

**Dreamscapes and Folktales: Reinventing Desire and Justice within
the Narrative Phantasmagoria of *The Arabian Nights***



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**Dreamscapes and Folktales: Reinventing Desire and Justice within the Narrative
Phantasmagoria of *The Arabian Nights***

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.



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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read "Mehelika Anan".

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Dedication

To my past, present, and future

Acknowledgements

Stories, myths, fairy tales, and folk culture — these are some of the things that inspire me to my very core. I will still read any “children’s book” with the same intensity and fascination as I did years before. Therefore, this project is one of my dearest belongings, something that embodies my passion, hopes, and interests. It is a part of who I am, and the journey that led me to it. The journey couldn’t have been directed in the same way if certain events, and people who came along with them, didn’t come across my life — some friends and teachers, whose companionship and mentorship I will cherish for the rest of my life. I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Sohana Manzoor Ma’am, who gave me liberty and guidance throughout the whole process. I appreciate her kindness and the endless support that made me feel at ease and pushed me to believe in myself. Additionally, words cannot express the gratitude I feel toward DEH for shaping me and my views throughout the years. Thankfully, I had the opportunity to be acquainted with some of the most inspiring individuals. Nishat Atiya Ma’am, Sudeep Chakravarti Sir, and Tabassum Zaman Ma’am, whose lectures I loved more than anything else, and who helped me discover the most about myself and my interests. I still remember sitting through Tabassum Ma’am’s class recordings and wondering how I could ever interpret and express thoughts the way she does. Also, I would like to thank the Head of the Department, Arifa Ghani Rahman Ma’am, for helping me channel my interests and leading the way to communicate them with the world. Lastly, I’d like to thank Ammu and Deep, for providing me with constant emotional and mental support through thick and thin. Thank you, Deep, for having more faith in me than I do, and for relentlessly boosting me to chase after my aspirations.

P.S. Thank you, Ritobina, for being my companion in confusion throughout the whole semester. Here’s to entering a new phase of our lives together!

So, what’s next?

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Abstract

Folktales require a careful analysis, taking into account both the "tale" and the "folk." In many of the past studies dedicated to folktales, Freudian psychoanalysis has been used to effectively study both components, offering an understanding of collective folk psychology and repressed communal identities. *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, a cornerstone of Middle Eastern classical folk literature, demands a similar approach for the complete comprehension of its complexities within and beyond its narrative boundary. While previous psychoanalytical studies of *The Arabian Nights* associated Shaharazad's storytelling with a talking cure for King Shahryar, there remains an unexplored dimension in unraveling the root psychological cause within the King's mind that prompted Shaharazad's storytelling intervention. This research examines the psychological dynamics between Shahryar and Shaharazad, exploring how Shaharazad's narrative techniques (intertextual thematic and symbolic progression) contribute to healing Shahryar's destructive mindset. Moreover, the study adopts a qualitative, archival approach to explore folk psychology surrounding *The Arabian Nights'* frame-story and its interplay with the theme of justice. By synthesizing these perspectives, the research seeks to offer a comprehensive analysis that could potentially enrich scholarly discourse and contribute new insights to the field of folklore studies.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Stories envelop life; they recreate and reflect affective depths and travel beyond the reach of time and space. As individuals progress from childhood to adulthood, the stories they encounter during their formative years continue to influence their understanding of identity, whether individual or collective. Spanning borders and generations, oral literature has taken different forms and sources of relief. Oral tales manifest in diverse forms and serve as a source of recreational solace and imaginative relief. Additionally, oral folktales offer a priceless depth into authentic and raw communal identities, commonly integrating fantastic elements and events for their tellers and listeners to dwell on the creative liberty of mind. Perhaps this is why folktales intrigue children the most, so that their boundless creativity finds a companion to channel itself through.

Dundes' perception that "folklore reflects (and thereby reinforces) the value configurations of the folk, but at the same time folklore provides a sanctioned form of escape from these very same values" (476) requires careful consideration, for the larger and humbler part of society manifests its identity through folktale. Sigmund Freud, better known as the father of Psychoanalysis, also emphasizes folk narrative and its semiotics for theorizing the machination for his discipline. Freud suggests that psychoanalysts can gain significant insights from folk narratives and fairy tales to uncover the hidden desires of the unconscious mind. One particular means for the unconscious to communicate, according to Freud, are dreams. Freudian dream theory assists in revealing unconscious desires and conflicts, but the way in which they do, might not be the easiest to decipher.

Freud's model of the mind involves the id, ego, and superego. The id represents instinctual desires, the ego mediates between the id and reality, and the superego enforces moral standards. Dreams, according to Freud, have the sole purpose of fulfilling the wish stored deep within the unconscious. It often disguises expressions of repressed wishes through what is psycho-critically known as “distortion.” Freud asserts that the distortion is a censorship for thoughts that repulse the ego and superego, associating it with societal/cultural views on taboo or mischief. Yet, the definitiveness of “taboo” varies primarily on inherent communal power dynamics. Meanwhile, getting no physical means to rationalize and channel itself, the repressed wish is only fulfilled in one's dreams — an inherently private realm where blame is neither assigned nor warranted. Aligning this with literature, authors' works are often embedded in censorship; they moderate the real message, sensitive and restrained, through some form of deception/distortion, specifically, through allegory or semiotics.

Nonetheless, when considering the analysis of written literature through censorship and deception, one must also contemplate the impact on oral literature — particularly for those who lack access to express their creative freedom through written forms or manuscripts. Alan Dundes and other folklorists propose extending the use of psychoanalytical semiotics to oral literature, applying similar analytical techniques not only to study the substance of folktale but also to explore its origins within folk communities. This research aims to analyze the censorship, both within and beyond the written manuscripts of the *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights* (Henceforth: *Nights*), in accordance with Dundes' opinion.

Certain scholars, like Hasan El-Shamy, however, acknowledge that the motif index of the *Nights* and its research process is Eurocentric. He highlights the flawed application of Western theories (that includes Psychoanalysis for its Western origins) and indexes to Arab traditions,

leading to assumptions that may not accurately reflect the cultural context. However, both primary principles in this research, concerning folktale and psychoanalysis, surpass the boundaries of temporal and spatial contexts. Moreover, collective communal identities (for example, the very idea of what constitutes as “taboo”) may differ from one another in terms of social norms and customs, but their interplay with the repressed private and the mind is universal. Nevertheless, the global perception about the boundaries of right and wrong methods significantly affects the progress and representation of non-Western folk culture. This may be one of the leading reasons behind the lack of study and research tools for non-Western folklore, creating a massive imbalance in the current scholarship.

Therefore, by acknowledging the unique and intricate history of the *Nights*’ origin and following the suggestions made by the current academia, this research contributes to the folk-literary scholarship by introducing a new perspective through the narration of the *Nights*.

The Nights is a collection of Middle Eastern folktales that showcases a narrative structure containing stories within stories. The narrative structure is framed around the story of Shaharazad, a clever young woman who tells stories to the king, Shahryar, to postpone her execution. The narrative intricacy stems from the way stories are nested within each other — Shaharazad tells stories to the King, and within those stories, characters tell their own tales. Many of the tales feature fantastical elements such as magic, jinnis, flying carpets, and enchanted creatures, which captivate the listener/reader and convey moral lessons in symbolic and engaging ways. However, the concept of morality, once again, beyond chronotopic margins, posits inherent differences. Therefore, this research fosters Freud’s understanding of desire/wish fulfillment, deciphering intertextual thematic and symbolic suggestions in respect to dream analysis, and the *Nights*’ folk origin. The first chapter dedicated to the analysis (Chapter 3),

concerns identifying King Shahryar's repressed desires and provides emotion-based elucidation to his despotic atrocious actions. Chapter 4 delves into Shaharazad's storytelling techniques and mechanisms, employing dream theory and transference to elucidate and offer insights into her underlying intentions behind narrating the stories. It explores how storytelling gradually liberates the King from his cycle of murderous impulses, ultimately guiding his psyche toward reconciliation with his deepest desires through transformative narration tools, which facilitate his psychological healing and emotional evolution. Finally, drawing upon a comprehensive understanding and synthesis of relevant academic studies, Chapter 5 examines the implications of justice within folkloric narratives, questioning whether censorship shapes the definition of justice and determines who it is intended for and who is excluded.

To proceed with the theoretical implications within the narration of the *Nights*, the following research questions were developed to navigate a straightforward study process:

1. Is the eventual attainment of moral justice and romantic fulfillment a manifestation of Shahryar's unconscious desire?
2. How do the thematic and symbolic progression of the tales told by Shaharazad help Shahryar to navigate his desires to reunite with his lost past and preserve stability?
3. To what extent does the narrative's sense of justice, embedded by the tale's folk origins, differ from the overarching notion of morality?

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative approach to analyze the main characters of the *Nights*' frame story. Textual analysis from the Penguin Classics edition, *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, identifies and investigates psychological and behavioral patterns of the

main characters (King Shahryar and his wife Shaharazad) and observes the techniques in Shaharazad's storytelling stream. This edition was chosen to avoid any Orientalist modifications to the translations. With an interpretive reading of "The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad," an understanding of its thematic and symbolic progression, and identifying its significance as a story within the collection, the research looks at how Shaharazad's storytelling worked like a therapeutic talking cure for King Shahryar. The study draws upon archival research to incorporate two primary theoretical aspects from Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis: Dream Analysis and Transference. References and concepts from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) and essay, "Construction in Analysis," inform the analysis of psychological patterns exhibited by the characters. Dream Analysis is to interpret the narrative as Freud would a dream, investigating the unconscious mechanism of the two characters. In addition, the therapy theory of transference was used to interpret how the interactions between Shaharazad and Shahryar reach a successful therapeutic session. These specific aspects of psychoanalysis fit adequately to underline and understand the psychoanalytical implications within the story. Furthermore, a thorough interpretative-textual observation was conducted to observe the folkloric aspects of the *Nights* to comparatively analyze and evaluate the portrayal of "justice" in the frame story. Existing folklore scholarship, namely Alan Dundes' "Projection in Folklore: A Plea for Psychoanalytic Semiotics," Robert Irwin's "Political Thought in *The Thousand and One Nights*," and Ferial J. Ghazoul's *Nocturnal Poetics* were studied, and the theme of justice was associated with the *Nights*' academic reception. The research aims for the scopes of newer variations and modifications to the interpretation of the primary text and its influence on society.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

To understand the folk-originated tale, one must understand the folk itself. Several researchers and philosophers, including Sigmund Freud himself, believe psychoanalysis and folktales have a seamless bond — one can be used as a tool to understand and explain the other. The application of psychoanalytic perspectives to the study of folk narratives serves a dual purpose: first, to delve into the psyche of the characters within these tales, and second, to unravel the collective consciousness of the communities that created them. Consequently, the exploration of psychological implications within the *Nights*' narrative and its genesis involves employing psychoanalytic lenses to examine both the manuscript of the *Nights* and the psyche of its narrators—the folk themselves. Existing research has religiously focused on the thematic significance in Shaharazad's storytelling in the *Nights*, attempting to understand why certain themes were chosen and linking them to the therapeutic concept of talking cure. At the same time, studies have also observed the text's narrative structure, connecting its form and the cultural landscape through which it emerged. The following set of reviews will illustrate existing research on three different sectors: understanding the folk psychology inherent in the foundational creation of the *Nights*, Shaharazad's storytelling techniques, and elucidating how these techniques can be intertwined with psychotherapeutic principles. The findings can build a layout through which it will be possible to unravel the knowledge of moral justice, folk ideology, and the psychological thinking process of the *Nights*' characters.

First, it is essential to justify the understanding of folk narratives through psychoanalysis. For a similar pursuit, Ritamani Das, an Associate Professor at Kokrajhar Government College in Assam, has synthesized the results of her extensive archival research on the psychoanalytical correlations to folklore and its scholarly implications in contemporary academia. In her article, “Psychoanalytical Study of Folktale,” she highlights the usefulness of folklore studies by associating folklore with Freudian psychoanalysis: by analyzing a folktale in depth with the help of psychoanalysis, one can get a clearer understanding of the ‘folk’ that generated it. She addresses that folktales mirror culture, expressing society's repressed desires and anxieties through metaphors. The basis of her research is to address human behavior and societal interactions through the close reading of folktales. Like dreams, folktales reveal the psyche of a community with symbolic figures reflecting deeper emotions. She suggests that folktales are viewed as a societal defense mechanism, “through which a society maintain(s) its well being by releasing pent up tensions” (Das 17). Das came to this conclusion by extensively reading and evaluating folklore scholarship through resources from libraries and databases. It does not analyze any particular text and provides a generalized overview. However, her research holds scope for understanding folktales through psychoanalysis and confirms the importance of in-depth folklore investigation.

The psychoanalytical application of studying folklore is apparent, but aspects unique to the individual formation of each folk narrative, like in the case of the *Nights*, should also be considered to understand its unique folk psychology.

Fundamentally, one significant trait of folklore is that it is initialized and transmitted orally, which provides an authentic illustration of an unfiltered lifestyle and identity of a community. In “A Motif Index of *Alf Laylah Wa Laylah*: Its Relevance to the Study of Culture,

Society, the Individual, and Character Transmutation,” Hasan El-Shamy emphasizes the oral transmission of the *Nights* for a more accurate cultural identification. El-Shamy acknowledges the variations and modifications the initial *Nights* has undergone, pointing out the narration traveling from region to region, intensive familiarization, and class-gender dynamics while producing the literate, male-written manuscript. He presents possible additions to existing research tools for a more inclusive association for world folklore by addressing the unrecognized tale-types of the *Nights*. The analysis speculates on the documentation of oral folktale, its affective components, and its origin from the lens of folkloric behavior (El-Shamy 235-237). It partially deconstructs the generalized narrative techniques to get an authentic idea about the *Nights*’ reception in the Medieval Arabian community, which can provide insights into “why” the folk intended the tales to end up a certain way.

Moreover, the oral storytelling of the *Nights* finds itself reshaped in its written manuscript by the influence and necessity of linguistic censorship. It introduces the idea of how the narrative technique of a tale can reflect upon a culture’s restrained ideologies. Erez Naaman, in “Eating Figs and Pomegranates: Taboos and Language in *The Thousand and One Nights*,” describes *Nights* as a “polyphonic and heteroglot” (Namaan 335) work formulated by various voices and influences, resulting in a diverse range of language usage, including both deliberate censorship and non-censorship of taboo words. Namaan points out that euphemisms are used in both the Arabic and the English translations. The paper identifies how the translations overlook the inconsistency of Arabic expressions concerning taboo topics. It does so by comparing treatments of taboo topics in translated and non-translated scripts of the *Nights*. While the findings may not acknowledge the cultural restrictions and beliefs that influence the modifications of expressions in literary production/translation, the mechanism of the Arabic written culture can be used to

explore the stylistic preferences in the *Nights*' storytelling stream as well as the folk understanding of taboo topics. It connects linguistic censorship to Freud's understanding of dream work, the id, and the ego.

Consequently, the influence of male-written narratives and the understanding of taboo topics invite feminist criticisms of the *Nights*. In "Promiscuity, Emancipation, Submission: The Civilizing Process and the Establishment of a Female Role Model in the Frame-Story Of *1001 Nights*," Attar and Fischer identify the cultural repression of women in the *Nights* by textually analyzing the frame-story. The argument is that the many socially unacceptable pre-Islamic taboo topics are told by the ideal Islamic woman Shaharazad, and her portrayal as a submissive, traditional, and ideal woman nullifies the effects of the taboo topics in the tales of the *Nights* (Attar and Fischer 16). They compare the representations of the Box Woman, who is a radical concept of sexual gratification, to Shaharazad, who is depicted as a female role model in the text. While the analysis supports feminist theories by challenging the imposed roles of women in a male-written narrative, it shows bias against cultural customs followed in the Medieval Arab. However, the portrayal of Shaharazad as the virtuous female role model and the Box Woman as a symbol of perverse promiscuity illustrates the folk narrative as a reflection of traditional gender roles. It opens the door to questions such as why polygamy was/is not equal for men and women, and why the folk considered a promising ending for Shahryar despite his extreme atrocities.

Certain feminist readings of the *Nights* find the text to be a guide for male solidarity in dealing with perceived threats from women and instructing patriarchal men on "managing" female desires. In "Women and Slaves: Gender Politics in *The Arabian Nights*," Tarek Shamma highlights the patriarchal sense of justice portrayed in the *Nights*, directly addressing the complexity of interpreting Shaharazad's character as a feminist savior. Her character brings forth

an ambiguous mix of a “patriarchal, ‘virtuous’ woman” (Shamma 258) as well as a “feminist icon challenging the extremes of a patriarchal king.” According to Shamma, Shahryar’s extreme reaction of decapitating each woman every morning stems from deep-seated fears within a patriarchal society, where male identity is tied to controlling and managing women. In Shaharazad’s stories, women’s perverse sexual liberation is expressed in negative ways, yet she presents tales of both deceitful and virtuous women. Ultimately, her tales of betrayal, punishment, and restoration of order contrast Shahryar’s, and assist in developing his view on female nature and just rule. This interpretation highlights an ambiguous sense of morality and makes one question Shaharazad’s thought process while telling the stories. While the themes of three selected tales of the *Nights* have been investigated to support Shaharazad’s patriarchal womanhood, the techniques of storytelling and its psychological effects on Shahryar are not explored in-depth. Nonetheless, the dual interpretation of Shaharazad’s character opens the door to investigating the idea of morality portrayed in the *Nights*.

The ambiguity invited by Shaharazad’s abstract standing in the *Nights* calls for a closer observation of her storytelling process, and what she intended by narrating them to Shahryar. Ferial J. Ghazoul adds more to the overall analysis of the *Night’s* narrative in her book *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context*. Using the first Cairo-Bulaq edition of the *Nights*, Ghazoul decomposes the text into smaller units and compares them for an overall textual analysis. She emphasizes the themes of taboo, recovery, redemption, and time in the text, and attempts to make an understanding of how intertextuality is significant to the frame-story. Ghazoul suggests the four narrative blocks of the frame-story form binarism through correlation, confrontation, and antithetical meaning (Ghazoul 42) in terms of character designs and the narrative plots. This suggestion of binarism and duality, along with the critical observation of the

characters and the plotline, opens a window of studying Shaharazad and Shahryar's characters, how they work individually, and their impact on one another. Ghazoul carefully dissects several tales told by Shaharazad and tries to highlight their significance in Shaharazad's choice of stories to be told. However, it does not connect the storytelling patterns to Shahryar's eventual mental healing, rather only focuses on the narrative structure. Overall, the fragmented components of the *Nights*, as suggested by the book, invite thorough textual speculation.

In "Potócki, Proust and the *Thousand and One Nights*: The Mystery of the Night," Richard van Leeuwen describes the influence of night as a theme in the *Nights*. Based on intertextual comparison and close reading, Leeuwen conducts a comparative study on Marcel Proust's and Jan Potocki's use of the night in their works, where the night serves as a domain of passion, taboos, and mystery, like in the *Nights*. Leeuwen summarizes that "the night thus represents the antithesis of the day, the domain of chaos vis-à-vis the domain of order" (Leeuwen 145). He suggests that the authors in the discussion (Proust, Potocki, and Shaharazad) understood the enchantment of the night, which allowed them to craft the mystical tales of fantasy. Leeuwen's study is primarily based on Orientalist perspectives. It is not an argumentative study, but rather a descriptive analysis for establishing the significance of nighttime that enhances a story's captivating power. The theme of mystical nights holding possibility and duality underlines Shaharazad's storytelling effects reaching full potential at night, which serves as a therapeutic and comforting talking cure for Shahryar.

Shaharazad's intricate storytelling techniques captivate Shahryar's attention and paces toward his eventual mental and emotional healing. This affirmation is confirmed by Jerome W. Clinton's understanding of the text in "Madness and Cure in *The 1001 Nights*." Clinton studies the themes of the *Nights*' frame-story from a psychological perspective, affirming Shahryar's

slipping into madness due to his wife's infidelity and Shaharazad's approach to his psychotherapy through storytelling. The thematic analysis emphasizes the recurring themes, such as justice, the power and character of women, and the wound of psychological trauma in Shaharazad's storytelling. Jerome proposes that such storytelling exposition holds the capacity to cure Shahryar's temporary madness. The paper does not delve into Shaharazad's psychological process while telling the stories and has no mention of morality or folk. However, Clinton's claim that "the psychological realities of the tales [...] form an essential dimension both of their appeal and the narrative unity into which they have been formed" (Clinton 125) works as an approval of attempting the application of Freud's ideologies directly to the context of the *Nights*.

Furthermore, in his book chapter "Traps and Treasures: Symbols, Stories within Stories and Metaphorical Literacy," Rob Parkinson explains the multiple embedded metaphor scheme, or the method of embedding a story within a story, in Shaharazad's storytelling, and its potential therapeutic implications. In addition to Shaharazad's purpose of storytelling having the dual purpose of saving herself and educating the king, Parkinson highlights the method of embedded, incomplete stories as a hook to retain Shahryar's attention, which works "as distractions to distract from distraction" (Parkinson 300). The trick here is that Shaharazad tells the stories in a manner that goes to another story without finishing the first one, with most of the stories often revolving around themes of a romantically deceived man, and someone misusing the power of a supernatural force — one theme creates a pathway for the other. The psychological explanation for this intertextuality is for Shahryar to immerse in the stories, emotionally relate with the characters and the events, and empathize with the tragedy, with Shaharazad's hope of Shahryar eventually rethinking his own actions. Although Parkinson does not critically dissect any particular tale of the *Nights* that falls into this scheme, and rather gives a general overview of the

whole storytelling process, the idea can work as a foundation upon which its elaboration is possible by observing a specific story told by Shaharazad.

Moreover, interpreting a patient's narrative depends on the transference space between the analyst and the analysand. In Peter Brooks' "Changes in the Margins: Construction, Transference, and Narrative," he elaborates how transference, a process that denotes a special space where past affective experiences are reenacted and reinvested in the present interaction between the teller and the listener, involves personalized projections of how the patient views the therapist. By closely observing the implications of the transference, a therapist can make stronger and more meaningful interpretations of the patient and how they consciously or unconsciously choose to present their narrative (Brooks 51-61). Brooks uses Sherlock Holmes' "The Final Problem" and Balzac's "Adieu" as examples, however, in the case of the *Nights*, the execution of this process is passive. Shaharazad, the storyteller herself, evokes affective experiences from Shahryar's past through her tales' narrative coherence and leaves the dynamic interaction to be interpreted by the listener, King Shahryar. In other words, the idea of transference in forming narratives can be used to address the multi-dimensional effects of Shaharazad's storytelling process, Shahryar's way of interpreting them, and the collaborative connection between the two for reaching the ultimate destination of emotional and mental healing.

Overall, from the existing scholarship, it is clear that the attempt to connect Shaharazad's storytelling to a therapeutic talking cure has been made sufficient times. Additionally, psychoanalytical, folkloric, and feminist studies of the *Nights* have either focused on the folktale or the folk, but did not underline the collective folk psychology and their sense of justice projected in the text. Therefore, for a balanced study of both the folk and the folktale, this paper

psycho-critically investigates what King Shahryar truly desired, how Shaharazad navigated him toward it, and what the ultimate resolution reflects about the tale's folk origins.

Chapter 3

His Royalty Asunder: Decoding King Shahryar's Innermost Desires

Following Ghazoul's separation of the four primary narrative blocks of the *Night's* frame-story, it is crucial that they are categorized and recognized as per their essentiality to the tale. The four narrative blocks are divided based on the events during Shahryar's temporary leave from his kingdom, the meeting with the Box Woman, Shaharazad's introduction, and the fable told by the vizier (Shaharazad's father) to Shaharazad (34). One of Freud's methodologies of decoding the latent of his patients' dreams was to observe the immediate past events that happened before. Hence, to understand and evaluate the depths of King Shahryar's psychological mechanism and to identify the judgment behind his actions, a thorough inspection of Shahryar's history should be considered, which in turn can help assess its influence on the tale's subsequent course of events. Among the four blocks, the first two include the direct context for Shahryar's present narrative. This chapter provides speculations on the basis of a detailed textual analysis of the first two narrative blocks and forms a rational connection between Shahryar's past and present.

As the very first description of Shahryar, notably, the first paragraph of the entire book goes this way:

Among the histories of past peoples a story is told that in the old days in the islands of India and China there was a Sasanian king, a master of armies, guards, servants and retainers, who had two sons, an elder and a younger. Although both of them were champion horsemen, the elder was better than his brother; he ruled over the lands, treating his subjects with justice and enjoying the affection of them all, (35)

It introduces the four focal adjectives that construct King Shahryar's entire personality: opulence, pride, valor, and a sense of justice. Before meeting his tragedy — that is, witnessing his wife's bacchanal association with the slaves — Shahryar enjoyed the life of a proud and valiant king with abundant wealth. To measure and fathom the intensity of its catastrophic impact on Shahryar, a small detail such as the timing should fall under magnification. What should be noted is how the act of adultery occurred specifically when Shahryar went "hunting." Hunting is a prime symbol of traditional masculinity, and the brave, just, and proud King Shahryar received the worst wound of defiance from his queen when he went hunting alone. The two acts occur parallelly; Shahryar's prime point of masculine exposition and getting ridiculed by his wife's carousal and adulterous behavior, which creates a conflict with the King's masculine authority. In the beginning, Shahryar is also shown as a just and lovable King. He was the one to send out for his brother, while his brother played the role of a folly to highlight Shahryar's characteristics of being kind, just, and respectable. Unlike Shah Zaman, Shahryar does not immediately slaughter his queen upon discovering her infidelity. Contradictorily enough, despite the significant moral contrast between them, the means of weighing justice, to both brothers, was to see whether someone else has faced something similar or something worse, Shahryar's exact words were: "Until we can find someone else to whom the same kind of thing happens, we have no need of a kingdom, and otherwise we would be better dead" (38). Similarly, for Shah Zaman, it was not until he found that his elder brother, who is, according to the description, "better than [him]" (35), had received the same, if not worse, outcome. What seems intriguingly necessary is to figure out why it is so important for the two to have someone else who shares a similar or greater case of misfortune.

At first glance, this thought process might seem almost illogical, but a psycho-critical explanation for this would be crucial to understanding the pattern in which Shahryar's psyche adjusted itself. To assess, the first goal is to fully comprehend Shahryar's statement to forge some clues. The three essential elements in Shahryar's quotation emphasize the primary concerns for Shahryar; the first is to find someone with similar/worse experiences, the second is to keep his kingdom abandoned until that happens, and the third is to end his life if that someone is not founded. By this statement, Shahryar is declaring his emotional competence to be deeply intertwined with the necessary and urgent arrival of that certain someone.

The reasoning to elucidate both the kings' thinking rationale aligns with the trajectory of the previously highlighted adjectives. As Kings, both Shahryar and Shah Zaman treated their "very beautiful" (36) queens like trophies, a crucial part of the extravaganza that adorns their opulent royalties. Yet, the betrayal of their most cherished possessions ignited in them the premonition of losing ownership over their dearest subjects, unlike how they expected it. The queens' betrayal also hurt their pride. Sneaking behind their Kings during their duties of maintaining noble valor (expedition to meet his brother for Shah Zaman and an act of bravery symbolized by the hunt for Shahryar) undermines the kings' perceived strength, authority, and masculine roles. The juxtaposition of the two simultaneous events ridicules the valor both Kings were so proud of. Additionally, it is to be recalled that Shahryar's statement underlines a complete dependency of his eventual outcome on successfully finding another wretched soul like himself. It might as well be due to the urgency for comfort in seeing others' pain, also known as "Schadenfreude," or the passive participation in seeking pleasure from another's misfortune. Spurgin explains that schadenfreude has a distinct interconnection with an inherent sense of justice:

When we experience it, we take no pleasure from others' suffering, but, rather, we take pleasure from others receiving their just deserts. We are driven by considerations of justice, not by cruelty or sadism. Our pleasure stems from our recognition that justice is being served. (768)

For Shah Zaman, the underlying jealousy for his brother's prowess made him feel like Shahryar deserved something similar, and Shahryar's case being, in fact, worse than his, consoled him as he associated that with justice. Similarly for Shahryar, a Jinni's generally wicked connotations spark in him a sense of duty to assign passive retribution. As much as he feels remorseful for the Jinni, he does not at all attempt to put up a fight against the abducted Box Woman's wish for sexual intercourse. His description from "brave" and "powerful" suddenly becomes "frightened" and "docile." It raises the implications of deliberation in Shahryar's action, which should not have ideally been the only option for his valiant persona. One possible explanation is that underneath his conscious mind, he wanted to be intimate with the Box Woman before the Jinni's presence to humiliate him to the extent of risking the pride associated with his King's demeanor. His unconscious imperativeness to protect his position as the King urged him to be humbled by another woman, giving him the satisfaction of both *schadenfreude* and an excuse to return to his kingdom.

After King Shahryar finally starts over, he immediately beheads the queen and the slaves, but his lost kingdom remains lost and beyond his reach. His reputation as the King of Justice becomes wretched and unhinged as his subjects move away to shield themselves and their daughters from Shahryar's newly formed female animosity. "Every night for the next three years, Shahriyar would take a virgin, deflower her and then kill her" (41). No direct justification rationalizes an outburst like this, but it is to be noted that the incident with Box Woman ignited a

strong antagonism in him. The narrator of the *Nights* only gives two poems for the reader to dwell upon and rushes to this current transition. Both poems are about treacherous women — an allusion that reflects Shahryar's mind. Consecutively witnessing three cases of female adultery, one of which almost throwing him off from the King's position so dear to him, created an uncontrollable vindictiveness in him, for which he took it upon himself to eradicate any chance of another woman potentially cheating her husband. That would be the logical perception of it. However, the method of delegating retribution itself does not seem just or logical. To delve deeper into his mind and identify the answer to why he would only choose virgin women as his prey, what needs to be in consideration is Shahryar's unhinged emotional state that made him lose the means to judge, evaluate, and understand his actions with reason. Hence, the rather emotional-driven act of heinousness calls for an emotional judgment that observes Shahryar's sentimental attachment to his actions. The two highlighted action verbs in the quotation are “deflower” and “kill;” they indicate Shahryar's obsessive and compulsive reaction to actively cut off any romantic ties as soon as it holds the potential to bloom. Mirroring the split ego in Shahryar's unconscious, the two verbs associate with his id and ego, coupling the raw desire (id) for wanting to start afresh with a maiden, but restraining himself as soon as his ego reminds him of earlier events. As Freud would define, it is due to Eros, or the drive for life, love, and intimacy (121); a juvenile force, also known as Desire. As Carson illustrates, “Pleasure and pain at once register upon the lover, inasmuch as the desirability of the love object derives, in part from its lack” (30). In other words, desire is activated from lack, and Shahryar desires what he no longer had — a queen and a wife who will restore his defining traits as the opulent, proud, valiant, and just King, and navigate him back to his old life. Contrastingly, Lacan believes that desire is not aimed at achieving stable satisfaction but is rather a process of continually seeking and pursuing

the object of desire, for which, the object remains elusive and ultimately unattainable (431).

Hence, desire wants to be acknowledged and retained, and for desire to sustain, the lack needs to be kept alive. Hence, trapped within this loop of hesitance and temporary triumph for fulfilling and preserving his desire, Shahryar's alter ego disavows his wish as a defense mechanism to protect himself from the same damage, and he continues to terminate every opportunity of a romantic beginning.

Shahryar's mental oscillation of denial between perpetual uncertainty and momentary ecstasy remains ongoing for three consecutive years until the arrival of Shaharazad. She is held captive in Shahryar's chambers for another three years, and each night she presents to him a fantastical tale that eventually allows him to revert his tyrannical steps. Whether it is the tale or the tale-teller, or a collective effort of both, that navigates the King toward his right mind is what the following pursuit unveils.

Chapter 4

Reconciliation of Mind and Desire: Shaharazad's Masterstroke

The impact of a narrative on its audience is significantly influenced by the storyteller. Parkinson writes: "Part of the meaning and sense of the story is situational. It's what the teller and their listeners add to it that brings it to life" ("Healing History of Therapeutic Storytelling"). The way a storyteller narrates a story and the way the listener interprets it may depend on a number of variables — namely, the chronotopic relationship of the narration, connectivity to the characters and the events, and so on. Therefore, if stories were the physical representation of being, the substantial content would be the flesh and the added details to the exposition would be the skin/ornamentation. The narrative of "The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad" has a unique allure as it exemplifies this idea vividly and delves deep into the art of storytelling. From the captivating sequence of unusually fascinating events to the cohesive narrative unity achieved through intricately woven characters and their tales, the story emerges as a masterful work of art that single handedly asserts a tale's power to compel its listeners.

Regardless of having five different embedded tales within the story of "The Porter and the Three Ladies," the theme of overstepping the boundary to forbidden and unwanted knowledge is dominant throughout the entire story. Every guest present in the ladies' house — the porter, the three dervishes, and the caliph and his companions — were given the condition to not ask questions for that which does not concern them (128). Despite such bold terms, the men eventually turn to the porter with their questions as their curiosity gets the best of them. It inadvertently offends the ladies, who decide to punish them. Following this, each man in the house is asked to share their stories, in turn, to convince the lady of the house against their punishments. After the porter's brief tale comprising only of the events that took place before he

entered the house was heard, the three dervishes presented their stories one by one; each affirming their tale to be a fascinating one. The first dervish was a prince and an heir. Upon his cousin's request, the dervish buried him and his sister without fully comprehending the consequences. Later on, his father — the King — was betrayed by the vizier in his service, who banished the dervish to conduct the kingdom's affairs as the new king. Additionally, the vizier, seeking vengeance for the dervish's accidental arrow that took one of his eyes, retaliated by taking one of the dervish's eyes in return. The dervish then visits his uncle — the king of another realm and whose son the dervish had buried. Once the dervish tells his uncle about his son, they both dig through the soil where the cousin was buried and find an iron gate — only to witness the cousin's burned body embracing that of his sister. Ever since then, he drifted in search of peace and justice and thus visited Baghdad. On the other hand, the second dervish, once a king, found himself transformed into a woodcutter after being robbed on a pleasure journey. One day while felling a tree, he discovers a hidden trapdoor leading to an underground chamber. Inside, he encountered a woman imprisoned by an ifrit, with whom he spent five days. Upon discovering the truth, the ifrit kills his wife and turns the dervish into an ape, but his brilliance and literacy fascinates the king of a foreign land. In his kingdom, the princess who was exposed to a bit of magic recognizes that he is a man and fights the ifrit. While doing so, the sparks of magic cast by the ifrit burn the left eye of the dervish, but the princess remains victorious, despite her tragic death. The dervish is then banished from the kingdom and comes to this city with the hope of finding justice. Finally, the third dervish, also a former king, presents his intriguing tale; he finds his luck constantly enveloped in peril and yet is always saved by remarkable and fantastic events. Following such a course, one day, after being acquainted with ten mysterious one-eyed men, he found himself forbidden to open the fortieth door of a

fantastical palace where he was living with 40 beautiful women. Despite the warnings, he opened the door and found a horse that took him away from the palace and whipped off his eye with its tail. The one-eyed men refused to take him back, and cursing his fate, he shaved his beard and hair and wandered off as a dervish.

The three embedded tales told by the dervishes are separate stories told in the same narrative breath, but a critical aspect is to be recalled that these tales are ultimately being exchanged between the teller, Shaharazad, and her listener, King Shahryar. Ghazoul observes that Shaharazad's persistent storytelling over one thousand and one nights stems from her primal instinct for self-preservation (17). For an overarching understanding of the text, Ghazoul's statement presents itself to be true, however, it is rather curious that the prowess of storytelling remained her only weapon for survival until the end of the long thousand and one nights. It invites speculation about how she managed to emancipate herself and further inquiry to unravel Shaharazad's web of thoughts as she narrated the stories; stories that would shield her life from the hands of the despot, King Shahryar.

While survival undoubtedly constitutes Shaharazad's paramount objective, the eventual attainment of her position as the King's new wife, and the advocacy for safeguarding the female subjects from the murderous grasp of the King — both while holding on to the storytelling process for three long years — undeniably requires a systematic approach. To look deeper into it, Shamma states that the legitimacy of Shaharazad's storytelling gallantry is backed up by a motivation that is something other than just survival. He defines that her placement as a feminist savior, as well as a yielder to the patriarchal dominion, makes her motives ambiguous (258). At the end of the frame story, Shaharazad's plea to the King to spare her life for the sake of their children, and accepting the reward for her unwavering submission and virtue as the King's new

wife assures the latter to be more convincing. Her character was designed as though a quintessential manifestation of an “ideal woman” in a male-dominated narrative realm, yet it does not fully answer how her prolonged session of storytelling cure ultimately leads Shahryar to the shores of sanity. To find its answer, it is crucial to identify the roots of her narrative methods and fathom their correlation with Shahryar’s eventual redemption.

Among the diverse array of stories told within the timeframe of three years, some storytelling devices were repeated over and over, perhaps with the intentional means for the talking cure to continue long enough to make the King accustomed with the safety of stability and solidify his faith in Shaharazad’s existential permanence. Additionally, a critical narrative tool that secures the objective is the intertextuality or the embedded tales within tales. Parkinson observes that the insertion of a story within a story serves the purpose of hooks so that it provokes a restlessness and urgency to the listener to want to know the consequent events, and the interruption of a smooth narrative flow by entangling it in a loop of secondary compelling stories make the listening journey more exciting (297-300). On another note, the entire construction of the *Nights* is based on binary bodies and their correlation through confrontation and antithesis (Ghazoul 42). The two principal characters of the frame story, Shahryar and Shaharazad, are the two poles in the narrative line. Similarly, the tales embedded in the frame story, or specifically, the tales told by Shaharazad, are constructed following the binary correlational and antithetical perspectives as well. Justice is undoubtedly one of the primary examples that picturizes the idea. It is one of the recurring themes in most of the stories and what Shaharazad is supposed to be lecturing the King about. In her tales (that counts the tales of the dervishes as well), justice is served with all fairness and equivalent exchange. The first dervish loses an eye for an eye, which is a direct reference to the ancient rule of punishment and

consequential reinforcement for one's misdeeds. Additionally, the three dervishes' tales portray the interplay of sin, redemption, misfortune, and relief. Sin and misfortune are the counterparts of redemption and relief, one is the consequential force of another; two sides to one whole.

Reminding the King of just ruling and fair play through recurring allegorical messages is supposed to store an understanding of morality within the King's unconscious. This is a strategic tool for projecting one's reality to the receiver of the message. Freud introduced a similar concept, psychologically referred to as transference. The therapist and the patient will enter a space of transference if the patient projects affective attitudes toward the therapist based on past trauma and personal historical affiliations (Corey 70-71). In the case of the *Nights'* frame story, the traditional roles of the patient and the therapist are inversed, as it is through Shaharazad's talking that Shahryar finds his mental peace. It forms yet another binary combination of transference and countertransference as Shaharazad's intentional storytelling subjects are dependent on the crucial extractions from Shahryar's past and present. To persuade him, she must evoke a recurring collection of emotions by creating a relationship with the story substance and Shahryar. In other words, Shahryar's thought projection is reflective of her stories, which she narrates with a decorum projecting her intentional message aiming for the ultimate liberation of herself, the King, and his subjects from the perpetual flames of a tyrant's wrath.

Another crucial approach to decoding Shaharazad's storytelling substance and its effectiveness on Shahryar's eventual mental salvation is to observe its thematic (manifest) and symbolic (latent) progression. Freud theorizes that the functionality of a dream and its complete understanding separate the dream content into two layers — the manifest, or what is remembered/ is seen in the dream, and the latent, or the connotative symbolic meaning associated with the manifest and the dreamer's personal life history. In other words, in Freudian

Dream Analysis, interpreting the dream is somewhat similar to interpreting literary texts. As mentioned earlier, much like the flesh and the skin of a physical body, the story of “The Porter and the Three Ladies” has two elements under the microscopic lens — the plotline (flesh) and how Shaharazad chooses to narrate it (skin), which are parallelly equivalent to the manifest and the latent counterparts of any dream. In this section, the tale of “The Porter and the Three Ladies” is analyzed distinctively from its flesh and its skin, identifying its thematic significance as the manifest and its symbolic progression as the latent.

The first day of the story-sharing arrangement takes place in the ladies’ house, where only the men, namely the three dervishes share their stories. Those stories are essential to the total narrative coherence of the tale. Within the dervishes’ stories, the two most significant themes were the loss of an eye and the entrance through the door of the undesirable. Several interpretations help decode their essentiality. To start, the symbolism of the lost eye particularly concerns the concept of “Dajjal” within Islamic belief, who is said to appear with one eye on the day of judgment and claim to be the Almighty (Sahih Muslim 2933a). Dajjal’s (Satan’s) lost eye represents spiritual blindness. It portrays the incapability of internally acknowledging God’s divinity, showing signs of a “kafir” or a non-believer (Sahih Muslim 2933a). The dervishes find themselves away from the immanence of god’s existence because of their misdeeds and misfortunes in the same way as Dajjal, inevitably desperate to reinvent their connection with God — as dervishes. It also serves as an emblem of ‘dissociation from the past.’ It is almost as if the absence of the eye is a perpetual reminder carved within the dervishes' physical beings, evoking retrospect for their individual stories and identities — at all times. Moreover, the reduction of the multifaceted gaze to one source of sight catalyzes heightened vigilance and resolve. It ensures newfound awareness and determined commitment to one targeted destination,

with nothing else in sight as a distraction. The dervishes have chosen a journey in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, and the one eye is the physical embodiment of their repentance and their fixated gaze on a determined destination of finding God.

Additionally, the second dominant theme is fostered in all three tales told by the dervishes, which directly connects to the grander theme of possessing unwanted knowledge exhibited throughout the primary tale. According to Kirby, opening forbidden doors for the overpowering thirst for knowledge is a recurring theme in several of the *Nights*' tales (112). The three dervishes find a door of unwanted secrets that they open themselves. The common intrinsic force for the three to open those doors is not a masochistic desire, but rather an unusual series of events — caused by either sheer luck or overwhelming inquisitiveness — that pushes them to open the doors and face the tragedy in account of their own free wills. Using one's free will to be in possession of forbidden knowledge and thus inscribing one's own doom is a direct allusion to the Quranic description of Adam and Hawwa's fall from paradise (Al-Baqarah 2:36). This recurrence is a classic hint of hamartia where one shall be responsible for her/his own downfall. Despite such repetitive examples, Shaharazad does not entirely associate a negative connotation with this possession of forbidden knowledge. This is where decoding the latent activates — as punishment and repentance are not necessarily symbols of suffering and shame only, but rather tools for correcting oneself and one's past mistakes to be granted ultimate spiritual enlightenment. Inquisitiveness may take one to unfortunate consequences, but it also takes one closer to the truth. The pursuit of truth serves as a necessity for making well-informed and equitable decisions. For Adam and Hawwa's children and humankind, their fall from heaven allowed life to begin on Earth. According to the Quranic descriptions, life in this world (*dunya*) is temporary and a test by Allah, and only his true devotees will resecure their position in Jannah.

In the context of the dervishes, they found their downfalls by obtaining undesirable knowledge, and their tragedy enabled them to facilitate a deeper connection with the divine. It is through the revelation of truth and its price that they are granted the opportunity to draw nearer God, and in the process, find a sense of justice.

The settled preset for understanding this tale was that the story itself is the manifest and Shaharazad's storytelling formula and underlying intentions behind them are the latent. Within the two motifs mentioned lies a profound subtext that Shaharazad wishes to project into King Shahryar's psyche. The essence of the story paints a metaphoric journey toward truth. As the dervishes have lost their eyes as a reminder of their dissociation from the past, Shahryar has lost his previous image as the loved King. Now, he must recognize the intrinsic value of his truth and make informed and just decisions like the ideal ruler and caliph do in the story. Just as the dervishes opened the gates to the truth, Shahryar must also unlock the door to his unconscious and confront the truth within himself. Equivalent to removing a bandage essential to the ultimate healing of a wound, Shahryar must endure the pain of questioning and evaluating his emotions and actions, and most importantly, search for the truth that drives him to do what he does. Freud believed that overcoming defense mechanisms was a crucial aspect of psychoanalytic therapy and personal growth. King Shahryar has built a mental wall that barricades his traumatized consciousness from external or further wounds. Within this wall of denial, he harbors the desire to return to his previous life. What stops him from gaining his old position as a just and loved king is the absence of a romantic counterpart on whom he can place his trust to polish his appearance as a wealthy, lovable, masculine, and just king. Yet his fear of further damage restrains him from taking action for it, thus it entertains the longevity of his desire without taking the measures to fulfill it, eventually eating him from the inside. Hence, to break apart the wall of

denial, Shaharazad's storytelling works equivalent to a talking cure. Using such a story as the one of "The Porter and the Three Ladies," Shaharazad projects her emotional reaction and catalyzes Shahryar's internal healing by inviting confrontation within himself. As mentioned earlier, this projection is a two-way transference-countertransference, as the analyzer's (Shaharazad's) intentional projection of emotions silently evokes the analysand (Shahryar) to evaluate and understand his conscious actions; simultaneously, the analyzer's carefully crafted narrative is dependent on her understanding of the emotional processing of the analysand.

The frame story ultimately reveals the tyrant's demise, and Shaharazad succeeds with her attempt to reason with King Shahryar to recognize and confront his truth and desire. While this conclusion may carry a positive connotation, it leaves unresolved questions regarding the lack of retribution for the King's mistreatment of his female subjects and the absence of Shaharazad's remorse over her extended captivity. The ambiguity surrounding these unresolved issues invites an investigation of the story's conception of "justice" and underlying social implications, highlighting the intricate interplay between narrative resolution and collective moral anxieties within and beyond the literary framework.

Chapter 5

Recreational Liberation through Tale: The Folk Dimension of Royal Justice

Justice: one of the central themes within the narrative fabric of the *Nights*. Throughout the tale's expansion, every event and character are tied in a knot of justice, although it might not contain the same meaning in all cases. To support this statement, only a glance at the frame story is enough — as the King, initially depicted as the provider of virtue and morality for his subjects, finds himself deprived of just treatment due to his wife's infidelity. This leads to a cycle, where seeking retribution for his selfish requirements excuses the atrocities he commits against his female subjects. However, through her transformative power of storytelling, particularly through stories of past rulers and didactic legends, a girl educates the King on the principles of just rule. The outcome, as conveyed by the narrative tone, is the secure restoration of justice. Yet a critical inquiry emerges regarding the nature of this justice: is it an individualized pursuit tailored to the King's benefits, or does it transcend personal interests and prevail for all?

Most tales of the *Nights* fulfill the wish of only an individual (Irwin 253) insofar as it is not unthinkable that the frame story itself will preserve a similar notion. The logical understanding of King Shahryar's actions of beheading a maiden each night for his wife's infidelity is that it is a despotic, heinous act of murder. Yet, in return for his sadistic tyranny, King Shahryar gets rewarded with a wife of virtue who restores his faith in a woman's love after being his captive for murder for three years. The preposterous exchange for the tyrannical act and its consequences has little to no moralistic balance, so the sense of poetic justice is either contaminated or only served based on partiality for King Shahryar and his supremacy. In the previous chapters, the two primary derivatives are: 1) In losing his place as a respectable and just ruler, Shahryar desires justice and to regain his old position, but his denial and urgency to sustain

the desire hinder his progress, and 2) Shaharazad, through her therapeutic storytelling cure, navigates Shahryar to identify his denial and what he truly wants. In accordance with the previous findings, this section aims to understand the role of justice in the *Nights* and its interpretation through folk psychology and the historical significance of the *Nights*' formation, along with the scholarly enterprise of its reception in contemporary academia.

The stories in the *Nights* are oral tales adapted from different regions and cultures, namely India, Persia, and Greece (Irwin 9). However, the manuscript has not simply been compiled with all those tales, but they are rather woven together in an order and embedded within the focal frame story of King Shahryar and his captive Shaharazad. Adding to Ghazoul's identification that Shaharazad's only purpose is to "survive" (17), Attar and Fischer question "the aim of the story-teller(s) who write(s) the stories down for the purpose of publication," and the intention of "go[ing] to such length to construct a new story that becomes the frame" (13). In other words, whether the frame story's significance is to merely unify the tales as an artistic endeavor or to inject a moralistic message to its consumers is still undetectable, yet the researchers find that the embedded tales of the *Nights* — the tales that originated prior to the Islamic Golden Age — have pre-Islamic themes, most specifically, promiscuity in women. Hence, to negate any ounce of justification for female agency in that accord, the frame story was added to propagate the theme as indecent, blasphemous, and hateful. Historically, in the Abbasid Caliphate, or the Arab governance during the formation of the *Night*'s manuscript, higher male authorities had access to harems, and their concubines would often be slaves acquired through warfare or trade, so promiscuity was excused, or even encouraged, for male figures but remained a taboo for female subjects. Therefore, the many stories of the *Nights* involving female infidelity would be naturally considered a disruption in the smooth flow of patriarchy and its dominion.

Evelyne Sullerot calls this an “inversion” of accepted conventional gender roles and suggests it poses a “sense of scandal” (8). Although judging the customs of an ancient civilization with the influence of Western-Orientalist feminism is a matter of egotistical cultural appropriation, Attar and Fischer describe the rational explanations as to how the frame story of the *Nights* serves the purpose of negating “anti-civilized” motifs:

Just as Shaharazad’s virtue contradicts and cancels the promiscuity of the Box Woman in the frame-story itself, her presence as the narrator of all the tales is designed to confront the reader at every stage with the model of exemplary social behavior, including her relatively independent, emancipated status. The *mission civilisatrice* of woman as shown in the frame story of *1001 Nights* thus parallels, as a literary image, the “civilizing process” during the early expansionist phase of the Arabic-Islamic civilization. (16)

In accordance with the observation, El-Shamy also provides speculation on the questionable origin of the *Night*’s manuscript, namely addressing the variations and modifications the initially tailored tales had witnessed, their narration traveling from region to region, intensive familiarization, and class-gender dynamics while being produced for the literate, male-written manuscript (236). However, if that explains the process behind the manuscript of the written documentation of the *Nights*, it is of further necessity to understand the originality of the oral lore.

The stories of the *Nights* are folktales, typically known as stories that originate and get transmitted/preserved orally. Dundes explains that while studying folklore, one must put emphasis on the word clusters and treat the “folk” and the “lore” as individual components working together as means of “communication”; he says, “Whether one assigns motif or tale

type numbers, or attempts to structurally dissect a given folklore text, one can effectively forget about the fact that folklore is used as a means of traditional communication between humans” (35). But it is crucial to find answers to how one defines the “folk” in folklore. According to Noyes, folklore exists within a social context where individuals, driven by their goals and conflicts, engage with it through tangible instances of performance rather than abstract traditions, often using folklore to construct communal identity at social boundaries rather than expressing pre-existing identities (14). In essence, folklore is the social enterprise of a community and its beliefs and customs concerning socio-political and socio-economic regulations and conflicts, which often encircles themes of unity, morals, and optimism, as if suggesting a collective desire for a utopic and moralistic world. Dundes calls this the folk’s “projection” on the lore, or in this case, the tale. It is an “autobiographical ethnography, as a mirror of culture, [and] is a natural projective test” (38). As the *Nights*’ portrayal of the historical accuracy of the Islamic civilization is almost flawless, some researchers believe that tales with certain semiotic significance, for instance, the tales concerning animals, are expressions through which the humbler folk articulate their exploitation through means that will not be easily detectable by their rulers. Moreover, Irwin analyzes that kings being lectured by women in Arabic traditions is historically inaccurate and highly unlikely (250), which solidifies the fantasy of the *Night*’s behavior as folkloric.

Instances of the perpetual stream of exploitation and abuse fueled by extreme power mismatch invite violations of justice that have taken place beyond the boundaries of time and space, and the periods during which the tales of the *Nights* had been passed on are no different. Irwin phrases the concept quite sarcastically:

To hear is to obey! The fantastic stories of the *Nights* that were read or listened to by people living under Mamluk or Ottoman despotism offered them no escape from the

despotic solution. Fiction merely offered different despots, Shahryar, Harun al-Rashid, Sultan Muhammad...Some were better and some worse than the ones the audience actually lived under. (256)

Therefore, the theme of justice appears partial and diluted in the realm of the *Nights*. The folk's perception is what they are subjected to, thus it is reflected in the narrative they design. While the frame story may have been added to instruct its listeners/readers about virtuous women and just kings, it raises the question of what "virtue" and "justice" really are. Shaharazad wins the King's heart by surrendering to him despite his murderous tyranny, and the King once again secures his old position as he desires. The justice served indeed appears partial, yet the narration's suggestive love of Shaharazad for the King and his unmentioned and unvilified cruelty signifies the victims of hegemony who accept the injustice against them and rejoice over the bare minimum. Therefore, in the *Nights*, Shaharazad is the mouthpiece of the folk, a representation of the folk narrative that wishes to indirectly educate the giver of justice on what it truly means and sow the seed of empathy in the authority that governs over them. Shaharazad may as well be the symbol and an icon for the marginalized communal identities, an idol and a savior for the womankind in patriarchal Arab and the captive slaves of tyranny; her weapons are her stories. Partially defeated in submission to King Shahryar, and ultimately taking on the role of the obedient, virtuous woman, her character parallels the tale-tellers who communicate their repressed anxieties in the shadows through oral folktales, but do not have their voices heard.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This research aims to merge the analysis of both the "folk" and the "tale" to contribute novel interpretations in the scholarly association for folktale studies. Historically and anthropologically, folktales symbolize documented and oral manifestations of cultural and societal imaginations. They offer insights into the essence of folk storytelling and its creators — the folk themselves. Amid a world where countless stories emerge every minute, those enduring tales, such as the timelessly cherished tales of the *Nights*, persist despite endless journeys.

In addition to acknowledging the dedicated scholarly discipline of folklore, Freud attributed significant importance to folktales and theorized their semiotics in some of his psychoanalytic concepts. Consequently, the relationship between folk narratives and psychoanalysis is profound, which enables critical dissections of folk texts and an exploration of the underlying communal anxieties they reflect. While it may be arguable whether a Western theoretical lens is fully equipped to grasp the nuances and complexities of orient texts, it is to be noted that communal unity goes beyond time and space. That makes consequent anxieties such as power struggles, quests for justice, and unheard voices universally relevant. In that aspect, the discipline of psychoanalysis provides a potent framework to observe and delve deep into those repressed anxieties through following a systematic approach of unveiling the collective unconscious. Hence, not only the *Nights*, but also other folktales are and can be investigated with the lens of psychoanalysis.

This study invites future researchers to revisit and reinterpret the tales they grew up with, enriching scholarly discourse through novel understandings and illuminating communal

senses of unity and identity. Through the lens of folk literary studies, uncovering a sense of rootedness will be achievable and available to showcase to the world.

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