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Making Sense of the *Nights*

Intertextual Connections and Narrative Techniques in the *Thousand and One Nights*[1]

Many of the more than five hundred tales included in the different manuscripts, editions, and translations of the *Thousand and One Nights* are jewels of traditional storytelling from the Arab world. Both the general audience and scholars of the *Nights*, however, have chosen to emphasize some tales more than others. In particular, the tales of *Aladdin* or *Ali Baba* are praised as the acme of Oriental storytelling, and even though these tales were only introduced into the collection by the French translator/editor Antoine Galland, following the oral performance of the contemporary Syrian storyteller Hanna Diyab, they are commonly perceived as representative constituents of (the European versions of) the *Nights*. In the Arabic collection, the tale of *The Hunchback* (Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 224–25), with its complex structure and its numerous tales artfully embedded in various levels, or the tale of *The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad* (1: 324–26), with its lively, uninhibited atmosphere, continue to fascinate international audiences. At the same time, contemporary Western audiences with their penchant for individual and inventive traits might at times perceive other tales of the *Nights* as somewhat lengthy in terms of plot development, as rudimentary or inconsequential in terms of action, or as repetitive

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in terms of narrative motifs—in other words as marginal. In particular, the latter point might easily lead the audiences to misjudge or even disesteem the narrative art of the *Nights*, as the repetitive use of specific motifs in different tales of the *Nights*[2] risks to be perceived as a lack of imagination or originality on the part of the storytellers. In the present essay, I argue instead that repetition, and specifically the intertextual allusion to themes, motifs, and concepts familiar to the audience, is a highly effective narrative technique for linking new and unknown tales to a web of tradition the audience shares. On the one hand, the process of recognition links to previous experiences and familiar contexts, thus creating an atmosphere in which the audience would feel welcome and appreciated; on the other, a tale's unexpected turn of events would attract attention and entertain the audience by introducing something new.

By discussing in detail a tale of the *Nights* that at first sight risks being regarded as quite marginal, I hope to demonstrate that most, if not actually all, of the tales in the *Nights* have good reason for being included, although the agenda justifying their inclusion or the underlying cultural concepts resonating in the mind of the storytellers (and their audience) only becomes obvious when analyzed in a "thick" context, that is, against the backdrop of the narrative culture of their original textualization and/or performance. Moreover, the present essay supports the argument that the anonymous storytellers of the *Nights* were educated authors well versed in the narrative universe, the "storyrealms" (Young) of their tradition. The narrators of the *Nights* compiled their stories in a style qualifying as "middle Arabic narrative literature" (Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une Nuits*, 15–20), implying a literary language influenced by the contemporary vernacular and a content ruled by astonishing and fantastic events. Previous scholarship has at times taken these specifics as indicating a "rather narrow" intellectual horizon of the "true Arabs."[3] But rather than lacking refinement, the storytelling techniques the narrators of the *Nights* employed—such as the introduction of tales that lack an apparent connection with the main narrative or the promise of tales that are not told—demonstrate their art of establishing an atmosphere of suspense that would keep the audience attentive and alert. The concluding reflections look at some of the discussed narratives in international tradition and illustrate how specific tales and narrative motifs were adapted to serve different ends in order to ensure their continuous tradition in changed contexts.

The Tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb, the Slave of Love*

The tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb, the Slave of Love* (Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 192–93) is the first tale of the standard editions of the *Nights* not contained in the fifteenth-century manuscript that served as the basis of Galland's early eighteenth-century French translation. In the second Calcutta edition (1839–42), it is presented in nights 38–45 (Lyons, 1: 278–304).

The tale begins by introducing a merchant's son at the time of his father's death. Ghānim proves a worthy heir to his father's business, delivering the "hundred loads of silk, brocade, and containers of musk" (Lyons, 1: 279) that his late father had intended to bring to Baghdad, and selling them for a considerable profit. Staying in Baghdad for many months, he is once forced to spend the night outside of the city, since the gates have already been closed. From his hiding place, he happens to watch three black eunuchs carrying a large, heavy chest to the burial plot where he has taken refuge. Instead of burying the chest, as the eunuchs have been told to do, they first sit down to rest for quite a while. In order to pass the time they decide that each of them "tell the story of why he was castrated and what happened to him from beginning to end" (281). When two of them have told their stories, the third one claims that his story is too long to be told right now, for it is already getting close to dawn and they should fear that their clandestine action be exposed. So now they bury the chest and return to the city. When they have left, Ghānim gets out of his hiding place, excavates the chest, and finds a beautiful young woman inside who is perfectly alive. The rest of the story—a tale of love, separation, and ultimate reunion like so many in the *Nights* (Gerhardt, 145–65; Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une Nuits*, 135–45; Van Gelder)—is of little concern to the present discussion.

Stock Motifs in the Tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb*

In terms of motifs, the prelude summarized above links the tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb* to a fair number of other stories in premodern Arabic tradition.[4] The merchant's son is a stock character of the *Nights* to such a great extent that the collection has been labeled a "mirror for merchants" (Chraïbi in Galland, 1: VII; Chraïbi, "Situation, Motivation, and Action," 6). In many of the tales in which a merchant's son figures as the main character, the plot would develop its dynamics only after the protagonist has wasted the money he had inherited from his father (Marzolph and Van Leeuwen,

2: 644–45). In the tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb*, the parallel introduction of Ghānim's sister, Fitna, indicates that the present story is not going to develop in the usual way. Fitna is introduced as a substitute for the caliph's slave girl, the woman in the chest, with whom Ghānim is eventually going to be united. Other stock motifs[5] encountered in the tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb* include the graveyard as a scene of extraordinary and ghastly events, the caliph's favorite slave girl being abducted in a chest by order of the caliph's jealous wife, and Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd's slave girl Qūt al-qulūb, who is the one buried in the chest in the tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb*, also figures in other tales of the *Nights*. My main interest here is not with the embedding tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb* but with one of the embedded tales the eunuchs tell in order to pass the time.

The Narrative Function of the Embedded Tales of the Three Eunuchs, and Similar Functions in Other Tales

Previous research has accorded little purpose to the embedded tales of the three eunuchs (Gerhardt, 49). This assessment probably results from the fact that there is no obvious significant relation to the embedding tale in any other way than that the characters acting in the embedding tale figure as the storytellers of the embedded tales. In the old core corpus of the *Nights* (Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une Nuits*, 89–116), many of the embedded tales directly relate to the frame tale since the telling of a story saves the storyteller's life, just as Shahrazād saves her life by telling a story to King Shahriyār. In these cases, the function of the embedded tales is quite obvious, and Tzvetan Todorov has aptly analyzed the phenomenon of "narrative men" (and women) as a core characteristic of the *Nights*. The tales of the eunuchs, to the contrary, have no bearing on their later fate, since the eunuchs do not play any role whatsoever in the further plot. Hence, their tales might even appear perfectly dispensable; whereas virtually all of the existing manuscripts include the embedded tales, Galland (2: 381) did not even bother to translate them.

Even though the tales of the eunuchs might constitute a later interpolation (Gerhardt, 49), they are not as randomly inserted as it might seem at first. The embedding tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb* is an exceptional romance in the *Nights*, since it is not only a story of love, separation, and ultimate reunion, but also a tale exemplifying proper social conduct. A crucial element of the plot is the fact that Qūt al-qulūb, the woman Ghānim frees from the chest, is Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd's

slave girl. Needless to say, after Ghānim has rescued her, he and Qūt al-qulūb fall in love with each other. But at first, she does not give in to his longing, and after she has revealed her identity, Ghānim refuses to touch her. This "combination of intensely felt love and adherence to the dictates of social propriety ensures that their story will end happily" (Heath, 2), albeit after the usual series of trials and tribulations. If we read the embedding tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb* in this manner, the tales of the two eunuchs turn into commentaries on the breach of the "dictates of social propriety," as a dramatic consequence of which the slaves in the embedded tales suffer castration. And even if we follow a different reading (Miquel, 52–53) that regards the slaves as having no social responsibility, their master's lack of complying with his responsibility of ensuring that the slaves will not cause any damage still results in the same dramatic consequences.

Even though the tales of the eunuchs are not necessary for developing the plot of the embedding tale, they are not at all superfluous in terms of narrative function. Instead, they serve as a narrative device to delay the action and keep the readers or listeners in suspense by diverting them with a number of strange and amusing short narratives. "They prolong the tension while Ghânim waits in hiding, and thereby augment our curiosity as to what is in the chest" (Gerhardt, 49, cf. 154–55). Only after the stories have been told does the plot continue. A similar technique is employed in various other tales of the *Nights*, particularly those that do not belong to the old core corpus.

A case in point is the tale of *Abu'l-Hasan, the Sleeper Awakened* (Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 392–93; Marzolph, "The Story of Abū 'l-Ḥasan the Wag"). In this tale, which is usually embedded in the lengthy romance of *ʿUmar ibn al-Nuʿmān*, the protagonist tells the story of the trickster (Arabic *ḥarfūsh*) and the cook when informing the caliph about his previous experience. The trickster consumes his meal, confident that he will eventually find a way to avoid having to pay, since he does not have any money. As he happens to see the bloody tail of a horse barely hidden under a vessel, he deduces that the cook has illegally mixed his food with horsemeat. So when the cook requests payment, the trickster alludes to the horse's tail. In order to cover up his misdeed, the cook pretends to remember his customer's payment and even offers to return him some change. This embedded tale is as unrelated to and unnecessary for the further development of the action as are the tales of the eunuchs in the tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb*. When comparing the different versions of the tale of *Abu'l-Hasan*, one can even demonstrate that the tale's earliest known version dating from the beginning of the seventeenth century (Basset, "Notes") does

not contain the embedded tale of the trickster and the cook that, consequently, appears to have been inserted at a fairly late stage of the tale's development in a conscious act of embellishment. But even so, in this case the embedded tale again serves as a commentary to demonstrate that whatever happens has a good reason behind it, a lesson that the host, Abū l-Ḥasan, teaches to his guest, the caliph, in order to make him understand that he will not be welcome a second time.

Another similarly effective narrative technique is practiced when in the tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb* only two of the three narratives promised are told. Folklore scholarship would traditionally regard such a gap as a "blind" or "blunted" element, implying either the degeneration of a previously "complete" version or the lack of attention or professional qualification on the part of the storyteller (Lüthi, 64–67). To the contrary, literary criticism in the vein of Wolfgang Iser's studies in reader-response criticism (182–203) convincingly argues that gaps or blanks in literature often constitute consciously employed elements. The gaps would allow readers to fill them with their own imagination, thus creating individually specific versions in each reader's mind. These individually specific versions would overlap only insofar as the readers share a common cultural background, or, in terms of narrative studies, insofar as the members of the audience belong to a shared web of tradition. Rather than disappointing the readers' expectations by creating dead ends, as folklore scholarship would tend to see it, gaps in the narrative potentially add to the literary work's attraction by encouraging the readers to communicate with and respond actively to the text they are reading. The discussion of consciously employed gaps or blanks in the text of the *Nights* also adds fuel to the fairly recent argument that the *Nights* is not a haphazard collection of "folkloric" tales—let alone tales that had been current in oral tradition since times immemorial. It is rather a diligently constructed compilation of "littérature moyenne" (Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une Nuits*, 15–20), that is, a literature in between "elite" and "popular" literatures whose authors were educated and versatile in using "folkloric" motifs to compile highly complex stories whose intricate design can be unraveled by diligent analysis.

In the tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb*, the promise of a tale that is not told, or, in other words, the creation of an expectation that remains unfulfilled, again adds to the establishment of an atmosphere of suspense that would keep the audience attentive and alert. In a similar vein, this device is practiced right at the beginning of the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights* in the tale of *The Merchant and the Jinnī* (Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 419–20). Here, a merchant is about to be

slaughtered by a demon for having unwittingly killed the demon's (invisible) son. He is ransomed by three old men who happen to pass by, each of whom tells his story so that the demon grants them a third share each in the merchant's blood. But then, only two of the three old men actually tell their stories (376–78). The text of the old manuscript mentions the story of the third old man only in passing as having been "even stranger and more amazing than the first two" (Haddawy, 29), without giving the reader a clue as to its actual content. In this instance, the compilers of the later manuscripts of the *Nights* neither shared the storyteller's aim nor the modern literary critic's assessment. Instead, they remedied the perceived lacuna by actually having the third old man tell his story in full (Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 378; Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une Nuits*, 100).

Another instance in the *Nights* in which readers might expect a tale that is never told—even though, to be exact, it is never promised—occurs toward the end of the tale of *The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad* (Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 324–26). When Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd has summoned the ladies to his court, he asks them to tell their stories, and the eldest lady and the portress do so (174–75, 326–27). But even though the text clearly mentions three ladies, the third lady never tells her story nor does the caliph ask her to do so. Whatever the storyteller's reason for not telling the tale of the third lady might have been, the audience would probably have been lenient toward such a minor slip of attention, since the frame tale in addition to a complex plot involving a total of nine major characters includes quite a number of embedded tales, and the embedding of yet another tale would risk delaying the tale's denouement beyond tolerable borders. In other words, even though there is a gap here, it is not displayed in a prominent way and might easily have escaped the audience's attention.

The Tales of the Third and First Eunuchs

The storyteller's promise to have three eunuchs narrate a crucial episode of their personal history prepares the audience for an amusing interlude in a tale that is otherwise ruled by mystery. In premodern Arabic tradition slaves, particularly black slaves, are often portrayed as dull witted and lazy, and even more so eunuchs. Even so, the humorous tales of the eunuchs do not just entertain the audience. They are as interwoven with other tales or narrative concepts of Arabic tradition as is the embedding tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb*. The tale of the third eunuch,

consciously untold, might have inspired the contemporary audience to fill the gap with another tale of the same genre. A particularly well-known item would have been the tale about the revenge of the slave who had been castrated by his master for having had sexual intercourse with the master's wife—even though this tale would not exactly offer itself for being told by the protagonist himself, since its Arabic version culminates in the slave's death. The tale about the castrated slave taking revenge—classified in comparative folk-narrative scholarship as tale type 844*: *The Revenge of the Castrated Man* (Uther, 1: 475)—was well known in classical and postclassical Arabic literature (Marzolph, *Arabia ridens*, 2: 105, no. 422). First documented in the important historical work compiled by al-Masʿūdī (died 956), the tale was repeatedly quoted in subsequent centuries. It was most likely known to the audience the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights* addressed, as it also appears in al-Ibshīhī's contemporary encyclopedia of all matters an educated Muslim Arab should know (Ibshīhī, 2: 170), a compilation that enjoys a certain popularity to the present day (Marzolph, "Medieval Knowledge").

The story of the first eunuch (Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 178) is rather short, relating how, when still an adolescent boy, the slave grew up as a close companion to his master's daughter. Once he inadvertently copulated with his master's daughter as she playfully straddled him; in consequence, his master had him castrated. Referring to the argument of the eunuch's tales as commentaries on social responsibility, it makes no functional difference whether we regard the slave as transgressing his role by copulating with his master's daughter (and consequently being castrated) or the master as neglecting the parental care for his daughter (who, even though unintentionally, has sex with the slave), since in the given cultural context the physical or social consequences for both parties are equally dramatic.

The compiler of the Manchester manuscript, one of the oldest manuscripts of the *Nights* preserved, obviously regarded this tale as unsuitable—probably because of its outspoken sexual component. Instead of eliminating the slaves' tales altogether, he replaced this particular one with a somewhat lengthy tale in which a black slave is castrated as punishment for having played a trick on the master's neighbor (Garcin, 137–38).

Cultural and Intertextual Relations of the Tale of the Second Eunuch

The second eunuch, whose given name is Kāfūr, begins his tale (Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 178–79) by mentioning that at the beginning of his career, when he was an eight-year-old slave boy, he "used to tell the slave-dealers one lie each year, to get them to quarrel with one another" (Lyons, 1: 283). One day, as his master was holding a banquet in a garden outside the city, the master sent him back to the house to fetch something. As the slave boy arrived at the house, he started to weep, pretending that an old wall had collapsed on top of his master. When his master's wife and daughters heard the news, they tore their clothes in grief and despair, struck their faces, turned the furniture of the house upside down, smashed the shelves, broke the windows and the lattices, and smeared the walls with mud and indigo, all the while spurring the slave boy to assist them in smashing the cupboards and breaking the vases, china, and everything else. Finally, they ordered him to show them the place where the master was lying dead under the wall. As the slave boy, leading the way, hurried to arrive at the garden sooner than everybody else, he pretended to his master that he was pouring dust on his head and striking his face because the house had collapsed, killing the mistress and all of the children. The devastating news of the annihilation of his family and all his belongings, delivered by the slave boy in an almost sadistic manner, caused the master to tear his clothes, pluck his beard, and beat his face in grief. Only when his wife and family arrived did both parties become aware of the slave boy's mischievous trick. After an extended period of complaint and reprehension, the master had the slave boy castrated, arguing, "As you burned my heart with regret for the things I held dearest, so I have made your heart burn for the loss of the dearest part of your body" (287). The eunuch terminates his story by mentioning that, ever since, he has served many different masters, constantly stirring up trouble in the households to which he had been sold, and finally ending up in the palace of the Commander of the Faithful, as he himself says, "with a broken spirit, having lost my strength as well as my testicles" (287). Again referring to the argument of the eunuch's tales as commentaries on social responsibility, the consequences for both concerned parties are similarly dramatic: the slave is castrated, and the master suffers a considerable material loss.

In terms of narrative classification, Kāfūr's tale combines elements belonging to the international tale types 1353: *The Old Woman as Trouble-Maker* (Uther, 2: 155) and 2040: *The Climax of Horrors* (2: 529–30). According to current research, both

tale types are first documented in pre-Mongol Arabic tradition (Marzolph, *Arabia ridens*, 2: 115, no. 459; 188, no. 811) and have subsequently enjoyed an international distribution.

In Arabic tradition, the initial motif of the slave who tells a lie once every year is firmly linked, albeit in the frame of a different action, with tale type 1353 ever since its first appearance. Early tenth-century author al-Bayhaqī, in his antithetical *adab*-work *al-Mahāsin wa-'l-masāwī* (The Good and the Bad Aspects of Things), narrates the following: Having been bought on condition that the new owner is aware of the slave telling a big lie once a year, at first life continues without any particular events. One day, however, the slave lies to the master's wife that her husband has fallen in love with another woman. In order to secure his love, she must prepare a charm, an essential ingredient of which is the hair from her husband's beard that she should cut from his throat when he is sleeping. At the same time, the slave lies to the master that his wife has fallen in love with another man and that in order to be free she will come to cut his throat while he is asleep. When the wife actually tries to cut some hair from her husband's throat at night, he thinks that she has come to kill him and slays her instead. As a result, there often follows an extended blood feud between the two families, in the course of which many people are killed.

The old Arabic tale makes it clear from the very beginning that the slave is sold and bought on condition that the former owner has mentioned the slave's shortcoming, and that the new owner has accepted to buy the slave with due acknowledgment of this defect. Meanwhile, the eunuch in the *Nights* at first mentions his nature of telling a lie once every year somewhat casually, and only later, when his owner threatens to punish him severely, refers to the conditions of the sale by saying: "you can't do anything to me because you bought me, fault and all. This was the condition and there are witnesses to testify that you bought me in spite of my fault. You know about it—the fact that I tell one lie each year" (Lyons, 1: 286).

In ancient Roman law "a seller was legally accountable for damages if the slave he sold turned out to be defective" (Baldwin, 58). Similarly, in Muslim law the condition of acknowledging the fact that an item offered for sale has a specific defect spares the seller of having to cope with eventual customer complaints or claims of regress, and in the specific case under consideration it also protects the slave from severe punishment. A fair amount of jocular narratives in pre-Mongol Arabic literature proves that this concept was well known to the premodern urban audience in the Arab world (Marzolph, *Arabia ridens*, 1: 210–11). For instance, a

customer returns a slave girl to the seller on the charge that she is stupid. When the seller appeals to the judge, the judge questions her and agrees with the buyer's evaluation (Ibn Qutayba, 1: 74). A slave is offered for sale with the following quality: "If you send him on an errand, you have to send somebody else after him." When the slave flees, the owner's complaint is to no avail, since the seller claims he had been adequately informed (Ābī, 4: 119). Another slave is advertised as wetting his bed at night. The potential customer, a Bedouin, is not concerned with this fault, calmly responding, "Let him first find a bed!" (Ibn al-Jawzī, 101). Similarly, a slave girl is advertised as having a tendency to run away, to wet her bed, and to steal. The customer is not worried, responding: "If she runs away, I will find her again; since she wets her bed, I'll have her sleep on the ground; and if she wants to steal—she won't find anything to eat at my place, much less something to steal!" (Ābī, 6: 483).[6]

When, at the beginning, the slave boy pretends to his mistress that his master has died, he does so in a fairly straightforward manner, and the ensuing action concentrates on the damage done as a result of the family's grief and despair. Even though the mischievous trick played by the slave boy would alone suffice to enrage his master to the point of punishing him severely, the tale's narrator stresses the fact that it was he himself who had caused the greatest damage in smashing the precious vases and the chinaware in the house. The slave boy's delight in causing mischief is furthermore emphasized by his claim that this particular incident was only, as he says, "half a lie," the rest of which would follow at a later date. In the end, the slave's ruthlessly destructive action serves to justify his master's action of taking him to the local prefect (the *wālī*) who gave him a fine beating, and of having the slave castrated in the end. When the slave boy later lies to his master that his family has been killed by the collapsing house, the narrative focuses on a sequence of pretended events. One after the other, the slave boy responds to the worried master's questions about the members of the family that each of them had died—his wife, the eldest daughter, his eldest son, even the riding mule, the sheep, the ducks, and the hens.

Although this passage is fairly short, its structure was bound to remind the premodern Arabic audience of another tale of lying that was widely known in Arabic tradition. It had an unbroken chain of tradition ranging from its first occurrence in al-Ābī's early eleventh-century encyclopedia of jokes and anecdotes (3: 291) via al-Ibshīhī's fifteenth-century encyclopedia (1: 382) up to a nineteenth-century compilation of the anecdotes attributed to the popular trickster and wise fool Juhā (Marzolph, *Arabia ridens*, 2: 188, no. 811). The main feature of that tale is the

character of the news that would change in relation to the hospitality granted or refused to an unwelcome guest: When the guest encounters a person who is enjoying a meal, he at first hopes to be invited to join and pretends that everyone at home is well. In al-Ābī's rudimentary version the family is fine, and the host's pregnant wife has given birth to healthy male twins. When the guest finally realizes that his stingy host is not going to share the meal with him, the news changes from bad to worse. First, the guest pretends that one of the twins has died, then the other one, and finally his host's wife. Later versions of the tale elaborate the chain of terrible events. When still hoping to be invited to share the meal, the guest pretends that his host's dog, his spouse, his son, his camel, and his house are all well and thriving. When realizing his host's stinginess, the guest then pretends that the dog has died from a bone getting stuck in its throat when devouring the meat of the camel; the camel is said to have died when tripping over the grave of his host's wife; his wife died mourning the death of his son; and his son died when the house collapsed on top of him. The result of the guest's cruel lies varies. In some versions, the host continues to eat without appearing to be emotionally moved; in others he is so deeply shocked by the turn of events that he stops eating or even runs away in despair. It is to this tale of lying that the tale of the second eunuch alludes to when the slave boy informs his master about the alleged death of his family. Given the wide distribution of the old tale, we may easily imagine that the author who included the eunuch's tale in the *Nights* was aware of the tale's tradition and that the audience would recognize and acknowledge the allusion.

International Versions of the Related Tales

The tales discussed above have also spread from their Arabic versions to European and international tradition. In doing so, they have often experienced specific adaptations, making them more suitable in the changed cultural and social contexts, thus ensuring their survival in both learned and popular tradition.[7]

The earliest known European version of the tale of the castrated slave taking revenge on his master appears in the *Itinerarium Kambriae*, the account of a travel through Wales that is interspersed with numerous insertions, compiled in Latin by Giraldus Cambrensis in three different versions around the year 1200. Since the concept of slavery did not play a similar role in medieval Europe as it did in the premodern Arabic context, the author here introduces a servant. And whereas the

Arabic versions have the slave punished by his master, the servant here jumps to his own death. Moreover, Giraldus Cambrensis has the servant blinded, in addition to his being castrated, and the blinding substitutes for the castration in the chronologically next European version in the anonymous *Compilatio singularis exemplorum* compiled toward the end of the thirteenth century. A similar replacement of the explicit act of castration takes place in the version included in Giovanni Gioviano Pontano's early sixteenth-century tract *De obedientia*, when the punished servant forces his master to cut off his own nose. Up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the tale is documented in a variety of Italian, French, English, and German sources. By way of the quotation in Simon Goulart's *Thresor d'histoires admirables et memorables de nostre temps* (A Treasury of Admirable and Memorable Stories of Our Time), published in 1610 (507–08), the tale would even have been accessible to educated readers at the time Galland introduced the *Nights* to French and, subsequently, world literature.

In the tale of *The Old Woman as Trouble-Maker*, the simple adaption of the slave in the Arabic version to a male servant was obviously not judged poignant enough by the medieval European authors. Instead, they chose to turn the tale into an exemplum warning against the evil character of women. It was twelfth-century Jewish author Joseph ibn Zabara in his *Sefer Sha'shu'im* (Book of Pleasures; Schreiber) who mediated the tale to the medieval European world by introducing the devil as a main character. He also added a distinctively misogynous perspective. In Ibn Zabara's version, the devil despairs since he is not able to sow discord between a loving couple. In the end, he promises a rich reward to an old woman who claims that she could achieve what the devil failed to achieve. From here on, the tale follows the well-known sequence of actions. In some of the later European versions, the tale's misogynous character is further elaborated: When the devil is finally forced to give the old woman her reward, he fears her mischief so much that he hands her the promised pair of shoes only from a distance and attached to a long pole. Whereas the tale's Arabic version suggests itself to be read as a warning against the destructive potential of male intrigue, the Western (male) authors externalized the malevolent aspect of the scheming character by attributing it to the mischievous old woman.

Incidentally, a similar introduction of a misogynous perspective also took place in another tale that experienced a narrative acculturation from its earlier version in classical Arabic literature to subsequently adapted versions in the medieval European literatures. International tale type 1553: *An Ox for Five Pennies* (Uther, 2: 292–93) tells of a man who, when trapped in a desperate situation, vows to sell a

large farm animal without personal gain. When he has safely escaped the danger, he advertises the animal as promised. Meanwhile, he will sell it only on condition that the customer buys the large animal together with a small and comparatively worthless animal for which he requests a large amount of money. Structurally related to tale type 778: *To Sacrifice a Giant Candle* (Uther, 1: 434–35; Neumann), an Aesopic fable in which a person in distress promises to sacrifice a large candle only to reduce the candle's size gradually as the danger ceases, tale type 1553 is first attested in eleventh-century Arabic literature (Marzolph, *Arabia ridens*, 1: 234, no. 1065). In the old Arabic version, the tale's protagonist is a Bedouin, the large farm animal is a camel, and the small animal that is actually tied to the larger animal's neck is a cat. The tale's widely documented European version, first quoted in the twelfth century in the *Fables* of Marie de France, mentions a peasant, an ox, and a cock. As the Arabic version is chronologically prior to the European one, the tale's European version is likely an adaptation. The European peasant is a close equivalent to the Arabic Bedouin, and both the cock and the cat are frequently encountered small animals in the cultural contexts of the rural societies referred to. Since, however, a camel would make little sense in a European context, the European version substitutes an ox as the large farm animal. Besides the change of animals that was necessary to adapt the tale to the European context and to supply it with a regional flavor, the dominant European versions again supply the tale with a misogynous perspective. In the tale's old Arabic versions, the man is introduced as a trickster who consciously aims to avoid the negative effects of his vow. In the dominant Christian European versions, the man has no clue how to avoid the negative effects of his vow and has to be advised by his wife.[8] Even though in today's popular opinion Muslim cultures are often perceived as inherently misogynous, the character of the scheming woman may serve to remind modern readers that the misogynous attitude of medieval Christian European literatures was at least as pronounced as that of their contemporary Muslim Arabic counterpart (Lundt, 163–69).

And finally, the Arabic tale of the *Climax of Horrors* was mediated to the Western world by both French preacher Jacques de Vitry, who had served as bishop of the Palestinian city of Akko since 1214, and Petrus Alfonsus (died after 1121), a Spanish Jew converted to Christianity, in his *Discplina clericalis*. The latter work was highly influential for the tale's dissemination in the West, resulting in dozens of versions recorded from oral tradition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The raven mentioned instead of the dog in German author Johann Peter Hebels *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreunds* (1811) probably resulted from a misreading of the Latin

text, from which the word *canis* (dog) might have been misread as *corvus* (raven). Out of the many minor variations introduced in the course of the tale's tradition, it is particularly interesting to note that a version of the tale documented from nineteenth-century Afghan Pashto tradition again links the climax of horrors to the tale of the lying slave by introducing the unwelcome guest as a habitual liar (Thorburn, 183–84).

Conclusion

The above considerations demonstrate the complexity of the narrative craft practiced by the narrators of the *Nights*. The neglect or marginalization of the second eunuch's tale on the part of European translators and scholars shows that they did not share in the cultural universe of the tale's tellers and textualizers, as they could not grasp either the tale's intertextual or its cultural salience. Talented storytellers did not only focus on the performance of a single story by itself. They would rather weave the manifold strings of the web of tradition they belonged to into a complex structure of narrative motifs, many of which alluded to similar tales or otherwise rang a bell in the audience's memory. Studies of historical narratives, such as the present one, can help to reconstruct this web of tradition, even though the analysis can at best suggest a range of possible links that may or may not have been actively present in the mind of both the storytellers and the audience. It is the powerful devices of storytelling and the ingenious craft of storytellers that we witness so often in the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*, even in instances that might at first appear simple, badly told, or simply marginal.

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■ NOTES

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2. The repetitive use of specific motifs alluded to here differs from the technique of "repetitive designation" identified by David Pinault, by which he groups "repeated references to some character or object which appears insignificant when first mentioned but which reappears later to intrude suddenly on the narrative" (16–18). For a list of closely corresponding stories quoted in the *Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, see Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 783–86. An extensive survey of narrative motifs in the *Nights* is El-Shamy.
3. Oestrup, 252. The statement is repeated almost verbatim half a century later by Littmann, 358.
4. For a detailed discussion of narrative motifs in the tale of *Ghānim ibn Ayyūb*, see Chraïbi, *Contes nouveaux*, 46–56.
5. For the motif of the graveyard, see Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 79, 317–19, 337–38; Hamori, "Folklore in Tanūkhī"; Hamori, "La Maison de l'amour incestueux"; Chraïbi, *Contes nouveaux*, 17–82; Basset, *Mille et un contes*, 1: 318–20, no. 6; for the motif "caliph's favorite slave-girl abducted," see Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, 1: 69–70, 252–54; for Qūt al-qulūb, see ibid. 312–13, 333–36.
6. Customary law in medieval Europe has given rise to similarly structured jocular tales. For instance, tale type 1631: *Horse That Will Not Go over Trees* (Uther, 2: 339; Fährmann) introduces a dealer advertising a horse that eats a lot and refuses to cross wooden logs. At first, the customer is not impressed, until he learns from his own experience that the horse viciously bites anybody passing by and refuses to cross a wooden bridge. The owner's complaint, however, is to no avail, since he has been adequately informed (although in veiled terms).
7. For detailed references to the following discussion of the tales in international tradition, see Marzolph, "Rache des Kastrierten," "Weib: Böses W. schlimmer als der

Teufel," "Ochse für fünf Pfennig," and "Häufung des Schreckens."

8. To be exact, already in two twelfth-century Arabic versions the man is advised by his wife. This is, however, motivated by the fact that the man had previously vowed to divorce his wife because she had made him leave the house, following which he had found a treasure, bought the camel, got annoyed by the animal, and vowed to sell it.

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