4

Resituating *The Arabian Nights*

Challenges and Promises of Translation

[Scheherazade] avait un courage au-dessus de son sexe, de l'esprit infiniment avec une pénétration admirable. Elle avait beaucoup de lecture et une mémoire si prodigieuse, que rien ne lui était échappé de tout ce qu'elle avait lu. Elle s'était heureusement appliquée à la philosophie, à la médecine, à l'histoire et aux arts; elle faisait des vers mieux que les poètes les plus célèbres de son temps. Outre cela, elle était pourvue d'une beauté extraordinaire, et une vertu très solide couronnait toutes ces belles qualités.

Le vizir aimait passionnément une fille si digne de sa tendresse. Un jour qu'ils s'entretenaient tous deux ensemble, elle lui dit: "Mon père, j'ai une grâce à vous demander; je vous supplie très humblement de me l'accorder."

—*Les mille et une nuit*, 1704, Antoine Galland's translation of *Alf layla wa-layla* (fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Arabic MS of Syrian origin now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

Scheherazade was possessed of a degree of courage beyond her sex, joined to an extent of knowledge, and degree of penetration that was truly astonishing. She had read much, and was possessed of so great a memory, that she never forgot anything, she had once perused. She had applied also, with much success, to philosophy, to medicine, to history, and to the arts; and made better verses than the most celebrated poets of the time. Besides this, her beauty was incomparable; and her virtuous disposition crowned all those valuable qualities.

The Vizier was passionately fond of so deserving a daughter. As they were conversing together one day, she addressed him with these words. "I have a favor to ask of you, my father. And I entreat you not to refuse me."

—*Arabian Nights*, 1802, Edward Forster's translation of Galland's translation

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[The vizier's] older daughter, Shahrazad, had read the books of literature, philosophy, and medicine. She knew poetry by heart, had studied historical reports, and was acquainted with the sayings of men and the maxims of sages and kings. She was intelligent, knowledgeable, wise, and refined. She had read and learned. One day she said to her father, "Father, I will tell you what is in my mind."

ARABIAN NIGHTS, 1990, Husain Haddawy's translation of Muhsin Mahdi's edition of *Alf layla wa-layla* (fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Arabic MS of Syrian origin now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

Adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* play out a related but different economy of wonder genres from the one I explored in chapter 3, and crucial to their global production and reception for several centuries now has been the mostly naturalized work of translation, as standing in for adaptation and constructing the "Orient" as other. Thus when I teach the *Arabian Nights*, I find it particularly important—even if and in a way even more because I am ignorant of the Arabic language—to do so in ways that call attention to the politics of translation (Spivak 1993; Venuti 1998) but also foster a "culture of translation" (Shankar 2012, 141).[1] In my classes, this means analyzing at least selections from different English-language translations to foreground how their varied poetics inflect the representation of characters, social world, style, and the supernatural in *Arabian Nights*. I do this to denaturalize appropriative misreadings and stereotyping, and also to reinforce the understanding that translation—like storytelling, like reading, and like adapting—always involves interpretation and transformative choices. I have found that looking at how Edward Forster, Edward William Lane, John Payne, Richard Burton, Powys Mathers, Husain Haddawy, and (most recently) the Malcolm C. and Ursula Lyons team introduce Shahrazad, the bold heroine and wonderful storyteller of *The Thousand and One Nights/Arabian Nights*, to their readers is, for instance, a good place to start. She is an extremely well read woman in all translations, but in turn she is also beautiful, wise, polite, sweetly eloquent, incomparable, well bred, phenomenal at memorizing book knowledge, avid as a book collector, or active in learning from books and sayings. Whether the translators are working from Arabic manuscripts, Antoine Galland's immensely influential French translation, or other French

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and English texts; what their knowledge of and investment in Arabic language and cultures are; and to which Euro-American discursive paradigms (fantasy, ethnology, erotica, Arabic literature) they contribute also matters, and so we try to get at least a rudimental understanding of the translators' varied historical contexts, positionalities, and legacies. The point being not to become experts in the *Arabian Nights* but to gain and put to work a stronger awareness of what translation is: an act of reading and rewriting that the discourse of (in)fidelity often obscures;[2] "a necessary impossibility" (Spivak 2005, 105), meaning an impossible task and an indispensable practice; an act of social engagement and recontextualization, whatever its politics and uses (Tymoczko 2010).

Generally speaking, some ways for those of us in cultural and narrative studies to promote this kind of culture of translation more widely are to foreground the workings of translation in the construction of literary and generic systems, whether national or transnational, rather than relying on their invisible labor (Lefevere 1992a; Venuti 2000; Schlump 2011); to consider how translation into a hegemonic language like English affects at-risk languages (for example, St-Pierre 2000; Kuwada 2009b; Aiu 2010) and how translating from and back into colonizing languages can function as resistance or activism (for example, Christie 2009; Kuwada 2009a); to learn/actively use languages other than English and produce translations as a form of activism or resistance to a "multiculturalism that goes hand in hand with monolingualism" (Spivak 2010, 38); to be attentive to the strategies and practices of translation, not to evaluate them as reproductive acts, but to discriminate among their transformative effects.[3]

In this chapter, as I give my attention to the transformative strategies of a few contemporary adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* in North America, I am particularly interested in reflecting on four aspects of translation. One, while they produce different sets of expectations, translation and adaptation are both acts of reading and rewriting, and "rewriters create images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes even a whole literature" (Lefevere 1992b, 5). My discussion will shuttle back and forth between translation as adaptation and adaptation as translation because the way that translation and adaptation have been heavily imbricated with each other in the history of the *Arabian Nights*' production and reception necessarily impacts how we receive new adaptations today. Two, in paying attention to how translations and adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* relocate it within a universalizing hierarchy of Western wonder genres, and how in Indo-European languages the act of translation is consistently associated with movement of meaning across space, I focus on the strategies of "transporting" and "displacing" characters as symptoms of this geopolitical shift. Three, because translation always figures ethical and political choices, I am especially

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interested in translations-adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* operating in the violent climate of pre- and post-9/11, specifically their ideologies of representation and the antagonistic or humanist bent of their poetics. And four, translation has done and continues to do violence to subaltern/colonized/Orientalized cultures, but translations and adaptations also enable us to act on the imperative of becoming more response-able to the diversity of knowledge and artistic systems of stories (King 2005) across conceptual and cultural horizons.

ADAPTATION AS DOMESTICATING TRANSLATION: THE GENIE AS PAWN IN THE QUEEN'S CHECKMATE

Aired in the United States on January 29, 2012, "Fruit of the Poisonous Tree," the eleventh episode of the first season of ABC's television series *Once Upon a Time*, offers one example of how the generic and cultural othering of *Arabian Nights* works in a monological popular-culture framework. This episode transports a Genie presumably from the *Arabian Nights* (Giancarlo Esposito) into the Disney-like fairy-tale land that in the TV show parallels the Storybrooke "realistic" world, in order to provide a backstory for the making of the wicked Queen (Lana Parilla playing Snow White's stepmother and Mayor Regina's otherworldly person) and for Storybrooke's reporter Sidney Glass (the Genie's alter ego). As a way into the larger discussion of *Arabian Nights*' relation to Western fairy tales in twenty-first-century adaptations, I focus here on the role of the Genie in the "Snow White" plot and on what his role tells us about the hierarchy of magic represented by the lamp's wishes, on the one hand, and the queen's wiles, on the other.

Snow White's father, King Leopold (Richard Schiff), who has inadvertently summoned the Genie of Agrabah by rubbing a magic lamp he found near the shore, somewhat surprisingly states he wants nothing for himself when informed of his three wishes.[4] The King nevertheless makes two wishes, one to set the Genie free and the other to grant him the third and final wish. The Genie is delighted with his freedom, but states he will never use his wish based on his knowledge of how the 1,001 wishes he granted have all ended badly; instead, he plans to use his freedom from the lamp to find "true love."

The Genie's image and the script he is written into after this initial encounter hold few surprises, in spite of his freedom and the change in settings. The Genie of Agrabah—an explicit reference to Disney's *Aladdin* movie (1992)[5]—wears the obligatory turban; his colorful clothing, curly goatee, and accentuated eye makeup give him a mysterious, exotic, and somewhat feminized look. Having accepted the invitation to stay in King Leopold's kingdom, he immediately

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PLATE 41. The King and the lamp in *Once Upon a Time*

falls for his benefactor's wife, Snow White's stepmother. While the Queen's skin may not be "as white as snow," meaning she does not have the innocence of Snow White and cannot ultimately replace Snow White's mother in the King's heart, her beauty is enough of a lure to enslave the dark-skinned Genie to the Queen. Significantly, Regina is wearing an off-white gown when they first meet under the special apple tree she has brought to the palace grounds, and (for the first season of *Once Upon a Time*) in both Storybrooke and King Leopold's kingdom, Sidney/the Genie is the only nonwhite character and actor. Another "Snow White" motif, from the Grimms' version, makes its appearance when the Genie gives the Queen a gift, a beautiful mirror so she can see herself as he does, as "the fairest in the land." That they continue to meet near the apple tree reinforces the connection with the "Snow White" tale but also with the Garden of Eden scene, especially when a two-headed viper comes into the plot and the Genie, while still appearing wise and honorable, starts to act deviously with the King and foolishly with the Queen. Having eaten the fruit of Regina's apple tree, the Genie is clearly domesticated into a storyworld where he has no special powers and elicits no fear or wonder.[6]

Spectators are likely to realize that Regina is manipulating the Genie much earlier than he does. Under Regina's spell, the Genie believes she needs saving so he kills King Leopold only to realize too late that she has played him and that the two-headed viper of Agrabah she chose as their weapon points clearly to him as the King's assassin. Confronted by the Queen's explicit statement that he "is

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PLATE 42. The scene of temptation in *Once Upon a Time*

no longer of any use" to her, the Genie defiantly brings out the magic lamp and makes his wish to "be with [her] forever, to look upon [her] face forever." That wishes always end poorly is confirmed when the Genie finds himself once more a prisoner, this time of Regina's looking glass.

This scene of wish fulfillment run amok connects intertextually with the *Arabian Nights* as well as with "Snow White." In "The Story of the Fisherman and the Demon" (Haddawy 1990, 30–66), the fisherman cleverly tricks the powerful being who wants to kill him into returning to the jar from which the fisherman had freed him.[7] Regina, like the fisherman, deceives the Genie into doing what she wants, but he poses no threat to her and is only susceptible to her guile because he is in love with her. The magic mirror in which the *Once Upon a Time* Genie is imprisoned also recalls the most popular "Snow White" narratives, the Grimms' and Disney's, but in contrast to them its voice and image are recognizably those of a character we know has an intensely personal attachment to the Queen. In particular, the Genie's dark features stand out against the pale mask in the Disney mirror, as does the Genie's anguish against Disney's dispassionately abstract figure in the mirror. The not-so-wise Genie in the *Once Upon a Time* mirror will continue to confirm the power of Regina's beauty to her, and in Storybrooke he will continue to do her bidding as Sidney, the editor of the *Daily Mirror*.[8] Clearly, the Queen from the "Snow White" tale wins the power game in "Fruit of the Poisonous Tree" all around, and within *her* story the

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PLATE 43. The Genie in Regina's mirror in *Once Upon a Time*

violent, because emotional and foolish, Genie of the *Arabian Nights* is enslaved to her and faces her contempt.[9]

In this fairy-tale/*Arabian Nights* remix, the traditional "Snow White" tale has been altered by Regina's plotting to kill her husband, but the function of the Genie in the "Snow White" adaptation is narratively clear and fitting: he serves as her magic helper, though magic refers more to his being than to his actions. In contrast, the matter of how this Genie in *Once Upon a Time* relates to the *Arabian Nights* narratives remains vague and also somewhat extraneous to most spectators' expectations. After all, "Fruit of the Poisonous Tree" features the Genie as one of the iconic images from *Aladdin* the movie, not "The Story of Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp," and the link I made earlier with "The Story of the Fisherman and the Demon" is likely to be perceived by many viewers of the show as rather esoteric. Overall, this episode of *Once Upon a Time* transports the Genie as a narrative prop into the storyworld of the "Snow White" fairy-tale adaptation and capitalizes, in its visual and thematic tropes, on the generalized familiarity its target audience has with an *Arabian Nights* phenomenon that, over centuries, has transformed *Alf layla wa-layla* or *The Thousand and One Nights* into the globalized *visual* production of an exoticized magic that embodies both eroticism and deviousness. Before turning to an analysis of other North American contemporary *Arabian Nights* adaptations, I will offer a brief synthesis of this translation or transformative rewriting process across cultures, languages,

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and media, and then link two specific aspects of it to the critical questions this chapter explores.[10]

THE TRANSLATION-ADAPTATION OF *THE NIGHTS* AND THE EVERYDAY POLITICS OF MEDIA TEXT

About *The Thousand and One Nights* in European culture, Francesco Gabrieli wrote in 1947 that following Antoine Galland's early eighteenth-century "free version" of it in French, "the West came to be submitted to the reign of the Eastern tale and fable" (Gabrieli [1947] 2010, 426). This is an accurate statement in that *The Thousand and One Nights*, almost as popular as the Bible in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was widely read in its various translations and adaptations (Irwin 2004a), and that it influenced fashion and art (as seen in the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, George Lord Byron, Charles Dickens, and Robert Louis Stevenson, to name only a few English-language examples). But true? Only if one takes Gabrieli's point to mean that the West fell under the spell of what it construed, in Orientalist fashion (Said 1978), to be "the Eastern tale and fable" and continued to refashion into the European and then globalized cultural phenomenon of *The Arabian Nights* (Marzolph 2007, 30).

The textual history of *The Thousand and One Nights* and the transnational cultural morphing of the *Arabian Nights* are immensely complex. Here are the basics of what I learned from reading scholars as well as teaching the tales in translation (Haddawy 1990; Irwin [1994] 2004a; Marzolph and van Leeuwen 2004; Marzolph 2007; Chraïbi 2007; Marzolph 2008; Nurse 2010; Warner 2012). Including stories that generally portray a Muslim storyworld from the medieval or Abbasid and Mamluk period, but are mainly from Indian, Persian, and Arabic (Syrian and Egyptian) traditions and date back to manuscripts from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries, *The Thousand and One Nights* was never simply one book, in manuscript or print form, and it was never in print until Antoine Galland published it in a French adaptation (1704–15) in twelve volumes. It was generically eclectic (integrating jokes, epics, legends, and didactic and wonder tales) but projected for the most part the values of a mercantile class (Chraïbi 2004);[11] its storyworld portrayed characters from various religions and parts of the world; and at its core covered some two hundred nights of storytelling, never a thousand and one. It is by now widely known that Antoine Galland added the tales most immediately associated with the *Arabian Nights*, such as "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp" and "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," having heard them from Syrian Maronite storyteller Hanna Diyab in Paris; known as the "orphan tales" (Gerhardt [1963] 2010), these were not in Arabic manuscripts until,

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for instance, "Aladdin" was translated from Galland's French writings. Characteristic of the collection are its *khurafat* (amazing or fantastic narratives dealing with the supernatural), ransom tales, and their embeddedness in frame stories, often multiply layered, as they are offered by several characters turned intra- but also extradiegetic narrators in Shahrazad's tales to Shahriyar.

Issues concerning the global circulation and popularity of *The Thousand and One Nights* are just as complicated as its textual history. Partly because of its vernacular and folkloric features, *The Thousand and One Nights* was definitely not considered a masterpiece in the context of the rich traditions of classic Arabic literature, but it has been revalued and adapted in the second half of the twentieth century, especially in Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian literary texts. In European literature, specific intertextual links with stories from *The Thousand and One Nights* are active as early as in Giovanni Sercambi's *Novella d'Astolfo* (circa 1400) and Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516–32),[12] and more tenuous links in early collections of fairy tales such as Giovan Francesco Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti* (1550–53) and Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* (1634–36) suggest story trafficking across cultures and continents had an impact long before Galland's translation/adaptation. In the nineteenth century, European adaptations of *The Thousand and One Nights* were also translated into non-European languages, including Hawaiian, not necessarily with an Orientalist bent (Bacchilega and Arista 2007), and Japanese (Sugita 2006), eliciting new fantasies and further adaptations by writers, illustrators, and filmmakers, including contemporary anime artist Hayao Miyazaki. Even the basics about *The Thousand and One Nights* are exceedingly complex.

For my limited purposes here, I am interested specifically in two aspects of this baggy history of translations and exchanges as intersecting in current adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* and their production of wonder. First, the *Arabian Nights'* transformation into a "media text" of visual culture; second, the relationship between histories and fantasy that such adaptations construct, especially in a post-9/11 globalized culture. My focus in tracking these links is to explore whether and to what extent Western adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* contribute to a renewed politics of wonder that demands *re*translating across media and cultures so as to decouple Orientalist or stereotypical associations and resituate story power within cultural and historical specificities.

What am I calling a media text? A specific formation of popular cultural memory, "media text" is what Karin Kukkonen describes as Roland Barthes's *déjà lu* or "already-read," the "conventions and codes established through *other* texts" to identify a "source text," in this case the *Arabian Nights* without actually reading it (Kukkonen 2008, 262, my emphasis). While the *Arabian Nights*

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through translations and adaptations has continued to be transformed worldwide over the last three hundred years, in the twentieth century the book "ceased to be part of the common literary culture of adults" (Irwin [1994] 2004a, 274; see also Nurse 192–93); however, its confinement to children's literature was at the same time balanced by its popularization in film where the wonders of technology capitalized on those of the stories. As early as 1899 with George Albert Smith's *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*, 1902 with Ferdinand Zecca's *Ali Baba et les Quarante Voleurs*, and 1905 with Georges Méliès's *The Palace of the One Thousand and One Nights*; then with Lotte Reiniger's 1926 *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* and *The Thief of Bagdad* in 1924 (US production directed by Raoul Walsh, starring Douglas Fairbanks) and in 1940 (UK production directed by Ludwig Berger, Powell, and others), and on to Disney studio's animated 1992 *Aladdin*, characters, motifs, and landscapes associated with *The Thousand and One Nights* dazzled adults and children (Irwin 2004b; Zipes 2011; Butler 2009). With films as its most prominent aspect,[13] but also with illustrations, television shows, Halloween costumes and toys, flying-carpet images, and more recently video games, visual culture has contributed a great deal to our twenty-first-century experience of the *Arabian Nights* phenomenon as a media text.

As media text, the *Arabian Nights* has been increasingly reduced to Aladdin, Ali Baba, and Sindbad since these are the heroes of action movies and children's cartoons. Because it clashes with such structures of adventure and action stories (Butler 2009, 61), Shahrazad and Shahriyar's[14] frame narrative is conspicuously absent from screen adaptations, with Hallmark Entertainment's *Arabian Nights* (2000) as a rare exception in which, however, the brave and wise heroine is domesticated to American family values (Orme 2010c). As media text, the *Arabian Nights*' main props are eclectically "Oriental," and in Robert Irwin's words, they "signal fantasyland. As Ray Harryhausen remarked: 'When you are making a picture about the *Arabian Nights*, there are certain things you are going to have which are repetitious, like a sword and a turban' " (Irwin 2004b, 24).[15] Genies, magic lamps and rings, flying carpets; splendor, astounding riches, the legendary Roc bird (as seen in the 1962 *Uncle Scrooge* comic "The Cave of Ali Baba); and—when the images are not for children only—sexual pleasures have become the wonders that brand this *Arabian Nights* world.

This kind of fantasy connects very little with the histories of the diverse peoples who produced *The Thousand and One Nights* or with the history of the tales as they migrated and impacted a range of cultures and literatures over the centuries. Nevertheless, coinciding with a time of intellectual secularism in Europe, the publication of Galland's *Les mille et une nuit* [*sic*] has had quite a lasting legacy outside of the Arab world as it constructed not only an exotic and

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sumptuously imaginary space of magical riches but also a pseudo-ethnographic knowledge of the people that by the nineteenth century European powers—especially, though not exclusively, Britain and France—sought to colonize. What does a fictional text tell us about the people who produced it? A lot, which should not, however, be confused with the people's "nature" or be replacing their actual histories, contributions to world civilization, and lived realities. What "if the tales compiled by the Brothers Grimm, however evocative, were all that were known of German literature and were considered all that was needed for an understanding of the German people?" (Kabbani 2004, 26). What's more, to a substantial degree, the producers of the *Arabian Nights* and its storyworld were its European translators or, better, adaptors who—we can say in retrospect—in the process participated in popularizing a multidisciplinary discourse about the people of/fictionalized in the *Arabian Nights* and thus contributed to the reproduction of a limited inventory of dehumanizing tropes and the naturalization of Orientalist disciplinary practices to manage these "strange" people.[16]

Within *The Thousand and One Nights*, Shahrazad refers to her tales as "strange and lovely" or as "strange and amazing" (in Haddawy's translation (1990) see for example 18 and 25), which I would say connects with the production of a state of wonder she is seeking to elicit in Shahriyar so as to open him up to respond to the unexpected, in particular to what he does not expect of women and in himself—and, metanarratively, with the wonder the narrator of an oral or written version of the tales wants to elicit in listeners or readers. However, as Europeans came to enjoy these wonder-filled entertainments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they also insisted on "a political vision of reality whose structures promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, "us") and the *strange* (the Orient, the East, "them")" (Said 1978, 43, my emphasis). Etymologically as well as culturally, in French, English, Italian, and other European languages the "strange" is the "stranger," and even today the *Arabian Nights* as media text plays a formative role in what passes for outsiders' "knowledge," that is, our sanctioned ignorance of the so-called Orient, of the Middle-Eastern or Arabic stranger. In this media text, and at large in the Hollywood imaginary, the "other" who is from the Arab world automatically becomes a Muslim: barbaric, violent, and devious if male; oppressed, licentious, and devious if female (Shaheen 2003; Cooperson 1994).[17]

This has been going on for a long time, and not without protests. It is well known, for instance, that in response to complaints from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), Disney Studio revised the most offensive lines in the "Arabian Nights" song that opened *Aladdin* (1992).[18] But following the September 11, 2001, hijackings and attack on the Twin Towers,

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anti-Muslim sentiments have escalated in the United States, and the conflation of "Arab" with "Muslim" and "violent Muslim stereotype" has further fantastically become equated with "terrorist."[19] Anti-Islamic hate crimes went to being the "second highest reported among religious-bias incidents" in 2001, the FBI reported, and these statistics remain unchanged in their 2010 report.[20]

This violence brings a new gravity to the deployment of *Arabian Nights* tropes in the public sphere, popular culture, and everyday usage.[21] I will point just to one "Ali Baba" example. At the time US troops were withdrawing from Iraq after almost nine years of war, Fox News' Geraldo Rivera wrote a blog entry for December 16, 2011, titled "Back in Iraq with U.S. Soldiers on the Journey Home," where he reminisced: "When looters we called Ali Baba's began tearing apart Baghdad shortly after our triumphant March 2003 invasion, we hoped it was just an exuberant display of long-suppressed freedom from tyranny." This reference signals not only how popular the association of thief and Arab is, but how well the *Arabian Nights* media-text iconic figure serves the purposes of profiling and dehumanizing.[22] The question of where the actual responsibility lies for looting not only the banks, hotels, and government buildings, but the museums of Baghdad in 2003 is successfully deflected here thanks to the tacit understanding that it is in the nature of these people to be violent and steal. Reports on these violent events taking place at a time of chaos in a city of several million vary, and a May 2003 article in the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* covered the story that, according to Iraqi witnesses, some American soldiers instigated the plundering themselves, saying "Go in, Ali Baba, it's all yours!" (Sommerfeld 2003).[23] Yet another German newspaper reported a more violent use of the epithet on the part of American troops in 2003, which resulted in an Amnesty International's request that there be a further investigation of possible violation of human rights.[24] While it is hard to assess the reliability of sources documenting the specifics of its circulation, it is clear that "Ali Baba" became for American troops at the time an almost generic term for Iraqi looters.

Antoine Galland, who introduced "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" into the *Arabian Nights* Western canon, is clearly not the one responsible for such vilifying contemporary usage. Galland's intervention as a translator and adaptor was not only vastly influential but also complex and sustained by admiration, not racism.[25] Its unforeseeable effects point simultaneously to how in the production of the *Arabian Nights* phenomenon there is no single use or project, just as there isn't in the history of the fairy-tale genre in general, and to how the expropriation of *Arabian Nights*' wonders has been and continues to be naturalized or masked by their branding as "exotic" or "other." In his presentation on the *Arabian Nights* at the 2010 American Folklore Society meeting, Ulrich

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Marzolph (2010) productively connected political and textual concerns in this way: "For the purpose of my presentation, disregarding or neglecting the fact that Muslim terrorists are not representative of Islam as a whole is equal to regarding the world of the *Thousand and One Nights* as a legitimate playground for Western fantasy while disregarding their highly complex and diverse character." He concluded that the " 'experts'—whether those of Islam or those of the *Thousand and One Nights*—hold the key to preventing the solidification and further growth of biased notions." Marina Warner's 2012 visionary book, *Stranger Magic*, takes on this project by making the case that "reading the *Nights* as a case study in the contact zones of history offers a path towards changing preconceptions about Arabs, Islam, and the history and civilization of the Middle and Near East" (Warner 2012, 26). In whatever ways we can, we all—not just scholars, but artists, readers, fans, bloggers, and spectators—have a responsibility to counter this politics of inequality.

In the next two sections, the main question I will be asking of specific *Arabian Nights* adaptations is whether and how they contest this naturalized and vilifying imaginary, especially in light of the escalation of Islamophobic violence in a post-9/11 cultural economy. Because peoples and their cultures are equated wholesale with one another in the limited language of exoticizing, and because their stories function in a hierarchical economy of genres, my query extends to metanarrative considerations: how do these adaptations figure the *Arabian Nights* in relation to the modern genre of the fairy tale, or what is their story-power relation? Metacritically, this chapter seeks to activate links in the folk and fairy-tale web to three specific points about translating/adapting/deploying *Arabian Nights* across cultures and media: translation is an ethical and political act that "does not merely reflect existing knowledge, it can also . . . construct knowledge, much of which becomes the foundation of representation" (Tymoczko 2010, 16), and this applies just as much to adaptation; any discussion of the *Arabian Nights* today will benefit from taking into account the interplay of visual and verbal codes and tropes (Ouyang 2003; Kukkonen 2011) in an intertextuality that is not only intermedial but also immersed in the everyday politics of culture, and if stories "need not report on real life, but clear the way to changing the experience of living it" (Warner 2012, 27), the stakes of such a transformation are dramatically high within the *Arabian Nights* with its life-or-death outcome as well as in the everyday politics of its global circulation today. Do these adaptations contest the popularization of *Arabian Nights* as repository of vilifying stereotypes? Do they reproduce the iconic wonders we have come to expect in *Arabian Nights*, and to what purposes? Do they activate other links that invite us to approach the tales, and the worlds they come from, in and with wonder, and

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how? The next two sections ask these questions of two North American adaptations, respectively a comic-book series and a play, both of which make explicit reference to current events and struggles in the Middle East.

TRANSLATION AS TRANSPORTING AND DISPLACING CHARACTERS: FANTASIES OF DIPLOMACY, VIOLENCE, AND USURPATION

Fables, Bill Willingham's series of comics and the winner of multiple Eisner awards, is ten years old in 2012 and going strong. Published by Vertigo, a subsidiary of DC Comics known for its adult themes, issues of *Fables* appear monthly and are then republished in trade volumes, of which the first eleven comprised a complex "journey of connected stories" that over six years took readers down what its creator called "The Fables Road" (Willingham 2008a, 178). The journey has since successfully continued (as I write this chapter, issue #114 is for sale, and there are at least seventeen volumes), and the road has forked, expanding the *Fables* "universe" to other series, such as *Jack of Fables* (2006–), *Cinderella from Fabletown with Love* (2009–), and *Fairest* (2012–). Authored by Willingham in its entirety and illustrated by many artists (Mark Buckingham most prominently, but also Lan Medina, Steve Leialoha, Charles Vess, Mark Wheatley, and others), *Fables* features fairy-tale characters and nursery-rhyme/fantasy beings who call themselves Fables and, unbeknownst to the Mundies (mundane humans, akin to "muggles" in the *Harry Potter* series) in New York City, have lived there for centuries in the underground community of Fabletown.[26] As the title of the first volume, *Legends in Exile*, announces (Willingham 2002), because the mysterious and powerful Adversary invaded their Homelands and many kingdoms, the Fables sought refuge in "this dreary mundane place: the one world the Adversary seemed to take no interest in" (84). Needless to say, this truce did not last long: over the many volumes, not only is the Adversary revealed to be Geppetto, Pinocchio's and other wooden puppets' creator, but also there is an "all-out war" between Fabletown and the Adversary's Empire in which the various Fables prove their different kinds of heroism. In the process, the exiled-in-New-York Fables interact with "Arabian Fables," and I will analyze the ideology of these encounters between characters, but also between narratives, against the backdrop of the series' intertextual politics.

As seen in Karin Kukkonen's study of *Fables*'s iconography (2008; 2011), Adam Zolkover's analysis of bodies and sexuality (2008), and Jack Zipes's critical comments on how comics tend to minimize the "resistant quality of the fantastic" (2009b, 87), this series has definitely attracted the attention of folklorists

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as well as narrative and fairy-tale scholars. Of particular interest to me is the playfully ironic genre mixing of the Fables' adventures and their backstories with urban fantasy, murder mystery, war and love tales, especially as it impacts characterization and metanarrative. We see this in Bigby Wolf who, if there is such a role in the Fables ensemble, plays the main hero. He is the sheriff of Fabletown in the beginning, then frontline and monstrous warrior in the war with the Adversary, and eventually Snow White's devoted husband; he is described as "a monster and a brute, but a reformed one, now on the side of the angels" ("Who's Who in Fabletown," in Willingham 2008b, 6); he is the conflation of many storied wolves and can switch back and forth into his powerful animal body, while his human look is that of a scruffy, unshaven dark-haired man who's always lighting up. His "big bad wolf" image is clearly linked to fairy tales: his experience as predator and then prey of the hunter in the Grimms' "Red Riding Hood" version makes a cameo appearance in Bigby's backstory, "The Runt" (Willingham 2006a, 79). But his masculinity and heroism are just as much related to werewolf legends as to a range of "mythic" narratives, including that of the underdog, the cowboy outlaw, the World War II American soldier, and the Bogart-like detective. As Mark Hill noted, "Bigby's connection with a horrific past, as well as his current honorable conduct, only strengthens his connection to an American heroic imagination fueled by stories of redemption and second chances found within the mythology of Jesse James" (Hill 2009, 184).

Worldly politics are never far from comics, and *Fables* is no exception. This association fueled much controversy when in *Wolves* (Willingham 2006c), following the defeat of the Empire's invading army of wooden soldiers, Bigby declared to the Adversary/Geppetto, "Fabletown has decided to adopt the Israel template in whole" (76 and 144). "The Israel Analogy," as per the episode's title, is thus delivered: "Israel is a tiny country surrounded by much larger countries dedicated to its eventual total destruction. . . . They stay alive by being a bunch of tough little bastards who make the other guys pay dearly every time they do anything against Israel. . . . Every time you [Geppetto with your huge Empire] hurt us [Fabletown] we're going to damage you much worse in return. . . . You're the only one who can end the cycle" (76–77 and 144).[27] Geppetto shows no fear ("Are you near to being done? I'd like to go back to sleep," says the old man knowing that he and Pinocchio are protected by spells, 76 and 144), but, in order to punish him for "the wooden soldier raid against Fabletown" (77 and 144), Bigby proceeds to detonate dozens of bombs and destroys Geppetto's home and the magic grove from which he made his puppets. In response to the online controversy that followed the publication of this issue, Willingham, while declaring himself pro-Israel, also unequivocally asserted that *Fables* was "not going to be

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a political tract" (qtd. in Sternberg 2011, a post on the conservative team blog of the David Horowitz Freedom Center) and made it clear in various interviews that the "Israel analogy" was Bigby's: "we've already established that historically, he [the character] went to war several times, and was involved in World War I and II. He would be the type of character who would think along those lines" (Willingham and Robinson 2007). It is hard to say how much such statements depend on the increased power of fans' say in convergence culture, but the "Israel analogy" is not the only instance in which Willingham's characters perform so-called antiliberal, if not Zionist, politics.[28]

Having characters stand on the soapbox or perform specific ideologies is nothing new in comics or other artistic practices. My interest in bringing up these controversies and explicit references to worldly conflicts lies in how they intersect with my dual focus of analysis: how the interactions between the citizens of Fabletown in New York City and the so-called Arabian Fables dramatize ideology, and how the metanarrative aspect of this politics unfolds; that is, what is the commentary that *Fables* makes on competing storytelling traditions? Significantly, in the *Fables* storyworld these interactions revolve mainly around the alliance of Fables across geopolitical lines to resist and defeat the powerful Empire: they are both diplomatic and military relations. More specifically, in *Arabian Nights (and Days)* (volume 7, 2006b), Sinbad [*sic*] is an envoy from Baghdad to Fabletown, and in the prequel graphic novel *1001 Nights of Snowfall* (Willingham 2006a), Snow White goes to King Shahryar (spelling in *Fables*) as ambassador of the European Fables. My argument is that rather than an exchange, these encounters envision either a terrorist or ancillary construction of Arabian Fables; these interactions also propose a "stagist" (Chakrabarty 2007) revision of historical intertextuality, meaning that the *Arabian Nights* is imagined as "not yet" there compared to the European fairy tale. This hierarchical economy of genres is established through very different strategies and links to the *Arabian Nights*; however, overall, transporting the jinnî to Fabletown and Snow White to the *Arabian Nights*' frame tale results in an ironic reversal of Gabrieli's words ([1947] 2010), "the West came to be submitted to the reign of the Eastern tale and fable"; that is, it enacts the submission of *Arabian Nights* to the reign of the Western Fables and tales.

When in the first chapter of *Arabian Nights (and Days)*, Prince Sinbad and his adviser Yusuf arrive in Fabletown to pursue a diplomatic mission, they are in a fancy white limousine, from which harem slaves emerge in a procession that is vaguely reminiscent of the *Arabian Nights* dream scene in Federico Fellini's film *Amarcord* (1973).[29] In typical *Fables* ironic style of clashing expectations, Flycatcher, the janitor (also "Frog Prince of Old," 2006a, 4), is the only one there

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to greet the diplomatic party, and certainly not in the manner to which Sinbad is accustomed. "Who **are** you, western dog, and why are you the only one here to greet me? Where are the courtiers and wazirs and sundree **grandees** of high office?" asks Sinbad (2006b, 15).[30] Prince Charming, the mayor of Fabletown at the time, has forgotten about the envoy's arrival, and making things worse, the Fables that Sinbad encounters have trouble understanding his English. Sinbad and his entourage are finally given rooms, but the tension mounts as Prince Charming calls his guests "damned slave traffickers" (20).

Issues of language and cultural norms are thus immediately foregrounded. How much of each other's words the two leaders actually understand is not that clear. While all dialogue is in English for the reader, the difference in font style alerts us to when the characters are speaking Arabic, and the chapter's title, "Broken English," points to challenges in the storyworld's communication. When King Cole is called upon as interpreter and go-between, his Arabic translates into flowery English on the page, and some communication flow is established. Later in the story arc the slaves' and Sinbad's English-language misnomers are occasion for some comic relief. Also visually emphasizing the clashing of cultural norms or "larger social horizons of knowledge and experiences—the "social minds" of the Oriental and Western fairy tale characters" (Kukkonen 2011, 48)—are the different icons framing the pages or panels that present the Arabic Fables' perspective or focalization (stylized minarets and patterns, as seen in plate 44 and partially in plate 46) or Fabletown's official and security concerns (eagle emblem, guard in uniform, as seen in plate 45).

In contrast, when in *1001 Nights of Snowfall* Snow White travels as "envoy from a small community of fabled refugees" to the "far-off demon-haunted land of magnificent jeweled cities," the language of communication is not even mentioned. Clad in Victorian travel dress, Snow White presents "her credentials, with all appropriate ritual and courtesies, at the palace of the ruling Sultan, where she is received well, as befitted the import of her mission." However, "Then she is escorted to a most comfortable suite of rooms, whereupon she was fed, bathed, rested, and thereafter ignored" (Willingham 2006a, 9). After weeks of being more "prisoner than honored guest" (10), Snow White decides to do away with "courtly manners" and starts throwing tantrums, "frightening the servants from her sight" (10). When as a result of these antics there finally is a response to Snow White's demand that she see the Sultan, the Wazir approaches her by unceremoniously stating, "You are a most troublesome woman!" (10), and asking, "what sort of backward people would send a woman as their envoy?" (11).

While Snow White's and Sinbad's diplomatic missions start out quite differently, in both cases the Arabian Fables' treatment of women is at issue: in one

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scenario, Prince Charming morally condemns Sinbad for having a harem; in the other, the Wazir will not hear of diplomacy coming out "of a woman's devil-painted mouth" (2006a, 12). This common Orientalist trope that locates gender inequality and women's oppression outside of Western modernity establishes at once where subjectivity and civilization reside, whether it is with modern-day Fabletown or its "once upon a time" Snow White envoy.[31]

What is also established in the first few pages of both volumes is that as Willingham's readers we can easily fall back on our knowledge of the *Arabian Nights* media text. The *Arabian Nights* as media text in Western and now globalized popular culture has functioned most lavishly in its visual tropes, and this is the case in *Fables* as well: we recognize Sinbad's turban, Yusuf's sinister silhouette and hooked nose, the scimitars, the flying carpets that identify Sinbad's scenes in the comics' top gutter, the huge and powerful jinnî that is released in *Arabian Nights (and Days)*, the veiled yet sexy women of the harem, the "sumptuous garments of silk and gauze" (2006a, 12) in which Snow White is veiled and draped in preparation for her seeing the Sultan. These are the visual "workings of imprecise intertextuality" (Kukkonen 2008, 262), of a popular cultural memory that extracts the *Arabian Nights* from its history and works to reinforce what we think we know.

The structural pitting of the two male Arabian Fables in Willingham's *Arabian Nights (and Days)* (2006b) against each other as opposite types is equally predictable. Sinbad is the Other who is well meaning and curious about Western cultural systems and quickly moves toward assimilation: he plays chess with King Cole, he appreciates the discursive subtleties of their conversations in Arabic and makes progress with his English, and of course he liberates his slaves giving them the opportunity to return as free citizens to Baghdad or remain in Fabletown. He is a mimic man with no critical edge, of the kind that Thomas Babington Macaulay fantasized about in the "Minute on Education," which in 1835 advocated the adoption of English (replacing Sanskrit and Arabic) for education in colonial India.[32] Yusuf, to the contrary, is consistently double-tongued, acts suspicious of Fabletown, and as proponent of a binary logic reminds Sinbad "we should join them [Fabletown], but only in the way that the conqueror joins the conquered" (2006b, 35). Once he suspects being crossed by Sinbad, whom he sees succumbing to Fabletown's ways, Yusuf does not hesitate to resort to jinn magic in order to reassert the power of the Arabic Fables over "western devils" (50).[33] Particularly interesting in connecting the *Arabian Nights* fantasy with a more contemporary fantasy of Middle Eastern innate deviousness are the panels in which the jinnî who is doing Yusuf's bidding in a US-military-occupied Baghdad takes on the appearance of a slave girl whose sexual lure is an asset

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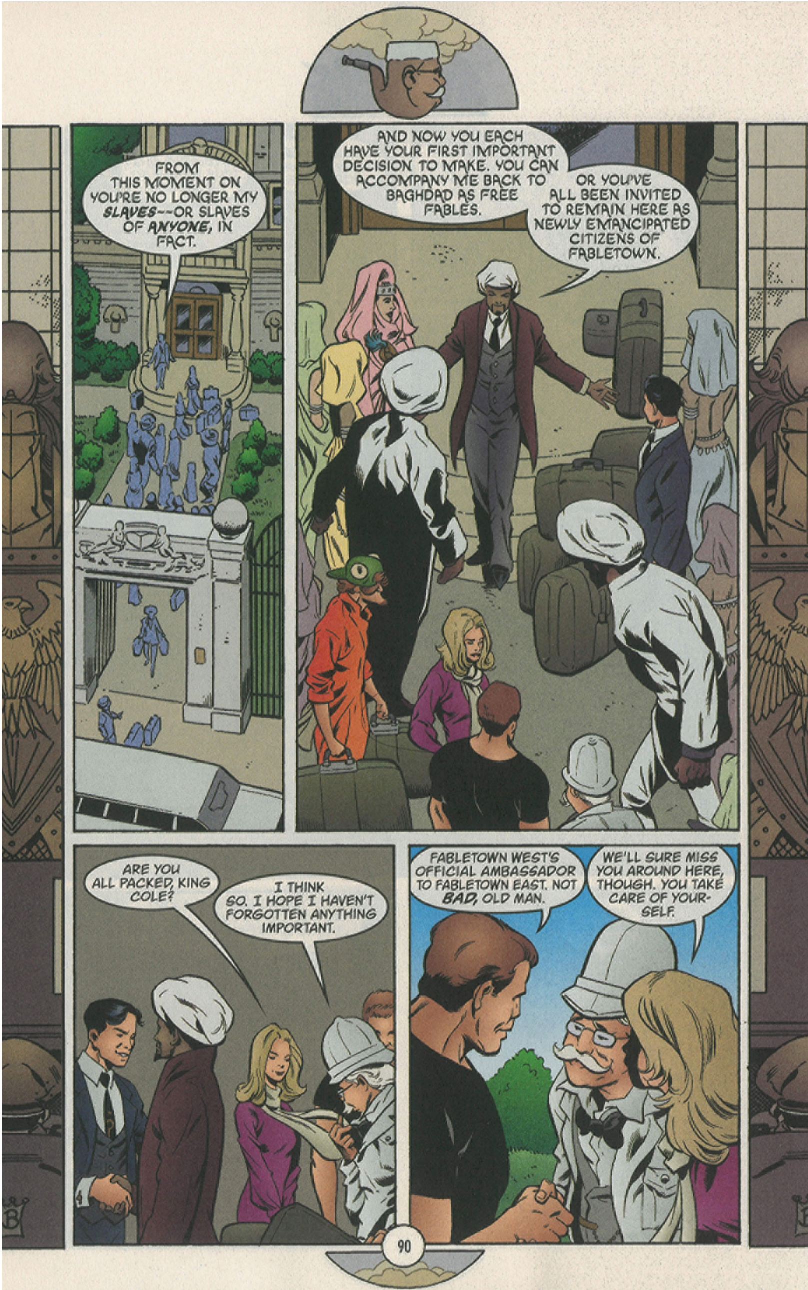

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both for the jinnî to elude the scrutiny of a US patrol and also trick Baghdadian conspirators (56–60). Sinbad is educable, transitioning to becoming more civilized; his treacherous adviser is not, and it is implied that his type never will be. Eventually, once Sinbad declares he had no intention or "invention" (in his "broken English") to be at war with Fabletown, he is redeemed in the eyes of Prince Charming and King Cole and instated by them as "the new major of Fabletown East" (88). That his title of Prince is hardly used in the dialogue suggests that his becoming mayor of this mirror Fabletown is much more of an honor.[34]

Just as the Arabian Fables are ancillary to Fabletown's "true" (that is, unqualified or absolute) heroes and political power, their magic is easily overcome in *Arabian Nights (and Days)* by Fabletown's Frau Totenkinder, "the Black Forest witch who used to live in a gingerbread house" (2006b, 4). Her spells detect that Sinbad and Yusuf have brought with them a "**d'jinn**," who—she explains to Beast, the new sheriff of Fabletown—is "**exactly** like a genii, Mr. Beast. 'Genii' is just a corruption of the proper term" (41). In this chapter ironically titled "D'jinn & Tonic with a Twist," Frau Totenkinder is clearly presented as the authority on jinn when she informs Beast and readers that jinn are "close to 97 percent" magic (41), much more powerful than sorcerers, and they are "wild things with no sense of good or evil" (42) who can grant wishes, "**any** wishes" (41). They cannot be stopped or killed, continues Frau Totenkinder but, as "Sulymon the Wise" did when he cleverly cajoled them into shrinking themselves into small bottles, they can be tricked. While Frau Totenkinder's magic is not strong enough to defeat or trick the jinnî himself, her exposition previews the means by which she will succeed. Cunningly, she works not on the jinnî, but on Yusuf, and she distorts his wording when he makes his wishes known to the powerful being. While Yusuf believes he has sent the jinnî on a mission to destroy his enemies in Baghdad as well as Fabletown leaders, which will put him in command, Frau Totenkinder has turned Yusuf's words against him so that the jinnî—unbeknownst to his master—goes off to destroy Yusuf's secret allies in Baghdad, comes back to "**devour** [Yusuf]—slowly and oh so **very** painfully" (73), and with the third wish is eventually contained again in his small bottle.

Grandmotherly and apparently fragile Frau Totenkinder, who is often shown knitting or drinking tea, is no match in many ways for the jinnî or d'jinn. However, like Regina in *Once Upon a Time*, she is clever and cunning enough to prevail; the witch of the West, whether she is young and beautiful or old and wrinkly, will defeat the overly emotional, powerful but slavish Other.[35] Furthermore, while Yusuf and Sinbad have trouble with the English language, her magic translates across language barriers and she effectively pulls off a ventriloquizing trick in Arabic. Metanarratively, one could say that the demonic and

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spectacular magic of the *Arabian Nights* succumbs to the more domestic and behind-the-scenes magic of the Euro-American fairy tale, but this intertextuality has a political valence as well. As shown in the disproportionate size of the jinnî and the witch in the two images (plates 47 and 48), Frau Totenkinder is also another figure for the "Israel Analogy," according to which mighty strength will not lead to victory.

What will lead to victory from Bigby's perspective, we know, is the determination to be "tough little bastards," which Frau Totenkinder has no trouble with in spite of her meek appearance; I would add that as the workings of Orientalism in history have shown, constructing a system of knowledge about the Other also contributes to her success. "They grant wishes, **any** wishes. Let's say I had one and wished for Fabletown to be destroyed—or New York—or **America**" (2006b, 41; plate 47), explains Frau Totenkinder to Beast to help him imagine just how powerful the jinnî is. The words in the panel refer to the witch's hypothetical wish, but the image suggests the jinnî's actualization of the violent wish in New York City, which at one level evokes the real-world tragedies of 9/11 and at another anticipates Yusuf's wishes to take over Fabletown. Frau Totenkinder's focalization of the jinnî offers an aggrandized and violent portrait of jinn, who instead in the *Arabian Nights* stories are mortal (in fact, a carelessly flung date stone hits and kills one in "The Story of the Merchant and the Demon" [Haddawy 1990, 17]) and can be malevolent, indifferent, or benevolent in dealing with humans (Marzolph and van Leeuwen 2004, 534–37; Warner 2012, 44–53). While the jinn "add the energy of unpredictability" (Warner 2012, 44) to the plots in the *Arabian Nights*, Frau Totenkinder's terrorist construction of what jinn are and do determines the development of the whole *Arabian Nights (and Days)* plot, and given this conceptualization it is no surprise that her work is done and Fabletown is safe only once the jinnî is returned to and sealed in the bottle. Her words and clever imagination as power/knowledge control the jinnî much more fully than Yusuf ever can, constructing the magic being from the start as a serious threat to Fabletown and then engaging to disarm him.[36]

In a way, I am suggesting that the interdependence of words and images in these two panels (plates 47 and 48) somewhat undermines the legitimacy of Frau Totenkinder's view of the jinnî's powers as terrorist because—in the absence of any further decoupage or breaking down of the panel into differently focalized scenes—it is presented as a construct of her imagination to which Beast, Prince Charming, and the other political authorities of Fabletown grant absolute authority. But despite this deconstructive opening, overall Frau Totenkinder is celebrated in *Arabian Nights (and Days)* as the unpromising hero of the "Israel Analogy," enacting metanarratively the superiority of an unassuming fairy-tale

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magic over the impressive wonders of the *Arabian Nights*. While the size of their icons in the comics' top gutter is equal, the discursive power of the gingerbread-house magic (plate 47) not only overcomes but also *inscribes* that of the flying-carpet magic that marks the Arabian Fables scenes (plates 44, 46, and 48). And this is visually confirmed when we consider the "braiding" (*tressage*) of plates 47, 46, and 48 (Willingham 2006b, 41, 51, 74), that is, the linking as a series of these discontinuous panels "through non-narrative correspondences" (Groensteen 2007, ix), for example, visually through the jinnî's size, fierceness, and color. In this series, we see the magic-carpet icon appearing in the top gutter as a spatial or character-function marker (these images concern the Arabian Fables) in two panels, but the "social horizon of knowledge and experiences" or "social mind" of the Arabian Fables figures only in the lateral framing of plate 46, and (if we consider the series of three panels sequentially in the volume) it is braided into or enveloped by the witch's panel first (plate 47) and then by a deceptively unframed—that is, naturalized and universalized—panel (plate 48). Here, Frau Totenkinder, from the bottom right corner of the page where she stands with King Cole, verbally asserts her overwhelming power as "an old back-country witch" by belittling Yusuf and "his dutiful demon," the jinnî.

In contrast to *Arabian Nights (and Days)*, *1001 Nights of Snowfall* (Willingham 2006a) does not engage in openly political analogies—possibly because, as I mentioned earlier, its time frame is that of Fabletown's "once upon a time"—and its economy of genres is based on a richer intertextual relationship with the *Arabian Nights*, even as, I argue, its revisionist framework problematically reduces the storytelling power of Shahrazad (or Scheherazade as she appears in the graphic novel).

When the Grand Vizier finally grants the ambassador Snow White "a private audience with the Sultan," a "crafty look" has come into his eyes (Willingham 2006a, 12). Clued in by the title of the volume and the setting, readers already know that the so-far unnamed Sultan is "King Shahryar," the crazed tyrant who tells Snow White he has already sent one thousand brides of his to their death after their wedding night. As Shahryar and Snow White converse, readers who know the *Arabian Nights* frame narrative are made aware of what Snow White has and has not in common with the legendary heroine whose role she is about to play. A "proper woman of demure manners," Snow White, like Shahrazad, is "possessed of subtle cunning" (14) and exhibits poise, wit, and courage. Like Shahrazad, Snow White has a political mission, but it is a diplomatic one to bring about an alliance between the Arabian Fables and Fabletown against the Adversary; unlike Shahrazad, Snow White is a foreigner who is unaware, until he tells her, of Shahryar's experience of betrayal and its horrific consequences

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on the lives of his subjects. Unlike Shahrazad (and unlike the Snow White heroine in the Grimms' or Disney's tales), this Snow White is not a virgin and is divorced. Both Shahrazad and Snow White in their respective frame narratives ask the Sultan's permission to tell him a tale and embark in long-lasting storytelling therapy.

Willingham's frame tale, "A Most Troublesome Woman" (in 2006a, 7–22, 55, 85, 136–40), indicates a rather unusual level of engagement in American popular culture with the themes and structure of the *Arabian Nights* and its narrative frame. Featuring continuous verbal text with sumptuous illustrations by Charles Vess and Michael William Kaluta, Willingham's frame tale is also in its page layout set apart from the stories that Snow White tells, which feature a range of illustrators—including John Bolton, Mark Buckingham, Tara McPherson, and Jill Thompson—but are all in comics style. By the end of the first installment of the frame tale, the image of Snow White has also undergone quite a transformation. And both images provide significant distance between Snow White the ambassador and storyteller (plates 49 and 50) in this graphic novel and, respectively, the Snow White with whom readers of the comic-book series *Fables* are familiar (plate 51; Willingham 2002, 9) and the one whose story Snow White as Shahrazad tells King Shahryar (plate 52; Willingham 2006a, 23).

The multiplying of Snow White images is, on the one hand, a sign of how the graphic novel is less constrained than the comic-book series by the need to offer readers great ease of character identification, which presenting over and over again a distinctive body type, facial features, and dress for each main character produces (Lefèvre 2011, 16); on the other hand, the transformation of the Victorian-dressed Snow White into her *Arabian-Nights*-like persona exemplifies Snow's great "artifice and subterfuge" (21)—visually signaled by the images' same color palette—as she seeks to entertain and persuade the deadly Sultan not only to spare her life but also to heed to the political alliance she has come to propose between their countries. The image of Snow White as harem-like storyteller shows us not only how the Sultan sees her but also, metanarratively, channels for readers with previous knowledge of the *Arabian Nights* frame tale (which Shahryar has in part just summarized for Snow) that of the wonderful Shahrazad, just as to most readers the events in the first story that Snow White/Shahrazad tells clearly indicate it is a sequel to and disturbing reading of the traditional "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" tale. At the same time, there is a marked contrast between the storyteller Snow White's Orientalized masquerade and her image in John Bolton's illustrations of the story she tells—illustrations that oscillate between the Disney-like homage of the cover (plate 52) and the evocation of a (differently Orientalized) East Asian sensual-and-dangerous trope, of

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PLATE 49. Page 9. From *Fables: 1001 Nights of Snowfall* © Bill Willingham & DC Comics. Used with Permission.

the *Crouching Lion, Hidden Dragon* (Dir. Ang Lee 2000) wuxia style, and the visual disassociation between these two Snow Whites is key to the storyteller's enchantment of her listener as she draws the Sultan into her fictional storyworld.

While she responds in more ways than one to the Sultan's request, "Tell me your tale, Snow White" (Willingham 2006a, 21), it is crucial for Snow White/Shahrazad to establish some narrative distance, to provide her stories with a fictional and fantasy-like patina coating her experience and the messages she wants to convey: "Know, O King of the Age, that long ago and far away, a beautiful

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PLATE 50. Page 22. From *Fables: 1001 Nights of Snowfall* © Bill Willingham & DC Comics. Used with Permission.

maiden was rescued from varied trials and tribulations by a handsome prince" (Willingham 2006a, 24). The same strategy ("It is said, O wise and happy King, that once there was a prosperous merchant . . .") (Haddawy 1990, 17) allowed Shahrazad in the *Arabian Nights* to change the Sultan's absolutely dark outlook on women and life, showing him that "revenge is ultimately unsatisfying" (Willingham 2006a, 55) without calling his own murderous practices directly into question. In his use of the *Arabian Nights*' frame tale, narrative embedding,[37] and therapeutic slant, Willingham—the writer we know has *Arabian*

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PLATE 51. Page 9. From *Fables: Legends in Exile* © Bill Willingham & DC Comics. Used with Permission.

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The Fencing Lessons

In which a wedding gift is given,
bad doings are discovered,
and two neighboring kingdoms begin
to beat the drums of war.

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN BOLTON

PLATE 52. Page 23. From *Fables: 1001 Nights of Snowfall* © Bill Willingham & DC Comics. Used with Permission.

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Nights on his mind (however novel its metanarrative setting may be for the Snow White character from Fabletown)—shows remarkable wit and craft.

1001 Nights of Snowfall also skillfully adapts another storytelling strategy on which Shahrazad's success in the *Arabian Nights* depends, and that is her wide range of stories and genres. "Fencing Lessons" is a post-HEA tale of intrigue and revenge; "Christmas Pies" is also a trickster tale, but the protagonists are forest animals as in Aesop's fables; tales about losing everything to war ("A Frog's-Eye View"), growing up ("The Runt"), abusing one's powers or using them to help others ("The Witch's Tale" as well as "Fair Division") follow. Women—just as in the tales Shahrazad told the Sultan—are not consistently treacherous or trustworthy, and what it means to be a hero shifts from tale to tale. It is the exposure to this multiplicity of experience that, in the setting of both frame narratives, counters Shahryar's belief that "there is not a single chaste woman anywhere on the entire face of the earth" (Haddawy 1990, 10; repeated almost verbatim in *1001 Nights of Snowfall* [Willingham 2006a, 20]) and the cycle of violence that such absoluteness demands. In the graphic novel, the illustrators' styles further convey a spectrum of experiences by constructing multiple storyworlds in different color palettes and line drawings. At the same time, many of the tales that Shahrazad and Snow White tell cluster around themes of revenge, loss, transformation, and the deception of appearances that—in their varied treatments—speak to the King. And while all the stories told to Shahryar work to extend and eventually redeem the life of their tellers, Shahrazad and Snow White, some of them function as "ransom tales" (Gerhardt 2010) within embedded narrative frames. The first of several examples occurring in the *Arabian Nights* is "The Story of the Merchant and the Demon" (Haddawy 1990, 17–19) in which three sheiks save the merchant's life by each telling a "strange and amazing" (22) story to the Demon; and in *1001 Nights of Snowfall*, acknowledging "The Witch's Tale" she has just heard as "an amazing story " (Willingham 2006a, 112), Red Rose decides to save the old and weak witch by taking her with them as she and her sister, Snow White, flee from the Adversary. While of course the elaborate art of narrative variation and repetition in the *Arabian Nights* cannot be matched in Willingham's compact graphic novel, *1001 Nights of Snowfall* does seriously engage not with the iconic wonders of the *Arabian Nights*—the genie, the flying carpet—but with the wonder that Shahrazad's stories inspire in the Sultan and in readers.

However, while *1001 Nights of Snowfall* celebrates the storytelling power of the *Arabian Nights*, it does so by having Snow White and the other Fabletown heroes temporarily take over its fictional landscape. Snow White replaces Shahrazad; the tales Snow White tells provide backstories for Bigby, Fly Catcher,

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Snow White herself, King Cole, and Frau Totenkinder; and Snow White's political goal has everything to do with Fabletown's security and future. Contrary to the jinnî in *Arabian Nights (and Days)* whose relocation to Fabletown could only result in his defeat as an enemy, Snow White in the *Arabian Nights* is the victorious hero who charms Shahryar and redeems her own life even though, after three years or a 1001 nights of storytelling, she must admit to having run out of stories "of giants and dragons and cursed princesses" (Willingham 2006a, 136). Snow White has not only won him over, helping the Sultan emerge from his rage, but has also won, or disarmed him, by exposing him—in his words—as "a fraud" (136) who for a while had been only pretending to be unchanged because he wanted more stories. Note how, in contrast to most illustrations of Shahrazad and Shahriyar in bed together,[38] one of the final images in *1001 Nights of Snowfall* represents the Sultan in a subservient and lower position in relation to the comfortable and in-control Snow White (plate 53).

Furthermore, that Snow White has taken over not by appropriating the stories of *Arabian Nights* but by usurping Shahrazad's power is evident when the comic-book Scheherazade (spelling as in *Fables*) makes her entrance at the very end of *1001 Nights of Snowfall*. She is the Wazir's daughter who is fated to be King Shahryar's new bride when Snow White leaves, and Snow White has the last word when she gives Scheherazade some advice, "He likes stories" (Willingham 2006a, 140). This is a clever ending, which many of my students enjoy in its symmetry and playfulness, but it is also a sleight of hand that claims for the Euro-American Fables Shahrazad's inventiveness and wisdom, and, fictionally, reverses the intertextual history of exchanges between older *Arabian Nights* stories and the emergent fairy-tale genre in early-modern Europe. While she has her own stories to tell, this Scheherazade can only mimic the inventive and clever Snow White, or act after the fact and in her shadow. Just as their body language in the illustration (plate 54) suggests a mother-child composition,[39] symbols in the verbal description of the two—"She [Scheherazade] was a woman, like Snow White, bright with exceeding fairness and grace and beauty, but where Snow was the rising sun, she was the somber twilight" (Willingham 2006a, 140)—consolidate a hierarchy. I have called this a "stagist" revision of intertextual history because in this case too, European modernity comes "to non-European peoples . . . as somebody's way of saying 'not yet' to somebody else" (Chakrabarty 2007, 8).

"Fabletown is where as adults we keep our fairy tales after the invasion of the Adversary," commented Jason Adaniya in one of my classes, capturing the deep hold that Willingham's series *Fables* has on many young and not so young inhabitants of our "mundane and quite unmagical world" (Willingham 2006a,

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PLATE 54. Page 139. From *Fables: 1001 Nights of Snowfall* © Bill Willingham & DC Comics. Used with Permission.

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6). We read and enjoy *Fables* because it actively resists the exile of the imagination from the everyday world of business and traffic, and it does so, according to Willingham's preview in the introduction to *1001 Nights of Snowfall*, by providing "modern day adventures" to characters from folklore and fairy tales that, Willingham eagerly reassures us, we "already know" (6). So nostalgia and comfort ("Grab a comfy seat and make yourself at home. We'll be starting the story in a moment," 6) are both important elements in the reenchantment that *Fables* offers. It is, therefore, not surprising that the characters adults participating in globalized pop culture already know best—Snow White, the Big Bad Wolf, the Witch, Prince Charming—are its central protagonists, even when they link up with the *Arabian Nights*. What is more striking to me is how the *Fables* series is also, and perhaps centrally, a fictional response to 9/11, where resistance to the "invasion of the homelands" justifies war and where Fabletown's moral and world-making superiority (in its Israel analogy or its re/dislocating of Arabs strategies) is absolutely upheld.

ADAPTATION AS *RE*TRANSLATING STORIES, REORIENTING AUDIENCES, AND IMPROVISING FOR WONDER

As with *Fables*' graphic narrative, the work of adaptation in Mary Zimmerman's play, *The Arabian Nights*, involves a shift from telling to highly selective showing, visually dramatizing the passing of time, description, and thoughts; however, like a movie and unlike a comic book, a stage production transforms not only the verbal into visual but also print into the audible (Hutcheon 2006); as a performance, it also involves a direct interaction with its audiences in the theater. A member of the Lookingglass Theatre Company, Zimmerman is a professor of performance studies at Northwestern University and a prolific adapter of classics such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for the stage (which won her the Tony Award in 2002 for Best Direction of a Play) and of operas for the Metropolitan's new stage productions *and* its *Live in HD* series (for example, Gioacchino Rossini's *Armida* with Renée Fleming, 2009–10). When working with nondramatic texts, Zimmerman is well known for her use of improvisation and live-audience involvement as well as her Reader's Theater style. This means that several plays she has adapted and directed are also available in print, which has allowed me to teach *The Arabian Nights* (Zimmerman 2005a, abbreviated as *TAN* from now on) in courses on fairy-tale adaptations, in which when we read her script in the classroom we are confronted with another level of adaptation—back from the stage to the printed page but with new possibilities for reading

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PLATE 55. Photo by Sean Williams. Design by Ted Studios. Courtesy of Lookingglass Theatre Company.

out loud and performance in an instructional setting.[40] The play, *The Arabian Nights*, premiered in Chicago in 1992, as Zimmerman has often stated, "in the shadow of the first Gulf War." In a 2011 interview, she continued, "I was distressed by the discourse surrounding The Middle East at the time. In order to persuade people to go to war against others, you have to convince them that the others are truly different, not quite human, not quite 'like us.' In *The Arabian Nights*, the characters are actually very familiar sorts, although we find them in somewhat exotic trappings" (Zimmerman and Markowitz 2011).[41] In the book, the play is framed on one end by an epigraph, quoting the tenth-century Arab geographer Muqadassi [*sic*] or Muqaddasi, in praise of a thriving ancient Baghdad, and at the other by the final lines the whole cast repeats several times, "And the nights over Baghdad were whiter than the days" (*TAN*, 130), to evoke the bombing of the Iraqi city during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Stage directions call in this final scene for "the sound of air-raid sirens and of static on a distant radio and the rising of the wind" (130), with the whole company "sink[ing] to the ground" and "roll[ing] away . . . like dead leaves in the wind," until the wind stops and "everyone is still" (131).[42] In between these two (dramatically opposite and temporally distant from each other) views of the city, the fictional storytelling the play brings to life seeks to give us more than a glimpse of the talent, elegance, and knowledge that Muqaddasi ascribed to Baghdad and its people. John Wat, who directed a 2005 high school production of the play in Honolulu, recalls how he and his students "talked about the idea that with US bombs dropped on the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys, it was like 'we' were bombing the cradle of our own civilization" (e-mail communication).[43]

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To bring this humanist message to audiences and readers, Zimmerman deploys several strategies in her adaptation of *The Arabian Nights*, resulting in what I am calling a *re*translation that offers its target audiences antihegemonic ways to connect with *The Arabian Nights* that differ from the usual icons of its media text version. This *re*translation is not aimed at establishing or recreating cultural authenticity. Zimmerman works for her adaptation from E. Powys Mathers's translation, *The Thousand and One Nights* (specifically in the Routledge and Kegan Paul 1986 edition)—a not so fashionable multivolume text in the English language that is itself a translation of the French and very fanciful version of the *Nights* by Joseph Charles Victor Mardrus (1899–1904). I take it that by choosing Mathers as her canvas, Zimmerman implicitly acknowledges the convoluted history of *Arabian Nights* translations and takes responsibility—from her position as an American woman in the early 1990s adapting *The Arabian Nights* for the stage with no specific investment in Arabic culture or knowledge of Arabic—for working within a culture of translation as well as against its Orientalist tradition.[44] Because Zimmerman's motivation is to *move* her North American public away from dehumanizing stereotypes, exercising the impulse to think outside of the "*Nights* as media text" box necessarily involves intervening in the discourse of Orientalism, thus claiming no representational purity, and she does so aiming to produce an appreciation of *The Arabian Nights* as a masterful treatment of the life-saving quality of stories, an artwork of salutary significance to all humans. Her *re*translation is meant to loosen a fixed image of *The Arabian Nights* and the diverse kinds of people who produced it, just as Shahrazad's storytelling in *The Arabian Nights* succeeds in undoing Shahriyar's all-negative image of women and his blood for blood logic.

Shahrazad in *The Arabian Nights*, Zimmerman in her play, and Scheherazade in Zimmerman's play proceed "gently and fictionally" to move—emotionally and epistemologically—their respective, fictional and live, audiences.[45] One of Shahrazad's strategies that Zimmerman adapts in her play is to tell tales that are rhetorically varied though thematically linked; significantly, they are selections from *The Arabian Nights* that are not well known to the general public. *Re*translating, in this case, means surprising audiences and readers with stories they are unfamiliar with and yet cultivating a relationship between these fictional tales and their listeners/readers that fosters "empathy" as a way to reorient us in the social world.

For instance, the storytelling action from *The Arabian Nights*' frame narrative that is dramatized in Act 1 of the play extends to a few nights only, during which Shahryar and audiences in the theater listen to the following "new" stories:

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- the tale of Harun al-Rashid, the famous and wise caliph of Baghdad (who in Scheherazade's tales is a mirror image of the sultan Shahryar could be) going to visit the madhouse (*TAN*, 10–38) in which the Madman tells Harun about his marriage with Perfect Love—
- "The Madman's Tale," which is the "Story of the Second Lunatic"[46] in *The Arabian Nights*, mixed with the witty verbal sparring from "The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad"—as a result of which Harun has him freed "for the sake of this story" (37);
- and "The Perfidy of Wives" (40–74), the tale of the Jester's wife and her four lovers (the Pastrycook, the Butcher, the Greengrocer, and the Clarinetist), framing the tales they each tell Harun al-Rashid to redeem their own lives;
- "The Pastrycook's Tale" (49–53), a version of "The Ruined Man Who Became Rich Again through a Dream" from *The Arabian Nights*;
- "The Butcher's Tale" (53–63), a version of "A Contest of Generosity";
- "The Greengrocer's Tale," or "The Wonderful Bag" (64–67), a version of " 'Alî the Persian";
- and "The Clarinetist's Tale" (69–74), a version of "How Abu Hasan Brake Wind."

Most of these tales in Act 1 are successful ransom tales that do not present themselves as moralities or as tales of magic. Via the tales and the narrators to whom she delegates, Scheherazade dares to challenge Shahryar's totalizing or monological worldview and to present varied, even simultaneously different perspectives on deceit, virtue, sex, fortune, and transformation. The humor that animates many tales of *The Arabian Nights* also plays a big part in Act 1 of Zimmerman's play, dramatizing conflicts and confronting the self-important or powerful with their images in funhouse mirrors, but working less toward satire and more toward establishing chance and human frailty as great equalizers. These jocular tales are just that, an invitation to play, rather than to stick with the set rules and moves of a violent game: while death is inevitable, sentencing other humans to death is shown to be madness. At the start of the first night of storytelling, Shahryar "unsheathes his curved knife, and holds it up to [Scheherazade's] throat" (7); but by the end of Act 1, Shahryar, Scheherazade, and Dunyazade are "rolling with laughter" and, while Shahryar still "raises his knife to Scheherazade," he ends up kissing her and letting the knife be taken from him (74).

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PLATE 56. Pictured: Jason Ellinwood and Gilani Moiseff in *The Arabian Nights,* by Mary Zimmerman. Mid-Pacific Institute School of the Arts, Honolulu, 2005. Courtesy of Dir. John H. Y. Wat.

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PLATE 57. Pictured: Susaan Jamshidi, Barzin Akhavan, Andrew White, and David Catlin in *The Arabian Nights,* Written and Directed by Mary Zimmerman. Photo by Sean Williams. Courtesy of Lookingglass Theatre Company.

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Scheherazade's life is still at risk, but the mood is different in Act 2, which begins on "the five hundred and first night" and with Shahryar asking to "hear words of wisdom from you [Scheherazade]" (75). In Act 2, retold and partly retold tales from *The Arabian Nights* include "The Tale of 'Azîz and 'Azîza," "Tawaddud," "The Mock Caliph," "The Prince and the Tortoise," "Qamar al-Zamân and Budûr," " 'Alâ al-Dîn Abu'l-Shâmât," "Hard-Head and His Sister Little-Foot," and "Ishâq of Mosul and the Lost Melody." The generic range of this selection again significantly contests the impoverished canon of *Arabian Nights* as media text, and the stories' variations on the themes of love, power, grief, and knowledge likewise contribute to draw Shahryar out of his repetition compulsion. Harun al-Rashid's encounter with Sympathy the Learned (adapted from "Tawaddud") is key to advancing Shahryar's transformative journey, not only because it mirrors that of Shahryar with Scheherazade, but also because Sympathy the Learned—who displays extraordinary knowledge of the Koran and religion, "things of the body and the world" (82), and riddling, putting to shame his top (male, of course) sages at court—refuses Harun's marriage proposal by asserting, "Kings do not need Sympathy. She must lie with those less fortunate" (92). In the tales that follow ("The Mock Caliph" and " 'Azîz and 'Azîza") Scheherazade confronts Shahryar with reflected images of his own grief, which is no longer about being betrayed but also about, as Zimmerman explains, the "killing off of his own ability to re-engender . . . and regenerate himself" (Zimmerman 2009), and opens him up to desiring change or self-transformation. "How perfect just to be someone else" (*TAN*, 108) becomes not impersonating or ventriloquizing the Other, but recognizing the Other within oneself as well as recognizing that fictions provide humans with a space to try out new possibilities. While I have only sketched how Zimmerman's and her cast's selections work in this adaptation, I hope to have conveyed how the play takes advantage of the collection's generic range and how refreshing its *re*translation and engagement with the narrative variety, sophistication, and power of *The Arabian Nights* are.[47]

"Scheherazade, marvelous girl, you have lifted the veil from my heart," Shahryar finally exclaims (122). The goal of the play is to dramatize how Shahryar's experience of multiple possibilities through stories saves him, but it is also to transport us, audiences in the theater and readers, and to lead us away from our prejudices. As such, the tales become portals to knowledge, not to knowledge about Shahryar as the Other, dehumanized tyrant and enemy, but about ourselves as we are, like him, moved.

Working with a second strategy of adaptation, Zimmerman's stage directions, choreography, and casting facilitate this emotional and epistemological reorientation by immersing us in a space that is fluid and a human subjectivity

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that is plural. "The play is best suited to a thrust stage with the audience surrounding" it; "all of the performers [musicians included] remain in full view of the audience throughout the play, sitting or lying on pillows . . . rising to join the action as needed"; "the action is continuous; scenes and locations overlap and dissolve into one another" (*TAN*, "A Note on Staging," xv). In Reader's Theater style, when Scheherazade begins to tell her first tale to Shahryar, the shift from frame narrative to embedded tale is performed aurally (rather than spatially) as she and Harun Al-Rashid, a character and focalizer in her tale, speak a few lines together ("Let us go at once," 12); after that, one ring of the finger cymbals will signal moving from the scene of the frame tale to the storyworld of one of Scheherazade's tales, and the triangle chime signals the arrival of dawn and of Scheherazade's ordained (but then postponed) death.

Furthermore, just as carpets overlap on the stage, actors have several parts, "adding a bit of costume as they play a new role" (xv); the man performing as Shahryar, for instance, also plays Mock Khalifah and 'Azîz. However, playing out a multiplicity of personae in one body does not empty the subject of conflicts or result in obvious pairings: Zimmerman suggests that different actors, for example, play Shahryar and Madman, or Scheherazade and Sympathy the Learned. In other words, visual and auditory experiences on stage are set up to represent *The Arabian Nights*' wonderful stories as "airy suspension bridge[s]" where "traffic moves in both directions" (Warner 1994, 24)[48] between normative reality and its transformation, and to cultivate the audience's abilities to perceive human subjects relationally (rather than as unchangeable essences or in binary oppositions).

That storytelling is a form of social interaction of consequence is reinforced in the play by characters' comments about stories they are telling or listening to. The mise-en-scène of such evaluative comments (for example, Harun says "This is an excellent tale indeed" [53] in response to the "The Tale of the Pastrycook," and Scheherazade and Clarinetist announce, "I have a story even more absurd—if you will hear it!" [68]) works to break down Shahryar's absolute authority to kill the teller Scheherazade if the tale is not to his liking. Following the telling of "A Contest of Generosity," the audience is encouraged to be part of this articulation of varied responses to storytelling, and members of the cast ask people in the theater to indicate, by clapping, who are their favorite or "most generous" characters. By breaking the fourth wall, Zimmerman further involves the public not as spectators but as human beings whose life choices are—like Shahryar's—animated by narratives and fantasies, and whose prejudices have harmful consequences.

Attuning Shahryar to wonder in his life and the audience to a (somewhat) de-exoticized sense of wonder is a third and final strategy of adaptation by which Zimmerman's *The Arabian Nights* engages in a humanist *re*translation of *The*

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Arabian Nights stories that seeks to undermine the us/them logic informing what has become the "war on terror."[49] When she is no longer under the threat of death, Scheherazade asks in the play for permission to tell one more story, the tale of "The Forgotten Melody" (122). In it, the great musician Ishak of Mosul describes his reaction upon hearing the performance of the forty-third song composed by an even more accomplished musician of earlier times, Maabad of al-Hijaz; in Ishak of Mosul's words, "the walls moved closer in to listen. . . . And time was frozen in my blood, and I left the prison of my skin and became other than myself" (124). He believes he will never forget such an extraordinary song, but when he tries to play it himself—and for himself since he wants to keep the song as his greatest possession—he is unable to. Determined to search for "his" lost melody, the musician is on a quest across the desert when he is approached by three young women who tell him they too know the song, having overheard it from the harem on the night it was performed for Ishak of Mosul. They know how greedy he is, so before singing the song, they make him promise to "willingly sing it and every other song you know to whomever you may meet upon the road" (127). The three women then sing and dance, "and the vault of heaven came closer in to listen, and the stars began to dance, and the river and all its life began to dance" says Ishak of Mosul (127). What the audience experiences is the women's *silent* dance on stage, which Zimmerman's notes tell us is "made up of the ordinary gestures of everyday life—perhaps tying a shoe, spreading a cloth, etc. Slowly, and at first clumsily, Shahryar joins them" and so does Scheherazade and every other member of the company (*TAN*, 127–28).

The adapted tale and the on-stage performance of the "lost melody" serve, I believe, multiple functions in Zimmerman's play. First, within the frame narrative in which Scheherazade's storytelling has been a lifesaver, hearing and responding to Ishak of Mosul's tale give Shahryar two related opportunities: in his own silent dance performance, he shows that he is finally ready to move from the fictionality of "story time" back into the flow of life in the everyday; his capacity to tune into the "silent music" shows that his appreciation of the many strange and wonderful experiences and lives in Scheherazade's tales will not be confined to the realm of performance, but extend to his everyday choices. The Scheherazade of this play is a successful teacher, who like the Shahrazad in Haddawy's English-language translation "had read and learned" (1990, 11) and who is perhaps testing here whether Shahryar's epistemological and emotional transformation is *habitus* forming and, at the same time, how capable he is of improvising in response to the good and bad surprises that life inevitably holds.

Second, that Zimmerman's notes list only a couple of possible movements for the "silent dance" performance suggests there is no one melody that is

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wonderful to all or for good, and metanarratively it reinforces the important role of improvisation in Act 1's trickster tales adapted from *The Arabian Nights*, in Scheherazade's storytelling as she adapts her tales in response to Shahryar's signs of interest or boredom, and in the writing and staging of the play itself. The actors' improvisation is most prominent in the performance of "The Wonderful Bag," in which two characters enumerate the imaginary contents of the bag, and Zimmerman encourages them to come up with "outrageous" lists (of which two examples are given in *TAN*, 133–39). But improvisation is overall integral to the process by which Zimmerman adapts nondramatic texts. For her, "the script does not precede the production, but rather 'grows up' simultaneously with it" under the pressure of three factors: the designs for the play, the cast, and "the events and circumstances of the world during the rehearsal period of the play" (Zimmerman 2005c, 26). Writing the script "in the hours between rehearsals," she strives to be attentive to the actors' physical improvisations, to the narrative she is adapting, and to creating a text that is "open to the world, part of the world," responding to the events that are in the news at the time, that she and the cast bring with them to rehearsals.

For *The Arabian Nights* play, in particular, we already know which events were on Zimmerman's mind at the time when she and the Lookingglass Theatre Company in 1991 were engaged in rehearsals and adaptation; since then, this poetics of improvisation has resulted in productions with different music and tighter scripts, but also in shows that have continued to vary, even if slightly, to put pressure on the dehumanizing rhetoric of "holy wars" wherever it comes from.[50] For his 2005 production of Zimmerman's play, director John Wat utilized "a process in rehearsal called 'discoveries.' Anyone working on the production is encouraged to 'discover' something related to the play and share it with the cast. For example, the girl who played Sympathy the Learned, found all the Christian equivalents to the list of prophets from the Koran. . . . I do think the story of Sympathy the Learned was especially effective at presenting some facets of Islamic knowledge, belief systems, and customs. And I think it was also an effective exploration or critique of 'professed' knowledge and true knowledge and wisdom" (e-mail communication to author, April 30, 2012).[51]

Third, the "Lost Melody" tale and the silent performance of its song also work to shift the audience out of "story time" and back toward rejoining the everyday. While the finale's evocation of Baghdad's bombing in 1991 reconnects us to the news and world events, the silent dance embodies an everyday with which, it is implied, we have lost touch, an everyday that has its own melodies and surprises, *habitus*, and improvisations. In its generic and emotional range, Scheherazade's storytelling has prepared us, like Shahryar, to participate in our

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own—and different—scenarios with renewed appreciation. This small-scale wonder of the everyday is—despite the exotic costumes and setting—then serving a de-Orientalizing function in the play. What we (may be moved to) feel is wonderful has nothing to do with flying carpets or jinn, but with reviving our participation in our ordinary home worlds. Contributing to this de-Orientalizing of wonder is also Zimmerman's deployment of the Lookingglass Theatre Company's multicultural cast. While there is no pretense to the characters having some sort of authentic look, my students' reactions to the play and to the illustrations in the book suggest that this multicultural casting can work against, on the one hand, the reduction of diversity in the Middle East to one Arabic image or Muslim stereotype and, on the other, can work to undermine the preconception that "the others are truly different, not quite human, not quite 'like us' " (Zimmerman and Markowitz 2011). And this is the prejudice that Zimmerman sought to intervene against by *re*translating *The Arabian Nights* for North American audiences as "one of the great masterpieces of world literature."

The adaptations of *The Arabian Nights* I discussed in this chapter have all been not only North American but also mainstream in the fields of popular culture and performance arts. While all exhibit some degree of sophistication in their poetics that deserves scholarly attention, their politics of adaptation is tame, at the most embracing a humanist approach to de-exoticize wonder—much tamer, for instance, than that of the creolizing projects I analyzed in chapters 1 and 3. If my discussion of these adaptations projects a rather limited and precarious sense of a de-Orientalizing poetics of wonder, this is not only because there is nothing here about the wealth and range of recent adaptations produced in the Middle East or by Arabic artists, but also because the currency of Ali Baba stereotypes is powerful, and the tragic consequences of war are very much with us. Scheduled performances in Chicago of another theatrical adaptation, *The Thousand and One Nights* (dramatized and directed by Tom Supple, staged in summer 2011 at the Luminato Festival in Toronto and the Edinburgh Festival, and featuring an all-Middle-Eastern cast) were canceled after several members of its pan-Arabic cast had problems with US visas.[52] I take it as a good sign in this climate that high school students today have the opportunity to perform in Zimmerman's play and cultivate their improvising skills as one strategy to contest the pernicious naturalization of the us/them rhetoric.[53]

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