

Introduction

The Stunning Growth of a Constellation

This study of the *Thousand and One Nights* addresses the place of what is commonly called *Arabian Nights* in contemporary world cultures.¹ It aims to study theoretical and philological undertakings, including poetics of prose and poetry, in conversation with social science. It explores and excavates the reasons for and effects of an enormous constellation of knowledge about and around the tales that has generated further projects to compile manuals, guides, companions, edited compilations, and encyclopedias.² These constellations and projects also build on, or converse with, cinematic production, theater, painting, music,³ and other visual sites and spectacles. Since its early inception in translation, 1704–12/17 (*Les Mille et Une Nuit: Contes Arabes*), it has sustained an unequalled presence in cultural production. The enormous increase in scholarship on *A Thousand and One Nights* (the *Arabian Nights*) is further indicated by the multiplication of publications that take the tales as their focus and concern.⁴ Whether this scholarship addresses issues of translation, the appropriation of the tales in visual culture, or in media, its growth evidences a massive production of published materials, one that

¹ *The Thousand and One Nights, Arabian Nights, Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, and *A Thousand and One Nights* are interchangeably used.

² Among the latest compilations of edited material, see Ibrahim Akel and William Granara, eds., *The Thousand and One Nights: Sources and Transformations in Literature, Art, and Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); and Orhan Elmaz, ed., *Endless Inspiration: One Thousand and One Nights in Comparative Perspective* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2020).

³ Although the most known were Farmer's writings, there was earlier G. W. Peck, "The Thousand and One Nights," *American Review* 5 (1847), 601–18; and, certainly, Henry George Farmer, *The Minstrelsy of "The Arabian Nights": A Study of Music and Musicians in the Arabic "Alif Laila wa Laila"* (Bearsden: Hinrichsen, 1945); and his "The Music of the Arabian Nights," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 2 parts (October 1944 and 1945), 172–85, 39–60. Reflecting on Rimsky-Korsakov's and Ravel's inspired music, Tim Ashley wrote to *The Observer* about the scope of this inspiration; see Tim Ashley, "Eastern Promise," *The Observer*, August 20, 2005, [www.theguardian.com/music/2005/aug/20/cl](http://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/aug/20/classicalmusicandopera.proms2005)

⁴ See Ulrich Marzolph's bibliography: <http://www.user.gwdg.de/~umarzol/arabiannights.html>.

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prompts us to speak of *A Thousand and One Nights* as a field of knowledge. Over time, this field has witnessed some radical transformations in relation to other fields and also within its own diversification of assets at certain moments in its historical processes. In other words, its appearance in France, and almost simultaneously in translation in English, was also conditioned by possibilities while opening up certain venues within each culture.

Conditions of possibility that may be applicable at a certain historical moment undergo change, mutation, or transformation in relation to other fields.⁵ Studies of the reception of the *Nights* at different periods within each culture can tell us as much. The *Nights* has become a mirror of specific tastes and directions in cultures as a result of certain properties that are highlighted or appropriated in each translation or adaptation within an episteme, or “a total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems.”⁶ A cursory glance at the following can give us an idea of how the *Nights* reached even the grand minds of the Age of Reason and the pre-Romantic reaction: Denis Diderot’s novel *Les bijoux indiscrets* (1748), Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *La reine Fantastique* (1755–56), and Francois-Marie Arouet’s (Voltaire, 1694–1778) *Zadig* (1747), along with a prologue in which he finishes by acknowledging the widespread popularity of the *Nights*. The case is even more problematic when we study the notorious theorist for racist ideology, Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816–82), the author of *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55; *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*). Pierre-Louis Rey argues how de Gobineau considers the *Nights* a Persian text, an

⁵ See, as examples, Muhsin Jassim al-Musawi, “The Arabian Nights in Eighteenth-Century English Criticism,” *Muslim World* 67 (1977), 12–32; and his *Scheherazade in England: A Study of Nineteenth-Century English Criticism of the Arabian Nights* (Boulder, CO: Three Continents, 1981); Rochelle Almeida, “A Thousand and One Nights in the Pedagogic Global Village: Cross-cultural Transnational Connections,” in *La Réception mondiale et transdisciplinaire des Mille et une Nuits*, ed. Waël Rabadi and Isabelle Bernard (Amiens: Presses du Centre d’Études Médiévales, 2012), 17–30; Danielle Buschinger, “*Les Mille et une Nuits* et la littérature européenne: quelques rapprochements,” in *ibid.*, 117–39; and Sylvette Larzul, “Les Mille et Une Nuit d’Antoine Galland: Traduction, adaptation, création,” in *Les Mille et Une Nuit en partage*, ed. Aboubakr Chraïbi (Paris: Sindbad, 2004), 251–66. Digital surveys like Encounters with the Orient project, funded by HERA (Humanities European Research Area) can offer handy and accessible information (www.kent.ac.uk/ewto/projects/anthology/index.html). An effort to place the Enlightenment intellectuals in context of two categories, Arabic science and an irrational “Islam,” is made by Rebecca Joubin, “Islam and Arabs through the Eyes of the Encyclopédie: The ‘Other’ as a Case of French Cultural Self-criticism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 2 (May 2000), 197–217.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 191.

understanding that led him to study Persian: “During his adolescence in Brittany, he had become enamored of the *Thousand and One Nights*. All he dreamed of were mosques and minarets, he said he was a Muslim, ready to make his pilgrimage to Mecca.” Furthermore, as soon as he arrived in Paris in 1835, “he started taking Persian lessons with Quatremère at Le Collège de France, before giving into the Orientalist fashion of the time in a long poem entitled *Dilfiza* (1837).”⁷ Almost every writer, philosopher, philologist, and theologian of note, in France, England, and Germany, was engaged with the tales in one way or another. In other words, and apart from the striking appeal that the tales engendered with the rest of society, the dialogue through which the learned engaged with the *Nights* for more than two centuries signifies this epistemic shift that was made possible by Galland’s appropriated translation, and the multifarious and composite nature of *A Thousand and One Nights*. Its journey in one translation or adaptation or another to other cultures may not display the same set of conditions or responses that are applicable to Franco-Anglo orientations; and yet, this migration established the path for multiple transactions that have attracted attention. Hence, we read of its presence in Sicily, Slovakia, Argentina, Somalia, and almost everywhere else, not only in Europe and America, but especially in the Global South.⁸ The current study is thus a theoretical continuation of explorations already initiated in

⁷ <https://heritage.bnf.fr/bibliothequesorient/en/joseph-gobineau-art>.

⁸ See, for example, Abdalla Uba Adamu, “‘We Are Not in Baghdad Anymore’: Textual Travels and Hausa Intertextual Adaptation of Selected Tales of One Thousand and One Nights in Northern Nigeria,” in *Endless Inspiration: One Thousand and One Nights in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Orhan Elmaz (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2020), 35–59; Zubair Ahamed and Krishnaswamy Nachimuthu, “Reception of The Arabian Nights in Tamil: The Story of Medinatun Nuhas in Tamil Adaptation,” in *Essays on The Arabian Nights*, ed. Risvanur Rahman and Syed Akhtar Husain (New Delhi: India International Centre, 2015), 25–39; Syed Hasnain Akhtar, “Reception of Alf Layla in India with Special Reference to Urdu,” in *ibid.*, 105–10; Sergio Gabriel Waisman, “The Thousand and One Nights in Argentina: Translation, Narrative, and Politics in Borges, Puig, and Piglia,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 40, no. 4 (2003), 351–71; Kevin Windle, “The Slavonic Nights: Observations on Some Versions of *The Book of a Thousand and One Nights* in Slavonic Languages,” *Modern Language Review* 88 (1993), 389–40; Francesca Maria Corrao, “The Arabian Nights in Sicily,” *Fabula* 45, no. 3–4 (2004), 237–45; revised version in *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective*, ed. Ulrich Marzolph (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 279–89; Magdalena Kubarek, “The Reception of One Thousand and One Nights in Polish Contemporary Literature,” in *The Thousand and One Nights: Sources and Transformations in Literature, Art, and Science*, ed. Ibrahim Akel and William Granara (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 216–26; Manuela Cortés García, “Les Mille et Une Nuit dans une zarzuela espagnole: El Asombro de Damasco,” in *Les Mille et Une Nuit dans les imaginaires croisés*, ed. Lucette Heller-Goldenberg (Cologne: Romanisches Seminar der Universität Köln, 1994), 204–10; Justin St. Clair, “Mahfouz and the Arabian Nights Tradition,” in *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Naguib Mahfouz*, ed. Wail S. Hassan and Susan Muaddi Darraj (New York: The Modern Language Association of

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Scheherazade in England (1981) and a couple of articles in 1977 and 1980:⁹ a study of informed response, as demonstrated in the writings of poets, prose writers, critics, journalists, moralists, neoclassicists, and Romanticists.

A sequel to that research project, one that is also concerned with a broader field of narrative in diverse fields of production, is in order. Many colleagues have already participated in this endeavor in one way or another, and the present project derives power and acumen from their research and insights. It aims, however, to interrogate the place of the *Arabian Nights* in postindustrialist, postcapitalist world cultures; hence it adopts a theoretical line that focuses on the reasons behind every phenomenal rise in a field of knowledge called *A Thousand and One Nights* (*Arabian Nights*), as attested to by Marzolph's online bibliography.¹⁰ That said, however, the current study departs from my earlier undertaking, not only in its historical perspective, the postcapitalist, postindustrialist world order, but also in its focus on new concerns, applications, theories of enunciation and narrative, and what Michel Foucault describes as "a modification in the principle of exclusion and the principle of the possibility of choices" in a "a new discursive constellation."¹¹

On the scholarly and critical levels, my study intends to depart from current studies, edited volumes, and conference proceedings, with their strict application of either current literary theory and its emphasis on social science, or its rhetorical return to techniques that were popular once in concomitance with the vogue of structuralism. While not overlooking these approaches and making use of some of them at certain points, my study takes as its point of departure the critical and popular reception that I have already studied, examining in depth the postcolonial transactional activity that started more conspicuously in the 1970s in Europe, the United States, and all over the globe. Reception in its popular

America 2012), 105–17; Matthew Isaac Cohen, "Thousand and One Nights at the Komedie Stamboel: Popular Theatre and Travelling Stories in Colonial Southeast Asia," in *New Perspectives on [the] Arabian Nights: Ideological Variations and Narrative Horizons*, ed. Wen-Chin Ouyang and Geert Jan van Gelder (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 103–14; and Thomas Lahusen, "Thousand and One Nights in Stalinist Culture: Far from Moscow," *Discourse: Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 17, no. 3 (1995), 58–74. See also Kamran Rastegar, *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe: Textual Transactions in Nineteenth-Century Arabic, English and Persian Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁹ al-Musawi, *Scheherazade in England*; and his "The Growth of Scholarly Interest in the *Arabian Nights*," *Muslim World* 70 (1980), 196–212.

¹⁰ As I have no intention to reproduce the bibliography that I sent to publishers in 2008, I find Ulrich Marzolph's updated online bibliography the best (<https://wwwuser.gwdg.de/~umarzol/arabiannights.html>). It shows the enormous amount of material written about the *Nights* in many languages.

¹¹ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 67.

and critical form; the understanding or misunderstanding of Islam, the Arab, or the Orient; and the nature of navigation in texts, lands, and languages all provide a substantial threshold to the core of the book, its central argument, one that makes use of multiple documentaries, films, paintings, novels and novellas, poetry, digital forums,¹² and political jargon, to offer an updated and nuanced understanding of a text that at this point encapsulates world cultures. Whether we speak of globalization, worldism, literary theory, cultural dialogue, or “clash of civilizations,” no other text can ever signify and encapsulate everything in its protean core, especially in relation to the first translated text that managed to play havoc with European cultures upon its first introduction in French and, probably, simultaneously in English.¹³

A dominating cultural climate constructs its temporal/spatial tropes and topoi in an age that, for better or worse, now takes pride in its media achievements that compress materiality into a cyberspace. Facts on the ground speak, however, of massive wars, migrations, displaced communities, and also reflect the growth of an astounding rhetoric as another venue for conflict, rapprochement, cold war, persuasion, and deception. This multidimensional universe, with its cultural scripts and the increasing domination of artificial intelligence, is another space that also makes use of Scheherazade’s tales, her rich lexicon of intrigue, ruse, treachery, love, passion, and anxiety. It is not in vain to trace the *Arabian Nights* in this space, even in places that could have eluded the ingenuity of an artist or philosopher. Barry Blitt’s cover for the *New Yorker*, January 25, 2021, is a case in point. It depicts the former US president Donald Trump lifted by a *rukḥ*, an enormous eagle. Blitt calls it “A Weight Lifted.” But behind this, in the subconscious, the artist could have the *Arabian Nights* tale of the third mendicant, ‘Aġīb Ibn Khaṣīb, the son of a king, in mind. He is lifted by the *rukḥ* to experience further trials that end up with the loss of an eye and consequent mendicancy.¹⁴ ‘Aġīb Ibn Khaṣīb has become a mask among modernist poets whose trials, troubles, and misfortunes confront them with difficult choices. The Egyptian poet Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s poem “Mudhakkirāt al-Malik ‘Aġīb Ibn Khaṣīb” says as much, though the poet takes the early history of the king’s son as a starting point to bemoan the absurdity of things

¹² See, on this point, Tarek el-Ariss, *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals: Arab Culture in the Digital Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 34–38.

¹³ For some reason, what we have as extant copies of the English version relate to 1706. See, for example, James Holly Hanford, “Open Sesame: Notes on the ‘Arabian Nights’ in English,” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 26, no. 1 (1964), 48–56.

¹⁴ Husain Fareed Ali Haddawy, trans., *The Arabian Nights* [based on the text edited by Muhsin Mahdi] (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 125.

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around him.¹⁵ In his usual propensity to empty the real of carnage and human loss, a propensity for simulacra, Jean Baudrillard references the *Thousand and One Nights* for the sake of contrast between recurrent time and real time in the war on Iraq. Procrastination, false advance, and retreat are levelled at the victim to exemplify “the recurrent time of *The Thousand and One Nights* – [as] exactly the inverse of real time.”¹⁶ The *Nights* is recalled only in relation to warmongers’ Other.

Combined with the growth and mobility of global capital, its smooth or enforced flow through wars and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, followed by the fragmentation of nation-states, a new culture industry now forces its way alongside a newly emerging world of media fluidity. Whether in the tourist industry, film and TV production, or political rhetoric and economic transaction, Scheherazade’s treasures are even more alluring and available than before. An enormous appropriation is taking place, one that suggests a number of classifications under which the present project, *The Arabian Nights in Contemporary World Cultures*, argues its point. There is first appropriation, including adaptation, as cultural production in response to the transactional dynamics of consumerist economies. Contemporary trends do not necessarily involve a complete departure from earlier appropriation, including intertextual allusions as pervasively seen, for example, in Victorian fiction.¹⁷ New options and dialogue with another world order under a postcapitalist economy and powerful soft technologies impel moves in other directions.

A very recent example is the marketing of the new Disney production of *Aladdin*, in its adult and also earlier cartoon versions. Directed by Guy Ritchie, May 24, 2019, with a budget of 183 million USD, the version departs from its original like many other appropriations of the *Arabian Nights*, and it incites critics to speak of great art and cinematography at the expense of a familiar story (Figure 1).¹⁸ Thus, while there is a newly

¹⁵ Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, “Mudhakkirat al-Malik ‘Ajīb Ibn Khaṣīb” [Memoirs of King ‘Ajīb Ibn Khaṣīb] (1961). It is included in *al-A’māl al-Kāmilah* (1993), 419–42. See Muhsin Jassim al-Musawi, “Engaging Tradition in Modern Arab Poetics,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 33, no. 2 (2002), 195.

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. with an introduction by Paul Patton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 65.

¹⁷ For a detailed and thorough reading, see Nancy Victoria Workman, “A Victorian ‘Arabian Nights’ Adventure: A Study in Intertextuality” (PhD diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 1989).

¹⁸ “The story that follows is surprising in that it is not the tale we have actually heard and known. It seems that the makers have taken a big risk. To be honest, their experiment has been well crafted. The plot gives a very impressive character arc for Jasmine. Though the story of *Aladdin* begins and ends in a familiar way, a different tale is told. We see the rise of a different Sultan, a feature that is neatly written and brought out. It has, for sure, befitted all the ongoing noble fights going on in our real world. Kudos to the team for tampering with the original story, introducing a motive to bring out a strong message.”



Figure 1 Arthur Boyd Houghton: The African magician offers new lamps for old in the tale of Aladdin.

directed revival of scholarly and literary interest, along with productions for the cinema and theater, there is also “collateral” damage, as Jack Shaheen’s comprehensive survey of cinematography shows. Raids on

Behindwoods.com, “Aladdin Movie Review,” www.behindwoods.com/english-movies/aladdin/aladdin-review.html.

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the *Arabian Nights* that are as violent as wars of intervention are in evidence.¹⁹ Alongside objectified reproductions and highly informed presentations,²⁰ there are many others that have cursorily skirted the tales to intensify their stereotypes of the region. Orientalist paintings, broadcast productions, and satellite TV appropriations are in abundance, signifying a new turn in reception. This postcolonial, global capital turn rests on understanding the *Nights* as a manageable property, an appropriate commodity that can meet differentiated tastes while appealing to all as a shared cultural script.²¹

Appropriation is not only a method, but also a strategy, one that derives from a cultural script and conveys and disseminates a worldview of one sort or another. It appears in multifarious productions that take the *Arabian Nights* as a rejuvenating and perpetual property. Alongside this axial mapping is translation that presents the translator as a dynamic actor, an author who absorbs, clarifies, or obfuscates an appropriated and owned tale and forces her/his being as the ultimate authority on a text. As will be shown in Chapter 5, on archaeologies, processes of translation are bound to convey the contours of the mediating milieu and the character of the translator. Compilation, accretion, and translation are often in line with a cultural script that impacts cultural importation. However, economies of desire and communal and business-like transactions constitute the basis for reception, circulation, appropriation, translation, publication, publicity, and whatever that makes up a culture industry.

¹⁹ Steve Marble, “Jack Shaheen Dies,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 2017, www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-jack-shaheen-20170713-story.html. Shaheen convinced Disney to change a few things. Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, 3rd ed. (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2014). See also Christopher Wise, “Notes from the Aladdin Industry: Or, Middle Eastern Folklore in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” in *The Emperor’s Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney’s Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayers (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 105–14; Dianne Sachko Macleod, “The Politics of Vision: Disney, Aladdin, and the Gulf War,” in *ibid.*, 179–92; Timothy R. White and James Emmet Winn, “Islam, Animation and Money: The Reception of Disney’s Aladdin in Southeast Asia,” *Kinema* (1995), 58–59, <https://doi.org/10.15353/kinema.vi.778>; and Erin Addison, “Saving Other Women from Other Men: Disney’s Aladdin,” *Camera Obscura* 11, no. 131 (January–May 1993), 4–25.

²⁰ Like Tim Supple’s significant production for the theater of *One Thousand and One Nights*: Two Parts, Friday, June 17, 2011. This is part of the advertisement for the panel that followed: “Luminato 2011 examines modern takes on old stories, from its commission of *One Thousand and One Nights*, to Evie Christie’s adaptation of Racine’s *Andromache*, to Theatre Smith-Gilmour’s production of *LU XUN blossoms*. Join *One Thousand and One Nights*’ director Tim Supple, author Evie Christie, artistic director Dean Gilmour and renowned Columbia Muhsin al-Musawi, an expert on *One Thousand and One Nights*, for a rich discussion on the craft of adaptation and interpretation.”

²¹ Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790–1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

We speak of Antoine Galland (1646–1715),²² Edward William Lane (1801–76),²³ Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821–90),²⁴ and less of John Payne (1842–1916),²⁵ for example, because these translators present themselves and their texts as world treasuries emerging from metropolitan centers. The aesthete Payne was not a publicist, and his suave style keeps the copy in the dark, especially as it was soon to become Burton’s ghost text.²⁶ Given the nature of *A Thousand and One Nights* as a common storytelling property, these translators are archaeologists, resuscitators, and founders of a tradition. Along the third axial pattern are narrative art, narratology, and a theory of fiction.²⁷ It includes metafiction, as shown in John Barth’s novels,²⁸ and the Lebanese Elias Khoury’s *The Children of the Ghetto: My Name*

²² Antoine Galland, trans., *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments: Consisting of One Thousand and One Stories, Told by the Sultanness of the Indies, to divert the Sultan from the Execution of a bloody Vow he had made to marry a Lady every day, and have her cut off next Morning, to avenge himself for the Disloyalty of his first Sultanness, &c. Containing a better Account of the Customs, Manners, and Religion of the Eastern Nations, viz. Tartars, Persians, and Indians, than is to be met with in any Author hitherto published. Translated into French from the Arabian Mss. by M. Galland of the Royal Academy, and now done into English from the last Paris Edition* (London: Andrew Bell, 1706–17), 16th ed., 4 vols. (London and Edinburgh: C. Elliot, 1781). Other publishers, like Longman, issued many editions.

²³ Edward William Lane, trans., *The Thousand and One Nights, Commonly Called, in England, The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. A New Translation from the Arabic, with Copious Notes*, 3 vols. (London: Charles Knight, 1839–41). It came out first in 1838 in thirty-two parts.

²⁴ Richard F. Burton, trans. *A Plain and Literal Translation of The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments, Now Entitled the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night: With Introduction, Explanatory Notes on the Manners and Customs of Moslem Men and a Terminal Essay upon the History of the Nights*, 10 vols. (Benares [= Stoke-Newington]: Kamashastra Society, 1885).

²⁵ John Payne, trans., *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night; Now First Completely Done into English Prose and Verse, from the Original Arabic*, 9 vols. (London: Villon Society, 1882–84); John Payne, trans., *Tales from the Arabic of the Breslau and Calcutta (1814–18) Editions of the Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night, Not Occurring in the Other Printed Texts of the Work; Now First Done into English*, 3 vols. (London: Villon Society, 1884); John Payne, trans., *Alaeddin and the Enchanted Lamp; Zein ul Asnam and the King of the Jinn: Two Stories Done into English from the Recently Discovered Arabic Text* (London: Villon Society, 1889).

²⁶ There is more on this point in the following chapters, but among recent writings on Burton’s use, see Anna Ziajka Stanton, “Vulgar Pleasures: The Scandalous Worldliness of Burton’s ‘Arabian Nights,’” *Journal of World Literature* (September 2020), 1–20.

²⁷ Gerald Prince, “Narratology, Narrative, and Meaning,” *Poetics Today* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1991), 543–52; where Prince sums up the term as “Narratology, as is well known, attempts to define the nature of narrative, its specificity, and to characterize the forms which it may take” (543).

²⁸ For more on Barth, see Lahsen Ben Aziza, “Romancing Scheherazade: John Barth’s Self-perpetuating Narrative Machine from ‘The Floating Opera’ through ‘Chimera’” (PhD diss., Dalhousie University, 1991).

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Is Adam,²⁹ or in the Egyptian Ṭāriq Imām's *Ṭa'm al-nawm* (*The Taste of Sleep*). Narrative and narratological experimentation present technical and thematic issues that often subvert and destabilize a cultural scene. Multiple theories of narrative emerge that take their cue from Scheherazade. French experimentation with Scheherazade was noticeable in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³⁰ In English, the American Edgar Allan Poe was a pioneer, as was Meredith, along with a number of others before we reach Barth. Among early twentieth-century Arab writers, Ṭāha Ḥusayn and Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm collaborated in a joint novella, *al-Qaṣr al-maṣhūr* (1936; *The Enchanted Palace*). A vast thematic terrain opens up, and women writers find in Scheherazade a feminist pioneer, an adept in narration as to outwit a dominating masculine discourse.³¹ Male writers may hold other views and present their women characters as unhappy with Scheherazade for accepting the role of a wife in the first place, as is the case with the mother Najwa in the Libyan novelist Hisham Matar's *In the Country of Men*. She thinks of Scheherazade as a "coward who accepted slavery over death," a "stupid harlot."³² Throughout these and other worldwide engagements, the *Arabian Nights* appears liberal and open enough to offer imitators, adapters, translators, and architects of taste a wide scope for use and misuse that ranges between complicity in a dominating ethic and a postcolonial consciousness that interrogates the status quo.³³

At a certain point, scholars and critics felt some unease with respect to a seemingly waning interest in the *Arabian Nights*. Pitted against their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century vogue, the tales are no longer a center of attention in periodical criticism. While there may be some justification

²⁹ Elias Khoury, *Awlād al-ghūtū: Ismī Ādam* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2016); trans. Humphrey Davies, *Children of the Ghetto: My Name Is Adam* (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2019).

³⁰ See Jennifer Lynn Gipson, "Writing the Storyteller: Folklore and Literature from Nineteenth-Century France to the Francophone World" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011), 29–34.

³¹ See Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Shahrazad 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.

³² Hisham Matar, *In the Country of Men* (New York: Dial Press, 2008), 15, 17, respectively.

³³ Ferial Jabouri Ghazoul finds in the absence of a definitive text enough license for marauding in redactions and editions. "If the text has been handled frequently in this promiscuous fashion, it is indicative that the text allows itself to be 'mishandled.' One cannot blame a Lane or a Galland for taking liberties with the text, for after all, texts get the treatment they deserve. . . . It is constructed so as to accommodate and incorporate different material, as in an anthology or a compendium." Ferial Jabouri Ghazoul, *The Arabian Nights: A Structural Analysis* (Cairo: National Commission for UNESCO, 1980), 17.