours, however, may be retained, albeit

<sup>13</sup> The lead actors, Jon Hall and Maria Montez, one of the B-status golden couples of studio era Hollywood, collaborated in seven 'action adventure costumers', including another *Nights* inspired *Ali Baba and forty thieves* (1944). The storyline of all their films departs little from *Arabian Nights* (1942) despite changes in costumes and settings. Their films were all designed to bring out the chemistry between them and satisfy audience expectations, from lavish costumes, to comic interludes, adventure and sword fights.

<sup>14</sup> The two recent Disney films (mentioned above) were so popular that a spin-off television series was produced and shown on cartoon networks worldwide.

modified or enhanced by contemporary insights. But perhaps this kind of narrative transformation is the prerogative only of a genre of Hollywood B films into which the *Nights* stories have been integrated. Would genre ideology operate in similar force in other genres of storytelling? In *Arabian Nights* (2000) Scheherazade is portrayed as a student learning the art of storytelling, and as she tells stories and finds herself stuck, she turns to a master storyteller who makes a living in the market place. He in turn enlightens her in the art. This modification of Scheherazade's qualifications seems informed by modern re-writings of the character found in contemporary novels. In Egyptian Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz's novel, *Layālī alf layla* (1979),<sup>15</sup> Scheherazade's knowledge and the wisdom implicit in her fountain of stories are attributed to her teacher, a Sufi scholar by the name of al-Balkhī, who has taught her well. Mahfouz's novel has been translated as *Arabian Nights and Days* and has been available to English readers since 1995.<sup>16</sup> Mahfouz, however, inherits the *Nights* notion of the function of storytelling as an instrument of healing—in this case, taming Shahrāyār—and life-saving. The focus on the art, or techniques, of storytelling and its relation to creativity is tackled elsewhere, in John Barth's *Dunyazadiad* (1972). What do these re-writings of the *Nights* frame-tale tell us about genre and ideology and their role in shaping stories?

*Scheherazade falls out of love in Naguib Mahfouz's Arabian Nights and Days*

Since its publication, *Arabian Nights and Days* has been read as a novel that portrays Mahfouz's vision of the human condition and the struggle between good and evil,<sup>17</sup> or an allegory of political reality in the Arab world in general and Egypt in particular.<sup>18</sup> The two distinctive features of the novel highlighted and discussed by critics—intertextuality with the *Nights* and the use of the fantastic—are interpreted within the context of generic expectations of the 'realistic' novel for which Mahfouz is famous. In his analysis of 'intertextuality' and its role in the production of meaning, Sa'īd Yaqṭīn focuses on the ways Mahfouz's narrative strategies transform the 'story' and its message. Notwithstanding its adoption and adaptation of the familiar characters, motifs and plots of the *Nights*, the structure of the novel, its plot and focalization transform the mode of the story from fantasy to realism, and the function of storytelling from fending off death into prevention of evil. Realism displaces and replaces fantasy when Shahrāyār, the main character of the frame-tale, is integrated into Hārūn al-Rashīd, the main character of many framed-tales, when story merges with history and the frame-within-frame structure of the *Nights* disappears. According to Yaqṭīn the fantastic is equated with evil in the novel, and as long as evil exists, stories will never cease.<sup>19</sup> Sabry Hafez similarly explains Mahfouz's move from realism to fantasy in terms of the failure of mimesis, the operative impulse and structure in realism, to deal with contemporary Arab reality. Mahfouz's novel, according to Hafez, is constructed around the principle of dialectics of complex narrative structures—intertextuality, and conveys an ideological message: that political authority

<sup>15</sup> Published by Maktabat Miṣr in Cairo.

<sup>16</sup> Translation by Denys Johnson-Davies (Cairo: American University Press, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Rasheed Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: the pursuit of meaning* (London: Routledge, 1993), 159–60.

<sup>18</sup> See Sabrī Hāfiz, 'Jadaliyyāt al-bunya al-saridyya al-murakkaba fī layālī Shahrāzād wa Najīb Maḥfūz' (*Fuṣūl* 13/2 [Summer 1994], 20–69); Ferial Ghazoul, *Nocturnal poetics: The Arabian Nights in comparative context* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1996), 138; and Muḥsin Jāsīm al-Musawī, *Thārāt Shahrāzād: fann al-sard al-'arabī al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Adāb, 1993), 109–15.

<sup>19</sup> Sa'īd Yaqṭīn, *Al-riwāya wa al-turāth al-sardī* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1992), 33–47.

should not in any way impinge on the rights of the individual to freedom and political participation. The numerous similar yet divergent interpretations of the novel are interestingly not affected on reading Mahfouz's text against its intertexts despite the many references to intertextuality with and narrative strategies inspired by the *Nights*. They are straightforward readings of a story in a contemporary context as a political allegory with emphasis on narrative strategies 'exotic' to the European novel, especially the fantastic,<sup>20</sup> which is in turn read as a mirror of realism. The critical enterprise, in this case, seems imprisoned in genre ideology and unable to look beyond the generic expectations of the realistic novel in its readings of Mahfouz's work. Would it be possible to transcend genre ideology in reading texts? Would intertextuality complicate our understanding of genre ideology? What determines the shape of the story in this case, the genre ideology of the pretext or of the novel? And, more important, what happens to this ideology and the genre it supports when they travel across cultures?

I have a purpose in rehashing an old debate about the efficacy of literary categories in reading texts. Genre studies have, since Croce's revolt,<sup>21</sup> departed from simple classification of literary works into kinds or types and writing the history of each genre. They have adopted a more complex view of the function of genre in writing and reading literary texts, without necessarily doing away with this articulated category of knowledge. Harold Bloom, Mikhail Bakhtin, Tzvetan Todorov and Thomas O. Beebee, to name but a few, have contributed to the now more complex notions of genre, of 'anxiety of influence',<sup>22</sup> 'dialogic imagination',<sup>23</sup> 'genres in discourse'<sup>24</sup> and 'generic instability'<sup>25</sup> respectively. These notions, notwithstanding their derivation from diverse theoretical frameworks, have in common that generic operations in texts cannot be denied but that generic boundaries are unstable, in fact, they change constantly as they engage in dialogical discourses with past texts or with other genres. Bloom shows us the ways conventions of the form, specifically that of poetry, are misread, distorted and transformed as new generations of poets try to outdo their predecessors. Bakhtin takes us through the intricate history of the emergence of the novel from the epic while also appropriating other narratives. Todorov tells us about the intersection of poetry and the novel. And Beebee takes this a step further and examines the ways generic boundaries collapse not only among the literary kinds but also between the literary and non-literary.

These approaches are predicated on some common theoretical assumptions, which are pervasive in much of genre studies: historicity, power and ideology of genre. John Snyder explains in *Prospects of power*:

... every work deviates from any particular set of characteristics that may

<sup>20</sup> Moroccan scholar of the *Nights* and pre-modern Arabic storytelling Aboubakr Charaibi identifies the novel's intertextual links with the *Nights* in an article on 'Les jinns penseurs de Naguib Mahfouz' (2001), providing a list and appropriate backgrounds of the *Nights* stories recast in Mahfouz's novel. Charaibi, however, stops short of providing a reading of Mahfouz's novel. See *L'Orient au coeur, en l'honneur d'André Miquel*, ed. F. Sanagustin et al. (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001), 171–83.

<sup>21</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Problemi di estetica*, second ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1923). Referred to in Claudio Guillén, *The challenge of comparative literature*, tr. Cola Franzen (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19 and 140.

<sup>22</sup> Harold Bloom, *The anxiety of influence: a theory of poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>23</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The dialogic imagination: four essays*, translated by Carol Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>24</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in discourse*, translated by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> Thomas O. Beebee, *The ideology of genre: a comparative study of generic instability* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

be attributed to its kind. And over time every work combined with all others of more or less the same kind constitutes the history of the genre: the genre *is* its history of individual instances. This history, of course, signifies changes, even transformations in the genre: *Hamlet* both is and is not a tragedy in the same sense as the *Oresteia*, and *Othello* both is and is not a tragedy in the same sense as Imamu Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*. A historically transformed genre necessarily includes all its moments. That is how it changes.<sup>26</sup>

This historicity, as I have demonstrated in my discussion of *Arabian Nights* (2000), is precisely the source of the power of genre based on what Adena Rosmarin describes in *The power of genre* as 'a finite schema capable of infinite suggestion'.<sup>27</sup> This schema, borrowed from Gombrich's *Art and illusion*, is to Rosmarin the theoretical underpinning for both creative and interpretive strategies.<sup>28</sup> Genre, whether we deny or acknowledge its existence, exerts its influence on us when we read or write. 'The ideology of genre is all around us', thus Thomas O. Beebee states simply in his book of the same title, *The ideology of genre*.<sup>29</sup> Beebee's notion of genre ideology, however, means more than merely the existence of recognizable categories of literature each with a distinct schema, and rather that this schema inevitably becomes internalized paradigms of knowledge, shaping the ways we view the world and, more importantly, read the text.

Even as Bloom, Bakhtin, Todorov and Beebee examine genre instability with what Snyder would call 'dialectic attention',<sup>30</sup> focusing on the power struggle among genres, they unwittingly fall under the inescapable influence of the ideology of genre. Ideology, in this case, is the by-product of historicity, the location of the subject of their study in a specific history, and here it is the history of the genres in the geographical, national and cultural area perceived as the West. For a scholar of modern Arabic literature, the question is what happens when a genre travels from one culture to another? In *Travels of a genre*, Mary N. Layoun raises the same question but answers it only partially. Inspired by postcolonial theories, Layoun exposes the ideology of hegemony in the Western novel and reads a number of non-Western novels as responses to this hegemony. Even as she questions the West-based history of the novel, describing it as 'fictional genealogy' constructed in parallel to national/ist history,<sup>31</sup> Layoun is unable to transcend the ideology of genre I have described above. Her reading of non-Western novels against Western novels places the former as the historical precursor of the latter and further confirms the centrality, not to mention ideological hegemony, of the Western novel in the interpretation of non-Western novels. This difficulty is common among critics of the Arabic novel, and poses a dilemma, perhaps insoluble, with regard to the latter's history: what is the genealogy of this genre in Arabic literature? As genre it is obviously a development of the Western novel, for this literary form did not exist in the classical Arabic literary tradition and only came into being during the Western colonial expansion in the nineteenth century. It seems logical then that the Arabic novel, even when we incorporate the notions of

<sup>26</sup> John Snyder, *Prospects of power: tragedy, satire, the essay, and the theory of genre* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Adena Rosmarin, *The power of genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 44.

<sup>28</sup> Rosmarin, *The power of genre*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Beebee, *The ideology of genre*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Snyder, *Prospects*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Mary N. Layoun, *Travels of a genre: the modern novel and ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3.

‘generic instability’, ‘genres in discourse’ and ‘dialogical imagination’, is examined against its Western precursors.

In his analysis of the numerous reincarnations of Scheherazade in modern Arabic literature of the second half of the twentieth century, Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Ghanī focuses particularly on the worldviews—what I would call ideologies—implicit in two modes of expression imported from the ‘West’: romanticism and realism. He points out that in both ideologies Scheherazade is inevitably idealized in a Western garb. The difference is that in the first instances she represents individualism and in the second society.<sup>32</sup> The implications of ‘Abd al-Ghanī’s conclusions are clear. The shape of the story is defined by the ideology of the mode of expression internalized by a genre. An old story recast in a new genre cannot escape transformation effected on the basis of the rules governing a genre. *Arabian Nights* (2000) is a perfect example of the power of genre ideology. All the readings of Mahfouz’s novel point to similar conclusions. The *Nights* frame-tale, for example, is clearly bent out of shape here. In the aftermath of the thousand and one nights storytelling, Shahrāyār is certainly cured of his thirst for blood and tyranny and has turned into a benevolent king rather like the famous ninth century ‘Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. He has pardoned his kingdom and now tours the city at night and inspects the affairs of his subjects. Alas, he is estranged from his queen who, as it turns out, finds him repulsive. She does not and cannot love a man with so much blood on his hands. Shāhzamān disappears completely and Dunyāzād marries Nūr al-Dīn, the son of a retail merchant, who is eventually executed for an act he does not commit. These details, together with the re-written versions of other *Nights* stories, all point to the political allegory spoken of by critics of the novel. However, this political allegory is not only grounded in the context of the contemporary Arab reality, but also on the ways Mahfouz reads the *Nights*.

The marriage between the fantastic world of the *Nights* and the contemporary political allegory in Mahfouz’s novel, as I have demonstrated elsewhere,<sup>33</sup> makes a statement about the nation-state that is Egypt. As Mahfouz returns to themes, narrative strategies and techniques, and vision contained in the Arabic literary tradition after a long sojourn in the realism which originated in the European novel, he looks back on the path Egypt has taken in its transformation from one community to another. The novel imagines a community as a nation-state and at once subverts its own imagining. The novel mimics the nationalist discourses and imagines a community that secularizes and democratizes in a painfully bloody experience. It begins by humanizing power and ends by popularizing it. Power, more particularly political authority, follows the movement of two counter-narratives: one of Shahrāyār’s descent from power and the other of the ‘folk’s’ ascent to positions of authority. Mahfouz’s rendition of Dunyāzād may similarly be read as part of the two-way process of democratization. She, sister of the queen and daughter of the vizier, marries a commoner who remains a commoner, Nūr al-Dīn. In the *Nights* stories, he would have become vizier. These two narrative movements are in turn mediated by the story of Jamaṣa al-Bulṭī’s metamorphosis from instrument of tyranny to means of justice. By choosing political power as his subject, Mahfouz creates a world akin to Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined political community’. Anderson’s definition of the nation calls for two more

<sup>32</sup> See Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Ghanī, *Shahrazād fī al-fikr al-‘arabī al-ḥadīth* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985 [1995]).

<sup>33</sup> See ‘Theorizing narrative, narrativizing theory: Mahfouz interprets the *Nights*’, <http://www.cpege-cpa.ac.ma>.

criteria: it must be imagined 'both as inherently limited and sovereign'.<sup>34</sup> The community is defined by the all-too-well-known realist Mahfouzian *Hāra* located in the heart of old Cairo, and its members are all citizens of this *Hāra* who, like the characters of his realist novels, congregate evenings in the Café of the Emirs, where news of the community is disseminated. However, the novel does not only make ideological statements about political authority, it also provides diagnosis and prognosis of the nation-state. This is effected on Mahfouz's play with the paradigms of knowledge inherent in *Nights* stories.

The *Nights* frame-tale contains a paradigm of knowledge specific to the medieval Arabic-Islamic culture. It is patterned on a well-known genre of '*al-faraj ba'd al-shidda*' pre-modern Arabic storytelling. *Al-faraj*, literally 'openness' refers to a state of emotional and material relief after a period of difficulty, *al-shidda*, which means tightness. The pieces collected in the numerous compendia under the general rubric of '*al-faraj ba'd al-shidda*', whether in classical<sup>35</sup> or vernacular<sup>36</sup> Arabic, tell the stories of hardship followed by relief. In the *Nights* frame-tale, Shahrīyār and Shāhzamān as well as their kingdoms clearly fall on hard times, when the betrayal of their respective wives precipitates the 'gynocidal' wrath of the two kings. The kingdom is thrown into crisis not only because women are being killed on a nightly basis, but also because the implication of 'gynocide' is the discontinuity of the kingdom. When the virgins are all killed on the night of their wedding, who will bear the heirs to the kingdom? Scheherazade resolves the crisis when she is able to postpone her death for one thousand and one nights, during which period she bears Shahrīyār three sons. She saves the kingdom not only by putting a stop to 'gynocide' but also by making sure that the genealogy of the kingly family is not interrupted. More important, she teaches her king the meaning and power of love. Lessons of love are, however, fleshed out in the enframed tales, which inform and are informed by the frame-tale. Stories of love in the *Nights* are more often than not about the fate of a 'nation' effected on the interplay between 'erotic romance' and 'patrimonial romance'.<sup>37</sup> Survival of the nation often depends on the resolution of stories of love in *Nights* romances. *Nights* love stories are about the propriety, suitability and legitimacy of a love match guided by loyalty and endurance. An appropriate love match, such as the successful union of a prince and princess conducted within societal codes of propriety after a series of misadventures, leads to the coherence of the royal household and, therefore, the nation. Our understanding of the skeletal pattern and unjustified happy ending of the *Nights* frame-tale are premised on our understanding of the pattern and resolution of the love stories it enframes.<sup>38</sup>

Mahfouz's reformulation of the *Nights* frame-tale and love stories is informed by but wary of their inherent paradigm of knowledge, or their genre

<sup>34</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1983 [1991]), 6.

<sup>35</sup> e.g., Abū Bakr 'Abdallāh Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Al-faraj ba'd al-shidda*, ed. Hasan 'Abd 'Āl (Tanta: Matkabat al-Shāhāba, 1987), and Abū al-Muhassin Ibn 'Alī al-Tanūkhī, *Kitāb al-faraj ba'd al-shidda*, ed. 'Abbūd Shālījī (Beirut: Dār Šādir, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> *Al-ḥikāyāt al-'ajība wa al-akhbār al-gharība* (Bibliotheca Islamica), ed. Hans Wehr (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1956), which includes many of the *Nights* stories.

<sup>37</sup> See Andras Hamori, 'An allegory from the *Arabian Nights*: the City of Brass', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 34, 1971: 9–19; 'A comic romance from the Thousand and one Nights: the tale of two viziers', *Arabica* 30/1, 1983: 38–56; 'The Magian and the whore: readings of Qamar al-Zamān', *Mundus Arabicus* 3, *The 1001 Nights: critical essays and annotated bibliography* (Cambridge, MA: Dar Mahjar, 1983): 25–40; 'Notes from two love stories from the Thousand and One Nights', *Studia Islamica* 43, 1976: 65–80; and *On the art of medieval Arabic literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

<sup>38</sup> See my two articles, 'Romancing the Epic: 'Umar al-Nu'mān as narrative of empowerment', *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures*, 3/1, 2002: 5–18; and 'The epical turn of romance: love in the narrative of 'Umar al-Nu'mān', *Oriente Moderno* 2002 (forthcoming).

ideology; it disrupts this paradigm in a number of significant ways. The absence of love between Shahrayār and Shahrazād drives the king away from the palace and forces him to seek happiness elsewhere. The break-up of the family is exacerbated by the tragic marriage of Dunyāzād not to Shāhzamān but Nūr al-Dīn. Mahfouz's rendition of the story of 'Dunyāzād and Nūr al-Dīn' is a reformulation of two *Nights* romances: 'the Story of Qamar al-Zamān' and 'Story of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad and his brother Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī'. In these two romances, the fates of the kingly family in the former and of the viziers' family in the latter depend on the successful marriage of a prince and a princess and the son and daughter (cousins) of two viziers respectively.<sup>39</sup> Mahfouz's 'Shahrayār and Shahrazād' and 'Dunyāzād and Nūr al-Dīn' do not obey the rules implicit in the paradigm of knowledge in *Nights* romances. As the marriages dissolve in separation or death, the imagined community falls short of cohesion and the legitimacy of the political authority is brought into question. The discourses implicit in *Nights* romances, diverse and complex in themselves, are brought into Bakhtinian dialogism with the contemporary nationalist discourse. The textual space of the novel becomes the ground on which the divergent discourses on community converge to tell the heart-breaking story of humanity's yearning, search for and failure in finding the Utopian 'state of fantasy'.<sup>40</sup> The incompatibility of wisdom and power is ever more poignant when it is located in the individual's despair in transcending the self-centred human curiosity—the seed of the tyrannical desire to control and own destiny—and the community's failure to overcome this tyranny manifest in social and political organization and interaction. The fantastic in the novel does not merely lie in the interplay between humans and genies, good and evil, wisdom and power, transcendence and desire, contradictory impulses for letting go and possessing. Rather, it rests on exposing the nation-state as a flight of fantasy, a fantastic world that does not and cannot exist in reality. Put differently, the nation-state is set in the realm of the fantastic, not the real.

Mahfouz's text is what Genette would call a palimpsest,<sup>41</sup> its composition an amalgam of overlapping, co-existing and contesting genres, all engaged in a dialogism that contributes to the polyphony of the novel, as Bakhtin would say. Reading such a novel then is a kind of archaeology that involves unearthing the layers of the text. Identifying these textual layers is, however, only a first step towards understanding the text. A meaningful interpretation depends to a great extent on seeing, as Genette would say, the 'generic reactivation'<sup>42</sup> of these textual layers. Each genre incorporated into the text brings with it its own generic expectations, implicit in narrative paradigms, which become fully operative in the text into which the genre is imported. Where more than one genre is conjoined, ideologies of all genres, let us say, become participants in the discourse of the novel. There seems to be no escape from genre ideology in reading the Arabic novel, or for that matter, any other literary texts. However, rather than examining the novel through the lens of a single genre ideology it may be more productive to look at the text as a site where various ideologies of genres interact to produce meaning, just as the text of *Arabian Nights and Days* does.

The text of *Arabian Nights and Days* is also a discourse on its form, history and authenticity, and is necessarily subject to the cultural pressures surrounding

<sup>39</sup> See my analysis in 'Theorizing narrative, narrativizing theory'.

<sup>40</sup> I borrow this term from Jacqueline Rose, *States of fantasy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests: literature in the second degree*, tr. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> Discussed in Genette, 'Generic reactivation', *Palimpsests*, 210–12.

it. The question is also about the fate of the novel. In his probing of the destiny of the nation-state, in which the future of the novel is invested, there is an inherent discourse on the novel and the modernity, legitimacy and centrality of the Arabic novel. By retaining the Western form but locating its history in the Arabic narrative tradition, it 'offers us the vista of two parallel streams of literary history';<sup>43</sup> and these two histories go beyond the modern period to encompass two narrative traditions. One Western, including the modern European novel and its more recent series of novelistic traditions that have grown up outside Europe or the United States, and the other an historically indigenous narrative tradition. 'Anxiety of influence' operates not just within one tradition but, rather, across two traditions. *Arabian Nights and Days* resists the Western novel and its deviation from this tradition may be considered misreading, but it appropriates Classical Arabic narrative, not necessarily misreading but rather re-reading it. 'Dialogic imagination' works too, though across cultures, as an alien genre appropriates and absorbs indigenous narratives into its form. 'Generic instability' too is manifest cross-culturally as the various forms of Classical Arabic narrative participate in discourse with and reshape the novel, which can no longer be read as a strictly Western genre. The genre has changed in its travels across cultures, and these changes must be taken into consideration in our reading of it. Paradoxically, generic expectations remain an avoidable starting point. These generic expectations are, however, often informed and modified by ideologies external to the novel, in this case, postcolonial identity politics, which do play a crucial role in shaping the discourse and the form of the Arabic novel.<sup>44</sup>

*Dunyazade speaks in John Barth's Dunyazadiad*

Ideologies external to genres are somewhat more easily detectable than genre ideologies. That *Arabian Nights and Days* is an allegory of political authority in the Arab world is an obvious interpretation of the novel in the context of the culture of engagement of modern Arabic literature and postcolonial identity politics. These ideologies often obfuscate the subjectivity that informs the text. The question of subjectivity seems more transparent in texts informed by marginality, be the cause gender, language, colonialism or political oppression. Interrogation of the *Nights* frame-tale and the various male re-writings by Arab women writers in Arabic or French is often seen as an expression of feminist sensibilities which aim to expose the hegemonic nature of 'patriarchy'.<sup>45</sup> However, ideological readings of 'feminist' texts can hardly suppress the question of subjectivity that lies at the heart of re-writings of the *Nights* frame-tale by Arab men and women engaged in identity politics from a marginalized position.<sup>46</sup> Leila Sebbar, an Algerian writing in French, demonstrates

<sup>43</sup> Michael Beard, 'The Mahfouzian sublime', in Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, *Naguib Mahfouz: from regional fame to global recognition* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 95–105, 96.

<sup>44</sup> I have made similar observations about Naguib Mahfouz's other novel, *Rihlat Ibn Fattūma* (Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1983); translated into English by Denys Johnson-Davies as *The journey of Ibn Fattouma* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), in my article forthcoming in *Edebiyât* 14/1, 'The dialectic of past and present in *Rihlat Ibn Fattūma* by Najīb Maḥfūz'.

<sup>45</sup> See Fedwa Malt-Douglas, 'Rewriting patriarchy' in *Men, women, and god(s): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab feminist poetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 91–117; and 'Shahrazād feminist' in *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic literature and society*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 40–55.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī, *Suqūt al-imām* (1987), tr. Sherif Hetata, *The fall of the Imam* (London: Methuen, 1988); Mayy Tilmisānī, *Dunyāzād* (1995); Fawziyya Rashīd, *Al-qalaq al-sirrī: min 'adhābāt Shahrazād* (Secret anxiety: Shahrazād's sufferings, 2000); Leila Sebbar, *Sherazade*, (1982), tr. Dorothy S. Blair (London: Quartet, 1991); Tahar Ben Jelloun, *The sandchild* (1985), tr. Alan Sheridan (London: Quartet, 1988) and *Sacred night* (1987), tr. Alan Sheridan

in *Sherazade* (1982), a novel of rather conventional story line and narrative, the ways in which the intersection of gender and postcolonial identity politics speaks to the issue of subjectivity. Sherazade, the 17-year-old runaway, insists to her Arabist lover that she is not *Nights* Scheherazade, despite her name, or Matisse's *Odalisque in red trousers*, even though she is of Algerian descent. She is rather an immigrant of modern sensibilities who is caught between two worlds attempting to negotiate her right to define her selfhood. Readings of postcolonial and 'gynocentric' texts, whether Foucauldian or Freudian, reveal the ways in which subjectivity is negotiated in a web of power relations. The emerging prominence of subjectivity in literary studies coincides with the harmony between ideologies of writers and critics educated in gender and postcolonial identity politics. The pervasiveness of subjectivity-centred readings of postcolonial and 'gynocentric' texts has in turn created a specific reading culture. It has become common practice to look for identity politics in the meditations on and mediations in subjectivity in postcolonial and 'gynocentric' writings. Scheherazade in writings of postcolonial Arab men and women is understandably seen as an expression of subjectivity caught in identity politics. In fact, Scheherazade has become a symbol of feminized Arab selfhood in male writings or Arab womanhood in female writings. This, clearly, cannot be the case in 'Western' re-writings of the *Nights*, which problematize postcolonial and 'gynocentric' notions of subjectivity and its textualization. Scheherazade, the enigmatic storyteller who has reigned in a body of diverse stories and a kingdom, has unsurprisingly become the subject of transmogrifications in the 'West' as well. She has been mythologized, orientalized, modernized and, most significantly, idealized as a narrative icon in adaptations of or sequels to the *Nights* frame-tale<sup>47</sup> and, more importantly, in narratology.

John Barth's *Dunyazadiad* is unique in 'Western' fiction in that it re-writes the *Nights* frame-tale rather than simply fleshing out a character or filling one of the many lacunae of the tale. One of the most obvious lacunae, however, does serve as Barth's point of departure. He gives voice to Dunyazade and Shah Zaman, the relatively silent 'other' duo in the *Nights*, who now get a chance to tell their versions of the story, their own stories. In critical assessments of John Barth's career, both as writer of contemporary American fiction and theorist of narrative, *Dunyazadiad* is examined in the context of discussions of *Chimera*, a trilogy of which *Dunyazadiad* is the first part. *Chimera* signals Barth's transition from 'modernist' to 'postmodernist' writer in his creative work. Three features of the novel—textualized self, direct engagement with mythology and multiplicity of narrative voice—are seen as signs of this departure. The necessity for this departure is located in Barth's crisis as a novelist suffering 'writer's block' and his response to it creatively and critically. Creativity lies not necessarily in inventing new stories from scratch but rather in finding new perspectives for old stories. Intertextuality comes to symbolize postmodernist reconciliation with 'literary tradition' and a cure for 'exhausted narrative possibilities'.<sup>48</sup> *Alf Laylah Wa Laylah*, *The Book of the Thousand*

(London: Quartet, 1989); and Assia Djebbar, *Sister to Scheherazade* (1987), tr. Dorothy S. Blair (London: Quartet, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Edgar Allan Poe, 'The thousand-and-second tale of Scheherazade', *Tales of mystery and imagination* (London: Everyman's Library, 1908 [1984, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001]), 332–49; Githa Hariharan, *When dreams travel* (London: Picador, 1999); and Anthony O'Neill, *Scheherazade* (London: Headline Books, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> See Jac Tharpe, 'Toward the chimiracle', *John Barth: the comic sublimity of paradox* (Carbondale and Edwardsville & London and Amsterdam: South Illinois University Press and Feffer & Simons, Inc., 1974), 105–10; Charles B. Harris, 'The new Medusa: feminism and the uses of myth in *Chimera*', *Passionate virtuosity: the fiction of John Barth* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 127–58; Stan Fogel and Gordon Slethaugh, 'Chimera', *Understanding John Barth* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 131–48;

Nights and a Night', according to Barth himself in the epilogue to *Dunyazadiad*, 'is not the story of Scheherazade, but the story of the story of her stories'.<sup>49</sup> This story is told from two perspectives, those of Dunyazade and Shah Zaman. In the first half of the approximately fifty-page 'novella' Dunyazade tells Shah Zaman the *Nights* frame-tale from her own perspective on their wedding night. In the second Shah Zaman tells his bride of his failure at 'gynocide' first during Shahryar's one thousand and one nights' 'gynocide' and second during Scheherazade's one thousand and one nights' storytelling, the other half of the missing piece of *Nights* frame-tale.

There is, of course, no escape from gender politics in any re-writing of the *Nights* frame-tale. Barth, however, is more interested in expressing his own brand of 'feminism' than tackling 'misogyny' in the *Nights* or restoring female subjectivity to the story. His Dunyazade's priorities are not those of an Egyptian female writer, for example. Mayy al-Tilimsānī finds expression for a mother's grief over her stillborn daughter whom she names Dunyāzād. By giving Dunyāzād a voice in her eponymous novel, she delineates a woman's sense of self as mother, wife, daughter and friend. *Dunyazadiad* produces a gender discourse that advocates male-female equality. Barth's Dunyazade (Doony) portrays Scheherazade (Sherry) as being as 'promiscuous' as Shahryar: while he makes love to his harem of concubines she makes love to every female and male slave serving the harem. Shahryar is, according to Shah Zaman, aware of Scheherazade's marital infidelity and chooses to allow it, because in his newly acquired wisdom, he understands the need for a measure of gender equality. Shahryar's allowance for 'equal promiscuity' is balanced by Shah Zaman's demand for 'equal fidelity' from Dunyazade. Unlike Shahryar, Shah Zaman has no taste for a haremful of women or subsequent bedding and killing a virgin a night, and has qualms about keeping Shahryar and his promise to her. He has instead, thanks to the wise counsel of his own 'Scheherazade', given the virgins a choice to sleep with him or not, and then had them taken at dawn to live in the 'Amazonian' community established by his 'Scheherazade'. He is, in fact, fed up with the whole charade and longs to retire from it and settle down with 'someone special'. Shahryar and Scheherazade's seeming harmony and their proposal for him to wed Dunyazade are precisely the kind of news he has been hoping for. He propositions Dunyazade, who is intent on executing her part of her bargain with Scheherazade to rid the world of two incurable misogynists—Scheherazade and Dunyazade are to kill Shahryar and Shah Zaman simultaneously on their double wedding night—to give up her mission and give in to him, as Scheherazade must have done to Shahryar by then.

The two messages of the novel, artistic 'innovation' and gender 'equality', are presented not simply through reformulation of the *Nights* frame-tale but also through narrativization of the authorial self. Both solutions are presented as personal, and personalized. In Dunyazade's narrative, Scheherazade is not the 'originator' of her stories; rather, she learns them from a Genie, the

M. F. Schulz, 'The Eraton transactions of *Chimera*', *The muses of John Barth* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 16–32; and Patricia Tobin, *Lost in the funhouse* (1968) and *Chimera* (1972): The Hero Minors in Metaphor', *John Barth and the anxiety of continuance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 84–102. See also Bruce Allen, 'Chimera', Jerry H. Bryant, 'The novel looks at itself—again', Cynthia Davis, "'The key to the treasure": narrative movements and effects in *Chimera*', and Jerry Powell, 'John Barth's *Chimera*: a creative response to the literature of exhaustion', in *Critical essays on John Barth*, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980), 211–40.

<sup>49</sup> John Barth, *Dunyazadiad, Chimera* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 55.

textualized author, who has read them in *The Book of Thousand Nights and One Night*. Just as Scheherazade is suffering from 'writer's block'—she is unable to find a way to stop Shahryar's killings despite her extensive research, so is the author-turned-Genie when they first meet. By returning to the *Nights* they both find a way out of their 'writer's block'. She begins telling stories to Shahryar and he writing a new story about Dunyazade. Equal fidelity is advocated by Shah Zaman and in his narrative as well as the example of author's textualized self. The Genie turns down Scheherazade's offer of sex at his pleasure and prefers to work on an exclusive relationship with his then mistress, Melissa. Textualization of self provides a new vista for narrative perspective and subjectivity drives narrative movement in a novel way. Creativity is located in the insights gained in the process of integrating subjectivity into an inquiry into literary innovation and a kind of gender equality negotiated and accepted by both man and woman. Subjectivity comes to inform narrative and shape the text. Barth changes the order and layers of framing by inserting his self into the story. Dunyazade's narrative frames the *Nights* stories, which are now told by the author-turned-Genie to Scheherazade. Shah Zaman's narrative provides a new layer to the *Nights* frame-tale and becomes its frame-tale. These two frames are of course the story 'invented' by Barth, the person behind the textualized author-turned-Genie. The frame-within-frame narrative pattern of the *Nights* is turned inside out, outside-in, first in Dunyazade's narrative, then overlapped with Shah Zaman's narrative, producing what Barth's critics call a 'spiral narrative pattern', a pattern entirely new to the novel. The multiplicity of narrative perspectives does not violate the cohesion and coherence of the story, which are now grounded in subjectivity instead of narrative voice or plot. Intertextuality, in combining something old with something new, has produced a text that sounds uncannily familiar but looks positively extraordinary.

Subjectivity as internalized and externalized in *Dunyazadiad*, defined in the main by aesthetic priorities, has changed the genre in a similar fashion as subjectivity engaged in gender or identity politics from the margin. As the self negotiates, consolidates and asserts itself in the text, it interrogates, erodes and transforms familiar paradigms of knowledge but does not do away with them. Barth's text builds on the text of the *Nights*, assumes and relies on readers' familiarity with not only the outline but also the details of the *Nights* frame-tale and tales, and takes for granted the *Nights*' happy ending. Brief allusions to or summaries of the 'original' text frame departures in Barth's text. Storytelling and love in *Dunyazadiad* remain intertwined and life saving. Scheherazade, Dunyazade and Shah Zaman tell stories to save their own lives, when they are at knife point, and on occasion other lives, and stories are the means of courtship and to love. The lives saved, however, belong to the individuals in whom there is no vested communal interest. Barth's language—slangy and comic—dispels any sense of impending 'national' doom found in the *Nights*. Her mission, as Sherry sees it in 'the state of the nation' (p. 5) is to 'stop Shahryar from killing my sisters and wrecking our country' (p. 6) and 'woo' the King 'away from misogyny' (p. 21). Shahryar, despite his murderous pathology attributable to culture and absolute power (p. 6), ensures that there will be no *coup d'état* by 'sparing the daughters of his army officers and key ministers' (p. 6). The crisis in Barth's text is in part due to the difficult nature of harmonious male-female relationship in a culture of gender tension. In the absence of absolute gender equality, it should still be possible to love in an environment of 'as if' parity. The story ends with Shah Zaman's pledge of equal fidelity and his plea: 'Let's treasure each other, Dunyazade!'

Ultimately, the true crisis is generated by writer's block, articulated and resolved through discourse on love and attendant storytelling. Inability to write in a creative fashion is, for a writer, tantamount to death. Life is engendered by love and writing. Barth borrows the *Nights* notion of genealogy but invests it not in 'nation' but 'individual'. If the *Nights* places the stake in propriety of love as preserver of genealogy of both 'nation' and 'story', *Dunyazadiad* locates survival of 'love' and 'story' in subjectivity and the ways in which it resolves writer's block. Genealogy takes on a different meaning here; it is premised on reconciliation with the literary tradition and the notion that an old story can generate a new one. Innovation now resides in language and narrative patterns, not the content of story. 'You have a way with words, Scheherazade' (p. 4), Dunyazade thus begins her version of the thousand and one nights she has spent listening to *Nights* stories. The arrangement of the stories and the patterns of *Nights* text, she reveals later, are the subject and result of lengthy discussions between Scheherazade and the author-turned-Genie (p. 23). The lessons learned from Scheherazade's experience of storytelling yield two new stories, one told by Dunyazade and the other Shah Zaman, and Barth's new novel, *Dunyazadiad*. 'The Key and Treasure are the same', 'the key to the treasure is the treasure', (p. 56) the moral of the story as these two sentences suggest is that story leads to story. The involvement of subjectivity in narrative, as expressed in 'Dunyazade's story begins in the middle; in the middle of my own, I can't conclude it—' (p. 55) has serious implications for our notions of subjectivity. Subjectivity, even as it informs and shapes narrative, is informed and shaped by narrative—the writer's block is resolved in the process of storytelling. More important, subjectivity comes to be a matter of language and narrative.

The ways in which subjectivity and story are embroiled in each other's narrative unravelling in *Dunyazadiad* are not dissimilar to those involving genre ideology in *Arabian Nights* (2002) and genre and ideology in *Arabian Nights and Days*. Narrative develops into story when paradigms of knowledge, some inherent in genre and others external to it, give form to narrative. These internalized paradigms of knowledge in turn transform as they come into contact with other ideologies embodying other paradigms of knowledge. The paradigmatic pattern of '*al-faraj ba'd al-shidda*' of the *Nights*' frame-tale—problem, crisis and resolution—acquires new masks when it puts on Hollywood costumes in film, takes on communal identity politics in the postcolonial Arabic novel, or becomes embroiled in negotiations of subjectivity in postmodernist fiction. Culture, whose priorities often take the form of generic or ideological expectations, clearly exerts pressure on the kinds of story we tell. However, its products do not simply reflect these priorities. Rather, these priorities are interrogated, negotiated and modified in the processes of cultural and intercultural production. In these processes of production, story can only be integrated into a new genre or culture when it absorbs new paradigms of knowledge without necessarily discarding the old ones. Genre similarly changes in its travels across cultures as it assimilates stories produced in 'other' cultures. Subjectivity, often obfuscated by 'louder' cultural politics, plays a key role in narrative transformation and its externalization in narrative is not necessarily a response to power found in 'feminist' and postcolonial writings. Subjectivity thus, in its complex and ambiguous interplay with ideology, is like the latter, subject to narrative mapping. Where epistemology and ontology are inextricably linked, storytelling becomes a symbol of life, and story the site on which subjectivity works out its ways of dealing with the world. Questions of 'authenticity' and 'influence', or 'whose story is it?', become irrelevant; after all, the story is by and of its teller wherever the ingredients may come from.