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Framing and Meaning: Coincidence, Entanglement and Wonder in *The Thousand and One Nights*

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Abstract

Framing in *The Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf layla wa-layla*) brings together not only people and their stories but also temporalities, geographies and destinies. It stages coincidental encounters of these in entangled story lines (story within story) of the *Nights* and generates meaning through the strangeness (*gharāba*) of the narrated coincidences and the wonder (*ʿajab*) effect of the entanglement of temporalities, geographies and destinies resulting from them. Wonder, this paper argues, is the *Nights*' interrogation of the role of language and narrative in structuring ontology and epistemology. I will look at a particular entanglement engineered by framing in the *Nights*, between, first, the "Hunchback" and other *Nights* tales, second, between the different stories in the "Hunchback," and third between this cycle and *adab* (learned literature in Arabic). In so doing, I explore the context of the extra-diegetic canvas of an imagined infinite universe, and show how narrative framing engages with and pushes the boundaries of narrative in order to capture what narrative leaves out, and produce meaning and generate effect. Three elements of the meaning generated in the entanglement between the *Nights*, especially the "Hunchback," and *adab* will be the foci of discussion: the idealization of kingship and imagination of community, the subversion of the world of *adab*, and the formulation of a moral universe based in beauty.

Key words: Framing, coincidence, entanglement, *ʿajīb*, *gharīb*, *adab*, *The Thousand and One Nights*, *Arabian Nights*

Framing in *The Thousand and One Nights*

The Thousand and One Nights is today a world literature classic and as such it has spawned a global cultural industry. Translations, anthologies, investigations of the multilingual origins of this compendium of stories, theories of its formation, and close readings of individual stories are being churned out regularly and at a fast pace. Notwithstanding its status as a world literature classic, it has not shed its perception as "oral stories," "old wife's tales" and "folklore" in spite of Aboubakr Chraïbi's recent argument to locate its language in "middle" Arabic and its genre in "middle literature" (CHRAÏBI 2016: 62-64). While world literature celebrates its global reach and influence on modern and contemporary fiction, Arabic studies, whether in Arabic or other languages, is preoccupied with motif indexing, history of textual formation, narrative techniques, and the ways in which "low" oral storytelling and folklore

reference and occasionally subvert "high" cultural institutions, including religion, gender and canonical genres of writing.[1] Framing has yet to be taken into consideration in our comprehension of the *Nights* and its stories. It is at present seen as a technique of bringing different stories into one story world. The frame tale, hitherto the focus of cultural and literary analysis of the *Nights*, turns the paradigmatic master-slave dynamic premised on the male superiority and female subordination upside down, giving initiative, voice and power to Shahrazād, and putting the responsibility of saving Shahriyār and his kingdom on her shoulders. Stories are told in exchange for life, to ransom a captive of death sentence.

"Shahrazād and Shahriyār," the *Nights* frame story, considered by Mia Gerhardt as belonging to "entertaining frames," "time-gaining frames," and "ransom frames" (GERHARDT 1963: 395-416) is "a device in narrative technique" (MARZOLPH & VAN LEEUWEN 2004: II, 554) that serves two purposes. First, it "links the *Arabian Nights* to other well-known literary works with a comparable general setup," such as the Indian *The Ocean of the Streams of Stories* and *Tales of a Parrot*, the Persian and Arabic *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, and in the European context Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Basiles' *Pentamerone* (ibid.: 555). Second, as "a story constituting a frame for the inclusion of one or more other stories" (ibid.: 554), it "serve[s] to organize the presentation of different tales" (ibid.: 555). The rest of the *Nights*' "enframed stories" that "are in some way related to the frame story," often likened to Russian dolls, are understandably read as reflections of and responses to the "frame story." Defined in contradistinction to the *isnād* in "classical Arabic literature," "a chain of transmitters" that "enhance[s] a given story's credibility and faithfulness" as well as "enable[s] an individual to express his own opinion with conviction," the *Nights*' "all-embracing frame story"

> […] serves as an introduction to the reader or listener by revealing under what circumstances the storytelling began and who was involved in the process. Besides, it explains the collection's purpose as resulting from Shahrazâd's intention to risk her own life in dissuading the rule from continuing his lethal practices. The frame story also suggests the collection's unity in bringing together and joining the individual stories into a broader structure. Moreover, the frame story to a certain extent determines the collection's thematic coherence as an example of the functions of storytelling and the relations between storytelling, human relationships, worldviews, death, and human life. (MARZOLPH & VAN LEEUWEN 2004: II, 555)

From this perspective, "The Queen of the Serpent" and "The Tale of King ʿUmar al-Nuʿmān," for example, are seen as "stories [that] have been inserted into a framing without an obvious logical relation," whereas "The Hunchback" is an example of "structural complexity," in which the device of the frame story adds, I argue, considerably to the appeal of the *Arabian Nights* (MARZOLPH & VAN LEEUWEN 2004: II, 556):

> The comparative table on the length of the various stories supplied by Nikita Elisséeff (1949: after p. 212) visually demonstrates the complicated web of a story-within-a-story-within-a-story-within-a-story, as in the case of the ***Barber's Tale*** *of His*

1 For a comprehensive bibliography, refer to *Arabian Nights Bibliography* online, compiled by Ulrich MARZOLPH.

> *Brothers*, which are inserted into *The **Barber's Tale of Himself***, which is in turn inserted into the *Tale of the **Tailor***, which is inserted into *The **Hunchback's Tale***. (MARZOLPH & VAN LEEUWEN 2004: II, 556; italics and bold type in original)

"The Hunchback's" complex framing "is often cited by theorists of narrative like Todorov and Genette for its formal brilliance," Daniel Beaumont tells us, and "no other story group in the *Nights* joins so many different narratives in a complex artistic whole" (BEAUMONT 1993: 105). More importantly, "[T]he formal and thematic combine […] to chart, in greater detail than any other story in the *Nights*, the paths of desire within the social circuits of power" (ibid.: 105), which in Beaumont's Lacanian approach to sexuality and violence as emblematic of the master and slave relationship, here gendered, are already spawned in the frametale. The hunchback's "displaced corpse," the movement of which parallels that of both Shahrazād and the king of China's desire, is a "signifier" that points to "absolute otherness of death," and to the purpose of narration in the *Nights*: "to ward off death" (ibid.: 109). As such, it "obliges every character" in the story "to account for himself before the king and ordering his relations with others as instances of the master-slave relation" (MARZOLPH & VAN LEEUWEN 2004: I, 225).

Such a modern reading pushes out of sight the most relevant pre-modern cultural contexts of the stories. The intricate workings of framing and its inherent worldview that bring together a multiplicity of temporalities, geographies and destinies on the one hand, and a diversity of genres and narrative traditions on the other, are reduced to "a shaggy dog story that goes nowhere," (BEAUMONT 2004: 4), in which:

> The geography is whimsical—as befits a story that in the end goes nowhere. The story begins in "China," but soon enough we find ourselves in Basra, the port on the Persian Gulf. Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, and Mosul are later points on the itinerary. As is often the case in the *Nights*, time is also scrambled in a way that yields amusing anachronisms. One man's story takes place in the palace of Harun al-Rashid who reigned from 786-809 A.D., while a contemporary tells his stories to a caliph who reigned from 1226-1241 A.D. But particulars of space and time are trivial matters that the storyteller ignores while pursuing larger themes: the vicissitudes of desire in the circuit of power. (BEAUMONT 1993: 105)

Framing, I argue, is more than a technique of bringing stories together. Rather, it produces meaning on different levels. The frame plays a role in how we read the enframed, and similarly the enframed informs our comprehension of the frame. Taking this into consideration in my reading of "The Hunchback," I bring the multiple frames of this cycle and of the *Nights* into dialogue with each other. Going beyond "Shahrazād and Shahriyār," I locate intertextuality in the connections the stories make between the *Nights* and *adab*, including Arabic narrative tradition, and in a worldview expressed through networked geographies, temporalities and destinies. Using the oldest extant, so-called Galland-manuscript, edited by Muhsin Mahdi (in the following Galland-Mahdi text) as the locus of my interrogation of framing in the *Nights*, I look at play in narrative, here, modeled on language play in *adab*, and explore the ways in which framing partakes in this play and produces wonder and meaning. Distinguishing the two terms used to describe the effect of the *Nights*' stories on their audience, I place *gharāba* (strangeness) in production, and *ʿajab* (wonder) in

reception, and home in on the following dynamics: how defamiliarization comes into play in the narrative, the way narration weaves coincidences into coherence, and generates a world-view that simultaneously celebrates a universal plurality, fashions a moral universe in which justice prevails, mocks the very world from which the material of the stories is taken, and formulates a moral universality based on idealized beauty. These dynamics, as I will also show, are elaborated in stories about the material conditions of living focalized on food, the human body, and their relationship.

Intertextuality in the Nights: Coincidence and Wonder in "The Hunchback" and the Hārūn al-Rashīd Stories

"The Hunchback" allows us to see that the *Nights* is a network of interconnected stories, from within and without the *Nights*, created and formed in narration through multiple framing and intertextuality. "The Hunchback" is not only a frame story or an embedded story but also a story cycle enframed by the preceding and following stories in the *Nights*. The text of "The Hunchback," as shown in Chart 1 below, takes shape in an intertextual web of stories and at the same time reshapes these stories, which are now entangled with two frame stories, one of the *Nights* and the other of "The Hunchback" itself, and with the other enframed stories within both the cycle and the *Nights*. These stories are brought into "The Hunchback" from a variety of genres of writing in Arabic, all of which took form in a multilingual and multicultural environment. The *akhbār* anecdotes from history and *adab*, the accounts of martyred lovers from *maṣāriʿ al-ʿushshāq*, the stories of the wiles of men and women (*kayd al-rijāl*, *kayd al-nisāʾ*), the stories of *ṭufaylī* party crashers, and the con tricks of the *Maqāmāt mukaddī* mendicant, congregate in "The Hunchback," adding to and extending further the generic corpus of *Nights* that already include *Tales of the Prophets* and Solomon legends, animal fables, travel and adventure, and epic and romance.

First half

Shahrazād tells Shahriyār that
Storytellers tell the King of China

Second half

Shahrazād tells Shahriyār that
The tailor tells the King of China that
The young men tell the tailor
The barber tells the tailor that
The barber tells al-Mustansir
His story
The story of his six brothers

Chart 1: Framing stories and reception in "The Hunchback"

Framing, particularly in its multiplicity, threads the counterfactual coincidences into meaningful stories and brings these into conversation in the interstices of entanglement, of stories and their cycles and genres, and above all of geographies, temporalities, and destinies. Taking the Galland-Mahdi text as an example, we see the ways in which coincidence serves as the contact hub where itinerant princes, merchants, skilled professionals, and the wandering underclass congregate to exchange stories. These stories weave the historical time of the *Nights* into the pre-Islamic biblical times in Solomon legends and Persian tales, including "Shahrazād and Shahriyār," which are now mythologized as time immemorial. In "The Hunchback" alone, they connect far-flung places in China, Central Asia, and the Middle East, from Kashgar to Baghdad, Mosul, Damascus, and Cairo, and bring Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism, and perhaps even Buddhism into one cultural sphere and community. In so doing, "the Hunchback" mirrors the *Nights*.

This pluriverse, made up of divergent communities, cultures, and languages across multiple temporalities and distant geographies, networked by coincidence in the *Nights*, is iconized into an ideal diverse community structured around an idealized kingship. Hārūn al-Rashīd, iconized in the *Nights* through narrative framing and intertextual engagement with *adab*, is an exemplar (OUYANG 2022: 340-55). He is the model of the good kings in the *Nights*, including the king of China in "The Hunchback," and the foil of Shahriyār. Hārūn al-Rashīd appears in "The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad," "The Three Apples," "'Alī b. Bakkār and Shams al-Nahār," and "Anīs al-Jalīs and Nūr al-Dīn." These Hārūn al-Rashīd stories are sandwiched between the preceding "The Merchant and the Genie" and "The Fisherman and the Genie," two stories inspired by the biblical Solomon legends, and the following "Jullanār," also inspired by the Solomon legends, which ends the Galland-Mahdi text. "The Hunchback," set in the reign of al-Mustanṣir (r. 640-56/1242-58), is inserted between "The Three Apples" and "Nūr al-Dīn and Shams al-Nahār." Like "The Hunchback," all these stories cover a vast geographical area with its center in Baghdad and an infinite time span that begins in time immemorial and ends in eternity, as we see in **Chart 2** below (see next page).

The iconized Hārūn al-Rashīd frames "The Hunchback" and is enframed by it. Hārūn al-Rashīd, the icon, enframed within "The Hunchback," is one of the narrative hubs in the *Nights* serving as the site of interconnected narratives. It situates "The Hunchback" in the *Nights*, connects the *Nights* and extra-*Nights* stories into a network, and generates meanings appropriate to the *Nights*' worldview, first constructing it then deconstructing it. Iconization recalls material relevant to Hārūn al-Rashīd from Arabic historical and literary sources, refashions it, and deploys it in the construction of an ideal community in which life may be lived to the full under the watchful eyes of a model ruler. At the same time it evokes the literary community well known in the Arabic literary cultures, in which affairs of kingship and kingdom are told and retold. The anecdotes integrated into the *Nights* in general without the mechanism of framing remain diverting tales of poetry and music parties Hārūn al-Rashīd held at his court, and of his amorous escapades in his harem. The Hārūn al-Rashīd stories in the Galland-Mahdi text on the contrary transform similar anecdotes into material for *Nights* storytelling and integrate them into the canvas of the world created in its stories. This iconization is a site of wonder in the Hārūn al-Rashīd stories, of which "The Three Apples" is of particular relevance, and becomes that of irony in "The Hunchback."

"Frame tale" (mythic time in Persia)
Shahriyār and Shāhzamān
The Princess and the Demon
Shahrazād and Dunyāzād
Shahrazād and Father (Vizier)
The Ox and the Donkey
Shahrazād and Shahriyār
"The Merchant and the Genie" (biblical times of Solomon legends)
The three old men
"The Fisherman and the Demon" (biblical times of Solomon legends)
King Yunan and his Vizier Duban
The Fisherman and the King
The Enchanted Kingdom
"The Porter and Three Ladies of Baghdad" (historical time of Hārūn al-Rashīd)
The three qalandars
The two ladies
"The Three Apples" (historical time of Hārūn al-Rashīd)
"The Two Viziers" (historical time of Hārūn al-Rashīd)
"The Hunchback" (Hārūn al-Rashīd enframed by the king of China)
(See below)
"Shams al-Nahār" (historical time of Hārūn al-Rashīd)
"Anīs al-Jalīs" (historical time of Hārūn al-Rashīd)
"Jullanār" (mythic time in Persia)
The King and Jullanār
Jullanār
Badr Jāsim
"Qamar al-Zamān" (mythic time in Persia)
Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr
Budūr and Ḥayāt al-Nufūs
Qamar al-Zamān and Ḥayāt al-Nufūs
al-Amjad and al-Asʿad
"Frame tale" (anticipated mythic time in Persia)
Shahrazād and Shahriyār

Chart 2: Temporalities and Geographies in the *Nights*

"The Three Apples" is ostensibly a murder mystery. A chest containing a young woman's body cut into nineteen pieces is retrieved by a fisherman from the Tigris and brought to the attention of Hārūn al-Rashīd. As the story unfolds, we learn that her husband killed her out of jealousy, when he suspected her of having an affair with a black slave upon seeing one of the three apples he had brought her from the Caliph's orchard in Basra in the slave's hand. Hārūn al-Rashīd does not solve the murder. Rather, he orders Jaʿfar to do so and threatens to hang him within three days if the culprits are not found. The details of the murder are then revealed from the perspective of hindsight. This crime-of-passion story comprises a series of coincidences. The resolution unfolds through a similar series of coincidences. Jaʿfar sees a

Basran apple in the hand of his young daughter, inquires and finds out that one of his black slaves snatched the apple from the young son of the murderer who in turn stole it from the three apples his father bought for his mother. In response to Hārūn al-Rashīd's amazement, Jaʿfar tells him the story of "The Two Viziers, Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Miṣrī and Badr al-Dīn al-Baṣrī," in which the enduring love between the daughter and son of the estranged brothers, the two viziers, guides the family reunion that takes place at the end of the story. "This [story] is the wonder of wonders" (HADDAWY 1990: 206) or "*aʿjab al-ʿajab*" (MAHDI 1984: 271), exclaimed Hārūn al-Rashīd upon hearing it, and in a moment of ecstasy, he "freed the slave and gave the young man one of his choice concubines, settled him on a sufficient income, and made him one of his companions to the end of his days" (HADDAWY 1990: 206).

Hārūn al-Rashīd's "wonder of all wonders" is arguably his response to the series of coincidences that, in accordance with Hilary P. Dannenberg's analysis of modern and postmodern European narrative fiction, plot time and space, and, more importantly, break up families (in a divergent plot) only to reunite them at the end (in a convergent plot) (DANNENBERG 2008). In the stories she examines, "plot and character are inextricably intertwined," Dannenberg explains, "[t]he plot of coincidence and counterfactuality are configurations of character's life journey across narrative worlds. The major form of coincidence plot narrates the initially divergent but ultimately convergent paths of individual family members and culminates in recognition and reunion" (ibid.: 1). The *Nights*' stories follow the "traditional form of the coincidence plot" which Dannenberg summarizes as follows:

> Formulated as spatial metaphors, the plots of coincidence and counterfactuality can be mapped as opposing patterns created when vectors in time and space move together or move apart, tracing pathways that either converge or diverge. Convergence involves the intersection of narrative paths and the interconnection of characters within the narrative world, closing and unifying it as an artistic structure. Divergence, conversely, concerns the bifurcation or branching of narrative paths and thereby creates an open pattern of diversification and multiplicity. Convergence is a form of narrative unification most typically represented by the type of closed ending that provides a clear "sense of ending" […]. (DANNENBERG 2008: 2)

Coincidence in the *Nights* is "a plot pattern," as Dannenberg would say, but it begins as divergence and ends with convergence, not just "with fundamentally convergent tendencies," even as it "creates relationships that interlink characters across the space and time of the narrative world" (DANNENBERG 2008: 2). In the Hārūn al-Rashīd stories within the *Nights*, food, such as the apple in "The Three Apples" and the pomegranate dish in "the Two Viziers," can set the plot in motion and push the narrated events spatially outward from the family or bring them back into its fold, and temporally back into the past or forward into the future. The node of these spatial and temporal connections is located in the hearth of the family dwelling place, the harem in the *Nights* stories. But as we will see, the reach of this hearth extends beyond the palace walls to encompass not only Baghdad and the Abbasid Caliphate, but also the entire world.

Hārūn al-Rashīd's "wonder of wonders" may also be located in reception, the site of the fantastic according to Tzvetan Todorov (TODOROV 1975) and of wonder in Lara Harb's analysis of classical Arabic literary theory (HARB 2020). Hārūn al-Rashīd's exclamation

echoes that of the unnamed Sultān in "The Two Viziers," who upon hearing the ways in which the pomegranate dish effected recognition between father and son, and brother and brother, leading to the reunion of an extended family, "was exceedingly amazed" (HADDAWY 1990: 206 / *taʿajjaba ghāyata l-ʿajab*, MAHDI 1984: 279) "and ordered the story be recorded" (HADDAWY 1990: 206). It is also an affirmation of Jaʿfar's claim that the story of "The Two Viziers" he would tell Hārūn al-Rashīd would be even more amazing than "The Three Apples" (ibid.: 156-57). Locating "wonder" in reception shifts our focus from coincidences in the stories to storytelling and its impact on the listener or reader. "Wonder" may then be seen as the response to strangeness (*gharāba*) inherent in the story and how it is stitched together in an unfamiliar way, in other words, in defamiliarizing storytelling. *Gharāba*, which in Arabic connotes distance, ambiguity and exaggeration, can denote the quality of language, as in *gharīb al-lugha*, and of storytelling, including framing and frame-within-frame narrative, that through coincidence brings together characters from far flung parts of the world and distant time zones, and at the same time gives coherence to, as Dannenberg would say, such a "counterfactual" sequence of events (DANNENBERG 2008: 1-6). These events in "The Three Apples" and the "Hunchback" are structured around the theme of justice, the crux of the *Nights*' ideal community, and how it is administered through redressing the break in the code of conduct that results in a wrong done to, or the death of, another human being. Justice follows a simple formula.

The stories of injustice that unfold before Hārūn al-Rashīd are variations on the same theme: love unrequited or betrayed leads to tragedy or crime. He then intervenes to right wrongs, punishing the wrong-doers, rewarding the do-gooders, and to bestow happiness on all. If the Hārūn al-Rashīd stories show that justice is underpinned by fidelity between husband and wife and loyalty among friends, and the outcome of the education of passion, here, the transformation of tyranny into justice, "The Hunchback" escalates "wonder" to interrogate the limits of justice administered top down, and of storytelling as well as language, again, through framing and intertextuality. "The Hunchback" overlaps with the Hārūn al-Rashīd stories, repeating them in its first half (see **Chart 3** below), then turning the discourse

Shahrazād tells that
(in a reverse order of the events taking place)

The Christian broker tells that
The Muslim steward tells that
The Jewish Physician tells that
The tailor tells that
The barber tells that

Chart 3: Composition of the first half of the "The Hunchback"

of the first half topsy-turvy in the second half through a series of slippages (see **Chart 4** below).

"The Hunchback" is also a murder mystery that involves a king in its resolution. The king of China, like Hārūn al-Rashīd, takes no action. The mystery is unraveled and solved through storytelling. More important, the cause of death of his clown, the titular hunchback, is similarly

Shahrazād tells
That the Tailor tells
That the lame young man tells (of his encounter with the barber)
That the barber (the youngest of seven brothers) tells the stories of
Himself, and the stories he tells the caliph
His oldest brother, the hunchback
His second brother, Baqbaqa the Paraplegic
The third brother, Faqfaq the blind
The fourth brother, the one-eyed butcher
The fifth brother, the Cropped of Ears
The sixth brother, the Cropped of the Lips

Chart 4: Composition of the second half of "The Hunchback" Cycle

attributable to an item of food, here, a morsel of fish. Food serves as both a connector of stories and a site of slippages. Entanglement, of destinies in, for example, "The Three Apples," which is the feature of lives brought together by coincidence, is magnified. It begins with the connection that food (three apples and a morsel of fish) establishes between the Hārūn al-Rashīd stories and "The Hunchback," then moving into food's relation to the human body, particularly in the story the Muslim steward tells of a merchant who on his wedding night eats from a Zīrbāja dish and gets his thumbs and big toes cut off by his bride, Zubayda's lady-in-waiting, because he forgets to wash his hands. Food and the human body are, as will be seen, two additional hubs of intertextuality and entanglement in "The Hunchback." If the loss of body parts is a theme common among all stories in this cycle, food is the glue that holds the narrative thread together. I will return to both themes below.

The cycle begins with the titular character, a hunchbacked royal clown, choking to death on a morsel of fish, and ends with his revival when the same morsel of fish is removed from his throat. The hero, or anti-hero, is a prattling barber who tells stories that seem to resonate with the stories in the first half of the cycle but in effect take us in a different direction. For one thing, they are about characters who have already lost body parts (not how they have come to lose them) and who become subject to random abuse and violence, and for another, they form another frame-within-frame cycle of stories. The tailor tells the king of China in Kashgar the stories the barber told the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad. This new cycle of frame-within-frame stories mocks the *Nights*' frame-within-frame storytelling that purports to stall death and save life and at the same time to dispense and uphold justice globally. It rather expresses an existential anxiety over the possibility, or more aptly, impossibility of this aspiration.

Like all *Night*s stories, coincidence in the narrative unfolding of the itinerant characters and their stories in "The Hunchback" is the mechanism through which these, their locations, and their times, are brought into a web of entangled destinies. All times, from pre-Islamic times through the various Islamic dynasties, and all locations, from Cairo to Damascus, Baghdad, Mosul and Kasghar, are the sites of the unfolding of similar *gharīb* and *ʿajīb* stories of coincidental encounters and chance discoveries that lead to loss (of mind and body parts) and redemption (of life and honor), and to even more coincidences, therefore, potentially

even more stories. They are at the same time a complex web of coincidences, into which these characters and their stories are thrown together, whether we see the events from the perspective of the doer and his intention, or the done upon and the accident that befalls him as a result of the intention of the doer. The tailor and his wife happen to go out one night. They happen to meet the clown. They happen to feed him fish. And he happens to choke on a morsel. Happenstance turns into design then. The tailor leaves him at the door of the physician, who carries him to the stewards' house, who in turn dumps him on the steps of the broker's steps, who gets caught trying to get rid of him.

The storytellers are both culprits and victims of cruel pranks. They confess first, and their confessions, marking their will to uphold justice, to right the wrong they thought they had done, comprise the unequalled strangeness and wonder of what happened to the hunchback. To save their necks, they tell stories to elevate what they did to a higher degree of strangeness and wonder. But their words never match their deeds and the threat of death continues to hover above their heads. The king of China cannot be satisfied. Your story is neither "stranger" nor "more marvelous," *aghrab wa-aʿjab*, than what befell the hunchback, he would complain after each story he hears and threaten to behead all those involved in hiding the crime, moving the hunchback's body, and framing others for a crime no one committed.

This king of China seems a different species from Hārūn al-Rashīd and al-Mustanṣir. While Hārūn al-Rashīd is touched by the fidelity and loyalty of the characters in stories of crimes of passion, including jealousy among siblings, and moved to right wrongs, al-Mustanṣir is content with the absurdity of the stories of the barber and his brothers who through no fault of their own are maimed, dispossessed and forced into exile. The darker side of Hārūn al-Rashīd, here showcased in his nocturnal journeys in the inner belly of Baghdad and the storytelling séances held in the privacy of harems, is juxtaposed to al-Mustanṣir's lighter side, who in putting a gang of bandits on trial at court in broad daylight discovers the barber in the midst. The king of China connects these two sides of storytelling in the *Nights*. The first half of the stories resonates with the Hārūn al-Rashīd stories, and the second half comprises a repeat of the stories told to al-Mustanṣir. Even as storytelling in the second half of "The Hunchback" re-enacts the frame-within-frame strategy of storytelling in the *Nights* as a whole, it doubles and layers the reception of the same stories, framing one reception within another, then bifurcating the reception into al-Mustanṣir's amusement and the king of China's ennui. Through his reaction, deeds and words are brought into contradistinction, so are action taking and storytelling. The inquiry in "The Hunchback" slips from content to form, from the morale of story to the efficacy of storytelling, and from this to the pleasure of storytelling, to the pleasure of words and of word play, to the world of *adab* brought to life in Hārūn al-Rashīd's poetry and music parties and beyond. Through its intertextuality with *adab*, its style, themes, politics, ethics and aesthetics, "The Hunchback" tells us how to read *adab* in and in relation with the *Nights*.

"The Hunchback" and *adab*: From Icon to Farce

Similar to *adab* works, the *Nights'* discourse combines prose and poetry. Poems punctuate narrative in "The Hunchback." Lines of poetry adorn the frame of the cycle, the Christian broker's tale, and the Jewish physician's tale, but these explode into a series of entire poems,

some long and others shorter, in the tailor's story. This transitional story between the two halves of the cycle seems to shift tone, style, and above all, priority, from the efficacy of storytelling in preventing death to its role in diverting attention away from imposing it, from the morale of the story in the first half to the absence of any in the second, from ethics of rule and living to parody of patronage integral to the lifestyle of the powerful, and from story to narration, content to form, and politics and ethics to poetics and aesthetics.

The tailor's story brings us to a banquet reminiscent of an earlier banquet and more crucially of al-Hamadhānī's "al-Maqāma al-Maḍīriyya,"[2] all in anticipation of the story of the sixth brother, the cropped of lips, which begins like "al-Maḍīriyya" in that the host serves a feast of words. In the tailor's story, the protagonist, a handsome young man from Baghdad, refuses to partake in a feast to which he is invited because one of the companions is the meddling, prattling barber. The Baghdadi young man tells his audience the story of his earlier encounter with the barber. This barber is versed in all branches of knowledge, from poetry, history, language, and *adab*, to philosophy, medicine, astrology and astronomy, and natural sciences. The Baghdadi young man asks this barber to shave and clean him up before a rendez-vous with his object of desire, and the barber comes along. Instead of doing what he is asked, the barber, who calls himself "the silent one," prattles and prevents the young man from going to his date, and when the young man finally escapes him and makes it to the young lady's room, the barber comes after him and shouts out the secret for the whole world to hear. The young man runs, hides in a chest (and we see the recurrence of this motif in the story of Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Bakkār and Shams al-Nahār), then jumps out of it and out of the window into the street, breaking his leg as a result with the barber shouting and chasing after him. He makes a vow never to be in the same city as the barber and leaves Baghdad. He cannot believe his bad luck when he sees the barber at the feast in Kashgar. He packs up and leaves this city too. The tailor then goes on to tell the stories the barber told al-Mustanṣir and re-tells the guests of the feast.

The king of China is intrigued, "He shook his head with wonder and delight and said, 'Indeed, the story of the young man and the meddlesome barber is better and more entertaining than the story of the hunchback'" (MAHDI 1984: 377 / HADDAWY 1990: 293-94). He orders the barber brought to him. "[A] very old man, more than ninety years of age, with a white beard and eyebrows, floppy ears, a long nose, and a simple-minded look" (MAHDI 1984: 378 / HADDAWY 1990: 294) appears before him. He commands that he be told the hunchback's story. When he heard the story, the barber shakes his head and says, "This is amazing! Uncover for me this hunchback."

> Then he sat down and, taking the hunchback's head in his lap, looked at his face and burst out laughing until he fell on his back. Then he exclaimed, "How amazing! To every death there is a cause, but the story of this hunchback deserves to be recorded in letters of gold." Those present were puzzled by his words, and the king of China asked him, "What do you mean, Silent One?" The barber replied, "By your bounty, there is still life in this hunchback." Then he untied a leather bag from his belt and, opening it, took out a jar of ointment and applied it liberally to the hunchback's neck. Then he took an iron stick, inserting it into the hunchback's mouth, and pried open

2 My reading differs from Fedwa Malti-Douglas's (MALTI-DOUGLAS 1985).

> his jaw. Then he brought out a pair of tweezers, thrust them down the hunchback's throat, and drew out the piece of fish with the bone, soaked in blood. Suddenly the hunchback sneezed and stood up, rubbing his face with his hand. (MAHDI 1984: 378-79 / HADDAWY 1990: 294-95)

The king of China is so thrilled that he indeed

> commanded the story of the barber and hunchback be recorded, and bestowed robes of honor on the steward, the tailor, the Christian, and the Jew and sent them away. As for the barber, he bestowed on him a robe of honor, assigned him a regular allowance, and made him his companion. (MAHDI 1984: 379 / HADDAWY 1990: 295)

What he does is akin to a patron rewarding poets and men of letters, whose performance before him at court brings him up to a state of ecstasy, *ṭarab*. The trial in "The Hunchback" is less legal and more literary. Solving a crime is the pretext for storytelling, and the legal court is transformed into a literary séance (*majlis*) in the familiar language of *adab*, the body of Arabic writings produced and consumed within the Arabic literary culture. "The Hunchback," in fact the *Nights*, echoes, imitates, transforms, mocks, and subverts *adab*.

Even though it is not yet possible to map in detail the influence of *adab* on the *Nights*, or vice versa, we do know that upon the translation of the Persian *Hazār afsān* into Arabic, "eloquent men of letters" reworked them[3] and produced similar types of storybooks. As early as the tenth century, Ibn al-Nadīm already mentioned the ways in which the author of *Kitāb al-Wuzarā'*, Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbdūs al-Jahshiyārī, who was a government bureaucrat educated in *adab*, compiled a collection of Arabic, Byzantine and Persian stories (*asmār al-ʿarab wa-l-ʿajam wa-l-rūm*) from oral and written sources, from storytellers and books, and organized them into "nights" as well but kept each "night" a separate, independent, full story. Ibn al-Nadīm saw this book in more or less 50 folios which contain the 480 nights or stories al-Jahshiyārī collected before his death (IBN AL-NADĪM 1988: 363-64). Perhaps it is beside the point to map this mutual influence by tracing the movement of stories to and fro the *Nights* and *adab*, for *adab* itself defies any content-driven definition. Rather, it might be more productive to pursue a line of inquiry delineated by Ibn Khaldūn (732–808/1332–1406).

Ibn Khaldūn defines *adab* as one of the four sciences of the Arabic language (*ʿulūm al-lisān al-ʿarabī*), preceded in importance by grammar (*ʿilm al-naḥw*), lexicography (*ʿilm al-lugha*), and style (*ʿilm al-bayān*). *Adab* is an area of intellectual activity (*ʿilm*), not interested in any particular subject (*mawḍūʿ*); rather its objective is the effective use, or even aesthetic use of language in poetry or prose (IBN KHALDŪN 2001: 753-64). Accordingly, *adab* means poetry and prose distinguished not just by their form, but also by their play with language.

The *Nights* do play with language but their play is of a different order. The *Nights* transform word play known of *adab*, as in the deployment of *al-badīʿ* devices, such as *ṭibāq* (use of opposites in one sentence or line of poetry) and *jināS* (paranomasia), into play with narration, setting genres such as "epic" and "romance" against each other dialogically (OUYANG 2000: 5-18; 2002: 485-504). Moreover, they follow the principles of doubling

3 *Tanāwalahu l-fuṣaḥā' wa-l-bulaghā', fa-hadhdhabūhu wa-nammaqūhu wa-ṣannafū fī maʿnāhu mā yushbihuhū* (IBN AL-NADĪM 1988: 363).

(*izdiwāj*), parallelism (*muqābala*), paradox (*aḍdād*), and derivation (*ishtiqāq*) in the generation of motifs in accordance with the Arabic verbal arts of *badīʿ* and their organization as tableaux in the arabesque tapestry of the stories.[4] Motifs relevant to the human body demonstrate the *Nights*' play with *badīʿ*, network stories in "The Hunchback" with those in *adab*, and engage the *Nights*' stories and *adab* in spirited dialogues.

The composition of "The Hunchback" is effected through bringing together stories that share the motif of body maiming. The maimed body of the hunchback is the glue that binds this diverse body of stories together, but it also serves as the root from which similar stories but with shades of difference are first derived and multiplied, then juxtaposed and contrasted. "The Hunchback" playfully but judiciously selects material from *adab* and reconfigures this material for its own intents and purposes. The tailor's story, the transitional story from the first half to the second, as I mentioned earlier, reads like a long entry on a poet and his famous lyrics in *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (al-Iṣfahānī 2002), which is among Ibn Khaldūn's key *adab* works, or the works in the genre of "martyrs of love" (*maṣāriʿ al-ʿushshāq*; al-Sarrāj n.d.). The earnestness of early love kindled by passion quickly disintegrates into farce.

The love stories in the first half recount the ways in which the titular male protagonists, the four itinerant merchants, lose body parts for the sake of love or lust. They differ at the same time from the *Nights* love stories outside "The Hunchback," which end with the union of a couple matched in perfect beauty and conduct. The Christian broker's protagonist squanders his fortune away on a beautiful woman and resorts to stealing. He is caught and his hand is cut off. The Muslim steward's protagonist marries one of Queen Zubayda's favorite ladies-in-waiting and on his wedding night he eats from a Zīrbāja dish and forgets to wash his hands. His bride has his thumbs and big toes cut off. The Jewish physician's young hero consorts with the wrong woman and finds himself embroiled in a murder mystery. He falls in lust with a young woman, engages with her in a number of illicit trysts, then falls in lust again with the sister she brings, has a one-night stand with her, and wakes up to find her head severed from her body. He buries the body in the courtyard, flees but returns after he loses all his money in trade and digs her necklace up. When he tries to sell it, he is caught and his hand is cut off. The tailor's young merchant never makes it to his date but still manages to break his leg.

The stories in the second half comprise the misfortunes of characters with deformed bodies. They recount the ways random and gratuitous cruel pranks bankrupt the protagonists, subject them to physical violence and send them into exile. The first brother, a hunchback, is stripped of his dignity and possession by his neighbors, who take advantage of his attraction to the wife and make him work for free, run their mill like a donkey, then scandalize him as a lecherous man and force him to flee. The second brother, the paraplegic, is lured into the harem of a vizier's daughter, who has his brows dyed, his head shaven, and his clothes stripped then sends him back out to the street where he gets beaten and banished. The third brother, the blind, is punished and exiled because he is caught with a group of con artists who pretend to be blind. The fourth brother, the one-eyed butcher, falls foul with a dishonest customer, is accused of selling human flesh, and is punished and banished. When he begins

4 Not in the sense of Naddaff's reference to the visual arabesque in her discussion of patterns of repetition in "The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad" (Naddaff 1991, Ouyang 2018).

a new life, he is seen by a military commander who cannot stand the sight of a one-eyed man, and is again beaten and chased out of the city. In the third city, he hears tramping of horses and runs into a house. Again, he is accused of theft, beaten, and exiled. The fifth brother, the cropped of the ears, is lured to a house of con artists and gets dispossessed and beaten, when he tries to avenge himself, he is mistaken for the con artists, beaten and exiled. The sixth brother, the cropped of lips, meets a man who offers him patronage, but when he dies, all his estates are confiscated and he is exiled.

The two sets of stories are variations of the same. The central theme is doubled, or multiplied to be more precise, but not in an identical fashion. Rather, each story slips away from what precedes it, just enough to be different, akin to the ways in which *jinās*, full or partial, generates different and overlapping words and meanings. The two sets of stories are different enough to be considered opposites, albeit more contrapuntally than paradoxically. The disfigured body attracts attention whether the mutilation is natural or man-made. However, naturally maimed bodies invite laughter and abuse, but limbs lost to legal punishment elicit pity and even material support. The two halves of the cycle may be described in Arabic *badīʿ* terms as *ṭibāq* (using words in opposite meanings in one sentence or line of poetry) or *muqābala* (parallelism at the level of sentences) in a large scale, here, contrast between two halves of the same cycle. Furthermore, the stories within the first half of the cycle follows the derivation principles of *jinās* to generate variations of stories of "martyrs of love" that reverberate those in the *Nights*, in particular the Hārūn al-Rashīd stories, but with a twist. All male protagonists lose at least one body part. More important, except for the ending of the entire "Hunchback"—"and they continued to enjoy each other's company until they were overtaken by death, the destroyer of delights" (MAHDI 1984: 379 / HADDAWY 1990: 295)—they all end up alone and itinerant after the demise of their faithful and loyal partners. All female protagonists die prematurely. There is no such thing as "happily ever after" in "The Hunchback," not even in the second half, except for the prattling, meddlesome barber. The six brothers, though financially supported by the titular barber, are alone and in exile. It is almost as if the loss of a body part condemns one to an imperfect life, a life away from home and without family. In this the protagonists of the stories are distinguished from the storytellers. The storytellers, including the Jewish physician, the Christian broker, the Muslim steward, and the tailor, are sent home and the barber is integrated into the king's entourage.

Food and the Body: From Moral Beauty to Patronage

The stories in "The Hunchback" slip from the kind of symmetry we read in the *Nights* in general, those placed before and after this cycle of stories. Deformed bodies and unions cut short replace the perfectly matched lovers, each of perfect physical and moral beauty, living happily ever after in marriage. And, the perfect pattern of justice is similarly disrupted. The king of China takes no action, unlike Hārūn al-Rashīd or the king in "The Fisherman and the Demon," upon hearing all the stories, and the same goes for al-Mustanṣir, who laughs at the stories of the prattling barber and his six brothers but does nothing to restore the wronged back to, let us say, their rightful places. The ideal community imagined elsewhere in the

Nights, underpinned by twined physical and moral beauty, is tinkered with beyond recognition. In the first instance, any encounter with the power elite results in harm. The young merchant who falls in love with Queen Zubayda's lady-in-waiting in the Muslim steward's story, another young merchant who gets involved with the murderous daughter of a vizier of Damascus in the Jewish physician's tale, and a third young merchant who once dates the daughter of a Baghdadi judge in the tailor's tale, are all maimed and condemned to homelessness. The world of "The Hunchback" is marked by physical deformity, prattle, and meddlesome behavior. The physique of the hunchback is the first tale-telling sign. The "meddlesome and prattling" (MAHDI 1984: 327-28 / HADDAWY 1990: 249) barber hones this in. "[T]hat ill-omened, ill-behaved, bungling, shameful, and pernicious old barber" (MAHDI 1984: 327-28 / HADDAWY 1990: 249), in the words of his victim, in Arabic: "*al-shakyh al-naḥs, al-aswad al-wajh, al-qabīḥ al-faʿāyil, al-taʿīs al-ḥaraka, al-qalīl al-baraka*," is contrasted with his victim, "a handsome stranger, a perfectly beautiful young man," in Arabic, "*shābb malīḥ*, *gharīb*, *kāmil al-ḥusn wa-l-jamāl*" (MAHDI 1984: 327 / HADDAWY 1990: 249). The physical beauty of the young man is, in this case, destroyed, thanks to his ill-fortuned encounter with the ugly barber.

Beauty in the *Nights* is physical, but this physical beauty is a sign of a more important kind of beauty, that of words and deeds, of speech and conduct, or more aptly, moral beauty. Moral beauty comes in the form of physical perfection. The pair in the *Nights*' love stories is one manifestation. They are matched in perfect beauty and propriety in their behavior in love. The devotion to each other is such that they are able to resist all temptations thrown in their path until they are united in marriage after numerous trials and tribulations. Words and deeds are inextricably connected in the *Nights*. Stories result in action, in justice, particularly morally beautiful stories of fidelity in love and loyalty among the power elite and members of an ideal community as we see in "Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Bakkār and Shams al-Nahār" and "Anīs al-Jalīs and Nūr al-Dīn" in the Hārūn al-Rashīd stories. Reward for good words and deeds comes in the form of recognition and a life of comfort and happiness. The opposite solicits punishment, it goes without saying. We see the ways in which the protagonists lose their body parts if they commit a crime or infringement in the love stories the Christian broker, the Muslim steward and the Jewish physician tell the king of China.

"The Hunchback" complicates this discourse by introducing a disrupting element in the perfect symmetry of the physical, verbal and behavioral beauty underpinning the *Nights*. The barber disrupts this idealism further. Before he enters the scene, the love stories in "The Hunchback" have already slipped from the familiar pattern of perfect love into imperfection. They now turn into farce. The Christian broker tells a story of devotion that leads the male protagonist to steal. The story told by the Muslim steward is about Queen Zubayda's despotic lady-in-waiting who cuts off her husband's thumbs and big toes on their wedding night, simply because he forgets to wash his hands after eating Zīrbāja. Finally, the story recounted by the Jewish physician is of a man who despite his sexual escapade leading to murder and theft ends up happily married. The barber makes a grand entrance at this juncture of "The Hunchback." He is a party crasher at feasts, in the tailor's story and his own story, who brings with him chaos and breaks up companies. But he is well intentioned and means no harm. The same goes for his hapless and helpless brothers.

These stories of less than perfectly beautiful people subvert the very idealism put forward in the *Nights* exemplified by the Hārūn al-Rashīd stories. A Bakhtinian reading is obviously

entirely plausible and even appropriate. The deformed body in "The Hunchback" can be taken as the "grotesque" in Bakhtin's reading of the "carnival" as the cultural force that underpins the medieval European Menippean satire in *Rabelais and His World* (BAKHTIN 1984). "Carnivalisation," the transposition of "the carnival sense of the world" into language and storytelling, now focalized on the comic elements of the "grotesque," allows for the suspension of laws, restrictions, and prohibitions that govern the structure of ordinary life, for turning existing power structures upside down. Laity, with their low humour and grotesque physique, rule the day for the duration of the carnival, and gain the upper hand over the Church, turning them into objects of ridicule (ibid.: 1-58; 303-67). "The Hunchback" does not clearly suspend the religious or political structures, even in the world of the *Nights*; rather, its embedded stories mirror, interrogate, and challenge *adab* as both a practice and a cultural institution. It makes a mockery of the patronage system, idealized as the mechanism of appropriate reward for beautiful words, in this case for storytelling itself. They question the very value of words and the efficacy of storytelling.

I now turn to further details of intertextuality with *adab*, in particular, with texts that deal with individual conduct and social etiquette in relation to the consumption of food.[5]

The first part of the barber's story of his sixth brother, the cropped of lips, reads like the first half of a-Hamadhānī's "al-Maqāma al-Maḍīriyya." The protagonist is invited into a rich man's house and offered banquet, but only in words. He plays the game and is rewarded, unlike Abū l-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī, who flees in frustration into the street and breaks his leg (al-HAMADHĀNĪ 1889: 101-19). Abū l-Fatḥ's fate is transposed to that of the young man in the tailor's story about what the barber's prattle did to him. Prattle is synonymous with words. Words are produced in exchange for food in *adab*. Food in the *Nights* serves not only as a contact hub, but also semiotic code. We have already caught glimpses of the workings of food as a narrative device in the pomegranate dish in "The Two Viziers" and Zīrbāja in the Muslim stewards' story in "The Hunchback." I now turn my attention to the semiotics of food in *adab* through three examples, al-Hamadhānī, al-Jāḥiẓ, and Ibn Buṭlān, starting with the most obvious.

"Al-Maqāma al-Maḍīriyya" in the *Maqāmāt* is arguably the anti-*maqāma* in the collection. It turns the paradigm of the typical *maqāma* con trick on its head. Abū l-Fatḥ, who usually tricks his victims into giving him food and money with his eloquent words, is here silenced by his host's prattle, and instead of absconding with his host's food and money, he is diverted from his purpose and in fact gets himself into an accident and becomes lame. That food is a semiotic code in the representation of the economy of exchange within patronage is not new to al-Hamadhānī. Al-Hamadhānī simply escalates it into satire of the *adab* culture that lives and thrives on patronage. Al-Jāḥiẓ demonstrates three types of exchange in an escalating fashion in the anecdotes he relates on the miserliness of the people of Khurasan from Merv in *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'*: from food for food to word for food and eventually word for word. In the anecdote on one certain governor of Fars, possibly Khālid Khūmahrawayhi, who upon hearing a poet recite a poem in his praise, orders ten thousand dirhams for him, and increases the amount to twenty thousand, then forty thousand when he sees the poet's happiness. In the end, the poet leaves without taking his reward, for doing that would be

5 On representations of food in classical Arabic literature: VAN GELDER 2000.

repaying the patron's excessive generosity with ingratitude. When reproached for his cavalier attitude, the governor of Fars retorts, saying "he pleased us with his words, so we pleased him with our words" (*sarranā bi-kalām*, *fa-sararnāhu bi-kalām*) (al-JĀḤIẒ n.d.: 26).

But the word cannot really take the place of food in real life. Ibn Buṭlān equates food with life in *Daʿwat al-aṭibbāʾ* and healthy body with good food (IBN BUṬLĀN 2003). More significantly, just like in "al-Maḍīriyya," word is prattle and it frustrates as opposed to taking action. Physicians understandably must take action instead of merely bragging about their knowledge, for the word cannot cure illness but action will. "The Hunchback" echoes these and more. Food, in the form of the morsel of fish in (the frame story, is life and death. The word, the material of the stories, at best entertains, diverts attention and postpones death; at worst it is a pack of lies and can maim. Action is the antidote to word. The barber saves the day by taking action, by removing the morsel of fish from the hunchback's throat. This one simple act proves more effective than all the stories told in the cycle. With the hunchback's revival, it becomes clear that no crime is committed and no justice needs be dispensed. Stories are diverting; they stall time and create space for something to happen that would change the anticipated outcome, such as the king of China's determination to kill all the self-perceived murderers. They also distract attention from the real issue. Nobody notices that the hunchback is still alive until the barber comes along. The conundrum is simply that the "*laghw*" (nonsense) or "*ḥashw*" (superfluous words) or "*hadhar*" (prattle or babble, also the name of the second brother of the barber) between two actions, between the tailor jamming the morsel of fish down the hunchback's throat and the barber removing it, serves solely to tell stories for the sake of storytelling. The king of China's dismissal of the first half of "The Hunchback" and embrace of the second half accentuate the pleasure principle of storytelling and, above all, language. The king of China's trial court is akin to a literary assembly in which stories are told for the sake of storytelling.

The Workings of Framing: From Pain to Pleasure then Meaning

The second half of "The Hunchback" exists outside the *Nights* as a discrete collection of stories. It is known as "*Ḥadīth al-sittat al-nafar*" (The Story of the Six Men) in *Kitāb al-Ḥikāyāt al-ʿajība wa-l-akhbār al-gharība* (WEHR 1956; LYONS 2014: *Tales of the Marvelous and News of the Strange*). "The Story of the Six Men" comprises six separate stories of men who happen to congregate at "lodgings of the strangers" (*manāzil al-ghurabāʾ*), after having arrived in this unnamed city ruled by an unnamed king from unnamed cities. The king of the host city "was fond of stories, studying books and histories, and anyone who had something remarkable to pass on in the way of news, proverbs or tales would tell it to him" (LYONS 2014: 43)—"news, proverbs or tales" is Lyons' translation of "*al-nawādir wa-l-akhbār wa-l-amthāl wa-l-ḥikayāt*" (WEHR 1956: 45). One night, Alexander like, the king works too hard and thinks too much during the day and is therefore unable to fall asleep, so he sends his housekeeper, *qahramāna*, to the lodgings of the strangers and asks that she bring to him anyone who would tell him "the most remarkable thing that had happened to him" (LYONS 2014: 43; "*aʿjab amr marra bihi*," WEHR 1956: 46). Six men, who are transmogrified into the barber's six brothers with exactly the same bodily defects, volunteer and tell their stories,

which are of course the same stories the barber tells about his brothers. Upon hearing each story, the king laughs and gives the storytellers each a generous reward.

The king of China in "The Hunchback" is the reincarnation of this king and of course he prefers the stories of the barber's six brothers. However, he is at the same time remodeled on the iconic Hārūn al-Rashīd, who frames and is enframed in "The Hunchback," and holds court to adjudicate in matters of crime and justice as well as listen to stories and make judgments on them. This king, his entourage, and court frame a body of stories which are narrated formally according to the coincidence plot and are brought together and into conversation in the form of a network of texts connected thematically by the loss of body parts. The juxtaposition between the two halves of "The Hunchback," framed by idealized kingship and community in the form of the iconized Hārūn al-Rashīd and the stories of lovers matched in perfect physical and moral beauty preceding and following the cycle, exhibits the dire consequences of diverging from the paradigm of ideal behavior for individuals and at the same time casts doubt on the very paradigm. If the paradigm guarantees justice in the stories framing "The Hunchback," such as "The Three Apples" that precedes it in the Galland-Mahdi text, it no longer does so in "The Hunchback." Justice is not a priority here. The priority is rather storytelling and ironically of the type that transforms the pain of the victims of cruel pranks and random violence into pleasure for the audience.

The pleasure experienced by the audience, wonder (*ʿajab*), derives from the way in which narrative threads coincidences in various ways and makes them coherent. In doing so, each variation slips slightly from the familiar pattern of the ideal inherent in the *Nights'* love stories, and from the "original" love story with which "The Hunchback" begins, achieving a sense of strangeness (*gharāba*) through narrative defamiliarization. Defamiliarization is located in play, inspired by word play in *adab*, here in how narrative patterns coincidences into constellations while giving them meaning, in the dialogues among overlapping stories, or in the interstices of intertextuality focalized on the loss of a body part. If pleasure is the purpose of "The Story of the Six Men," framing in the *Nights* problematizes this pleasure, and the pleasure in word play and storytelling in general. Al-Mustanṣir, upon hearing the barber tell the comic stories of his own party crashing and of his six brothers, does not reward him but banishes him from Baghdad instead. The king of China arguably "bestowed on him a robe of honor, assigned him a regular allowance, and made him his companion, and they continued to enjoy each other's company until they were overtaken by death, the destroyer of delights" (MAHDI 1984: 379 / HADDAWY 1990: 295) as a reward for reviving the hunchback, not his stories.

Framing here also introduces ambivalence around meddling and excess, epitomized by the barber's behavior and stories, and conveyed in the term *fuḍūl* in Arabic, the meanings of which range from "curiosity" to "meddling" and "excess." The barber's unwarranted interference in other people's life leads to harm, and his prattle and stories of injury caused by random violence are gratuitous. This ambivalence lies at the heart of *adab*, in the works of al-Hamadhānī, al-Jāḥiẓ, and Ibn Buṭlān, to name just a few examples, with which the *Nights* engages in dialogue. Does pleasure suffice as the purpose of storytelling and *adab*? Can one tell stories for the sake of storytelling alone? Is this a form of unwelcome excess? For stories distract, postpone death but do not save life. Action in "The Hunchback" speaks louder than word. How then do we make sense of the wonder even such excess evokes in the audience? "The Hunchback" is silent on this, and on life that is a constellation of coincidences like the stories enframed within the cycle. It leaves the contemplation on life to other tales.

Framing, as we have seen, by staging chance encounters, networks stories from divergent temporalities and geographies, storytelling traditions and genres, and worldviews and ideologies, entangles them in one another, and brings them into conversation. Coincidence in this context is the mechanism and site of framing and entanglement as well as of intertextuality. Framing coincidence is a strategy of defamiliarization in narration (*gharāba*) the purpose of which is to elicit in the listener or reader a sense of wonder (*ʿajab*). Wonder, however, is more than a momentary reaction to the strangeness of narrative; rather, it ought to initiate contemplation and reflections on the meanings of the stories, here, not on each on its own but as an ensemble in which each story contributes its specific meaning and additional meaning in conversation with other stories in the network. Framing is more than a "narrative technique" that "links the *Arabian Nights* to other well-known literary works with a comparable general set up," and includes "one or more other stories" (MARZOLPH & VAN LEEUWEN 2004: II, 554–55); rather, it produces meanings that emerge from the dialogues the networked stories have with one another.

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