The Influence of *The Arabian Nights* on John Barth's *Dunyazadiad* and Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days*

Presented by
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Dedication

To
My parents,
My family,
And my friends.
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Abstract

This thesis deals with the influence of *The Arabian Nights* on John Barth's novella *Dunyazadiad* (1972) and Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Arabian Nights and Days* (1981). It will be divided into three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter will be a theoretical introduction on the importance of *The Arabian Nights* in world literature. It will emphasize its transformation into literary genres, namely, poetry, drama, novel, and the short story. It will also show some comparative critical theories on *The Arabian Nights*, especially concerning the oriental tale, narration techniques, the socio-political continuum. Chapter Two will consider the influence of *The Arabian Nights* on Barth's *Dunyazadiad*. It will show how Barth parodies *The Arabian Nights'* frame-tale, narrator, characterizations, and dénouement to critique the spirit of exhaustion prevalent in the contemporary modern literary scene. Chapter Three will study the influence of *The Arabian Nights* on Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days*. It will study Mahfouz's reformulation of *The Arabian Nights'* plot, narrator (first point of view), characters, and setting to critique the political corruption in the Arab society, in general, and Egypt, in particular. Finally, the conclusion will sum up the main arguments of the study.
Chapter One

Introduction: The Importance of *The Arabian Nights* in World Literature

“The future influences the present just as much as the past.” (Nietzsche)

This thesis aims at studying the influence of *The Arabian Nights* on John Barth's novella *Dunyazadiad* (1972) and Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Arabian Nights and Days* (1981). This influence is obvious through Barth's and Mahfouz's utilization of *The Arabian Nights* as an intertext for *Dunyazadiad* and *Arabian Nights and Days*.

In this chapter, I will focus on the importance of *The Arabian Nights* in world literature. I will observe the reception of *The Arabian Nights* in world literature and its transformation into different literary genres of different cultures. Further, I will show *The Arabian Nights*' contribution to the oriental tale, the narration technique, and the socio-political continuum.

In Chapter Two, I will study Barth's borrowing of the frame-tale, characterization, narrator, and dénouement from *The Arabian Nights*. Besides, it will show how Barth parodies these narrative techniques to "replenish" the spirit of exhaustion that seems to prevail in contemporary modern literature.
In addition, I will focus on the patterns of direct adaptation as well as reversal patterns of *The Arabian Nights'* frame-tale in *Dunyazadiad* within specific narrative devices of postmodern fiction, such as Barth's involvement in the novella's plot. Furthermore, I will focus on particular thematic issues, like the "used-upness" of modern literary forms which Barth exposes in *Dunyazadiad*. In "The Literature of Exhaustion," for example, Barth claims that the period of contemporary fictional forms "is up," and the potential rectification to such "exhaustion" is the "experimentalism" with new fictional genres (64).

By resorting to the "origins" of canonical literary works, Barth conceives *The Arabian Nights* as a "treasure house" for narrative fictional forms. Barth tackles such fictional "decadence" when he argues that: "the novel's time as a major art form is up" (71), and he proposes that experimental fictional "imitation" is the survival key which results in "something new and may be quite serious and passionate despite its farcical aspect (interpolation origin)" (72). In studying *Dunyazadiad*, I will rely on a number of narrative and stylistic theories, such as Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, and Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*.

Using Bakhtin's terminology, I will show how "dialogism" in *Dunyazadiad* interweaves with the authorial "monologic" voice which is
revealed in the incarnation of the author, John Barth, in the Genie's characterization within the novella's discourse. This dialogism embodies Barth's critique of the contemporary fictional genre. Besides, I will use Genette's theory of "voice" as a narrative concept.

Genette maintains that the narrative voice is either "intra-diegetic" or "extra-diegetic." The former refers to the internal narration of the literary text, and the latter to the external narrative stance. In Dunyazadiad, for example, Dunyazade and Shah Zaman exemplify the intra-diegetic narration since they narrate the whole story within the novella. On the other hand, the Genie embodies the extra-diegetic narration because he carries the author's external "monologic" narrative voice which exposes modern literature's fictional "decadence."

Moreover, Genette divides narrators into two main types, namely, the "hetero-diegetic" narrator who does not appear as a character in the plot, like Barth's narrative presence which is implicitly revealed in the Genie's characterization, and the "homo-diegetic" narrator who appears as one of the work's characters, like Dunyazade and Shah Zaman who narrate the entire three parts of Dunyazadiad.

In this chapter, I will depend on Richard Burton's translation of The Arabian Nights. I choose Burton's version because Barth admires it for his "intellectual purposes." Barth expresses his admiration to Burton's
translation in "The Literature of Exhaustion" where he says that: "I myself have always aspired to write Burton's version of The 1001 Nights... and for intellectual purposes I needn't even write it" (69).

In Chapter Three, I will study Mahfouz's Arabian Nights and Days as an allegorical sequel of The Arabian Nights. This is true to Mahfouz's reformulation of The Arabian Nights' plot, narrator (first point of view), characters, and setting to critique the political corruption dominating the Arab world in general and Egypt in particular. In addition to this thematic issue, I will focus on the technical styles utilized by Mahfouz in reformulating these literary elements. In studying Arabian Nights and Days, I will use Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality in Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art.

1.1 The Reception of The Arabian Nights in World Literature

The Arabian Nights, also known as The Thousand and One Nights, is one of the most famous collections of stories in the world. At first, this Oriental work has been received in world literature since the eighteenth century through Antoine Galland's 1704 French translation of the work. It has been inspiring different world literary genres in its Oriental milieu and other foreign cultures since then.
In *Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass*, Eva Sallis talks about the early reception of *The Arabian Nights* in the west through Galland's translation. This reception had been characterized by different literary responses caused by its vague authorial identity. Consequently, the primary "ignorance" of the book's production had led to controversial judgment of its real author; Sallis comments:

The *Nights* was received in the absence of any such understanding, and the culture of its origin was subjected to extremes of prejudice and ignorance; indeed, for much of the first one hundred years of its popularity, prejudice and ignorance encouraged many to believe that Galland had invented the tales. (6)

As a result of this translation, *The Arabian Nights* has been influencing many world literary writers. Critics, therefore, have identified the utilization of its literary techniques, such as repetitive designation (foreshadowing), frame-story, and dramatic visualization, in the works of a wide variety of world writers. Repetitive designation technique, for example, appears in the tale of "The Three Apples," where a man mistakenly kills his wife suspecting her fidelity. Her corpse is accidentally found by a fisherman in a chest caught by his net. The chest is first disregarded by the fisherman. When he opens it, and finding the dead woman, he tells the Caliph Harun al-Rashid of the crime. After
investigations, it comes true that the crime is plotted by the vizier's slave. The object of the repetitive designation is the presenting an object, like the chest, as first unimportant, but through the events consequence, it gradually gets significance. Here, the importance of the chest foreshadows the crime-proof later on.

In "Magic and Transformation in Contemporary Literature and Culture," Marina Warner discusses the transformation of The Arabian Nights' gothic aspects in the present day "culture" and how such aspects correspond to the styles of contemporary literature. Warner says that "The Arabian Nights is one of the richest sources for the magical turn in contemporary cultures, where ghosts, jinns, vampires abound, ubiquity, shape-shifting, possession, and spellbinding are the order of the day" (8).

In Nocturnal Poetics, Ferial Jabouri Ghazoul discusses the manipulation of The Arabian Nights' styles by some world writers and poets in order to invent appropriate literary "sequels" to The Arabian Nights. For example, Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Edgar Allan Poe perceived The Arabian Nights as a book of exceptional literary values, and the book's tales appealed to the ways of their writing styles; Ghazoul writes: "Adding, dropping, and reshuffling stories seem to be a temptation to any transmitter of The Arabian Nights. A number of writers indulged in