

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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**“NEVER TRUST THE TELLER,” HE SAID. “TRUST THE TALE”:  
NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE FROM THE *ARABIAN NIGHTS* TO  
POSTMODERN ADAPTATIONS BY  
RABIH ALAMEDDINE AND PIER PASOLINI**

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in

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by

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## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction  | 1   |
| Chapter One: The <i>Arabian Nights</i> and an Islamic Aesthetic | 20  |
| Chapter Two: Framing, Embedding, and Interlacing                | 57  |
| Chapter Three: <i>The Hakawati</i>                              | 88  |
| Chapter Four: <i>The Flower of the Thousand and One Nights</i>  | 119 |
| Conclusion  | 169 |
| Works Cited   | 186 |

## **Abstract**

**Sobia Saleem**

**“Never Trust the Teller,” he said. “Trust the Tale”:**

**Narrative Technique from the *Arabian Nights* to Postmodern**

**Adaptations by Rabih Alameddine and Pier Pasolini**

This thesis stems from an examination of Rabih Alameddine’s *The Hakawati*’s embedded narrative structure. The roots of this structure reside in the *Arabian Night*’s renowned frame structure, which can be traced to the Islamic aesthetic, primarily its textile culture and organization of the *Quran*. To further investigate framing, embedding, and interlacing as narrative techniques, the thesis draws upon discussions by M. M. Bakhtin, Erving Goffman, Mieke Bal, and Gerald Prince, applying their ideas and definitions to Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane*, Woody Allen’s *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, and Orhan Pamuk’s *My Name is Red*. The postmodern text *The Hakawati* is then reexamined in reference to these backgrounds, and finally, Pier Pasolini’s *Arabian Nights* is analyzed as a cinematic adaptation of the frame narrative.

*For Wlad*  
*A True Hakawati*

## Introduction

The following introduction will first explore how my initial interest in the topics discussed throughout this thesis developed, then it will give background on the primary text from which this project stems, after which it will follow the course of the development of this Master's project, and finally, it will end with a brief discussion of each resulting chapter of this thesis. The seed of my Master's thesis lies within a single text: Rabih Alameddine's *The Hakawati*.<sup>1</sup> The novel, whose title translates as "the storyteller" in Arabic, is a relatively quick and easy read despite its 500 plus pages distributed amongst 21 chapters. Moreover, and significantly, the book is an absolutely delightful read with its innovative retellings of classic Islamic folklore woven with tales of transnational citizens. Mostly, I found myself drawn to the text's unique style of storytelling in which stories were presented in a strikingly fractured fashion. However, when I sat down with the book, pen and highlighter in hand, ready to analyze its intriguing narrative structure, I found the task to be much more difficult and complex than I first naively imagined.

*The Hakawati* is truly a jewel of a text, praised as being a "seductive,"<sup>2</sup> "delightful,"<sup>3</sup> and "poignant,"<sup>4</sup> "multilayered new novel"<sup>5</sup> in large part because of the same narrative style and innovatively adapted stories that made me fascinated with the text in the first place. Alameddine's postmodern text consists primarily consists of two main story strains: the first, in accordance to appearance in the text, the emir's

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<sup>1</sup> Rabih Alameddine, *The Hakawati* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> *O, The Oprah Magazine*

<sup>3</sup> *The Washington Post Book World*

<sup>4</sup> *The Boston Globe*

<sup>5</sup> *The Seattle Times*

story, opens with the emir and his wife trying to conceive a son and their servant Fatima aiding and advising them; and the second, Osama's story, is that of a Lebanese-American, Osama-al-Herat, who visits his dying father and remembers his family's tales, particularly recalling those of his grandfather, a *hakawati*. The first story, the emir's, continues by following Fatima on her journey to seek advice on how the emir can conceive a son with his wife. On this journey, Fatima loses her hand to Afreet-Jehanam, the djinn king of Hell, whom she follows down to the underworld to retrieve her hand, meeting his imp prophets at each of the seven gates along the way. Fatima and Afreet-Jehanam conceive a son who is born at the same time as the emir and his wife's son. These babies, switched at birth, become a complementary couple, Shams and Layl, the "sun" and "moon" respectively in Arabic, with two mothers: Fatima and the emir's wife. The babies grow to love and lust after each other but are torn apart by the jealous emir's wife, then becoming the Layl and the "Majnoun," or "the crazy one" in Persian. While the emir's wife had been pregnant with his son, the emir had begun telling her the story of Baybars, a legendary Mamluk king, so that his son could osmose the legendary king's moral and masculine characteristics. This story, however, with the birth of his son, eventually takes on a life of its own in *The Hakawati*, continuing without a narrator, independently embedded within the emir's story while simultaneously parallel to the story of the emir's son Shams. Even within these two levels of tales, there are often disjunctures as well as smaller tertiary level tales, all of which are always connected in some way—whether by theme, motif,

icon, symbol, style—to the larger stories in which they are framed or with which they are embedded.

Like the first main story strain, the second story, that of Osama, also has layers, but of a different kind. His story does not necessarily follow the major “stories” of the Arab world or Islamic culture. It instead follows the stories of the storytellers Osama knows and with whom he identifies: his family members. As Osama sits next to his father on his deathbed, surrounded by family and old family friends, he reminisces about the stories his deceased paternal grandfather, a *hakawati*, would tell him, implicitly retelling them to himself in the greater text. *The Hakawati* traces the story of how Osama’s grandparents and great-grandparents met and created large families as the story of how he—the “he” at times being Osama and at others his grandfather—came to be. Osama’s story strain winds through the stories of his uncle, father, mother, sister, and even close family friends at the same time that the Lebanese civil war resounds in the background. Within Osama’s grandfather’s story is also embedded the story of Abraham, a story his English great-grandfather would often tell his grandfather who would tell little Osama in kind. The stories of Osama and the emir are embedded such that various events and themes seem to flow through the different embedded stories’ sections, as if they are sharing a conversation or really are one common story. Like in the strain of the emir’s story, in Osama’s story strain there are also often other tertiary level stories that branch out, filling in the gaps and shading the readings of embedded story segments. Throughout *The Hakawati*, the strains of the emir and Osama’s stories interweave, embedding each other and at

times even intersecting; moreover, within these main story strains are also often smaller embedded stories, like morsels caught in a narrative webs, and smaller tales that branch off into independent although related stories that then embed other stories in their own right.

Thus, the structural style of *The Hakawati* is founded on this oscillation between one story strain and another, and yet what is most difficult to analyze about the text is the way in which these story strains both relate to each other while also functioning to support the unity of the text. To briefly describe the narrative layout of *The Hakawati*, chapter one begins with the emir's story, which is broken by a fleuron about three pages in, followed by Osama's story, which is also soon broken by a fleuron, followed again by the emir's story, and the pattern continues. Chapter two has the same pattern; however, it begins with Osama's story instead of that of the emir. Clearly, the narrative framing order is being manipulated to suggest that in one moment it is Osama's story strain that is being embedded by the emir's, while in the next it is the emir's being embedded by that of Osama. The remaining chapters in *The Hakawati* continue in a similar pattern with stories embedded within and interacting with each other. The strains' embedded sections, however, start and end without creating explicit or direct links between the different stories, which I found puzzling because despite this lack, there still exists a sense of connection between the story strains' segments, perhaps offered through the mutual thematic, symbolic, or emotional currency between sections. Readers, such as myself, imperceptibly and almost unconsciously bridge the gap between unrelated story strains by reading non-

existent links into the gaps between embedded sections precisely because the embedded structure of the text fosters this kind of response. As a graduate student who initially read the text for entertainment purposes, I found it difficult and even extremely frustrating at times to work on *The Hakawati* because the process of analyzing the text would continuously force me to self-reflexively examine my own contribution to and participation in the reading of the text and ultimately in the manufacturing its illusion of unity. Hence, because of this way in which the stories of *The Hakawati* are structured, fitting into each other at times and juxtaposing themes, characters, motifs, and symbols in such a way that manipulates readers into forming links between stories, I found myself questioning the operational mechanisms and roots of the embedded narrative structure like that of *The Hakawati*.

Even in initially reading *The Hakawati*, it became clear to me that the text was born from various traditions: “the Koran, Bible, Bhagavad Gita; literary, commercial, and pulp fiction; Arabic poetry and folktales, a hakawati’s book, German studies of Arabic tales; [...] Borges, [...] and] Memoirs written by [Alameddine’s] family members now long gone” (“Alameddine”).<sup>6</sup> Most importantly though, I felt strong resonances between the stories of *The Hakawati* and those of the *Arabian Nights*, both in terms of content and more importantly structure.<sup>7</sup> Thus, I began drawing on my basic background of the classic text and its familiar frame narrative to help me begin to unravel *The Hakawati*’s unique storytelling style. At some point, however, I

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<sup>6</sup> Rabih Alameddine, “Bio: *The Hakawati*: Q&A for Rabih Alameddine,” *Rabih Alameddine* (2008) <<http://www.rabihalameddine.com/hakawati.html#qna>> (21 May 2011).

<sup>7</sup> *The Arabian Nights*, Ed. Muhsin Mahdi, Trans. Husain Haddawy (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).

started wondering as to whether or not I was “reading” too much into *The Hakawati*, so like any overwhelmed student of literature, I sought out Alameddine’s own words on his text, which led me to a few interviews and the brief biography he includes on his website. Alameddine speaks of seeking stories through networks of friends and family members, inducing conversations that give birth to several of his stories (“Alameddine”). This conversational undertone that pervades *The Hakawati* must also be part of the reason why the text has hints and traces of the *Arabian Nights*, originally an oral story told in a conversational environment in which the storyteller and audience would interact. In order to fully understand and examine the narrative aspects of the *Nights* and subsequently those of *The Hakawati*, I realized that I would have to eventually research theories of conversation and language in narrative, thus my eventual reading and incorporation of the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Dialogic Imagination* in my project.<sup>8</sup> As my research continued, my fascination with *The Hakawati* only deepened and I quickly became aware of my folly in assuming I could thoroughly tackle the text within a ten-page paper for a graduate course, a paper that has ultimately transformed in to the 150 page Master’s thesis project before you.

My initial approach to *The Hakawati* consisted primarily of attempting to analyze and understand its, at the time, elusive narrative structure of embedding, which I originally assumed to be basically synonymous to framing, only to quickly learn that this was far from the case. Embedding involves framing multiple stories within each other so that the stories themselves become frames *for one another*.

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<sup>8</sup> M. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

Unlike framing, in which one story primarily acts on another, in embedding, multiple stories act on and affect the readings of each other. Alameddine is very good in demonstrating that not only do embedded stories frame each other, but that they also often intersect, if only briefly, for example with the shared names of similar characters or through common themes that weave through multiple embedded story segments. Thus, embedding makes an effort to create for stories an interactive narrative environment for stories, one that is nonlinear, non-temporal, non-spatial but that allows stories to “converse” via their mutually embedded sections affecting the readings of each other. We see this, for example, when the characters of Fatima from both the emir and Osama’s story strains are confused for one another by readers: a manipulated misreading meant to highlight the intimate connections between embedded stories (367). It is at ambiguous moments such as this one that the embedded and embedding frames collapse for a moment and reveal the underlying unity of *The Hakawati* that the reader accesses.

This textual unity that *The Hakawati* demonstrates is adapted at least in part from one of the text’s major influences: the *Arabian Nights*. At this point in my project, I began reading and rereading this pillar of medieval Islamic folklore to better understand the classical text that *The Hakawati* was in part trying to adapt for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The *Thousand and One Nights*, or the *Arabian Nights*, is a oralistic frame narrative about Scheherazade, the primary narrating agent, and her husband King Shahrayar, a man bent on marrying a new virgin everyday, sleeping with his new wife on their wedding night, and executing her the following morning to avenge himself

against his wife who cheated on him. In the renowned frame tale of the *Nights*, Scheherazade tells her husband stories (within stories) every night in an effort to distract him and her life safe, at least until the following night when she again must once again tell her husband another enthralling tale to save her own life. The version of the *Arabian Nights* used for our purposes here is the English translation by Husain Haddawy, a well-written translation based on Muhsin Mahdi's edition. In the manner of framed tales, the stories in the *Nights* are always framed in a unidirectional manner with the origin and eventual point of return of the framed tales being the narrating voice of Scheherazade. The framed and framing stories in the *Nights* never intersect, unlike those in *The Hakawati*; however, they do implicitly interact when they come together during a mention within a shared introduction within the framing tale. The *Nights'* characteristically couched stories and indirect links between stories already begin to offer us some insight into the origins of the style of embedded stories manifested in *The Hakawati*.

In order, however, to fully treat the *Arabian Nights* narratively, which is necessary for a better understanding of its "descendent" text *The Hakawati*, I had to first closely examine the *Nights'* most famous literary device: its frame narrative structure of stories within stories. However, in trying to research framing, it quickly became apparent to me that I would have to delve into the sources of this structural style in the context of the *Nights*, primarily Islamic culture. My treatment of framing within an Islamic aesthetic dually arises out of the linked spheres of Islamic theology and visual culture, including Islamic art and architecture. With reference to Islamic

theology, Islam basically has two primary sources, the *Quran* and the hadith, the most authentic of which being the former.<sup>9</sup> Already familiar with the structure of this religious text, I began comparing it to the structure of the *Nights* in hopes of noticing any borrowing, transfer, or stylistic similarities between the texts, and it soon became clear to me that both the *Nights* and the *Quran* attempted to demonstrate a level of uniformity within their texts to their readers each time that their readers either hear or read either of the texts. Moreover, in the process of researching older manuscripts and styles of the *Quran*, I became increasingly drawn to the visual frames and border of pages of *Qurans* between the tenth and twelfth centuries largely because they possessed “invisible” frames in the form of empty borders. These “absent” frames seemed to me to visually speak to the “invisible” narrative frames that *Quran* and the *Nights* employ, a reaction to the deep anxiety in the Islamic aesthetic of heterogeneity and fragmentation.

My starting point in terms of Islamic visual culture was textiles, which are aesthetically concerned with methods of binding and connecting a series of “threads,” a different means of reaching and enacting unity. The connectivity essential to textiles only highlighted for me one of the many reasons why storytelling has traditionally been compared to weaving and thus stories to tapestries or textiles: precisely because this art has the capacity to intricately unite multiple story threads within a single text(ile), an especially relevant quality for texts such as the *Arabian Nights* and *The Hakawati*. Moreover, in my readings, it was brought to my attention that Islamic

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<sup>9</sup> *The Quran: Translation*, Trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Elmhurst: Tahrike, 2000).

culture significantly encourages and sustains an environment of cultural transference, and thus the weaving style used in textile production spread from the construction of fabrics to pottery to mosaics, etc., eventually to architecture. Hence, written text, such as the name of God or *Quranic* verses, inscribed on the walls of Islamic buildings like mosques; it is from here that the weaving styles of framing and interlacing that originated from textile began to flirt with the written word within the Islamic aesthetic. The Arabic script on these Islamic edifices first began to be written in calligraphic form, with weaving letters, only to soon be written with the lines of script interlacing each other. From there, it was only a matter of time until these weaving and interlacing styles ultimately penetrated Arabic writing beyond its form to its content, its narrative form, as seen in the framed narrative structure of the *Arabian Nights*.

Having accumulated religious and cultural background on the *Arabian Nights*, a text that had adopted a more prominent role in my project alongside *The Hakawati*, I realized that I still did not have sufficient background in framing, embedding, and interlacing in narrative rather than cultural terms. At this point then, I turned to literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination* as a means of better grasping these narrative structural styles in relation to, for example, his concept of heteroglossia, in which the relationship between the languages or contexts of texts is explored, or more generally his notions of language as an integral part of the frame in which texts are activated. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, moreover, assisted me in further refining my ideas about how texts might interanimate or embed each other as

well as *The Hakawati*'s relationship to the world at large since not only does the text twist and transform ubiquitous stories from Islamic folklore but at several instances it also attempts to fill in the gaps of missing stories within Islamic popular culture, for example the source story of "Fatima's hand." Through Bakhtin, I began to understand Alameddine as using *The Hakawati* essentially to novelize, in Bakhtin's sense of the term, traditionally Islamic stories whose evolution had stagnated at some point, mutating them in terms of content and narrative structure. Bakhtin's organic theoretical conceptualization of such "novelization" allowed for what I considered a fair and complex approach to adaptation through "re-accentuation," in which not only do classical texts inform their adaptation, but adaptations also retroactively affect future readings and interpretations of the texts from which they stem.

Studying and applying Bakhtin's work to my analysis of the *Nights* and *The Hakawati* only further impressed upon me the need to approach the issue of framing and embedding from a fundamentally narratological perspective, motivating me study in detail the basic definitions of these literary devices set forth by the well known narratologists Gerald Prince and Mieke Bal.<sup>1011</sup> Prince's definitions of framing proved difficult to use but educational nonetheless: his first definition employed the term "embedding," which I needed to eventually segregate from "framing" in my project, and his second definition of "framing" employed the term "frame." This latter definition I focused on in my discussion of framing because it forced me to examine

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<sup>10</sup> Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary on Narratology*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

the most basic premises of frames, their functions, the instances in which they disappear, the moments at which they are seemingly invisible, and finally when they are shattered. Abstractly establishing the characteristics of framing, often using the visual metaphor of the frame to contour and shape my examination, allowed me to return to specific stories in the *Nights*, and eventually *The Hakawati*, and concretely discern which parts of the text constituted the frame, which stories acted as frames to others and why, and how this influenced the narrator, primary protagonist, and narratee in both framed and framing tales.

As I developed a theoretical base grounded more firmly in narratology for notions of framing, and by extension embedding and interlacing, I began analyzing some classic American films known to employ these techniques, such as Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* and Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (TPRC).<sup>1213</sup> While my examination of framing and embedding in the *Nights* and *The Hakawati* existed within a specifically Islamic context, these films allowed my analysis to largely disregard the cultural context and focus primarily on the narratives techniques employed, usually more than one, from a predominantly narratological perspective. Welles's *Citizen Kane*, similar to *The Hakawati*, maintains an aesthetic component of infinity despite the fact that, like *The Hakawati*, it has a very concrete ending tied to *Citizen Kane*'s last word: "Rosebud." Analyzing Welles's ability to manufacture this feeling of infinity by embedding a short film and *Citizen Kane*'s fragmented story

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<sup>12</sup> *Citizen Kane*, Dir. Orson Welles, Perf. Orson Welles, Joseph Cotton, Dorothy Comingore, Agnes Moorehead, and Everett Sloane, Videocassette (Warner Home Video, 1941).

<sup>13</sup> *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, Dir. Woody Allen, Perf. Mia Farrow, Jeff Daniels, Danny Aiello, Edward Herrmann, John Wood, Deborah Rush, et al. Videocassette (UAV Corporation, 1985).

within his larger film as well as by returning his film at its very ending to what initially catalyzed the film, Kane's final word "rosebud," provided me with invaluable insight as to how *The Hakawati* similarly uses embedding and circular plot to maintain the feeling of infinite continuity that is naturally accommodated for in the *Nights* by its very structure. *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, like the *Kane*, has an embedded narrative structure, but it also, significantly, contains interlaced story strains such that the film within *TPRC* is not only embedded in it but it also often pauses in its screening so that the embedded film's characters can interact with, and thus narratively intersect with, the characters of the larger embedding story of *TPRC*. In inspecting this latter aspect of the film, I was able to draw parallels between conclusions from these instances in *TPRC* and those story strains in *The Hakawati* that seem to intersect and affect each other at key moments through prominent symbols, such as the hand of Fatima.

While working on unraveling the narrative logic of these films, I was introduced to Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red*, a beautifully written mystery/novel set in 17<sup>th</sup> century Istanbul following the death of a famous miniaturist and the death of miniaturism as an Islamic art form.<sup>14</sup> Each chapter of the text is told from a different perspective, often those of various miniaturists and main characters, sometimes that of an object or illustration, and occasionally even that of the unnamed murderer. Reading this text, I sensed that it contained elements of framing despite the fact that at the time, in terms of its overall structure, I could not find evidence of

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<sup>14</sup> Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red* (New York: Vintage International, 2002).

embedding, at least not in the same way as the texts that I had examined earlier. In fact, I discovered that it was not that *My Name is Red* necessarily mobilized a frame narrative structure at the level of the plot but rather it used embedding that the very act of narration. Narration as storytelling in the text is bifurcated into narration and focalization, elements that both Bal and Prince describe in their respective texts. This split in narration in terms of the voice in which a story is narrated, narration, and the eyes through which it is seen, focalization, although apparent and clearly at play in Pamuk's book and applicable to a particularly unique story in the *Arabian Nights*, seemed like a distinction that would be especially relevant in cinema, which often presents floating voices unsynchronized with the images displayed onscreen, thus essentially creating a break between narration and focalization.

As I delved into notions of framing and embedding in narratology at what were beginning to seem like more and more miniscule levels, I came across writer and sociologist Erving Goffman, according to whom embedded structure exists even at the level of the reported utterance.<sup>15</sup> For Goffman, the sentence is the metaphor of the story; thus, it is through the sentence that he investigates framing and embedding. Goffman and Bakhtin's ideas speak to each other well, with the former emphasizing the inherent embeddedness of narration and the latter suggesting that the very meaning of a word must be negotiated by people within the frame in which they jointly exist and their respective languages mutually operate. Although Bakhtin and Goffman use different terms, or languages, the two have related understandings of

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<sup>15</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

many narrative concepts, like framing, embedding, and language in narration. The metaphorical examinations of the word and utterance that Bakhtin and Goffman offer suggest that embedding and framing are necessary in a “dialogic” and/or narrative context, highlighting the potential purpose of these narrative techniques in *The Hakawati*, a text which stresses its own storytelling dimensions and the interaction between the languages of its two main and distinctly different story strains.

With this background of the *Arabian Nights*, the Islamic aesthetic, narratological approaches to framing, embedding, and interlacing, as well as other examples of these techniques in literature and cinema, I returned to Rabih Alameddine’s *The Hakawati*. This time though, instead of selecting several chapters to analyze, I focused on a single example from what I thought was each of the major narrative moves that Alameddine performs in his text, including but not limited to embedding two stories within each other, interlacing a single story with itself, framing short vignettes within larger embedded story segments, interacting *The Hakawati* with stories in the real world, and of course those moments of character confusion in the text that initially drew me in. In this part of the project revisited, my work involved performing in depth analyses of especially the various cues and markers in *The Hakawati* that allowed a reader like myself to be aware of story shifts or to be manipulated into connecting unrelated story segments with each other. Furthermore, I spent some time attempting to understand the role of the unnamed narrator in the text as both a functionary narrator and an unidentified storyteller. I compare this narrator to the conversely named and rather well known narrator of the

*Nights*, Scheherazade, as a means of deciphering the purpose to which the tales in *The Hakawati* are told and what drives and conversely ends these tales narratively.

Finally, I end my treatment of *The Hakawati* by once again trying to puzzle out how the text both maintains a sense of ending and infinity. The predecessor to *The Hakawati*, the *Arabian Nights*, maintains its infiniteness through two means: its Borges-esque ending, the story of Scherherazade telling the story of herself telling the story of herself, etc., which pays homage to Islamic visual culture's ubiquitous use of the divinely-inspired fractal design, and the *Nights*' serial propensity to continuously add more tales within its umbrella-like frame narrative.<sup>16</sup> Although *The Hakawati* draws inspiration from the *Nights*, it cannot indefinitely continue; instead, *The Hakawati* creates the feeling of infinite continuity and repetition at the conclusion of its text by beginning a new story, stalling the inevitable death of Osama's, and suggesting the start of a familiar story: the story of *The Hakawati* itself. In this way, *The Hakawati*'s "infinite" ending echoes the Borges-esque infinite ending of the *Nights* but the repetition of *The Hakawati*'s tale is not that of a single story infinitely mirrored, but rather that of many interconnected stories repeatedly retold.

In editing these various chapters of my thesis as my project drew to what I thought was its end, I realized that I could not fairly address adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* in terms of framing without also including in my discussion an example of a cinematic adaptation of the *Nights*. The highly controversial Italian leftist filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* explicitly attempts to maintain

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<sup>16</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *A Universal History of Iniquity*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Penguin Books: New York, 2004).

much of the flavor of the classical *Nights*; however, while the film include framing, like *The Hakawati*, it necessarily had to evolve its use of this classic narrative structural technique.<sup>17</sup> Pasolini's film allowed me to incorporate the knowledge of focalization that I had acquired earlier and that seemed so attuned to the specificities of the cinematic medium and apply it to analysis of an adaptation of the *Nights*. In my discussion of the film, I look at the role of the protagonist, Nureidin, a figure with whom the audience identifies, in terms of his simultaneous roles as an audience member of the oral framed tales in the film, as narratee to the film's various framed stories, and as a focalizer of these same stories as well as how this convergence affects the reception of Pasolini's *Nights* by the audience. This final chapter of my thesis, moreover, attempts to reflect on the ways in which narrative structure and audience's use of their imagination evolve from the classical *Nights* to Pasolini's cinematic rendition of the text, the latter also acting as an allegory of the socio-political, economic, and historical circumstances of the time. Specifically, my treatment uses the major story strain that occupies the latter half the film to try to understand the ways in which framing is signaled and maintained in the film, whether it mimics or breaks with the *Nights* formulaic style, what techniques and devices it uses to main a connectedness between its stories since they lack an overarching frame tale, and what the significance of dreaming is in relation to the framed story structure within the film.

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<sup>17</sup> *Arabian Nights*, Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Perf. Franco Merli, Ines Pellegrini, Ninetto Davoli, Franco Citti, Tessa Bouche, et al, DVD (Shock Entertainment, 1974).

Briefly, my thesis project can be broken down as follows. Chapter One: *The Arabian Nights* and an Islamic Aesthetic unpacks the narrative nuances in the classical text in terms of framing, specifically in relation to how they might later affect adaptations, and how they these narrative dimensions ultimately stem from Islamic theology and culture. Chapter Two: Framing, Embedding, and Interlacing examines these three narrative structural styles in a narratological context through Mikhail Bakhtin, Mieke Bal, Gerald Prince, and Erving Goffman, applying the definitions gathered from these scholars to *Citizen Kane*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, and *My Name is Red*. Chapter Three: *The Hakawati* is a return to the text that initially jumpstarted my research for and discussions in the two prior chapters; moreover, it attempts to utilize notions of framing but especially embedding through the context of the *Nights* and an Islamic aesthetic to analyze the narrative structure of *The Hakawati*. Chapter Four: *The Flower of the Thousand and One Nights* is a analysis of narration, focalization, and frame narrative structure in the context of Pasolini's film, which attempts to maintain the integrity and culture of the *Nights* in an era in which oral storytelling is no longer prevalent and cinema is becoming the major means of delivering stories. Finally, the Conclusion briefly summarizes these chapters before relating them to each other and offering their potential significance in terms of the various components of storytelling.

This project began with the question of how multiple stories are presented in a connected and yet notably independent fashion within *The Hakawati*, and although at various points, the paper seems to wander from its initial question, each divergence is

a means to address basically the same inquiry from a different perspective. Thus, in its attempt to address the initial question, the thesis first turns to the origins of framing, literarily through the *Arabian Nights* and aesthetically through Islamic culture, only to then define it narratively. After the question is framed by both the Islamic aesthetic and narratology, entwining examining cinematic and narrative examples along the way, it loops back to its original text, *The Hakawati*. However, the project progresses, broadening its original question, by including cinema and its affects on frame narrative within the established contexts. Eventually, this thesis project, informed by Islamic and narratological backgrounds, mainly becomes an in depth examination of three primary texts: the classical *Arabian Nights*, its textual adaptation *The Hakawati*, and its cinematic adaptation Pasolini's *Nights*, respectively. Because the fabric of the project was created in large part through its procedure and approach, the exploration and analysis of these three texts is heavily informed by the order of the research and the way in which the many topics, themes, and questions in this thesis develop and embed each other.

## Chapter One: The *Arabian Nights* and an Islamic Aesthetic

The *Arabian Nights*, *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, translated literally as “One Thousand Nights and a Night,” is a seemingly and supposedly never-ending collection of South Asian, Arab, and Persian tales in frame narrative form.<sup>18</sup> Many of these tales are specifically drawn from an Islamic cultural context that pervades the text, both at the level of form and content. This may explain the name the Occident coined for this text: the *Arabian Nights*, with an emphasis on the “Arabian,” connotative of “Islamic.” The original name of these stories concentrates on the notion of infinity; if “one thousand nights” is suggestive of a large quantity, then adding a night to it suggests an always greater amount—infinity through addition. The *Nights* initially began as an oral text that a *hakawati*, “storyteller” in Arabic, would tell, sometimes paralleling Scheherazade’s narration by also storytelling nightly. Numerous writers, artists, and filmmakers have drawn inspiration from, adapted, and imitated these world-renowned tales from as early as the first millennium CE into contemporary times.

The *Arabian Nights*’ initial manuscript copies fork into two main archetypes: the Egyptian and the Syrian (Haddawy xii). According to Haddawy, the Egyptian branch possesses more fluidity and newer tales; moreover, this archetype’s descendent versions of the *Nights* exchange stories and modify passages (xii). Haddawy believes that the Syrian archetype can be considered more authentic because of its “stunted growth” (xii) and rigid exclusion of tales that are outside the

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<sup>18</sup> Husain Haddawy, *The Arabian Nights* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).

*Nights*' "core," as considered by the famous compiler of the *Nights* Muhsin Mahdi (Irwin 55).<sup>19</sup> The Egyptian archetype is considered to be "a large, heterogeneous, indiscriminate collection of stories by different hands and from different sources, representing different layers of culture, literary conventions and styles"; whereas, the Syrian archetype is supposed to be closer to "the fundamentally homogenous original, which was the clear expression of life, culture, and literary style of a single historical moment" (Haddawy xiii). Nonetheless, the unifying narrative structure of the *Nights*, its frame narrative, reveals its anxiety towards the sense of heterogeneity essential in an Islamic aesthetic. Husain Haddawy's translation of Mahdi's compilation of the *Nights* (Haddawy xv), the primary text of the *Arabian Nights* for the purposes of this paper, draws almost exclusively on the Syrian branch, believed by Mahdi to be closer to an archetype derived directly from the "mother" source of the *Nights* (Irwin 55).

Structurally, *The Thousand and One (Arabian) Nights* is a frame narrative, a text in which stories are told within stories, layered in their telling, occasionally intersecting each other. The interactions between stories often function to relieve the tensions that drive the plot in framing tales. Often, even the act of the narration of the framed story alleviates the framing tale's primary source of tension, related to sexual consummation and death in the case of the *Nights*' overarching frame story. Sometimes though, the text leaves stories unclear and even untold.<sup>20</sup> This type of ambiguity is included in the stories of the *Nights* as means of creating reader curiosity for more stories and also leaving space to potentially insert more stories later.

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<sup>19</sup> Irwin Robert, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> The third old man's story in "The Tale of the Merchant and the Demon" is left untold (29).

Moreover, in the telling of the *Nights*' framed stories, storytellers can playfully undermine social mores: women can have affairs (5); a sage can criticize the king for asking him to tell a story before the former's imminent beheading (45); a barber can become the companion of a king (295); etc. Because the framed story is seen as non-threatening—since it is only a mere story—possibilities otherwise impossible in the framing environment can be narrated within the framing tale. If the framing story can be understood as level one of the *Nights* and the framed story as level two, then level one and two, when in a framing relationship, are separated by a degree of narration. Furthermore, this degree of narrative distancing is what makes possible an openness in narrating taboo topics and a fluidity in breaking social mores in the framed story. In the *Nights*, the reader is constantly reminded of the overarching frame tale at the beginning of every night and story through an acknowledgement of the storyteller: "Scheherazade said:" (294). Although this introduction of Scheherazade changes very little, it significantly always begins the framed tales in the *Nights*, reminding readers of the primary framing environment in which the secondary tales exist.

The structural relationship between the levels of stories in the *Nights* can be analyzed and determined on the basis of the narrative relationship between them, that is by correlating specific narrators with specific levels of stories. This is illustrated, for example, in "The Story of the Fisherman and the Demon," in which a fisherman punishes a demon who begs for his freedom (30-66); instead of granting the demon

his wish, the fisherman tells him a story like their own (36).<sup>21</sup> The fisherman from the framing story, level one, the level of events and narration, becomes the narrating agent for “The Tale of King Yunan and Sage Duban,” the framed story, level two, the level of a story within a story (36).<sup>22</sup> Once the level two, framed story of King Yunan begins, it takes on characteristics of a level one story. After the initial line, in which the fisherman-narrator’s presence is manifest in his direct address to the demon—“Demon, there was once [...]” (36)—almost no direct signs of a narrating voice exist in the telling of the story. Thus, although the story of King Yunan clearly begins narratively framed, the bulk of the remainder of its body makes the story seem like an independent, level one story. However, eventually the level one fisherman-narrator does interrupt his relatively smooth telling of the seemingly independent tale of King Yunan. The fisherman does this to emphasize his didactic message to the demon, significantly without quotation marks: “Demon, when the sage [...]” (46).

This lack of quotation marks, punctuation that is representative of direct speech, can be read in two ways at once. First, the story of King Yunan, despite the interruption from the real level one framing story of the fisherman, continues as a seemingly un-narrated level one text because of the fact that the entire story of King Yunan is not narrated as direct speech, bracketed in quotation marks. Consequently, the fisherman’s interruption in the story of King Yunan must be read as part of the

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<sup>21</sup> “The Story of the Fisherman and the Demon” and the story that the fisherman tells the demon, “The Story of King Yunan and Sage Duban,” have a basic plot in common: an unjust punishment is inflicted on an innocent man who eventually avenges himself against his transgressor (30-66).

<sup>22</sup> “Level one” and “level two” will be used in place of the equivalent literary terminology of diegesis. “Level one” and “level two” coincide respectively with extradiegetic and the metadiegetic worlds in a story.

latter's narrated text. Therefore, the story of King Yunan can be seen as effectively framing the act of the fisherman speaking to the demon—and by implication the fisherman's story as well. In this way, the first reading of the fisherman-narrator's interruption suggests that, to an extent, the real level two story, that of King Yunan, frames the real level one story, that of the fisherman. The second reading of the interruption places less emphasis on the framing capabilities of the level two story and more emphasis on the fact that the level one, framing story of the fisherman still has the ability to intrude its level two, framed story of King Yunan. Moreover, it is important to note that this intrusion is seemingly possible despite the fact that the level two story of King Yunan goes beyond the narration of the fisherman by taking on characteristics of a level one, independent story. Although, the fisherman's interruptions admittedly become part of the level two, framed story, such that the level two story is seemingly put in the position of the framing level one story, the level two story of King Yunan can still never narratively interrupt the level one story of the fisherman. The narrative relationship between levels of framing stories is such that only the level one framing story can interrupt the level two, framed story precisely because it is the former that narrates the latter. And yet, the structure of the narrative is organized in such a way that one gets the impression that the lower level story can reverse its position with respect to the higher one. This complex feature of the narrative technique of the *Nights* is key to the way that narrative tensions are handled in the corpus.

Because the level two story does not narrate the level one story, the former has no means of interrupting the latter; however, the framed, level two story can still influence the framing, level one story. The framed story can, through its actual telling, resolve the tensions in the framing story. Conversely, level one stories can *only* interrupt level two stories—they cannot intrude into subsequent story levels. For example, the story of Scheherazade is the level one story to the level two story of the fisherman and the level three story of King Yunan.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, Scheherazade as a narrator cannot directly speak in the story level of King Yunan, although she can interrupt the story level of the fisherman. Therefore, the *Nights* seems to have an order of narrative relationships between stories, such that stories predominately have power only over stories narrated directly within them, and in turn, these framed stories function to resolve tensions only within their immediately preceding, framing story levels. Thus, the story level of the fisherman, in its telling, alleviates the tension in the plot of Scheherazade's story level. Scheherazade tells stories to King Shahrayar as a means of sexual consummation and postponing her death (16-17); hence, secondary story levels, such as that of the fisherman and the demon, defer the tension in their respective primary story levels. In this way, framing story levels affect only those story levels that are immediately adjacent to them: framing stories can interrupt immediately framed stories and framed stories can resolve tensions in adjacent framing stories.

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<sup>23</sup> Story level number designations are relative to each other—the story of King Yunan is a level three story in terms of the story of Scheherazade but only a level two story in terms of the story of the fisherman.

This framing system is significant in the *Nights* because it dictates an order of operation, a succession articulating which story levels can affect which others. At the beginning of each tale, Scheherazade lists the narrative framing story levels that encompass the tale being told at that particular moment. She does this by listing the order in which narrators tells stories, paralleling the way in which an Arabic-speaker may list his family lineage in the lengthy pronouncement of his name: for example, Muhammad Khalid ibn (son of) Salim ibn Abdullah ibn Abdul-Razzaq ibn Abdul-Majid. In the *Nights*, Scheherazade lists narrative order in the following way: for example, “I heard, O happy King, that the tailor told the king of China that the barber told the guests that he said to the caliph:” (281). This lineage of narrators becomes indicative of story level generations: in this case, “The Tale of the Fourth Brother” son of “The Barber’s Tale” son of “The Tailor’s Tale” son of “The Story of the Hunchback” son of the “Prologue[: The Story of Scheherazade and King Shahrayar]”. This filial introduction of framing story levels through their narrators, at the beginning of each night and story, serves as a reminder of the story levels’ relationships to each other and which framing story level can directly affect which framed story level.

The *Thousand and One Nights* appropriates its iconic frame structure in large part from the Islamic culture(s) from which many of its stories also originate. Although the stories in the *Nights* come from a spectrum of places and cultural backgrounds, they have in common their eventual Islamicization and/or prolonged contact with territories until Muslim rule. Defining something as “Islamic,” however,

is difficult, given that Islam applies not only to a religious creed but also to a secular culture that developed with the spread of Islam. Bloom and Blair's *Islamic Arts* is useful in determining the meaning of "Islamic" in this context.<sup>24</sup> The text offers a uniquely comparative and historical, almost encyclopedic, approach to Islamic art.

Early on, the text attempts to address the question of what exactly constitutes Islamic art through a small, indirect discussion embedded in an exploration of the Dome of the Rock. *Islamic Arts* defines a work of art as "Islamic" in the following way:

This building so completely follows the traditions of late antique and Byzantine architecture that some people do not even regard it as Islamic at all. The people who built it, however, undoubtedly meant it to serve an 'Islamic' function. Like much Islamic art of later times, it was the function that made a work of art 'Islamic,' not the religious affiliation of the craftsmen who made it. (28)

The text clearly acknowledges multiple definitions of Islamic art and architecture: that which is made by Muslims and that which serves an Islamic function. However, the text's purposeful inclusion of this structure, the Dome of the Rock, in its discussion *on* Islamic art, clearly evinces its endorsement of the second definition. The text also suggests that a work of "Islamic" art is significantly not defined as "Islamic" just because its craftsmen may be Muslims. The clear concentration on the function of art in defining "Islamic" secularizes the creed by divorcing it of any

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islamic Arts* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2007).

essentially religious qualities that, for example, its adherents would possess solely by virtue of being Muslim. The implication is that although “Islamic” functions may stem from the religion of Islam, they go beyond its belief system, creating a culture, an aesthetic.

According to *Islamic Arts*, the qualifications of “Islamic” functions are still debatable, as is the function of the Dome of the Rock. The plural definitions the text offers for “Islamic,” as well as art and the text’s diverse examples of it, imply that there is also multiplicity in the definition of Islamic functions. If “Islam” as a cultural category has its roots in the religion, then its characterizations must relate to at least one of the faith’s requirements as outlined in the *Quran*, in sunnah (actions of the prophet Muhammad), in hadith (sayings of the prophet Muhammad), or other Islamic traditions.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, those items that serve Muslim people may also be considered “Islamic” in that they function for the followers of Islam. Considering Islam’s Arab cultural roots as well as the religion’s wide expansion into diverse cultures that it inevitably incorporates, “Islamic” also becomes reflective of the local “Islamic” functions created by the religion’s heterogeneous population.

Islamic textiles, a portable and common currency in the Islamic Empire(s), were an art form that quickly came to embody what would become the major characteristics of a developing Islamic aesthetic. Textiles and their various techniques are the source of many Islamic aesthetic devices, transferring into and through various media, even eventually as far as literature. According to Lisa Golombek in

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<sup>25</sup> *The Quran: Translation*, Trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Elmhurst: Tahrike, 2000).

“The Draped Universe of Islam,” “textiles in Islamic society fulfilled far more than functions normally expected,” even going so far as to infiltrate other visual cultures, including but not limited to pottery, the tiraz, architecture, and calligraphy (25).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, cloth was ubiquitous in the Islamic world—from door ways to walls, floors to curtains, pitcher covers to burial wraps, the contemporary fashion statements to tents—it was literally all-pervasive, used functionally and as means of embellishment. In the “Taming of the Horror Vacui,” Richard Ettinghausen addresses the obsession in the Islamic world with excessively covering things and people with intricately decorated textiles; he sees this as a fear of the empty (space), what he terms “horror vacui” (Golombek 25).<sup>27</sup> If this anxiety of the empty, especially the un-layered, originally stemmed from the realm of textile art, then it clearly permeated with the flow of textiles in other realms of Islamic culture, including the intense layering and detailing in the *Nights*.

Islamic textile usage, especially in terms of clothing, offers an aesthetic parallel to Islamic narrative styles. In the Islamic empires, clothing served as the narrative of oneself that was presented to the world. Notably then, dress in the Islamic world, specifically around the Mediterranean/North African region, was and still is traditionally layered, with loosely draped individual, often even unstitched, pieces of cloth coming together to form a total ensemble. This translated over from form to content in that often even the designs and images stitched onto and/or into the cloth

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<sup>26</sup> Lisa Golombek, “The Draped Universe of Islam,” *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World*, Ed. Priscilla P. Soucek (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Richard Ettinghausen, “The Taming of the Horror Vacui in Islamic Art,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 123(1) (1979): 15-28.

were layered and interlaced (Golombek 34-35). Hence, layered and interlaced clothing in Islamic cultures became suggestive of multiple narratives mobilized by wearers. Interlacing, “the basic over-and-under process whereby loose threads become bound together,” was not a technique exclusive to Muslims, although they may have greater cultural value associated with it because of their love of textiles (Golombek 35). If the layered textile style is indicative of multiple personal narratives or design compartments, then interlacing is a way of connecting these segregated narratives and designs. This connective capability of interlacing, its ability to unify various lines and figures, creates a sense of vitality: “the lines of the geometric grid took on a life of their own” (Golombek 35). Because of the dynamic character of interlacing as a presentation style and its ability to change the way in which a text is read, the presence of interlacing makes organizational style dominant over form (medium) and content (the individual motifs). In other words, the manner of structuring and presentation becomes more important than the materials (for example: textile, mosaic, stucco) or the contents (for ex.: stories, verses, scenery). The focus of the text, in the presence of interlacing, shifts towards the way in which narrative or design lines are interwoven into a whole piece—of clothing, art, or literature—creating a sense of unity between otherwise independent compartments and/or layers.

The capacity of aesthetic transference from Islamic textiles to Islamic narrative suggests that Islamic cultures did not segregate techniques or styles based on media. Instead, an Islamic aesthetic is specifically characterized by the coming together of various styles, often transferred through numerous media. Golombek

explores several examples of this type of cultural transference, significantly even one in relation to the Arabic alphabet. This may be the first direct link in the process of Islamic textile techniques moving towards creating counterparts in literature. Golombek notices that textile interlacing designs arise in a unique form of Kufic calligraphy in which “the letter of the inscription became knotted [and t]he horizontal bars in the letter *dal* of Muhammad are twisted around each other like threads of a chain stitch” (35). Clearly, the influence of interlaced textile art carried over into the visual culture of Arabic writing, as Golombek illustrates through her example, eventually even progressing as far as that which is the result of a culmination of letters: literature. Islamic textiles often carried visual narratives on them, with either a single snapshot representing a story or an amalgamation of scenes that could be read together, with the reader acting as assembling narrator. When the latter visual narrative, comprised of various scenes, was catalyzed by the aesthetic transference fostered by Islam cultures, a reversal between textiles and narrative was manifested. In tandem with the transference of visual narrative styles onto textiles occurred the transference of organizational textile techniques into narratives, demonstrated in an Islamic text like the *Arabian Nights*.

In Islam, a religion characterized by diversity and multiplicity, self-proclaimed as having seventy-two sects, unity is created through the use of the principle of *tawhid*, or the oneness of Allah or God.<sup>28</sup> God is the most central and

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<sup>28</sup> According to one Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have said that by the time that the Day of Judgement arrives, the Jews have 71 sects in their religion and that Muslims will have one more than the Jews: seventy-two.

important aspect of the Islamic faith. In fact, one of the only uniting characteristics of the *Quran* is that the whole of it is believed to be the word of the one, the same, and the only God. The principle of God's unity, *tawhid*, one of the two necessary beliefs for all followers of Islam, is arguably at the core of the faith. Since it is God's unity that brings together the *Quran*, Muslims attempt to impress a similarly divine abstract unity into the holy text, through its presentation, as a means of counter-balancing the wide spectrum of topics in its content. Some of the *Quran*'s unity was probably felt subliminally in the very process of composing and creating a copy of the holy text. This was especially true during the early years of Islam, when the occupations of calligrapher, artist, scribe, *hafiz*, *qari*, and scholar were all practiced by one and the same person. Thus, the *Quran* possessed a single divine and a single human maker, unified in its creation.

However, by the fifteenth century, there was already much differentiation and specialization in the production process for artistic pieces, suggesting an impending tension in the Islamic aesthetic with respect to a desire for *tawhidic* unity despite the heterogeneities in Islam. Most single Islamic pieces evidenced by this time a trend towards specialized positions through the inclusion at least two signatures, the designer's and the artist's (Bloom and Blair 331, 353). Furthermore, in the arts of bookmaking, there were clearly numerous specialized positions involved with making a single text, including but not limited to scribes, painters, binders, designers, teachers, paper-makers, illuminators, calligraphers, and rulers. Perhaps to counteract the great diversities in the creation of the Islamic aesthetic, in terms of the cultures

practiced within the Muslim population as well as the various specialized artistic positions, the visual presentation of the *Quran* attempted to recreate the unity at the center of the Islamic dogma. The holy text exemplifies the anxiety within the Islamic aesthetic to physically represent the abstract metaphor of God's *tawhid*. It does this by using the simple but effective visual technique of framing, which is later imitated and paralleled by other Islamic media, such as literature, with similar dilemmas. Early versions of the *Quran* relied purely on their high quality material and precise penmanship to demonstrate their distinction as God's sacred text above other books, thus having no need for major stylistic markers of difference. From the fourteenth century onwards, however, perhaps because copies of the *Qurans* became more common and cost efficient, especially with regards to their materials, there arose a distinctive pattern of framing applied to each individual page of the *Quran*. It may be argued that the framing functioned stylistically to characterize and demarcate the *Quran* as Islam's divine text.

Admittedly, if the frame is an integral and defining characteristic of the *Quran* and permeates Islamic aesthetics, then for the initial appearance of frames in copies of the *Quran* to be during the fourteenth century seems like a relatively late development, taking place almost seven hundred years after the religion's conception. However, frames were present in copies of the *Quran* from as early as the ninth century, even though these frames seem invisible in comparison to the typical, heavily decorated Islamic art pieces. As a result of the "horror vacui" emblematic of the Islamic aesthetic, "Islamic" style was characterized by intricate and embellished

detailing that tended to cover all visible surfaces. The most prominent exception to this was borders, which were left as blank space in Islamic pieces. Subsequently, the thick, two to three inch wide margins around every page, or at least every overleaf, of many ninth century *Qurans* should be read as conscious border frames that embed the entire contents of the *Quran*.

Frames, whether of individual pages or over-leaves, function to create a sense of the same scene, despite potential differences in contents, chapters, and/or scribes, every time that a person opens up the same copy of the *Quran*. Hence, the illusion of unity is repeatedly maintained by illustrating identical visual frames on pages of the *Quran*. In copies of the *Quran* after the fourteenth century, frames become more intricate, seeming to reach out beyond the pages on which they are illustrated, especially on the covers of the holy text. From their outward extension, *Quranic* frames seem to suggest that their textual metaphor of *tawhidic* unity connects with God's actual *tawhidic* unity, beyond the text, in the greater, real world. In the seventeenth century, particularly in the Ottoman Empire, another prevalent *Quranic* framing device emerged: marbling (Bloom and Blair 358). Marbled framing was an artistic technique that visually stressed a sense of unity, even with its various seemingly independent, colorful swirl bursts. Marbled designs offered the illusion of an eventual connectedness between their swirling designs. If the various marbled color swirls had not already merged within the text's visible frames, then the designs suggested, especially from the way in which they were cropped mid-design, that they

would connect in the imagined space beyond the text into which the swirls seemingly extended.

Consequently, through the illusion of unity, frames also foster an illusion of *connectivity*; in the case of the *Quran*, this latter illusion is between the text's stories or chapters, making the book seem more cohesive. Paralleling the pattern of consolidation and followed by diversification experienced by empires of the Islamic world from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, Islamic books also similarly transitioned from being unified, whole texts to an amalgamation of various pieces. From the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries in the Islamic world, the illustrated, whole book was in high demand; however, by the seventeenth century, single-page works were increasingly popularized (Bloom and Blair 352). Because of the shift from pre-made, whole books to individually illustrated story sheets, there arose a need to efficiently organize and mount individually acquired sheets into a single book. Bloom and Blair write that the first single sheet illustrations, from fifteenth century Iran, were merely cut and put together incoherently into an album for the sake of organization (352). They continue, however, that "by the seventeenth century, royal collectors often had single sheets mounted into albums with decorated borders that attempted to give some unity to a heterogeneous assortment of elements by different artists in different styles" (352-353). Moreover, because each page in an album had the same, usually floral, border, when over-leaves would be examined and interpreted, facing pages would often mistakenly be read in conjunction to each other because of the illusion of connectedness brought about by the framing device. The

seeming purposefulness of the arrangement, inferred from the structure possessing shared overleaf frames, would foster the illusion of relationships between facing images. Thus, the illusion of unity in Islamic texts was maintained during this era as a derivation of the orthodox Islamic principle of *tawhid* in/between an Islamic world that, despite its political and cultural fracturing, still managed to maintain a seemingly unified cultural category through the Islamic concept of the *ummah*, or the global Muslim community.<sup>29</sup>

The framing device is clearly mobilized in the *Quran* as a means of imposing a sense of *tawhidic* unity. Moreover, because the *Quran* is one of the two central texts in Islam, it undoubtedly influences the way in which other Islamic texts, facing similar problems of creating perceived senses of unity despite their essential heterogeneities, resolve their structural dilemmas. This is demonstrated by the narrative frame of the *Arabian Nights*, which brings together a wide range of stories from the diverse “Islamic” literary cultures. Vilashini Cooppan asks in “The Ethics of World Literature” what exactly is “Arabian” then about the *Arabian Nights*, citing the “heterogeneous mix of Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian cultures, and Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Turkish, Syriac, and Byzantine Greek languages that constituted the cosmopolitan medieval world of the *Nights*” (35).<sup>30</sup> Assuming that “Arabian” to some degree refers to “Islamic,” perhaps the *Nights*’ very ability to create a sense of unity among these diverse cultures is exactly what makes it “Islamic.” Furthermore,

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<sup>29</sup> *Ummah* means “community” in Arabic; when the term is used in an Islamic context, it refers to the notion of the greater, global Muslim community.

<sup>30</sup> Vilashini Cooppan, “The Ethics of World Literature: Reading Others, Reading Otherwise,” *Teaching World Literature*, Ed. David Damrosch (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009).

although Cooppan reads the multiplicity of the *Nights* as a means of asking how the text can be still labeled as of *a* single cultural origin, the underlying question remains: how is it that with such saturating heterogeneity the *Nights* still manages to remain *a* text at all, instead of a series of texts?

Stories in the *Nights* have one essential factor in common: their identification with the text's frame narrative: the *basmalic* formula. The *Nights*' nightly equation consists of Scheherazade telling stories every night to King Shahrayar until the break of dawn, when there is peace in silence until the following night, when the process begins (or rather is framed) anew. This story, often called the prologue, is better known as the frame tale of the *Nights*. As the nights progress in the text, the framing *basmalic* formula becomes repetitive, though growing slightly shorter every few nights. Although the *basmalic* formula is eventually reduced to only a few seemingly inconsequential, tedious words by the end of the *Nights*, it still frames every night; hence, it must play some critical role in the text. The familiarity of the *basmalic* formula, both from its original appearance in the *Quran* and its literal repetition in this text, sustains the illusion of there being *a* text at all. The presence of the framing prologue story in the *Nights* makes it difficult to discern the irrelevance of all the secondary level stories to each other, specifically because of these stories' shared relationship to the overarching frame story.

Therefore, an adaptation of the original *basmalic* formula functions as a major framing device in the *Arabian Nights*, as the formula also does in its most renowned

context, the *Quran*. The most common, repeated phrases that are always included as parts of every “night” in the *Nights* are approximately as follow:

The following night Dinarzad said to her sister Scheherazade, “Sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us one of your lovely little tales to while away the night.” Scheherazade replied, “With the greatest pleasure.”

I heard, O King, that [... the story level two narrator A told the story level two character B that the story level three narrator C said...]

[...]

But morning overtook Scheherazade, and she lapsed into silence. Then her sister said, “Sister, what an entertaining story!” Scheherazade replied, “What is this compared with that I shall tell you tomorrow night if the king spares me and lets me live!” (64, 68, 209)

This basic dialogue is repeated every few pages in the *Nights*, every night so to speak, breaking up larger stories into smaller, more regular sections.<sup>31</sup> In the *Nights*, the opening part of the *basmalic* formula generally includes a nighttime setting, Scheherazade as a narrative agent, and the act of her narrating; for example: “The following night Scheherazade said.” The middle part consists of an audience member or addressee, primarily King Shahrayar in this case and the act of hearing/receiving on the part of Scheherazade<sup>32</sup>; for example: “I heard, O happy King, that [...].”

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<sup>31</sup> The breakdown of the *Nights*’ larger stories into smaller parts to be delivered nightly by Scheherazade parallels the way in which Muslims may breakdown large chapters/stories of the *Quran* into shorter, more regular sections that they can recite daily—with each daily part necessitating a repetition of the *basmala* at the start of its recital.

<sup>32</sup> Scheherazade’s hearing/receiving of the second level story functions as a mirroring of King Shahrayar’s hearing/reception the same story from Scheherazade.

Finally, the ending section includes a morning setting, the (now non-)narrative agent, Scheherazade, and an (non-)act of silence; for example: “But morning overtook Scheherazade, and she lapsed into silence.” These three basic sections constitute the *Nights’ basmalic* formula that parallels the *Quran’s* original *basmalic* formula.

The original *basmalic* formula has three component parts, with the second or middle portion being the *basmala* itself. The *basmala* is the well-known opening phrase that Muslims regularly say to pay homage to God: “bismillahi-arrahmaan-arraheem.”<sup>33</sup> The phrase usually is recited before a Muslim begins any act, especially a difficult one or one that should be done in good conscience, and it means “In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.”<sup>34</sup> Often before the actual *basmala*, Muslims recite another phrase, also included in the *basmalic* formula as its primary part or opening section. This phrase means “O Allah, I seek protection from you from the rejected Satan.” It precedes the actual *basmala*, which itself is uttered or inscribed before performing an act or beginning to read or recite the body of a text. The last component of the *basmalic* formula does not come at the start of a text. In fact, not only does it come after the first two parts—the prelude to the *basmala* and the *basmala* itself—it also follows the entire contents of the framed text or act. This concluding, final phrase translates as “Allah says truth.” The parallels between the *Quranic basmalic* formula phrases and those of the *Nights* lay in their similar

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<sup>33</sup> Islamicized Christians use the following, similar phrase: “bismil-abi-wal-ibni-war-ruhil-qudusi.”

<sup>34</sup> The edited, Islamicized Christian version of the *basmala* means “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

arrangement pattern, rhythmic familiarity to the Islamicized ear, and general functions, including their meanings.

The framing formula of the *Nights*, directly parallels the structure and content of the *Quranic basmalic* formula. In the first part of the *basmalic* formula in the *Nights*, Dinarzad begs her sister to tell King Shahrayar and herself a story. The two women, especially Scheherazade, are seeking refuge from Scherherazade's husband, King Shahrayar, and it is the telling of her potential stories, the framed body of the *Nights*, that is invoked as a force of salvation. Scheherazade is merely the reciter, the narrator, of the stories that will protect her from the rejected man,<sup>35</sup> the threatening power. Muslims similarly recite the first part of the *basmalic* formula to seek protection from Allah against the vengeful Satan.<sup>36</sup> The potential protection is both the recited *Quranic* section itself and God's mercy that follows from its recitation. Next, in the actual *Quranic basmala*, Muslims clearly invoke and praise Allah in an effort to procure blessed, eternal lives for their souls. In the *Nights' basmala* phrase, Scheherazade does not praise God; instead, she praises the *King*, who parallels the rejected, vengeful Satan, addressing herself to him. This critical switch is indicative of the fact that Scheherazade is not narrating for her eternal life, but rather striving to keep her death at a distance. Thus, Scheherazade addresses herself to the force that is immediately stronger than her: her executioner, King Shahrayar. Finally, for the last

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<sup>35</sup> King Shahrayar was cheated on by his wife and, for this reason, feels anger towards all women and a desire to avenge himself.

<sup>36</sup> Muslims believe that when God created Adam, he asked the djinn Shaitan (Satan) to prostrate himself to the new creation. Satan refused and for this, God sentenced him to Hell. Before going to Hell, however, Satan asked God to be allowed to tempt as many people as he could to be sinful so that they too could go to Hell and he could have some sort of revenge upon the creature that was his downfall.

section of the *Nights' basmalic* formula, in place of the *Quranic basmalic* formula's last section "Allah says truth," Scheherazade lapses into silence. Likewise, after the recitation of "sadaqAllahulazeem,"<sup>37</sup> the last section of the *Quranic basmalic* formula, Muslims usually pause for a moment of silence; often this pause is used to contemplate the recited verses. Moreover, this silence tends to linger, representing that which is unnarratable: God's judgment on the Muslims' souls. Scheherazade similarly stops speaking after narrating (a section of) a story because judgment on her—her narration and her life—is taking place. King Shahrayar's judgment is never explicitly conveyed. It is only through the continuation of the *Nights'* narrative *basmalic* formula the following night that Scheherazade's reprieve is ascertained. Indeed, the *Nights' basmalic* formula becomes unnecessary if Scheherazade is convicted. In the moment of no longer needing or being able to seek refuge from a higher being (because one is already dead or condemned), the *basmalic* formula becomes inapplicable—and, in the case of the *Nights*, the text ends.

The striking parallels between the *Nights'* framing structure and that of the *Quran*, through their shared use of the general style of the *basmalic* formula, are suggestive of further similarities between the two, such as the way in which these two texts are activated. Although the *Nights' basmala*<sup>38</sup> opens every story of the text, it is also repeated at the beginning of each night before the telling of any nightly section, even that of an interrupted story. This use of the *basmala* in the *Nights* is reminiscent of the way in which Muslims read the *Quran*. Although Muslims recite the *basmala*

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<sup>37</sup> This is the transliteration of the Arabic for "Allah says truth."

<sup>38</sup> For example: "I heard, O happy King, that [...]."

at the beginning of each *Quranic* chapter, they also recite it when they resume the recitation of an interrupted chapter. Reciting an interrupted *Quranic* chapter is quite common because many of the holy text's chapters are quite long and difficult to read in a single sitting—much like the longer stories of the *Nights*. As such, often the only link between *Quranic* chapters and/or selectively recited sections is the *basmalic* formula, making this framing formula characteristic of the text through its repetitive use as an embedded framing device. The *basmalic* formula of the *Nights* is similarly employed as a frame that encompasses each tale and/or nightly narrative section of the *Nights*. Moreover, sections of stories in the *Nights* are delivered in daily, or rather nightly, doses, similar to the way in which the *Quran* is recited. Hence, this framing technique creates the sense of continuity, connectivity, and uniformity not only between portions of the text, but also between the daily/nightly settings in which they are activated, and derives the authority of its mode of telling from the most respected cultural and religious practices available.

Islamic texts and theology permeate Islamic art, which incorporates both religious and secular Islamic cultural elements, which in turn permeate Islamic narratives as well. In orthodox Islam, there is a tradition of the prophet Muhammad, or a *hadith*, that especially damns the person who imitates God's creation through its physical representation, specifically<sup>39</sup> through the portrayal of people and animals.

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<sup>39</sup> It is narrated by Ali ibn Abu Talib that the Prophet Muhammad said: "The angels do not enter a house which contains a picture, a dog, or a man who is impure by sexual defilement" (Book 32, Number 4140: Sunan Abu-Dawud). It is narrated by Aisha, the Prophet Muhammad's wife: "I bought a cushion with pictures on it. When Allah's Apostle saw it, he kept standing at the door and did not enter the house. I noticed the sign of disgust on his face, so I said, 'O Allah's Apostle! I repent to Allah

Thus, despite the tendency in the Islamic aesthetic to fill and layer spaces, orthodox Islamic art exists without depictions of animals or people. Because of this, the orthodox religious visual culture does not have characters; without characters, it also does not have events; and without events, it does not have narratives. Although Islam is clearly invested narratives, as seen in the many didactic stories in the *Quran* and hadith, it prohibits the depictions of narratives visually. Hence, there is a tension in the Islamic aesthetic between the desire to depict narratives in the religion's visual culture, filling and layering pieces with stories, and the inability to do so. This tension fuels the devolution of Islamic narrative from visual art to literature, and because literature receives its narrative aesthetic inspiration from Islamic visual culture, the latter's tendency of layering and embellishing is also transmitted to the former.

Islamic visual culture infuses human, literary narratives with art techniques because of the prohibition against illustrating human-based narratives in art. The process of deferring the desire for an Islamic aesthetic-based narrative form of art to Islamic literature begins from the smallest, most basic visual component of Arabic

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and His Apostle . (Please let me know) what sin I have done.' Allah's Apostle said, 'What about this cushion?' I replied, 'I bought it for you to sit and recline on.' Allah's Apostle said, 'The painters (i.e. owners) of these pictures will be punished on the Day of Resurrection. It will be said to them, "Put life in what you have created (i.e. painted)."' The Prophet added, 'The angels do not enter a house where there are pictures'" (Volume 3, Book 34, Number 318: Sahih Bukhari). It is narrated by Said bin Abu Al-Hasan: "While I was with Ibn 'Abbas a man came and said, 'O father of 'Abbas! My sustenance is from my manual profession and I make these pictures.' Ibn 'Abbas said, 'I will tell you only what I heard from Allah's Apostle. I heard him saying, "Whoever makes a picture will be punished by Allah till he puts life in it, and he will never be able to put life in it."' Hearing this, that man heaved a sigh and his face turned pale. Ibn 'Abbas said to him, 'What a pity! If you insist on making pictures I advise you to make pictures of trees and any other unanimated objects'" (Volume 3, Book 34, Number 428: Sahih Bukhari). It is narrated by Ibn 'Umar that Prophet Muhammad said: "Those who paint pictures would be punished on the Day of Resurrection and it would be said to them: 'Breathe soul into what you have created'" (Chapter 19, Book 024, Number 5268: Sahih Muslim). *Hadith of the Day* (2007) 10 June 2011 <<http://hadithoftheday.wordpress.com/2007/05/09/pictures-and-angels-in-the-house/>>.

writing to the larger, structural narrative forms of it. Writing can be understood to have three basic components: the form, or the alphabet; the medium, or the material (arrangement of writing); and the content, or the organization of narrative structure. In the Islamic culture, the love of intricacy is first transferred towards writing visually through the writing form. The depiction of the Arabic alphabet goes from being basic, at most slanted, to being beautifully calligraphic, becoming interlacing, intricate, geometric, repetitive, and/or ambiguously resemblant of animals, people, and even the Divine. Next, the medium of writing is melded with the tendency in the Islamic aesthetic to greatly occupy spaces with designs. In the Dome of the Rock, for example, *Quranic* verses are written in tiles amongst marble, mosaics, and jewels so that their material composition and frame are heavily decorated, made to be earthly imitations of the imagined divine. Moreover, in the Islamic visual culture, the rows of Arabic writing that would earlier appear on textiles, pottery, stucco, etc. begin to weave in and out of each other, interlacing and creating other designs. Finally, the Islamic aesthetic affects the content of writing, and stories, such as those in the *Nights*, begin to be structured as intertwining stories. Thus, the “horror vacui” and love for intricate designs and layering that characterize the Islamic aesthetic are transferred from textile art to narrative texts.

This level of intense Islamic cultural and aesthetic transference eventually leads to the creation of the literary equivalent of the *hazaar baf*, or literally the thousand weaves. The *hazaar baf* is a Persian architectural design in which the surface of a wall is patterned in relief so that it resembles the interweaving threads in

textile. The *hazaar baf*, patterned from textile and used in architecture, is renewed in literature as the *Thousand and One Nights*. The stories of the *Nights* imitate the threads of a tight-knit, multi-layered textile; the *Nights* mobilizes multiple story strains that, like threads in a fabric, interweave together to effectively to form a single text. Thus, undoubtedly, the Islamic aesthetic significantly consists of frequent cultural and design transference. Examining this tendency in relation to belly-dancing, Morroe Berger writes that “[t]he effect of dance is somewhat like that of Arab art in general. That is, it depends on form, the arrangement of parts within a compressed area, as in a mosaic [or carpet]. It is not an art of abandon, but largely of restraint and control” (Adra 33).<sup>4041</sup> This compression of form that stresses structural control and thematic restraint is a characteristic of the Islamic aesthetic through media, from mosaics and carpets to dance and eventually to literature as well. Indeed, the *Arabian Nights*, a renowned piece of Islamic literature with an iconic narrative form, is a text of control and restraint: control over death and restraint against sexual consummation.

The *Arabian Nights*' aesthetic roots in Islamic textile reflect and reinforce its tendencies towards control and restraint. In Arab societies, clothing is a very prominent and strict marker of social and societal relationships and roles, especially those that must be policed. Clothing and by extension the behavior of the body it covers are reciprocally defined in terms of one's position in his/her extended family,

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<sup>40</sup> Morroe Berger, “The Arab Danse du Ventre,” *Dance Perspectives: A Curious and Wonderful Gymnastic* (10) (1961): 23.

<sup>41</sup> Najwa Adra, “Belly Dance: An Urban Folk Genre,” *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*, Ed. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2005).

one's socio-political status, place/space, and reputation. Najwa Adra writes of the special role of one's dress in Islamic cultures: "One dresses to conform to social norms and not for self expression" (40). An extreme emphasis on one's presentation is socially enforced, especially when one enters the fluid space of what Adra calls the "public." Examining people's presentations of themselves in "public" spaces serves as the quickest means of determining their roles in the respective contexts. Adra illuminates the significance of this: "[W]hen people break the rules of conduct in public, others wonder if they can restrain themselves in other contexts [... conversely, people who carry themselves properly] can be trusted to behave appropriately in all situations" (40). Islamic culture concentrates tremendously on behavior because Islam's doctrines often lean closer to orthopraxy than orthodoxy, emphasizing the visible enactment of prescribed practices and behaviors over the critical understanding of the religious principles behind them.

This Islamic emphasis on outward propriety is transferred from religion to clothing to literature. Hence, socially inappropriate events that lack societal control and create negative cultural narratives, such as untimely deaths and passionate sexual consummations, are deferred. Unnatural deaths are the most commonly deferred events in the tales of the *Nights* because they both end the tales in which they are narrated and, through their active displacement, allow for their respective stories' narratives to be prolonged. The narratives of the *Nights*' stories exist largely because of constantly controlled displacement, like postponed executions, similar to the way in which Islamic art progresses because of its desire for depicting narratives, in spite

of the prohibition against them. Similar to the use of the motif of death in the narratives of several of the *Nights*, sex, in its very absence, fuels the plots of the *Nights*' stories. In the context of the *Nights*, sex can be understood as the death of the individual, a person unconnected directly by bodily fluids, such as semen or blood, to a lover or a descendent. At the same time that sex is symbolic of the death of an individual through his/her new status as part of a union, the event of sexual consummation also implies the birth of a new individual. Other than because of its death-like capacity to end narratives, sex is also postponed in storytelling to escalate titillation, thereby creating further narrative tension that both fuels the tales' plots and delays narrative familiarly, which would effectively stagnate the progression of the stories' plots. Because of the plot-based narrative tension that sex and death cause, they must be controlled and restrained so that storytellers, like Scheherazade, can prolong the telling of their tales.

The purposefully noticeable absences of sex and death in the tales of the *Nights*' allow for "play," which is basically when the rules of control and restraint are playfully broken through comedy and/or parody (Adra 41-42). The playful mocking of rules is comedic only because it is acknowledged as simply a *performance* of disobeying the rules. Nonetheless, in any event of "play," a subversive breaking of the rules still occurs, even if only implicitly, thus allowing those acts and topics that are normally socially inappropriate to be used in a semi-safe environment without fear of social repercussions, as seen in the example of Arab belly-dance. A particularly playful Islamic art form, belly-dancing is generally framed by Arab music

that lack a storyline or an articulated goal, other than perhaps providing an atmosphere of pleasure and entertainment (Adra 41). If Scheherazade can be understood as paralleling belly-dancers in the way that she plays with social propriety through the narrative performances of the tales she tells, then perhaps the overarching prologue story of the *Nights* can be understood as the atmospheric frame for Scheherazade's playful stories. Moreover, like belly-dancing, the stories in the *Nights* are a form of "play," requiring leisure and free-time (Adra 41; Benjamin).<sup>42</sup> Johan Huizinga characterizes four points of "play": it is free; it is outside the frame of ordinary life; it is "played-out" within limits; and it becomes tradition from its continual transmission (Adra 41).<sup>43</sup> Like participants of "play," readers of the *Nights* must also suspend their real-life frame for the one provided by the text, that of the prologue story of Scheherazade and King Shahrayar. Furthermore, from its secure location as outside the frame of ordinary life, "play" offers a very real means of witnessing the hierarchy between the authentic self and the voices or roles one enacts (Bakhtin). Adra writes that in Arab society "the authentic self is less important socially than the multiple roles each person is required to play" (43). The notion of a single, standard normality does not apply in the Islamic world. Instead, people slide in and out of specific roles, based on relative and shifting social and societal factors, creating multi-layered identities for themselves reflected in their multi-layered clothing.

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<sup>42</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935-1938*, Ed. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, et al (Harvard University Press, Web. 23 October 2009) <[http://slought.org/files/downloads/events/SF\\_1331-Benjamin.pdf](http://slought.org/files/downloads/events/SF_1331-Benjamin.pdf)>.

<sup>43</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Although Islamic geometric configurations demonstrate the Islamic aesthetic's tendency towards control and restraint, the expression of these attributes in the former is at least partially subverted through the use of playful ambiguity. Islamic geometric art is characterized by the high level of proportionality and symmetry between the components of any visual piece. Moreover, the congruence and synecdoche in Islamic geometric art foster a sense of (usually accurate) mathematical precision that defines the Islamic geometric style. Often, Islamic geometric figurations are meant to reflect real, vegetal nature; however, these visual depictions of gardens lack the mutations and imperfections found in reality.<sup>44</sup> Such visual, geometric gardens suggestively imitate the perfection of God's heavenly garden: Paradise, or perfected nature. Moreover, in their obsession with mathematical precision and accuracy, Islamic natural art pieces constantly reveal a desire to mimic not only nature but divine nature, the perfect Paradise. The imitation of paradisiacal gardens in Islamic geometric artwork may be seen as means for Islamic art to include the Divine within itself, paralleling the way in which Islamic literature, particularly the *Quran*, attempts to include the divine in itself through the *tawhidic* unity implied by the *basmalic* formula.

The strategy that allows the Islamic visual culture to adhere simultaneously to an orthodox Islamic aesthetic while still promoting multiple dimensions of metaphor and meaning is "play" or playful ambiguity. Playfulness is common in Islamic

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<sup>44</sup> The exception to this is when Muslims artists purposefully include an error in their mathematically precise geometric art pieces as a way of humbling their human work in comparison to the perfection of Allah's work.

geometric art, in which shapes are often arranged to suggest animal, human, and/or divine forms.<sup>45</sup> However, significantly, these resemblant figures of animate creatures are always analyzable and recognizable as smaller, distinct shapes and figures. For example, the image of a bird can be subtly suggested to the viewer in the synthesis of a series of shapes and designs, like open leaves for the wings, triangles for the tail and beak, and a circle for the head. In Islamic geometric art, after the appropriate shapes are arranged to suggest an animate creature, the areas both inside and outside the most prominent shapes are usually filled with complicated patterns. These embellishments arguably distract viewers from seeing a whole animate being in a piece of art, instead drawing their attentions to the component shapes. Hence, the image can still be easily read as a design or combination of figures that merely resembles an animal. The interlacing and combination of various shapes and designs function as a means of keeping highly suggestive Islamic artwork simply that: highly suggestive. Thus, the onus of reading the profane, sacrilegious animate being in(to) Islamic artwork is put on the viewer because the visual pieces themselves only seem to present a series of possible readings.

The Islamic visual culture compensates for its inability to illustrate the animate with techniques, such as playful ambiguity, promoting the creative complication and layering of designs, styles, and techniques within the confines of what is considered Islamically permissible. Fractals are a key example of this: these reiterative designs illustrate the ability of Islamic culture to take basic geometric

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<sup>45</sup> Muslims do not create images of God because they believe Him to be unimaginable and incomparable: “Like His similitude is nothing” (42:11, *The Holy Quran*).

shapes and make them not only aesthetically pleasing but also simultaneously indicative of the divine. Fractals are shapes or structures that are characterized by self-similar, recursive iterations of an initial shape or formula. The formula for a fractal is  $f(z) = z^2 + C$  such that all  $z$  values, after the initial  $z$ , are always the result of the insertion of the previous  $z$  value into the original formula,  $f(z)$  (“Hunting the Hidden Dimension”).<sup>46</sup> Consequently, the function actually resembles the following:  $f(z) = f(f(f(f(z))))$ , etc. The principal method of creating a fractal shape is through the repetition of the same or a similar whole image continuously, often congruently. As a result, when any part or level of a fractal image is examined or magnified, it always looks like any other part or level of the same fractal image, both geometrically similar and proportionally congruent.

The Islamic visual culture is filled with fractals not only because of the level of mathematical control they allow one to exercise but also because they determine the order of what is arguably Islamic art’s greatest subject: nature. The balance and symmetry that characterizes much nature-based Islamic art is normally understood as an attempt to have its aesthetic character mirror that of the Paradisial gardens, God’s realization of perfected nature. Subsequently, many of the sculpted, mosaic, textile, and even real gardens in Islamic visual culture aim to reflect the imagined ideal, the visual perfection, of God’s eternal Garden. Conversely, nature *does* have an inherent order that follows a (quasi) perfect formula, the very same one that many Islamic art pieces also aim to use. In this way Islamic visual culture imitates an imagined ideal

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<sup>46</sup> “Hunting the Hidden Dimension,” *Nova*, PBS (WGBH, Boston, 28 Oct.2008) <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/physics/hunting-hidden-dimension.html>>.

nature at the same time that it reflects the formula of real nature through its use of the fractal formula. Mandelbrot's breakthrough in the conceptualization of the fractal formula revealed it to be that which informs and dictates the order of the natural world—from clouds, to rivers, to mountains, to caves, to forests, to even the systems within the human body (“Hunting”). These natural processes, among others, are based on distinct fractal systems that parallel the type of self-similarity present in the Islamic reflections/re-creations of the inanimate order of nature.

There are numerous examples of naturalistic, fractal-based Islamic art pieces since fractal patterns infiltrated most forms of visual media in the Islamic culture, including textile, mosaics, architecture, pottery, book-making, and painting. Three exceptionally illustrative styles include the renowned geometric designs ubiquitous within large Islamic domes, the flower arrangements often depicted in mosaics and stone, and the *muqarna* architecture used in mosques, especially during the time of reign of the Safavid dynasty. A beautiful example of a fractal pattern is the ceiling-dome of the Lotfollah mosque in Isfahan; it exhibits, in a large circle, curly cue designs that repeat the further inward they progress, repeating at least four times. Outside this central circle, there are smaller, self-similar pendants that repeat six times but suggest even greater, congruent repetition: an implied fractal design. This style of self-same fractal designs is even depicted in Islamic miniature portraits,<sup>47</sup> such as those in which flaming fractal halos encompass the head of the Prophet Muhammad, or in paintings, like in the amorphous rock structures illustrated by

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<sup>47</sup> Although depictions of animate creatures, especially such holy people, like the prophet Muhammad, are strictly forbidden in orthodox Islam, they still do exist, often in miniatures.

Sultan-Muhammad. The flowers and leaves composed in mosaics, especially from the Safavid dynasty, also possess a strange vitality, obvious to those who see them, that is similar to the liveliness of the amorphous, fractal rocks of Sultan-Muhammad. This vital essence is usually attributed to the idea that the prime moment of bloom of these mosaic flowers has been eternally captured and frozen in the permanence of stone and glass. However, their lively nature is better associated with their fractal designs that render them truly and quite subtly natural to viewers already unknowingly accustomed to seeing fractals in real nature. Finally, the third example of fractal designs, *muqarnas*, or stalactite-like ceiling structures, also feel distinctly natural to viewers despite their clearly meticulous construction. This is because a *muqarna* tends to resemble the inside of a cave, a fractal-based terrain (“Hunting”). The difference between them, however, is that *muqarnas* are perhaps more symmetrical and perfect in their structure, imitating the ideal of nature instead of its mutation-marked reality. Within each of these three cases, a similar or identical structure is repeated several times, contributing to its fractal, and hence natural, quality. Although it is difficult to have an artificial, infinitely repetitive fractal shape, it is still strongly suggested in Islamic art through implied and imagined continuous reiteration.

Established in the Islamic aesthetic through its use in Islamic visual culture, the motif of the fractal pervades Islamic literature as well, affecting popular texts, such as the *Arabian Nights*. The fractal equation,  $f(z) = z^2 + C$ , is applied to the *Nights*’ narrative frame structure. The *Nights* essentially consists of the umbrella story of Scheherazade telling tales to King Shahrayar primarily to delay her death.

Scheherazade's framed, secondary story quickly develops its own main character; this figure may be considered the result of the "equation" or story in which Scheherazade and the king are the principal figures. The *Nights'* story formula is basically as follows: character b, the king, will execute character a, Scheherazade, unless she produces a story, which always has a character c, the main character of Scheherazade's secondary story. Character c of the secondary story soon takes on the role of character a, telling his/her own story to save his/her life from a new character b in the framed tale; in this story being told within the secondary story (itself within Scheherazade's story), a new character c is created. This character c also soon takes on the role of character a, who must tell a story to another character b, in which another new character c is conceived and so on and so forth. This frame tale-telling process becomes an example of self-similar, recursive iteration: the narrative fractal equation.

Although in the *Nights* this process of fractal frame narration functions linearly, with one story framing another, which in turn frames another, it can also function multi-directionally through embeddings. In the latter, stories' positions change so that the framed story becomes the framing and vice versa. This ability of stories to change roles, for example going from being a framed to a framing story, clearly distinguishes the use of fractals in embedding as compared to simple, linear framing. Thus, in narrative embedding, the figures of the "fractal equation" change based on which stories are embedding or embedded at any particular instance in the text. Thus, the investigation of individual narrative fractal segments becomes difficult

as stories often intertwine as a text progresses. Nonetheless, the narrative fractal structure still intuitively exists for readers as the moments of switching between embedded and embedding story become the new points of moving between narrative fractal levels of self-similar stories.

Fractal designs are convenient for the narrative structures of Islamic texts, like the *Arabian Nights*, because they make possible potentially infinite continuity, a theme Jorge Luis Borges explores.<sup>48</sup> Borges realized that the true meaning referred to by the *Nights* titular numerical value, “thousand and one,” is metaphorically “infinity,” as seen in other phrases in the Islamic world, like *hazaar baf*. The title of the *Nights* is an allusion to the text’s immense serial potential in the form of stories told within stories. The *Nights* can potentially keep expanding through the inclusion of greater numbers and levels of framed tales that often very closely resemble the basic components of their original frame tale, that of Scheherazade, creating something of a literary quasi-fractal. Borges, understanding this quality of the text, sought to literarily represent the infinite nature of the *Nights*, consequently writing (of) the 272<sup>nd</sup> night of the text (“1001 Nights”). In the conservative translations of the text, such as the Haddawy, the *Arabian Nights* ends with the following: the 271<sup>st</sup> night, an implied ellipsis, and a post-script that reveals the eventual familial resolution between Scheherazade and King Shahrayar (and their three children by this time). Borges, however, writes (of) the 272<sup>nd</sup> night, in which Scheherazade tells the

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<sup>48</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *A Universal History of Iniquity*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Penguin Books: New York, 2004).

story of Scheherazade telling the story of Scheherazade telling the story of  
Scheherazade... the perfect narrative fractal.

## Chapter Two: Framing, Embedding, and Interlacing

The notion of the infinitely regenerative fractal parallels the principle of re-accentuation explored and propagated by M. M. Bakhtin in the last part of his essay “Discourse in the Novel” from *Dialogic Imagination*.<sup>49</sup> Re-accentuation, as Bakhtin sketches it, defies the linear, forward-directed temporality of textual filiation presented by other scholars, such as Robert Stam in *Literature and Film*.<sup>50</sup> The organization of Stam’s arguments and analyses in his text are indicative of his logical premise: the ancestral, “original” text is what determines and creates the descendent, adaptive text, and the latter cannot affect the reading and interpretation of the former. Hence, Stam’s analysis of textual genealogy is only unidirectional, facing temporally forward. Undoubtedly necessary in some cases, in the context of texts that possess narrative fractals, Stam’s method is too limited. In fractal narratives, like in fractal designs, the point of origin is irrelevant because all levels of iteration are equivalent, if not equal. Stam’s textual filiation schema fails to realize that the very existence of the “son” changes and creates the identity of the “father” *to be* the father; ergo, the presence of the “child” text is what primarily grants the “father” text fatherhood.

Bakhtin, however, presents an evolved version of the relationship between parent and child texts, one that consists in a constant interaction between them. Bakhtin creates the notion of the re-animated text: a type of text that does not solely rely on adaptations to affect how it is read. Instead, he posits that even different

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<sup>49</sup> M. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>50</sup> Robert Stam, *Literature Through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

instances of reading or changes in one's personal environment can change the reading of a text by introducing new languages into the heteroglossic, or multilingual in a sense, background that frames it. Moreover, Bakhtin encourages the splicing and mixing of language genomes in an effort constantly to push the limit of the genre of the novel: "the authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia" (Bakhtin 272). This idea pulls reality into the text, instead of merely situating the text in reality. It suggests that the environment in which a text is read also frames it and that all texts are always-already embedded both in their contemporary times and the times in which they are activated: "At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions - social, historical, meteorological, physiological - that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions" (Bakhtin 428).

Bakhtin explicates the concept of re-accentuation through the following: his notion of the "chronotope" and an extended biological metaphor, in which the text is an organism. If Bakhtin can be understood as imagining texts as living organisms, then he surely values the novel as the most highly advanced, evolutionary textual organism. In fact, Bakhtin specifically categorizes the novel as a text-organism which, usually through parody-mutation of a previous genre-specie's strain, evolves itself into a new strain: the "novel" strain. Thus, temporally speaking, the novel is that which constantly pushes the limits of the present, pulling the future into the present by parodying the past. Bakhtin writes of the novel: "[It] comes into contact with the

spontaneity of the inconclusive present; this is what keeps the genre from congealing” (27). The novel is the organism that mutates normal genre strains only to open spaces for new sub-genres and normalizes formerly mutant strains or sub-genres to make them into genre strains. Most significantly, the novel is a result of any text’s constant contact with, reaction to, and even creation of the language of the present; thus, temporality is critical in the creation of the novel. The “chronotope,” literally “time-space,” according to Bakhtin, gives “body” to the entire novel (250). The chronotope can be seen as that which, in keeping with Bakhtin’s biological metaphor, permits the representation, reading, translation, transcription, decoding, and application of various parts of the text to be realized. Perhaps the chronotope may be considered as that which gives body to a novel *even* outside of itself, in the real world. In other words, the real life chronotope that embeds a novel influences the way in which it is re-accentuated, or made sense of in terms of changes in time, space, and readership.

Although Bakhtin does not explicitly address embedding, he implicitly speaks of it in his discussion of the conversational, dialogic novel. According to Bakhtin, the novel exists in stark contrast to the epic; while the latter is a distant, static, valorized genre, the former is a developing, mutable genre. Unlike the epic, in which the past carries more weight than the present, the novel is able to move beyond being framed unidirectionally. The novel can be embedded in multiple temporal locations at the same time that it pulls the past into the future, making the novel an innovative and potentially permanent genre. Bakhtin expounds this idea early on in the *Dialogic Imagination*:

[T]he entire novel breaks down into images of languages that are connected to one another and with the author via their own characteristic dialogical relationships. [...] The author participates in the novel [...] with *almost no direct language of his own*. The language of the novel is a *system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. (47)

Bakhtin suggests that the novel, the mutable literary genre, breaks down not into languages, but into “images of languages.” These “images of languages” are not languages themselves but rather refractions of languages in textual representations, or images. These images, he writes, are connected through “dialogical” relationships. Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic is derived from the root “dia” for “through,” referring to Bakhtin’s idea that multiple languages flow through a single person or text. If the embedded/embedding story is a form of an image or a textual representation, then Bakhtin suggests that the conversation that takes place between connected texts specifically traverses utterance and occurs at the level of the space between textual representations. Bakhtin seems to be speaking of the space or break between embedding and embedded stories, in which the multiple stories of a text silently speak to each other in the un-narratable language of intra-textual stories.

In *The Hakawati*, several unspoken conversations take place simultaneously; the text’s embedded stories speak to each other as well as stories from the real world of the author.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, in *The Hakawati*, the author is not the source of the conversation between (the languages of) the embedded stories or between the

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<sup>51</sup> Rabih Alameddine, *The Hakawati* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009).

embedded stories in the text and stories from the real world. In *The Hakawati*, readers are confronted with stories from various traditional genres (history, epic, myth, folklore), and yet they seem different because they are “novelized,” both through parody and the strange dialogic relations they have with other stories in the text. Moreover, these genres are essentially subverted because they are represented through the language of humor and specifically embedded so that their defining components are weakened and challenged. Humor, one of the novel’s favorite languages, usurps the language of tradition, pulling conservative historical stories into the present by embedding them in unorthodox frames and relating them in different languages.

Bakhtin writes that the author does not need to speak in the text: he must merely facilitate conversation within his text, such that the languages of stories “interanimate each other” (47). Similarly, storytellers situate and link tales by strategically placing key phrases, ideas, symbols, or emotions at “switching” points, moments when there is a move in the text from embedded to embedding story. In this way, the stories in a text share their own unique language, one that is intuitively registered by the reader. Subsequently, the reader almost imperceptibly connects the embedded and embedding stories such that they effectively transition from distinct stories into a narrative concatenation. The languages of and between embedded stories is conversational, dialogic, and deeply interpersonal, fostering a world or a “system” of languages that defines the text as the unique carrier of its specific set of stories. Bakhtin writes on the role of language: “language [...] lies on the borderline

between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's" (Bakhtin, 294). Bakhtin goes as far as to suggest, through his metaphor of language, that even the unit of the word is embedded with the intention of the speaker and in the context of its user. To come in contact with another language and thus another person, one must, therefore, even at the level of the word, make contact, allowing for a mutual framing between one's self and the other: an embedding. Embedding eventually catalyzes the creation of a shared language that draws on the languages, or the persons, involved in this type of connection and communication. Hence, the novel is the space in which the language of tradition and parody, past and present, converge such that the novel becomes the new, hybrid mutant textual organism.

To fully grasp embedding in narrative terms, its predecessor, framing, should first be investigated. Gerald Prince defines frame narrative as "a narrative in which another narrative is embedded; a narrative functioning as a frame for another narrative by providing a setting for it" (33).<sup>52</sup> The first definition is problematic in terms of this discussion because it includes the term "embedded," from which "framing" must be distinguished. Examining the second definition then, the term "frame" should first be unpacked. Frames generally set apart and encompass whatever is included within them, the framed text, offering a "setting" or a context for the framed material. Narrative frames alter and affect the reading of any text. Imagine, for instance, a crude handmade card with pasted macaroni, "Happy Mother's Day" scrawled in all different crayon colors, and a taped together Popsicle

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<sup>52</sup> Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary on Narratology*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988).

stick frame set on a neon yellow, mini plastic table. Now, imagine the same framed text, the crude card, the same but replace the Popsicle stick frame and plastic table environment with a deep, rich mahogany detailed frame on an eggshell white wall in a museum, accompanied by a small 2”x3” placard. Immediately, even the way in which one approaches the text changes. These modifications do not affect the actual, framed material that is being read, although they significantly impact any interpretation of the text. One cannot extract any framed object from its frame—its literal frame and/or its environment—consequently, the former is always read in relation to the latter.

There are, however, moments when frames seemingly melt away, for example, when a text shifts from an instance of being a clearly framed story to a story in its own right, one that can go on to frame another story—in other words, when a text shifts from being a metadiegetic to a diegetic story. The frame often seemingly disappears for a story when its environment has already been firmly established in readers’ minds and no longer needs to be repeatedly reestablished. The frame also seemingly vanishes when it is necessary for the framed text to be read in spite of or against the frame, thus requiring a disproportionate amount of attention paid to the framed text. Significantly though, the frame never fully disappears. It may seemingly disappear or it may be replaced by another frame, like when storytellers seemingly vanish their audience’s real life frame only to replace it with their own artificial frames, in which their stories can be better couched. This “shared space” of the artificial frame can be understood in terms of what Michael Warner calls “publics.” A

public, especially within a written text, fosters myths of connectedness and community among readers. The shared, artificial frame of a public works to combat the highly privatized, individualized nature of the written book (Godzich).<sup>5354</sup>

In written texts, a story's frame can also be implicit such that it is only the absence of a clear narrating agent or the presence of a shared style that indicates the frame. Before taking this discussion further, the question that should first be addressed is what defines *narrative* framing: a story's organizational structure *or* a narrative agent bookending a tale with dialogue. Often, the two work in conjunction as means of narratively framing a text. Here, both narrative-framing possibilities will be explored; however, structural framing is better considered in terms of embedding and narrative bookending in terms of framing. One case in which these two methods of narrative framing overlap is in the space between a framing and framed tale. This break, which usually occurs when a framed story is being introduced, takes the form of a visual and structural break from the framing tale's dialogue; it is such that the beginning of the framed tale is clearly distinguished as separate from its framing tale. Actually, it becomes the reader's role to actively make sense of this break between the framing and framed stories. This interpretive leap is usually aided by subtly positioned markers, instances in the framing and framed tale that seem to connect with each other somehow, that readers can intuitively piece together. In fact, even when the framing or framed text is missing, a frame narrative may still exist in terms

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<sup>53</sup> Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14(1) (2002): 49-90.

<sup>54</sup> Wlad Godzich, "The Management of Privatization," *Surfaces* 3 (1996),  
<<http://www.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/vol3/godzich.html>>.

of an absent frame, for example, like in the visual example of early *Qurans* with invisible frames. The missing half of the frame narrative, either the framing or framed tale, becomes the abject object that the frame text desires and of which readers are indirectly aware. Furthermore, readers often mentally construct the missing dimension of the frame narrative, even if it is only an adoption the frame of mundane reality.

Narrative frame texts can also be conceptualized in terms of conversation between the audience and the storyteller. Recalling Bakhtin's notions on the language and conversation of texts, it only makes sense that frame narratives, if not already oral, generally mobilize a faux oral environment. Storytelling in an oral environment often allows audience members not only to listen to but to participate in the storytelling event, even if only in the form of sporadic nods, murmurs of (dis)approval, and/or interruptions to ask where the nearest bathroom is. In this way, the storyteller *and* the audience perform in the event of storytelling. Moreover, then written stories with faux oral environments maintain some of this performative dimension of oral storytelling, even if artificially.

One of the most prominent elements from oral storytelling retained in written frame narratives is the audience. Readers, in such texts, must act as audience members. The framing tale requires the reader as an audience member to mentally institute its faux oral environment. Then, paradoxically, the reader must forget it when reading the framed tale in order to better situate his/her self in *its* faux oral environment. In fact, to fully follow the framed tales, audience members must to

some extent forget that they are also audience members of the framing story. This is part of the reason why readers can only keep track of a few levels of framed stories at a time—after a certain point, they can no longer recall all the levels of framing stories from their positions as selectively forgetful audience members.

Stories that frame and are framed by each other are embedded stories. Prince quite generally defines an embedded narrative as “a narrative within a narrative; a metadiegetic narrative” (25). This definition clearly overlaps with that of a framed narrative because embedded narratives are firstly frame narratives; embedding, however, is a more focused, sub-category of framing. In Prince’s second definition, there is the implication that an embedded narrative should be situated within a hypodiegetic narrative, or a primary narrative, implying an order of embeddedness, as it typical of frame narratives. However, Prince’s first definition sets no such limits. In embedded narration, although there may potentially be a “primary” hypodiegetic narrative, the narrative occupying the position of the embedding story does not stay constant throughout the entirety of a text. The sole requirement for a text to be an “embedded narrative” is that one narrative be embedded within another. To embed is “to enclose close in or as if in a matrix,” “to make something an integral part of,” and/or “to prepare for sectioning by infiltrating with and enclosing in a supporting substance” (“Embed”).<sup>55</sup> Thus, technically, embedding does not even require the traditional frame—a text can be free-standing and embedded as long as it is enclosed “as if in a matrix.” In terms of narrative embedding, a story can be considered

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<sup>55</sup> “Embed,” *Merriam-Webster Online*, Ed. 2011  
< <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/embed>>.

embedded without an explicit framing tale. Moreover, an embedding tale should be read not as a context for a story, like a frame tale is, but rather as a “supporting substance” within which the embedded text is sustained for reading.

The sustaining quality of the embedding story allows it to connect to the embedded story through a tacit system of markers. In the case of embedded narratives, if there are two tales involved, both will at some point act as the embedding and embedded story. Additionally, the adjacent portions of embedded and embedding stories tend to have possible linkages—not in the sense of narrative continuity, but in the sense of a shared system of markers, or a code. This system of links, or language, may be coded in shared themes, emotions, motifs, signs, plot elements, items, words, symbols, etc.; notably, the code is not often directly used by the narrative agent to connect the embedded texts. The relationship between embedded stories is meant to be revealed to readers progressively such that they make their own interpretative links. The sharing of this system of mutual markers between stories promotes the idea that both embedded and embedding story are equally important in an embedded narrative. Truly, the positions of stories (embedding/embedded) are only temporary since, if there are two stories in an embedded narrative, they are both actually embedded in each other.

Thus, it may seem that framing is more conversational in character than embedding, but Bakhtin refutes this. According to him, embedding is actually “a specific type of double-voicing form, in which the hero’s perspective on himself is

infiltrated by ‘someone else’s words about him’ (209)” (Surdulescu).<sup>56</sup> If in framing the storyteller gives voice to his/her characters, recalling their words or simply speaking as them like griots and hakawatis may do, then embedding is the juxtaposition between the storyteller’s voice and the voices of his/her characters. In embedded narratives, storytellers can switch between characters’ voices while simultaneously maintaining their own through double-voicing, or embedding one voice into another. Consequently, the question arises as to whether everything that is narrated is potentially double-voiced, at least temporally. In other words, because the past is generally narrated from the present, can most narration be considered temporally double-voiced? This situation arises at the level of narrative events as well: the acts in a story are events at the same time that the actual narration of a story is an event. Perhaps every storytelling event, to some degree, may be considered in terms of Bakhtin’s sense of embeddedness.

Nonetheless, embedded stories are a unique case of embedding; Coste realizes this when he writes the following phrase: “the secret intensity of the embedded story” (172).<sup>57</sup> Although readers may mentally link segments of embedded/embedding stories to what comes before or after them, the embedded sections themselves stand independently in terms of plot and narration. In truth, embedded sections of stories seem to engage in selective relations with other embedded sections. Embedded stories promote the illusion of having built-in agency through their progressive revelation of

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<sup>56</sup> Radu Surdulescu, “Mikhail Bakhtin and the Formalist Theories,” *Form, Structure, and Structurality in Critical Theories* (Online: University of Bucharest Press, 2000)

<<http://ebooks.unibuc.ro/lls/RaduSurdulescu-FormStructuality/Mikhail%20Bakhtin%20and%20the%20Formalist%20Theories.htm>>.

<sup>57</sup> Didier Coste, *Narrative as Communication* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

their system of markers, the silent language between embedded sections. Embedded narrations also seem to have the agency to facilitate multiple readings of the same text based on a system of markers that not only functions intra-textually but also extra-textually. In other words, embedded stories often allow themselves to be embedded in real-life stories, histories anecdotes, emotional situations, and experiences that readers may already know. Thus, readers' various contextual frames yield a series of readings from a single text. Moreover, there may even be levels of codes that can be keyed and read only by readers already embedded in the appropriate larger, real life embedding environments. Still, the text is not dependent on its readers to be read in all its possible ways; instead, the text is codependent with its readers in that they both exist in a mutually embedded and sustaining relationship.

Interlacing, like framing, is another narrative structure style with its roots in Islamic visual culture. In an interlaced pattern, two lines, or sometimes two ends of the same line, crisscross; this design is ubiquitous throughout in Islamic art. Moreover, while interlaced strands occasionally intersect, they often do not—even while creating the illusion that they do. Similar to framing and embedding, in an interlaced narrative, stories interweave so that it is only at the level of the whole, ultimate text that all the stories are clear in their interactions. Interlaced stories affect each other's readings, significantly, in terms of the whole text. Furthermore, they come together in such a way that the total narrative of the text is altered—like the way in which two weaving rows of dominoes topple together, creating various oval-based shapes. Because interlaced sections of a story create a whole new emergent

text, there is a strong emphasis in interlaced narratives on the relationship between stories and their result on the final text.

Indeed, interlacing, embedding, and framing share this: they bring together distinct stories in such a way that the text requires them to be read in conjunction. Interlacing and embedding both especially multiply the possible readings and interpretations of a text. Through framed settings, embedded links, and interlaced patterns, readers have access to more complex and tightly connected possible readings. Moreover, stories of these narrative types are arguably more “realistic” because actual conversations and stories are also always-already set in embedded and/or framed environments. Likewise, people’s stories are usually interlaced since conversations are rarely totally linear or completely logical.

Framing and interlacing are clearly integral parts of the narrative structure of Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane*.<sup>58</sup> In the search for Charles Foster Kane’s life story (the frame tale), multiple perspectives are offered but almost never of the same events. In the film, the frame tale progresses relatively chronologically in the style of a narrative relay: the narrator of any chronological segment passes narrative agency to the next narrator who continues in a similar fashion. Because of the obvious lack of overlap between narrated segments, Kane’s life is clearly periodized: childhood, business-rising/marriage, scandal, Xanadu/marriage, and ultimately, death. Moreover, because all the segments of Kane’s life are told by different narrators focusing on specific periods, the film’s climax or crux becomes difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, maybe

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<sup>58</sup> *Citizen Kane*, Dir. Orson Welles, Perf. Orson Welles, Joseph Cotton, Dorothy Comingore, Agnes Moorehead, and Everett Sloane, Videocassette (Warner Home Video, 1941).

this is the sole way to narrate another's story—or specifically the story of someone who is deceased or dying (Benjamin). Because only Kane had been with himself during the entirety of his life, only he knew the whole of his story. Hence, viewers of the film, like the makers of the short film inside the film, are forced to depend on multiple narrators and piece together a number of broken stories in order to approximate Kane's whole life story. A common version of this process often occurs at funerals when various people speak for/about and re-member their deceased. Attendees try to fill the space of the deceased's missing, narrating voice by trying to reassemble her story, even if through multiple narrative perspectives. Returning to the film, although it is clear that events do take place in each narrated portion of Kane's life, no event seems to carry more weight than the others—with the exception of the utterance of Kane's last word, "rosebud," a highly ambiguous and potential climax.

In truth, Kane's utterance of "rosebud" introduces more questions than answers because it redirects the entire narrative repeatedly to its beginning: the end of Kane's life; hence, "rosebud" functions as a term of repeated regress in the film. Furthermore, it points to Benjamin's "The Storyteller" in that at the moment of Kane's death, he bears the authority to control the (future) telling of his story by whispering this mysterious word. It is this utterance at the moment of his death that changes Kane's story from being the short framed film screened early on in *Kane* to the larger framing narrative of *Kane*. Death grants narrative power and urgency as well. For example, at the end of *The Hakawati*, it is only near the time of Osama's father's death that his story can be told. Although Osama's father's story will not be

told by himself, the event/passage of his death has granted him the authority, ability and/or need to have his story told. It seems that when a person passes away or will soon do so, there is an intense desire to catalogue and express his/her totality, significance, and self. Moreover, there is a desire for some sense of completion and yet, even in the process of telling dying people's stories, there are paradoxical openings, renewals, and/or continuations of their stories such that the events of telling their stories also, circularly, become events in their narratives.

*Citizen Kane* tells its audience the story of Charles Foster Kane—twice. First, there is the biographical embedded story, the film within the film, which begins from Kane's estate, Xanadu, and progresses categorically; for example, in one part of the short film inside *Kane*, the narrator declares, narrating thematically instead of linearly: "twice married, twice divorced" Second, there is the investigative, biographical embedding story. The real film *Citizen Kane* reconstructs the deceased's life story in the form of a montage of various media in the second embedding film but also and *especially* in the framed film. The latter uses newspaper clippings, analepsis, video footage, an array of photographs, "real" historical material, among other methods of piecing together the narrative. The *Citizen Kane* that the real world audience watches is a documentation of the search for the story of Charles Foster Kane around the term "rosebud." This search is catalyzed by a screening of *Citizen Kane*, the embedded film. The director of the embedded film desires to remake his short biographical movie about Kane around the deceased's last word: "rosebud." Hence, the title of the movie that the real world audience watches, *Citizen Kane*,

ambiguously alludes to both the embedded and embedding film. Although the real world audience members never actually view the screening of the resultant movie from the embedded film crew's efforts throughout *Kane* to remake Kane's biographical film around "rosebud," the audience still watches a movie essentially about Kane's life based on the term "rosebud" in the form of the larger embedding film: *Citizen Kane*. To further complicate matters, like Kane's life, the embedding film *Kane* also begins and ends with the term "rosebud."

*Citizen Kane* consists of a complex series of non-linear, disrupted story segments in the form from flashbacks of Kane's life. In the embedding story, the film crew of the short, embedded film visits various prominent figures of Charles Foster Kane's life in the hopes of discovering the mystery behind "rosebud," inadvertently and simultaneously acting as characters themselves in a story also around Kane's last word, the story of the embedding movie: the real *Citizen Kane*. The flashbacks in the embedding film are of key periods in Kane's life, narrated and represented by those closest to him: the banker, Thatcher; his business colleague, Bernstein; his friend, Leland; his mistress, Susan Alexander; and his butler. The broken narrative of Kane's story, the *Kane* that the real life audience watches, parallels the media montage of Kane's life, the short embedded *Kane*, in its collage-like quality with different narrators narrating various segments of the deceased's life story that are pieced together. These structural similarities indicate that the story of Kane's legacy, the *Kane* that the real life audience watches, becomes the story of Kane's story, a remake of the film inside the film inside the story of his legacy—a case of mutually

embedded stories. *Kane* illustrates the ambiguity involved with identifying the embedded and embedding stories in an embedded text.

At the end of *Kane*, the audience is directed back to the film's beginning. Towards the end of the film, the audience finally encounters the word "Rosebud" inscribed on a sled. The potential answer to the "rosebud" mystery is that the word was how Kane remembered his sled, a toy from his childhood that he was reminded of from the snow in the snow globe at which he gazes only moments before his death. "Rosebud" must have reminded Kane of the last memory he had had of his parents, first home, and life before he became "Citizen Kane." In fact, the only scene in the film with Kane still as a child, other than the initial scene of his traumatic separation from his parents, is from when he is ten, shortly before he gains access to his large inheritance, which puts him in the public eye, making him "Citizen Kane." In this scene, Thatcher, Kane's new legal guardian appointed by the bank, gives him a replacement sled and almost tauntingly wishes him a "Happy New Year." However, this sled does not read "Rosebud" like Kane's original sled did, again signaling "rosebud" as indicative of the time before Kane became a millionaire-icon, a public fascinator, and an enigma. Ironically, it seems that the obsession with the term "rosebud" in *Citizen Kane* actually symbolizes the search for Kane's identity prior to his becoming Citizen Kane. Subsequently, "rosebud" may simply be a code for Kane remembering himself still as a rosebud, a child not yet in bloom, filled with potential, instead of as a man with a narratable and documented life. "Rosebud" points to that which is not "Citizen Kane" from Kane's life and hence is not in the public narrative

of Kane's life—this is precisely why “rosebud” is absent from the various segments of Kane's life that are narrated by public characters in the film. In this way, the film's beginning prefigures its end, which refers to back to its beginning, thus making *Kane* a cyclic narrative.

Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (TPRC)<sup>59</sup> similarly has an embedded narrative structure. In it, a woman named Cecilia who is just fired from her job attempts to delay realizing the gravity of her situation by going to watch her favorite movie, also called *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, or *The Second* here for simplicity.<sup>60</sup> A character from *The Second*, Baxter, from his position on-screen falls in love with Cecilia; consequently, he steps off-screen, into the real world, effectively interlacing the story of *The Second* with that of Cecilia. At this point, the distinctions between the on-screen and off-screen worlds within TPRC begin to blur. At one point in TPRC, the characters in *The Second* wonder why their story cannot simply switch positions with that of Cecilia—in other words, why cannot the embedded story become the embedding story and vice versa, making *The Second* reality and TPRC fiction? Such dialogue directs the real world audience of TPRC to realize that the world of the film TPRC, although “real” in relation to *The Second*, is *also* fictive in relation to them, embedded in *their* real world.

However, there is one major difference between the on-screen and off-screen worlds within TPRC: while Cecilia's world inevitably continues, the on-screen world

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<sup>59</sup> *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, Dir. Woody Allen, Perf. Mia Farrow, Jeff Daniels, Danny Aiello, Edward Herrmann, John Wood, Deborah Rush, et al. Videocassette (UAV Corporation, 1985).

<sup>60</sup> In order to avoid confusion, the embedded film, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, will be referred to as *The Second*.

cannot do so without key characters, such as Baxter, who catalyze events necessary for *The Second's* plot—or for the plots of both stories actually. Baxter is the event-driving agent or “actor” in *TPRC* as well *The Second*. Although Cecilia’s life seems to have events, such as the loss of her job and abuse inflicted on her by her husband, they are only pseudo-events without any capacity to drive the plot. Because these events are repetitive, they become part of the story’s frame of mundane reality. The pseudo-events of Cecilia’s life make the “plot” routine; whereas, a real plot requires actual events based on changes from and usurpations of the norm to move forward. The main changes in Cecilia’s life are changes in the films that she watches on a weekly basis, like *TPRC*, represented by the figure of Baxter. He essentially pushes the plot of *TPRC*, making it a more interesting story for the real world audience. Hence, it is only because *The Second* is embedded in *TPRC* that the latter is a story at all—conversely, *The Second* only exists because it is embedded in *TPRC*.

Because of the embedded and interlaced nature of *The Second* and *TPRC*, it becomes difficult to identify to which movie, the embedded or embedding, that the title *The Purple Rose of Cairo* actually refers—most probably it is an embedded title that refers to both simultaneously. Although *The Second* begins as an embedded story in the form of a film that Cecilia watches, soon the literal “frame” of the screen, the visual reminder of *TPRC's* narrative framing of the embedding film, disappears. Thus, the real world audience watches *The Second* significantly *without* a frame. The real life film substitutes the narrative structure of embedding with interlacing: without its frame, *The Second* functions as an independent and simultaneous story that

autonomously interacts with *TPRC*. Recalling Bakhtin, the common language between the film's two languages, the on- and off-screen stories, can be considered the actual film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*: the mutual, novel space created by both texts interacting with and inter-animating each other. *TPRC* further points to the real world audience's relationship to this set of stories as framed and/or interlaced. *TPRC* suggests and reinforces the idea that in embedded and interlaced narratives, the interaction between stories is bi-directional, like in the case of *The Second* and Cecilia's story. The characters of *The Second* implicitly raise questions about the real world audience's relationship to *TPRC*—why cannot reality and the text switch positions such that the embedding becomes embedded and vice versa?

In her text *Narratology*, Mieke Bal suggests the possibility of narrative embedding at an even smaller level than that of narrative structure: the level of narration itself.<sup>61</sup> Bal's concept of focalization, similar to perspective, specifically demonstrates that narration has two levels: those of narrative voice and point of view. If in storytelling, narration is the voice through which a story is told, then focalization is eyes through which it is seen. Although Bal explores focalization in terms of characters, it can also be generalized to the level of stories. In other words, stories can be treated as focalizing agents such that one story is read through the eyes or *embedding* layer of another. *The Hakawati*, for example, has a series of stories within stories that treat the same subject matter, or focalized object, like sacrifice (63) or the afterlife (82), but that are read in accordance to their respective focalizing or

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<sup>61</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

embedding stories. Although the focalized object may be the same in both embedding and embedded stories, between the two there is often a change in the focalizing agent, which usually is accompanied by a clear shift in narrative voice as well. It is actually common for the narrative voice and focalizing viewpoint to overlap in this way. There are, however, cases in which ascertaining the focalizing object and/or viewpoint prove to be quite difficult. In *The Hakawati*, for example, when Fatima is introduced at the beginning of Ch. 14 (367), it takes some time to determine which Fatima is being referred to—and by extension, who is narrating which story.

Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* (*MNR*) plays with narration and focalization through its narrative structure.<sup>62</sup> In the text, even pieces of art, like the sketch of a “dog” or a “horse,” narrate and focalize chapters. The story of the text is focalized from multiple points of view, including those of non-agents and even things. Much of the focalization of this text can be cinematically translated as a camera filming from one character's viewpoint to that of another. However, the voice-over, or the narrative voice, is not always aligned with the focalizing, lens-directing agent. In *MNR*, readers can mainly have knowledge of what the narrators say and not necessarily what they see, especially if the narrators are not characters in the text. The images-as-narrators, for example, have a very limited, or rather situated, realm of experience that they can focalize. In many cases, narration and focalization function inseparably together. By having images-as-narrators in *MNR*, perspective is given to those who in reality do not have perspective, those who are the *objects* of perspective. Perhaps by having

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<sup>62</sup> Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red* (New York: Vintage International, 2002).

traditionally non-narrating figures narrate, the text suggests that readers also consider what it may be like to have an untraditional embedding scenario, like, for example, a text embedding reality.

Shifts in narrative voice and focalizing viewpoints in *My Name is Red*, although seemingly innovative, actually take their precedents from much older texts, like the *Arabian Nights*. An example of this is “The Story of Nur al-Din Ali ibn-Bakkar and the Slave-Girl Shams al-Nahar,” related atypically from the perspective of neither of the title characters. In fact, the story is focalized and narrated from the perspective of a druggist, who passes his position onto his friend, a jeweler. The primary focalizer, the druggist, abandons his position as narrator because he understands that for him to continue narrating, he must also be an engaged actor in the story, working to move the plot of the tale by encouraging a seemingly impossible affair forward despite the danger of his own death. Scheherazade functions as the intermediary narrator from the time when the druggist resigns his position as dual narrator and focalizer and the jeweler takes it over. In this brief time, “The Story of Nur al-Din and Shams al-Nahar” is focalized by a seemingly omniscient, third person, non-active narrator. The final narrator and focalizer of the story, the jeweler, unlike the druggist, enjoys being an engaged actor while relating (and creating) the lovers’ affair. The jeweler is thus the perfect simultaneous actor, narrator, and focalizer for this tale. When the lovers escape the jeweler’s vision and realm of experience, he is unable to continue focalizing and hence narrating their story except through the

repetition of rumors. Thus, the druggist decides to follow the lovers, apparently taking his role as narrator and focalizer of their romantic liaisons quite seriously.

*My Name is Red*, in its novelization of “The Story of Nur al-Din and Shams al-Nahar,” suggests that simply by focalizing and/or narrating a story, one may have sufficiently participated to be considered an “active” agent in that same story—much in the way of the jeweler in “The Story of Nur al-Din and Shams al-Nahar.” According to most definitions, an actor must be a character that actively engages in events that drive the plot in a story; moreover, a character must be an animal or a human in a story. However, in the case of a text such as *MNR*, in which the very *telling* of the story is *part of* the story, narrating and focalizing become active acts that retroactively render their doers as characters and actors. Thus, *MNR* becomes a story not only of the murder of a miniaturist, but also of the murder of a series of miniatures and by implication, even the era of miniature painting. In this way, *MNR* reinforces Walter Benjamin’s idea that death grants one the authority to narrate. Furthermore, in texts like the *Arabian Nights*, despite death’s power to grant narrative authority, narration functions to displace death within stories. For example, while the image-characters in *MNR* still narrate their stories, they also actively displace or postpone their deaths. Once their narration is halted, the tavern in which they reside is burned and they die, their narrating voices withering with them. The image-actors of *MNR* participate in three critical events: first, they come into existence through illustration—they are born; second, they tell their stories—they act as narrative agents and focalizers; and finally, they are burned in an arson fire—they die and fall silent.

The image-characters follow the same pattern of critical events—birth, narration, and death—as other typical storyteller-characters, effectively novelizing the conceptualizations of narrators and the stories.

Although the case of inanimate objects narrating in *My Name is Red* may seem thoroughly post-modern, it actually has its roots in the medieval Islamic era. In “The Eye of Sovereignty,” D. Fairchild Ruggles investigates the framing performed by the Al-Hambra, including how parts of the edifice frame other rooms within itself as well as the surrounding countryside.<sup>63</sup> The window frames are such that the ideal viewer, the king, is made to be the ultimate subject while the land is positioned as his ultimate object (Ruggles 183-184). In fact, the frame promotes the idea that the countryside was not pre-existing but precisely existed in relation to the king and his dominion over it (Ruggles 183-184). Moreover, Ruggles is particularly observant of the inscriptions on the window frames of the Al-Hambra, especially the portions of it that frame views of landscape. The inscriptions around many windows are significantly in the first person singular; thus, the Al-Hambra is anthropomorphized and addresses in its own voice the viewers that look out from and through it. The building, as an intermediary frame, instructs the viewer, the subject, on how to observe and perceive the object, the framed view (Ruggles 185-188). Because of the building’s position as an intermediary between the subject-object relationship, the subject no longer exists as the sole agent controlling and affecting the reading of the object. Like the Al-Hambra’s anthropomorphic window frames, *My Name is Red’s*

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<sup>63</sup> D. Fairchild Ruggles, “The Eye of Sovereignty: Poetry and Vision in the Alhambra’s Lindaraja Mirador,” *Gesta* 36(2) (1997): 180-189.

image-characters can also be understood as intermediaries between the subject, the reader, and the object, the story. The image-characters, like the window frames of the Al-Hambra, are narrating/narrative frames that affect the way in which the reader-subject interprets the framed story-object.

In *Frame Analysis*, Erving Goffman addresses the concept of a frame not only from a literal and narrative perspective, but a sociological one as well.<sup>64</sup> Goffman defines frames as “principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—[“in accordance with [which] definitions of a situation are built up”] and our subjective involvement in [these events]” (10-11). Goffman very briefly explores the concept of the natural frame before moving onto his main discussion on the notion of the social frame, which, unlike the natural frame, is affected by human agency. In his text, Goffman discusses a few key items with regards to the social frame: people always operate within a frame, even if it is only within the implicit frame of the ordinary; people’s questions, comments, reactions, thoughts, and conversations must be understood in terms of the frame in which they operate; conversely, it is only through frames that people derive meaning or significance in the world; what seems to be cultural incompetency may actually be evidence of discrepancies in the frames employed between (mis)communicating parties; people often find it comedic, or even threatening, when others apply the wrong frames to situations or ignore the ramifications of an applied frame (39); identical actions within the same primary frame can have different meanings depending on the keying of the event; and finally,

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<sup>64</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

some activities, such as stage plays and/or oral frame tales, must actively “foreclose other frame possibilities and require sustaining a definition” in order for their respective frames to be fully effective (499).

In the last chapter of *Frame Analysis*, “Frame Analysis of Talk,” Goffman, reminiscent of Bakhtin, uses conversation as a means of demonstrating and explaining his notions of framing. In his discussion, Goffman quickly defines two critical terms: reporting and replaying. The former is “any reporting of a past event,” while the latter is specifically “couched from the personal perspective of an actual or potential participant [...],” in other words narration with some focalizing element as well (504). Goffman explores the relationship between replaying, or narrating, and framing through the metaphor of a typical conversation. When people converse with others, they generally already anticipate certain responses from their fellow conversers, or audience. Hence, in order to elicit the desired responses, people as conversers also become actors who must do more than merely recount or report events: they must, instead, replay them. In replaying events, people create theatrical, staged, loosely scripted environments, in which events are not only narrated but also performed within a frame. Good conversationalists make the experiences that they relate personal in two ways: by narrating and focalizing them in terms of themselves and by choosing opportune settings within which to frame the delivery of their narrations. Thus, it is logical that soon after his discussion of replaying in the context of conversation, Goffman succinctly defines replaying in narrative terms as “recounting storylike events [sic]” (505).

After defining framing and replaying, Goffman introduces the term that he warns is easily confused with replaying: “embedding” (505). To illustrate an embedding, Goffman gives the example of a narrator, the person who replays, reporting an utterance: “I told John, ‘No’” (505). This is an example of a framed response because the utterance itself (“I told John”) is a framed, narrated event. An event requires an action to have occurred—usually a significant one; hence, in this case, the utterance may be an event depending on its significance within its story while the quoted material (“No”) is simply a report. When there is an utterance within an utterance, Goffman calls the occurrence an “embedding”; for example, “John *said* that Mary *said*, ‘No’” (italics mine, 505). When there are more than two levels of embedded utterances in the same sentence, Goffman terms it a “multiple embedding” (505). Embeddings and framings are, in Goffman’s explication of them, linked because embeddings always include framings—in fact, embeddings are merely framed framings. Nonetheless, embeddings and framings are *not* always replaying, or narratives. For an embedding to be a replaying as well, it must have an event occur within at least one level of the utterance, often in the one that is most embedded, creating a fabula, the content of a story. With his extensive analysis of framing and embedding at the level of the sentence, Goffman joins the conversations of other narratologists on the same subject, like Bal and Bakhtin, who also use the convenient metaphor of the sentence to explore storytelling structures.

Sentences and utterances are attractive means of illustrating narrative concepts because they are easy metaphors that demonstrate narrative scenarios at the

microcosmic level. Moreover, narratives are narrated and processed precisely *on* the scale of the sentence. Even at the level of the book, most of the events that comprise fabulas and stories are actually couched within sentences (Lohafer 2, 168).<sup>65</sup> Even narrative framing takes place within simple sentences; for example: “Scheherazade narrated.” Furthermore, narrative embedding also takes place within the space of a single sentence; for example: “[Scheherazade narrated:] I heard, O King, that the fisherman said to the demon: [...]” (37). Events of finality, like death, tend to occur in the span of a single sentence as well: “The king, the enchanted young man, and the fisherman lived peacefully thereafter, and the fisherman became one of the richest men of his time, with daughters married to kings” (66). Hence, the sentence is the preferred metaphor for demonstrating a narrative case-in-point precisely because it *is* a narrative case-in-point.

Bakhtin and Goffman’s uses of a common sentence/narrative metaphor allow their theorizations of framing and embedding to relate to each other. Bakhtin writes on narrative framing that “[a]t any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions [...] that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions” (428). Bakhtin upholds that every utterance is always-already framed differently from every other one, even if it is seemingly the same because time has inevitably progressed since the first utterance took place. By this logic, the first case of an utterance has

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<sup>65</sup> Susan Lohafer, *Reading for Storyness: Preclosure Theory, Empirical Poetics, and Culture in the Short Story* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003).

aged even as the utterance is being repeated a second time. Moreover, Bakhtin suggests, in his insistence on the idea that multiple languages are employed in any conversation, that utterances live and take shape in relation to multiple languages. By languages, Bakhtin means ideologies from which meaning is derived—similar actually to Goffman’s use of the term frame. Bakhtin also implicitly differentiates between the abstract utterance and the real(ized) utterance, implying that once an utterance has been voiced, the speaker no longer has sole ownership over the it. Rather, its meaning becomes half that of the speaker and half that of the audience. The utterance becomes framed in Goffman’s terms, or embedded in language in those of Bakhtin, by both parties struggling to enforce their significance upon it (Bakhtin 294). Therefore, imposing meaning on an utterance becomes what grants power to the narrator over the audience, or vice versa—in embedded narration, however, the power struggle is often “playful” such that both sets of meanings are simultaneously and interactively in “play.”

Thus, one method of controlling the signification of a word is by expanding its range of meaning by “playfully” embedding it. Bakhtin understands embeddings in terms of utterances. For Bakhtin, unlike Goffman, embedded utterances do not need to be clearly delineated levels of replaying or narrating and can instead be blended within a primary utterance. Bakhtin’s definition of embedding relies on his notion of double-voicedness, which may consist of a single focalization, an instance of juxtaposition, or multiple narrations. Goffman indirectly alludes to the Bakhtinian notion of embedding when he writes: “Also, ‘voices’ (or ‘registers’), these being

stereotyped accents employed by individuals during informal talk to say something that can be attributed to a figure other than the speaker, the figure being categorically, not biographically, defined” (536). If the figure were biographically defined, then the “voices” would align with Goffman’s own definition of embedded discourse. However, if these “voices,” or mixed utterances, are categorically defined, then they fit very closely into the Bakhtinian notion of embeddedness, or double-voicedness, employing multiple languages (not set off by quotes) within a single utterance.

Embedded narrative incorporates both Bakhtin and Goffman’s definitions of embeddedness and applies them at the macrocosmic level of narrative. Embedded narrative includes dialogic embedded narration, even at the level of the sentence, at the same time that it also includes structural embedded narratives, or stories within each other. If the narration of a text can be imagined as one over-arching, continuous utterance, then by including multiple stories in a text, especially without demarcating them, the “utterance” of a text essentially mobilizes multiple languages, ideologies, and/or voices. The “utterance” of the text is basically embedded in the Bakhtinian sense. The diversity of stories, or voices, in the text offers multiple, inflected meanings within a single narration. The text also simultaneously interacts with and is embedded in the text of reality and the voices of the real world.

### Chapter Three: *The Hakawati*

*The Hakawati* employs playful frame tales. The text opens in the following way: “Listen. Allow me to be your god. Let me take you on a journey beyond imagining. Let me tell you a story” (5). Already the text plays with the frame tale technique. A frame tale generally consists of a narrator introducing and telling a framed story. In *The Hakawati*, however, readers do not actually encounter a framing story at the onset of text. Instead, readers merely read, or hear, the voice of the narrator, who breaks the “fourth” wall of the text by speaking, it seems, directly to the reader. In fact, the first, unnamed narrator of *The Hakawati* treats the readers of this text as if they are the audience of the (untold) framing tale at the beginning of the text. The implied replacement of readers with audience members essentially suggests that the overarching, unnamed narrator of *The Hakawati* blurs distinctions between the text and the real world.

The unnamed, unidentified, overarching narrator of *The Hakawati* continues to suggest alternative ways of understanding the text by raising questions with regards to notions story-reading and storytelling, text-centrality and God-centrality, and framing and embedding. *The Hakawati* begins with “Listen,” as if it is a story being told orally when, however, clearly *The Hakawati* is a written text, within which the narrator speaks. To confuse matters further, the title of the text, *The Hakawati*, means the storyteller, suggesting an oral storytelling environment within the written text, as if the written text, this novel, is the novelized version of a modern-day storyteller. The unnamed narrator teases readers, cajoling them to “allow [the narrator/

Alameddine?])” to tell them a story, to be their “god.” The text’s use of “god” alludes to an era when God was considered the center of the world. The belief in a God-centric reality was typical of pre-Vienna consensus Europe and the Muslim world as well—and still is in many parts of the latter. Breaking from the Muslim world’s focus on the centrality of God, as emphasized in Islamic through the concept of *tawhid*, *The Hakawati* suggests that its primary speaker—the unnamed, unidentified narrator—should be the readers’ “god.” In this proposal, the text implies that readers and their world should be text-centric, or said another way, that readers should be embedded in the reality of the text. The remainder of *The Hakawati*’s brief introduction pays homage to the same idea. “[To] take the [the reader] on a journey beyond imagining” presumes that the reader’s reality is limited by his/her imagining; thus, taking the reader beyond those limits is equivalent to the text granting a gift to the reader that only God can grant. Moreover, in the Islamic culture, two things are specifically mentioned as being beyond human imagination: God and paradise. In this way, not only does the text go beyond God, but it is also emulates his paradise. However, like most religions, *The Hakawati* has a price for paradise: one must be willing to allow one’s self to succumb to the story, to allow the story to function as “the subject,” the God, the power to which all else is relative, and one must function principally as “the object,” the subservient, the power that yields (Godzich 103-105).<sup>66</sup>

Once the reader chooses to submit—submission being the key quality of followers of Islam—to the story, the frame comes close to becoming an embedding.

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<sup>66</sup> Wlad Godzich, *The Culture of Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

The unnamed narrator's brief introduction can be considered an oralistic prologue to the emir's story or even, significantly, to all the stories of *The Hakawati*, implying that the unnamed narrator may actually have a name: Alameddine. Thus, the readers of *The Hakawati* may be considered audience members of the oralistic telling of the text's embedded tales by the implicit overarching narrator of the entirety of the text. The introductory or prologue framing tale then also includes the real world because of its implied real world narrator and reader-audience. Additionally, when readers consent to read *The Hakawati*, they also agree to participate in it as members of its audience, its public "public," or the "you" to whom the text and narrator speak (Warner). Although the "you" of *The Hakawati* is often ambiguous, sometimes referring to multiple characters from different tales, it seems that it is generally employed by the unnamed narrator in *The Hakawati*—the same narrator who also speaks in the overarching, introductory framing segment of the text. Although readers are embedded as audience members for the various oralistic tales in *The Hakawati*, occasionally, even readers' real stories frame the stories in the text. Conversely, the text's stories sometimes also frame the stories of the readers-objects. *The Hakawati*, in this ability to suggest potential audience-text interaction, is a literary counterpart to *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

Stories in *The Hakawati* often begin as framed tales only to evolve into embedded tales, reminiscent of Bakhtin's writings on the mutant nature of the novel. One of the two main stories in *The Hakawati*, the story of the emir, generates a series of stories that morph during tellings into modern renditions of old legends; these

include: the story of Fatima, which turns into the story of Fatima's hand; the story of Afreet-Jehanam, or the story of Satan; the male-conceiving story that the emir tells his pregnant wife, or the story of King Baybars; the story of Shams and Layl, or "The Story of Qamar Al-Zaman" in the *Arabian Nights II*; the story of Layl and Majnoun, or the story of Layla and Majnoun; as well as several other tangential stories. An example of a story that outgrows its framing tale in *The Hakawati* is that of Baybars, which branches off from the emir's story. In the emir's story, Fatima, the emir's freed slave, tells him that if he wants to have a baby boy, he must tell his wife a masculine, potent story. Thus, the story of Baybars is literally conceived with the conception of the emir's son, Layl: "Virile heroes? How about faithful heroes? Wait. Wait. I know which story. I know now. Listen.' The emir began his story thus: In the name of God, the most compassionate, the merciful. Once, long before our age [...]" (118). The purpose of the framed story is clearly stated and situated in terms of the framing story. The story is told towards a specific goal in a particular context, with a tailored protagonist. Upon its telling, however, Baybars's story very quickly leaves the confines of its framing tale by continuing without any quotation marks bracketing it, eluding its narrator and narrative settings. Nonetheless, the reader is still meant to be aware of Baybars's story as at least a frame-like tale, for it still makes use of a narrative framing formula that parallels the *basmalic* formula.

Soon after its introduction in *The Hakawati*, there is a great change in the relationship between the framed tale of Baybars and the framing tale of the emir. The former is presented in the style of free indirect discourse, without direct dialogic

action verbs, like “said,” “narrated,” or “told,” or grammatical punctuation marks, like quotes, bracketing off the material. Free indirect discourse makes the narrative position of Baybars’s tale ambiguous: is it told directly by the emir, or is it being told by the emir and related to the reader via the unnamed narrator? In the case of the former, the story would be clearly framed; in that of the latter, however, it would merely be included in the “frame” tale temporarily until it could realize itself as a different type of narrative tale: an embedded story. Creating ambiguity within established conventions and normative narrative styles is characteristic not only of *The Hakawati*, but also of the *Arabian Nights*, which is littered with playful, mediated narrations of titillating tales, and of Islamic visual culture as well, in which animals are often playfully hidden within intricate design motifs. Although a playful ambiguity is maintained to some degree over the course of *The Hakawati* between Baybars’s and the emir’s tales, the tale of Baybars is still distinctly established as an independent tale in a bi-directional, co-dependent relationship with the tale of the emir. This becomes apparent when the story of Baybars resumes, after another embedded story segment, not only without quotes but also bookended by fleurons, like any the embedded sections of any other independent story would be.

The first instance in *The Hakawati* that the reader encounters a fleuron, a symbol to be repeated many times throughout the text within a critical and formulaic role, is only about two pages into the text (7). There is a clear break in the text’s narrative that is visually represented and reinforced by a fleuron. At this point in the text, the narration of the story being told switches from a third person, semi-

omniscient narrator to the unnamed, unidentified narrator to a first person, limited narrator, with the last also functioning as an actor in the story. Because there is no introduction to this story segment after the break, only a fleuron indicating some sort of change, readers find themselves attempting to renegotiate the actors introduced before the break in terms of the information they read after the break. Initially, readers are unsure whether the “I” in the story segment following the fleuron at all refers to the previous story segment’s unnamed narrator or to the same story’s savvy character, Fatima, who just begins a journey for the emir before the break. According to the story segment after the fleuron, the “I” feels “foreign” to itself, something that Fatima could possibly be feeling (7). The reader soon discovers from a combination of the narrative style, language, and/or the specificities of the story segment that this segment is actually the beginning of an entirely different story. Although transitions between stories are somewhat ambiguous throughout the text, the fleuron usually serves as an indicator of a shift from one story to another, as first exemplified in this case. Hence, when Baybars’s story is bracketed by fleurons, readers are clearly meant to understand his story as an authoritative tale that can enter independently into narrative relationships of embedding.

Although Baybars’s tale may be easily discernable for readers, even after embedded interludes, this is not the case for all stories in *The Hakawati*. If readers cannot completely confirm the fleuron as a marker of shifts between embedded stories, they often become confused as to which story is being presented. In fact, without the clear identification of a particular event, character, or setting, it is quite

difficult to identify stories from their onsets because of the many purposeful dualities and ambiguities that punctuate *The Hakawati*. An example of this lies even in the way in which the first and second story strains of *The Hakawati*, those of the emir and Osama respectively, are introduced. Because of the way in which the second story strain, that of Osama, is initially narrated to the reader, without any proper introduction, one must question why it was not introduced as the first story of text. Moreover, although the first story, that of the emir, has a playful framing introduction, it still lacks a traditional, normative framing story. The reason that the emir's story precedes Osama's is actually because the former *is* the latter's frame. The first story embeds the second story, positioning and affecting its reading from the start. This is precisely why readers unconsciously want to associate the two story segments before and after the first fleuron-punctuated break.

Therefore, although there are very few overt links in Chapter 1 between the emir's and Osama's embedded story segments, readers will unconsciously connect and relate them. The link between the stories is not plot-based, as seen in the *Arabian Nights*, in which the telling of one story may progress another. Instead, the stories are linked narratively in their structural and positional relationships to each other, because of which that readers may also unknowingly link the stories in terms of themes, motifs, names, characters, events, etc. The dynamic juxtaposition of these stories allows them to not only interact with each other, but to also create pockets of new, unidentifiable, and/or ambiguous spaces, such as places in the text in which readers cannot identify which tale they are reading (such as the ambiguous Fatima

(367)). The stories in *The Hakawati* are read in conjunction and in relation to each other, and, as a result, they are read in terms of the intense energies they create when interacting. Essentially, in embedded narrations, the reading and interpretation of all involved stories change so that they can no longer be understood simply in terms of their individual story lines, but must be considered interactively.

However, *The Hakawati* plays even with the notion of embeddedness by reintroducing, re-membling, and/or repositioning seemingly independent stories back in the original, conceiving framing tales from which they sprang again as specifically narratively framed stories; that is, the text will situate an embedded story as a framed one. Returning to the example of the story of Baybars, soon after it is already a distinct tale in codependent relationships of embeddedness with other stories in *The Hakawati*, Fatima and Afreet-Jehanam respectively recall: ““So—what do you think of the emir’s story?” [...] ‘The emir is a good story-teller.’” (139). The conversation between Fatima and Afreet-Jehanam returns the story of Baybars to its former position as a framed tale in relation to the emir’s story by clearly making it a possession—it is the *emir’s* story and it is couched in conversation in his story—and by again reminding the reader that it is the emir who is a good storyteller, implying that if Baybars’s story is good, it is only because of and hence in relation to its framing narrator. Moreover, later, the emir affirms and reminds the reader of this by saying: ““Yes, it is all my doing. My tale of Baybars worked its magic, and I shall delight in regaling [my son] with the rest of it” (298). Again, the emir emphasizes his possession and framing of Baybars’s story to his audience. Indeed, the emir makes a

special effort to assert that he is the sole originator and source of this tale, the narrative agent from whom the story is derived. Moreover, this is underscored by the parallel progenitor relationship established between the emir's framing tale and its descendent, framed tale (that of Baybars) and that of the emir and his descendent son (Shams/Layl).

Even characters from the tales in *The Hakawati* illuminate this vacillation of Baybars's stories between being characterized as embedded and framed tales. Fatima and Afreet-Jehanam remark: "The story of Baybars is many lifetimes old. There are numerous versions" (139). By stating that there are "numerous versions" of the Baybars story, the characters point out that readers cannot be certain which version of Baybars's story is embedded within *The Hakawati*. In other words, is the embedded Baybars's story an offshoot from the emir's telling of the Baybars story, that is a free indirect version implicitly told by the emir, or is it one of the numerous versions of the framed Baybars's story floating around that has embedded itself in *The Hakawati*? In the latter, the emir's framed Baybars's story and the embedded Baybars's tales are essentially the same story but merely told differently, while in the former case, there is a clear transformation of a framed tale into an embedded tale.

Although many framed tales in *The Hakawati* do naturally evolve into embedded tales, not for every frame tale in the text follows this pattern. General, introductory frames, and direct frames, especially to larger stories, are styled and function distinctly from the frames of smaller vignettes. When Fatima tells Afreet-Jehanam that his "hell" is unlike any she has ever imagined, he responds with: "Ah,

humans. Your ideas of hell are nothing more than the lees and dregs of unimaginative minds long since dead. Listen. Let me tell you a story”” (81). In this frame, like in those of longer tales, a narrative agent introduces a story, which is then presented after a page break, significantly without a fleuron or quotes though, in the form of free indirect discourse. It is precisely the lack of the fleuron that keeps the ensuing story in a framed instead of an embedded relationship with the previous. The fleuron is the major visual marker for the readers’ understanding of a story as not only separate but also independent enough to enter in an interdependent, embedded relationship with another story.

Because Afreet-Jehanam’s vignette is still connected to its framing tale in some ways, it is unable to establish an embedded relationship, maintaining a dependent, framed one. It parallels the style of narrative presentation found in the *Arabian Nights*, in which Scheherazade replies to a request to tell a story by saying that she will tell a one “[w]ith the greatest pleasure” (66). After this, there is a break in the text in which the framed story’s title is presented, followed by the body of the story itself. Significantly, the framed stories in the *Nights* always continue without quotation marks after the page break, yet they still maintain, at least at their outset, Scheherazade’s clear voice: “I heard, O happy King, that once [...]” (66). In the *Nights*, any story following such narrative framing is clearly not being narrated in the form of free indirect discourse. However, this is the form employed in *The Hakawati*, which leaves the identity of the narrator, the person who introduces or initially frames a tale, to ambiguously to blend with that of the unnamed, unidentified narrator who

frames the emir's story at the outset of the text. In other words, because the smaller vignettes in *The Hakawati* do not have a direct narrative frame, like that of Scheherazade's voice in the *Nights*, the voice of the person who introduces the tale and the unnamed, unidentified narrator of *The Hakawati* merge—or compete—in the narration of the vignette through free indirect discourse. Due to this ambiguity in narration, the vignettes that are not framed directly or clearly allow themselves to be multiply framed. Although these vignettes function primarily in the frame in which they are conceived and introduced, they also work on the level of the frame established at the very beginning of *The Hakawati* because the same unnamed narrator who narrates that frame is potentially narrating the vignettes. Furthermore, in the *Nights*, the “empty space” of the page break at the moment of transitioning between tales is filled with the voice of the narrative agent—Scheherazade and others—at the onset of the framed story. In *The Hakawati*, this space is still filled, perhaps as an aesthetic reaction to the “horror vacui” experienced by Islamic texts, but not with the details of an order or lineage of narration (for example, Scheherazade says: “I heard, O happy King, that the tailor told the king of China that the barber told the guests that he said to the caliph.” (281)). Instead, the lack of direct narration for these shorter vignettes is compensated with layered narration within the vignette or ambiguously shifting narration of the vignette, in which the framing story's narrator's voice interlaces with that of the unknown narrator's voice.

Another function of *The Hakawati* presenting narratively framed stories without any fleuron or normal break is to emphasize their primary relationships. This

type of framed story is told in an uninterrupted, somewhat continuous manner in relation to its framing tale. An example from *The Hakawati* may be illustrative: when Fatima is suffering birthing pains, she asks the imps to distract her; they turn into parrots, telling her “parrot tales” (249). The next embedded tale opens as follows: “Quawk, began the parrot Ishmael. [...] There was once a [a wife who asked her parrot about affairs]” (251). The embedded section ends with the parrot in the framed story saying: “I am a hakawati [...] Allow me to begin” (252). The following embedding begins: “A quawk here, said the parrot Isaac [...]./ And the hakawati parrot began telling the lovely wife this story:/ Four men [...]” (254). The hakawati parrot continues to distract the wife in the framed story; the very ending of the framed story is as follows: “Jacob said, ‘The merchant, in a fit of temper, slays his wife for her duplicity, and wrings the parrot’s neck’” (262). It is difficult to discern whether the introductive passages of the framed story should be aligned with a narrative frame (for example: “Listen. Let me to tell you a story” (Alameddine 81)) or with a narrative framing voice simply making itself known and identifiable in the text of the framed story (for example: “I heard, O happy King, that [...]” (*Nights* 66)). The narrated frames make the distinction between a conversational story, firmly entrenched within the diegetic text, and a framed tale, a metadiegetic text, blurred so that the very definition of a framed tale is questioned.

It is unclear whether the reader should understand these parrot tales in terms of their introductive frame, like passing stories in conversation, or as independent tales, experiencing breaks from their previous stories. The parrot-imps’ tale is

presented in the form of a specifically located, contextualized framed story, and much like in the *Arabian Nights*, the narrator's voice tells the story without quotation marks. By following the tradition of the *Nights*, it seems that the tale that the parrot-imps tell is to be understood as a framed tale. The narrative agent guides the tale early on, but then, like Scheherazade in the *Nights*, allows the tale to proceed with minimal interruptions. Soon enough though, the parrot in the parrot's tale, the hakawati parrot, is compelled to tell stories to save his own life and introduces his story. At this point, there is a completely different embedded story segment that interrupts the continuous telling of the hakawati-parrot's tale. In *The Hakawati*, even in the context of a seemingly simple frame tale, storytelling techniques evolve. The telling of any story is always broken by an embedding from another one, which fosters the illusion that a framed tale may also be an embedded one, which it technically is on the level of the framing text, the greater story, like Fatima's story, but *not* necessarily on the level of the framed text, the shorter vignette, in this case the hakawati-parrot's tale.

The framed text in *The Hakawati* maintains the tradition of the *basmalic* formula of the *Arabian Nights* and the *Quran*, as well as the narrative conventions of frame tales generally, by resurfacing to the framing text at the end of the framed tale. *The Hakawati* acknowledges this by locating the end of the framed tale within a conversation in the framing tale so that the ending of the former is almost post-scripted within the latter. In the *Nights*, Scheherazade's purpose for telling stories is to postpone her death and marital consummation—similar to the way in which the parrot-imps' and hakawati-parrot's stories simply serve the purpose of distracting

Fatima and the unfaithful wife, respectively. In the *Nights*, when Scheherazade's stories are no longer necessary, the text runs out of narrative tension fueling it, and no more than a three line post-script is generable for the ending of the text, more or less stating that the tension is resolved. That is, Scheherazade will not be killed (indicating that her death no longer needs to be postponed) and she and King Shahrayar have children (indicating that her marriage has already been consummated). Imitating this pattern, when the tension explodes in the stories of Fatima and the hakawati-parrot into a simultaneous birth-death—the birth of Fatima's children and the death of the hakawati-parrot and the unfaithful wife—no more than three lines are needed to end the story. The embedded section ends with a return to the framing tale, in which the narrative wraps up, which has a birth with the potential to compensate for the death at the close of the framed tale.

Unlike the necessary resurfacing to the framing tale that a framed story must undergo, embedded tales maintain a more or less equitable relationship with each other. While in one instant, tale "A" may be the embedding tale and tale "B" the embedded, this order can and will be reversed in the next. In Chapter 13 of *The Hakawati*, for example, the story of Baybars is embedded within Osama's story; the chapter opens with a segment from the former and closes with a segment of the latter. Even this basic structure highlights the notion that embedded stories frame *each other*. The embedded sections are separated with clear, characteristic breaks: the ending of an embedded story segment, followed by a space, a fleuron, another space, and then the beginning of another embedded story segment. For example:

“[...] Do not exit as you entered.”

•

Boarding hadn't been announced yet. (349)

Note that between the first and last sentences of embedded/embedding sections, an implicit conversation occurs. Although the former story's final section statement (“Do not exit as you entered”) is about a newly converted and married woman at a mosque and the latter (“Boarding hadn't been announced yet”) is about Osama transiting through an airport in Rome, a theme carries over. The reader is meant to realize some relationship between the embedding and embedded stories by allowing the former to couch and affect the meaning of the latter. There are numerous examples of such simulated connections in *The Hakawati* through the final and first sentences before/after embedding section breaks; for example: “‘come in and speak to your mother while she recovers’ [...] break/fleuron/break...] She felt woozy and disoriented” (355). There is an attempt in most moments of shifting from one embedded story section to another to present similar or suggestive themes, such as journeying or illness. This helps the reader to subconsciously establish relationships between sections, hence stories, so that *The Hakawati* seems a truly conversational, dialogic text.

This type of narrative structure of inter-embedded stories being simultaneously told reveals the part of *The Hakawati's* inspiration drawn from textile

and weaving. The embedded strains should be understood, as Alameddine himself implies, as threads that weave over and under and in and out of each other (“Alameddine”).<sup>67</sup> The embedded/embedding stories come together to weave a close-knit tapestry of narrative, with the smaller vignettes adding embellishments and filling potentially empty spaces. In this way, the “horror vacui” of narrative is circumvented in the production of a text that not only utilizes multiple stories but also multiple layers of telling, much like the layers in Islamic clothing, such that the text ultimately becomes an intricate, interrelated pattern of story threads.

Although embedded narrative structures usually require at least two distinct stories, like the way in which textiles need at least two threads to interweave each other, some embedded stories are sufficient with a single story, like knits made from a single yarn. There are instances in *The Hakawati*, in which, for example, one end of a story thread is picked up and interwoven with the other end of the same story thread, interlacing and embedding with(in) itself. This is evidenced in the telling of Osama’s story in Chapter 2, which does not have a single fleuron break at all, but still possesses an embedded narrative structure, as illustrated in the numerous intertwining sections. The main plotlines in Chapter 2 are as follows: present day Osama’s reflections, Osama’s childhood with his aging grandfather, his grandfather’s infancy with his own family, Abraham’s split family, and Jarown’s relationship with his family (34-65). The arrangement of the stories represents the way in which they are embedded in each other, weaving in and out of and interacting with each other. In this

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<sup>67</sup> Rabih Alameddine, “Bio: *The Hakawati*: Q&A for Rabih Alameddine,” *Rabih Alameddine* (2008) <<http://www.rabihalameddine.com/hakawati.html#qna>> (21 May 2011).

chapter, the story of Abraham is seen as one end of an elongated story thread in which Osama's story is the other end. Thus, Abraham's story is the beginning of Osama's, tracing its way through his grandfather's story in Urfa eventually to his grandfather relating his connection with Abraham to Osama as a child, sometimes reinterpreting/retelling these stories along the way, ending with present day Osama remembering his lineage. The story of this chapter is made to loop back onto itself so that there is an interactive telling of the tales, in which the past and present both color each other. The narrative structure plays with the normal, temporally linear telling of a tale by embedding narrative sections not any kind of temporally linear or chronological order but by specifically positioning them in dynamic and interactive relationships.

The relationship between the multiple story threads—or the story ends of the same thread—can be imagined in the interactions of the embedded and interlaced sections in Chapter 2. The lack of fleurons in this chapter undoubtedly points to the *tawhidic* character of the stories: a sense of unity or oneness among the stories in the chapter. However, the story levels still exist in this chapter, even though they run into, over, and through each other, especially in the case of Osama's grandfather's and Abraham's story/stories. At several points in *The Hakawati*, the same anecdote is repeated at multiple levels of the text, for example, with Osama's grandfather and his own father both telling the tale of Abraham. These moments suggest instances of cyclic interlacing between the stories. That is, not only are anecdotes repeated in their literal retellings, but they also recur thematically in the stories themselves, for

example with Lucine's relationship to the doctor's wife paralleling Hagar's relationship to Sarah (48-59). Additionally, the story of Osama is not only embedded with the story of Abraham but it is interlaced with it as well. The narrative events that make it possible for Osama's story to progress are often dependent on an interlaced reaction from the story of Abraham—Abraham being the father (figure) of all three monotheistic religions and their descendants/followers. Hence, the story/stories function(s) as embeddings while also occasionally interlacing, changing the composition and continuation of espoused stories.

There is the trend in *The Hakawati* to intertextually interlace stories that are common or popular extratextually, in the real world, such as those from the *Arabian Nights*, with those inside the text itself. One illustrative example is the story of Shams and Layl, later the story of Layl and Majnoun. The story of Shams and Layl is that of the two “twin” sons of Fatima and the emir's wife; the boys are simultaneously delivered and then switched at birth. Both mothers are wives of kings and often toted as being the dual mothers of the two boys who are inseparable. This story is loosely based on “The Story of Qamar Al-Zaman and His Two Sons” from Husain Haddawy's *Sinbad and Other Tales from the Arabian Nights*, an addendum to his *Arabian Nights*.<sup>68</sup> In this story from the *Arabian Nights II*, the king marries two women, Queen Budhur and Queen Nufus, who give birth to two sons, Ajmad and As'ad, respectively (270). These two boys, like Shams and Layl in *The Hakawati*

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<sup>68</sup> *Sinbad: And Other Stories from the Arabian Nights*, Ed. Muhsin Mahdi, Trans. Husain Haddawy (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2008). This text will hereon be referred to as the *Arabian Nights II*.

(296-308), are seen as both having two mothers; moreover, like the other pair of boys, they are inseparable at all hours of the day and night (the meanings of Shams and Layl coincidentally) (Haddawy 270). Because the boys are very comely and of course well mannered, the mothers fall for their respective stepsons and hatch a plot to make the boys have sex with them or else, if the boys resist, have them killed (273-276). In *The Hakawati* version of this tale, however, it is the boys who fall in love with each other and are separated by the hateful emir's wife, who is jealous of Fatima's maternal power over her son—she even goes so far as to kill Layl, who is her actual son (although she does not know this). At the end of this story in *The Hakawati*, however, driven by a madness fueled by love, Shams resurrects Layl, although it is not him who Layl wants. It is the emir's wife, his own mother, whom he desires—the opposite of the boys in the tale in the *Nights II*, who loathe their mothers because of their incestuous love for them. Layl and the emir's wife consummate their love, for the emir's wife too desires her son, infected as she was by Layl's passionate spirit when she destroyed him and ate his sexual organs. Thus, *The Hakawati* fulfills the unsatisfied desires of the *Nights II*, releasing some of its narrative tension.

Although the first half of the story of Shams and Layl interlaces with the *Arabian Nights II*'s "The Story of Qamar Al-Zaman and His Two Sons," the latter half of it interlaces with the Arab/Persian tale of "Qays and Layla." In this story, a young man falls in love with a woman whose father prohibits their marriage. She is eventually married to another man and dies far away from Qays while he is left to roam the earth missing her as Majnun, the crazy one. This tale is perhaps most

commonly referred to in popular culture as the story of “Layla and Majnun.” In *The Hakawati*, it is the moment that Layl goes missing and Shams realizes that he is gone that he goes insane and is referred to in the text as “Majnoun, the crazy one” (479). When these iconic motifs, such as the dual sons with the incestuous mothers, or the iconic names, such as Layl and Majnun/Majnoun, punctuate *The Hakawati*, its tendency to interlace with various popular myths becomes apparent. The intertextuality of *The Hakawati* not only plays homage to the *Arabian Nights*, which itself draws on a plethora of traditions, but also Islamic culture in general. The Islamic aesthetic is widely diverse because it historically covered a great expanse of territory, encompassing a broad range of empires and traditions, such that “Islamic” almost comes to mean being heterogeneous even while seemingly unified. Think only of the way in which Islam’s holiest text, the *Quran*, includes 114 *surahs* or chapters on an array of topics bound together by an overarching frame in a single text. Although *The Hakawati* makes no pretenses of representing an exclusively Islamic aesthetic, it does unite heterogeneous elements through embedding instead of framing at the levels of time (embedding medieval and modern tales with each other), place (embedding stories from the Islamic world and the non-Islamic with each other, and text (embedding stories from the real world and the text with each other).

Although the stories in *The Hakawati* often interlace with the real world by including, for example, key markers from popular stories, they also interlace intratextually, i.e. with other stories within the text. This is seen when, in Osama’s story, his grandfather gives him “a jewel, a tiny turquoise Fatima’s hand with dark-

brown and black blood encrusted in its grooves” (114). Fatima, in the story of the emir, loses her hand to Afreet-Jehanam and then goes to the underworld to retrieve it (68-83). The djinn eventually returns it to her: “Her lover [Afreet-Jehanam] opened his hand, and in his palm Fatima saw her decapitated hand. [...] ‘And in it I will place my third eye. [...] She took the talisman, and it [...] became stone, turquoise, and the eye in the palm a slightly darker blue” (83). The appearance of the blood encrusted Fatima’s hand in the context of Osama’s story is strange because only a few lines earlier, his grandfather asks: “[When] they ask [after I die] whether you believed me, what will you say?” (114). This interlaced segment, in which Fatima’s hand crosses stories, serves the purpose of supporting the storyteller, Osama’s grandfather. Just as in the *Arabian Nights*, complicating a tale by, for example, adding a framed layer or interlacing it, serves to affect the interpretations it offers. For instance, in the *Nights*, because of her frame—an environment in which she is trying to distract her husband—Scheherazade is allowed to deliver titillating tales (to the reader). More significantly though, she can even tell tales in which people whose lives are in peril, like her own, are asked to tell stories, and, unlike her, they can and do balk at this absurd notion, rebelling against those who hold their lives at will—things she clearly cannot do. In *The Hakawati*, the weaving of tales intratextually tightens the text, drawing the affects of different tales closer to each other and implicitly adding similarly subversive commentary by creating relationships of connectivity between stories of realistic fiction and fantasy.

As illustrated, *The Hakawati* interlaces stories and icons between its own stories, but often, these stories and icons also carry weight extratextually. For example, the hand of Fatima already exists as a potent symbol in the Islamic world. In the emir's story, Afreet-Jehanam says to Fatima, "Place [the hand] upon your person and no demon will dare hurt you. Place it above the door of your house and evil will never enter" (83). In North Africa, especially countries such as Morocco or Algeria, Fatima's hand, also known as the *hamsa*, meaning "five" in Arabic, is a common talisman used to ward off evil, especially the evil eye. It is usually kept in the form of a hand-shaped doorknocker, worn on the person in the form of a bracelet, necklace, or earrings, and/or tattooed on the hands of brides with henna so that their hands become the hands of Fatima with an eye drawn on the center of their palms. In this way, by interlacing the hand of Fatima into the emir's story, not only does the text introduce a new reading or dimension to the emir's story, but it also juxtaposes *The Hakawati's* version of the story of Fatima's hand with that of the folk narrative. In fact, because the story that explains the source of Fatima's hand in popular culture is largely unknown, it can be asserted that *The Hakawati* goes so far as to create narrative layers even for the "empty spaces" in Islamic folklore. Thus, the text embeds its story of Fatima's hand into the frame of the popular cultural talisman by strategically interlacing it with its own stories, those of the emir and Osama.

While the appearance of the hand of Fatima in Osama's story may suggest an extratextual interlacing, it is also meant to convey interactivity between the stories of *The Hakawati*. Although the reader understands that the bejeweled, blood encrusted

hand that Osama's grandfather gives him cannot truly be the hand of Fatima, the same one from the emir's tale, its presence in Osama's story indicates not only a structural relationship but also a content-based connection between the two tales. Such a connection is created again, later in *The Hakawati*, when Osama begins to tell the story of Baybars to his bored mother and his Uncle Jihad tells him the actual history behind both the man and his story, the former actually being "a ruthless, fork-tongued megalomaniac" and that latter being the result of a marketed "cult of personality" (440-441). Because of these moments of interlacing in Osama's story, it almost seems as if some of the independent, embedded stories in *The Hakawati* could possibly be versions of stories Osama's grandfather told him as a child (so perhaps his grandfather is implied as the unnamed narrator?). The interlacing of the fantastic stories of *The Hakawati* with the realistic ones additionally creates a sense of magic realism. For instance, it is almost believable in the context of the story that Osama's grandfather would have the actual hand of Fatima. Realistic stories conversely interlace with fantastic ones as well, perhaps trying to widen readers' conceptualizations of what is real. As seen with the discussion of Baybars's story, however, this limited expansion of the real is only temporary, for readers are reminded of their gullibility and the ways in which hakawatis create (hi)stories.

Ending a text, such as *The Hakawati*, with so many stories and threads is not easy, especially because framing and embedding, although attempting to create cohesiveness between tales, also tend towards continuity. For similar reasons, the moment of ending is slightly strange in the *Arabian Nights*: its infinite fractal

structure makes it potentially never-ending. Basically, the narrative structure of the oralistic frame of the *Nights*, to which stories can be infinitely added, allows for the possibility of a never-ending series of tales. *The Hakawati*, as a derivative text acknowledges this aspect of the *Nights*, but does not and, because of *The Hakawati's* formulation through the genre of the novel instead of the frame tale, cannot deal with its own ending in the same way as the *Nights*.

Still, because *The Hakawati* acknowledges in its own ending, to some extent, its lineage from the *Arabian Nights*, it may be best to explore the telling and ending of one of the stories in the *Nights*. One of the first examples of the coming together and ending of tales in the *Nights* is in “The Tale of the Merchant and the Demon,” after the three old men (two really) have told their tales. After each old man tells his tale, the demon in the story offers him one third of his claim on the life of the accidentally homicidal merchant (17-29). The old men congratulate the merchant upon getting his life back and say goodbye, each then separating and returning to his respective path, assumedly to continue each of their own stories as the merchant too continues his with own by returning to his family (29). “The Tale of the Merchant and the Demon” officially ends with the death of the merchant, the man whose life has been so arduously earned from the demon (29). In this tale, the occurrence of a single event becomes a story in itself: the merchant accidentally kills the demon’s son and must forfeit his life as consequence. This becomes the story he is obliged to tell to anyone who meets him; however, this event-story also acts as the catalyst of other stories and thus functions as a means of prolonging the initial story, that of the

merchant, or the life of the initial actor, the merchant himself. The actor in this context, as is often the case in the *Nights*, is the one who has the story to tell, the one who catalyzes events because of which stories are created. In the frame of the *Nights*, this role belongs to Scheherazade in her decision to marry the king and make her life dependent on the telling of a series of tales.

Stories told within the framing story are for the most part independent of it, except for when the framed stories intertwine their threads with the framing story to elongate the story/life of the narrating agent. For example, in “The Tale of the Merchant and the Demon,” the three old men’s stories serve to displace the death of the merchant, or the anti-event, which would effectively end the initial, framing story. In fact, in the *Arabian Nights*, when the initial, framing story can no longer continue on its own (because of a death or sexual consummation), it is precisely then that framed stories must be narrated, creating alternative events of displacement. The event of storytelling in the framing stories allows for the threatening situation to be temporarily paused or averted until a resolution arises. Often, the goal of storytelling in the framing story is to have a certain effect realized, like a lesson conveyed or a comfort level reached. In the *Nights*, it is the fear of death or sexual tension that needs to be displaced. After this happens in the text, the narrating stops and the story is rather quickly tied up and concluded, especially in relation to the process of telling the initial block of the story. In order to stop the framing story, however, the initial, catalyzing fear, typically of death or sexual consummation, must actually be fully realized. In other words, a death must occur or sex must be had—however, not in a

threatening, tension-filled manner. That is, in the framing story, death or sex must not be seen as an event so much as part of a natural progression, for example, a routine death in old age or children resulting from a comfortable and loving consummation between a husband and wife. The end of the framing tale is usually narrated simply and quickly in the form of a clichéd “happy ending.”

The endings of stories in the *Arabian Nights* typically follow a conflict-resolution paradigm, in which the framed tales come into play as a means of displacing the conflict in the framing tale. Nonetheless, although it is the framing tale that sets-up, contextualizes, and creates the environment in which there is a need of the framed tale in the first place, it is clear the framing tale itself cannot move forward or end without the insertion of the framed tale. In other words, the framed tale is a necessary component of the framing tale. It is only once the framed tale has served its function that the framed and framing tales can both conclude. In the *Nights*, for example, the framing tale generally progresses until a moment of non-narrativity, or silence, in which there is no longer any tension to drive the narration of either more framing tales or the frame tale itself. This is illustrated by the comfort that develops between Scheherazade and King Shahrayar through the birth of their children who are evidence of the consummation of their sexual relationship as well as the obliteration of the fear of death.

*The Hakawati*, however, does not end in the same way as the *Arabian Nights* by resolving its tensions through the telling of the framed tales and then resurfacing to a framing tale. It cannot precisely because its tales are not primarily framed tales:

they are, rather, embedded tales. Chapter 21 of *The Hakawati*, the final chapter of the text, is where the text's conclusivity is amplified for the reader. The intense coming together of all the significant story threads of *The Hakawati* is demonstrated by the frequency, immediacy, and "ending" feel of the embedded sections. The last is similar to what Susan Lohafer terms the "preclosure point": "the 'end' of a putative story within the actual one that the author wrote" (4). The length of the embedded sections of *The Hakawati* go from stretching pages at a time early on in the text to as short as a quarter of a page towards the next. Much like the end of a braid, in which the fibers being woven into the braid thin out towards the end with smaller but more frequent plaits being made, so too do the embedded and interlaced story threads towards the end of *The Hakawati* become shorter and more frequent, interacting with each other more quickly and immediately. The embedded story segments of Chapter 21 switch as follow (with the names corresponding to the stories in which these characters are the main characters): Osama, Fatima/Majnoun, Baybars, Osama, Majnoun, Abraham, Majnoun, Baybars, Fatima/Majnoun/ Emir, Baybars, Majnoun/Emir, Osama, Baybars, Osama, Majnoun/Emir, Osama, Baybars, Majnoun/Fatima, Osama, Baybars, Osama (Grandfather/Osama) (495-513). Within these final twenty pages of *The Hakawati*, the embedded segments of different stories often even coalesce within a single embedded sections, like the stories of the emir's wife, Fatima, and Majnoun, which drift apart as their own, distinct stories earlier on in the text but then return to a single story at the end of *The Hakawati*. Unlike the *Arabian Nights*, whose ending is merely stated but not felt because technically the

frame tale itself never ends, *The Hakawati* does have a sense of ending. The embedded story sections before the final embedding have a distinct pattern of “ending” or conclusiveness. They are essentially “preclosure” points in terms of the whole of *The Hakawati* and also simultaneously closure points for their own stories. For example, Abraham’s tale ends with his death; Fatima’s with the quasi-cancellation of her dual self (a death); the emir’s story ends earlier, although the character of the emir’s wife continues in Majnoun’s story—her “story” ends with her coming to life (a rebirth, which requires a death); Majnoun’s with an emotional and psychological loneliness (a kind of death); Baybars’s with him and his faithful horse riding into the sunset (an implied death); and finally Osama’s with the imminent death of his father.

There is something unique, however, about the ending of Osama’s story, which comprises the final embedding of *The Hakawati*, the text’s ultimate ending. As it has done at many other moments as well, towards its ending *The Hakawati* references and returns to the oralistic tradition that so heavily influences the style of frame narrative and the *Arabian Nights*. Although this final section of the text is clearly an embedding, it also functions as one of the frames of the text. Osama’s story, in conjunction with the emir’s tale, brackets the text; these two frames, although from different stories, seemingly share some themes or markers. For example, the ambiguously framed introduction to the emir’s story (and the whole of *The Hakawati* itself) opens with the word “Listen” (5), and consequently the last section of the text opens with a complementary phrase: “Do you hear me?” (511). In

this last embedded section of *The Hakawati*, Osama begins to tell his dying father much of the story that the readers have just finished reading in the form of the embedding sections in *The Hakawati*, like, for example, the story of Osama's grandfather, his father's father. Osama informs his father that not only does he know his grandfather's stories, but that he also knows his father's stories, as well as his own. Recall how, in Welles's *Citizen Kane*, the beginning of the film contains a film on the story of Kane, which will then again be recounted throughout the remainder of the film in an attempt to restructure or redo the original short film showed at the beginning of *Citizen Kane*. The readers of *The Hakawati* experience a similar phenomenon here: at the end of the text, the protagonist of one of the frame stories, Osama, recounts the stories told in the text (like the movie within the movie in *Citizen Kane*), retracing memories of hearing those stories initially from his grandfather (like the way various characters retrace Kane's life in *Citizen Kane*). Hence, the story of Osama's grandfather is continued in two ways: first through the lives of his descendants, such as Osama, who survive him and his story, and second, through Osama's recounting of his grandfather initially telling him his stories and retelling of them in the process. These two continuations of Osama's grandfather's story (and his own in a sense) interlace in the figure of Osama, who is both the descendant of his grandfather and the recounter of his stories—he is embedded in his own story in this way.

*The Hakawati* attempts to adapt the *Arabian Nights*' notion of the infinite ending to fit the form of the novel, in some ways a more finite text than an oralistic

frame narrative. *The Hakawati* ends with Osama offering to tell his stories to this father with the word “Listen” (513), mimicking and mirroring the opening bracket of the text which also reads “Listen” (5). Again, unlike the *Nights*, *The Hakawati* is not a porous text in which stories can be inserted or repeated indefinitely after the 271<sup>st</sup> tale. However, it is still intertextual in that it not only builds on and includes tales from various traditions, but it also specifically pulls in threads from other tales, interlacing their yarns into its own fabric. In this way, *The Hakawati* attempts to circumvent some of its finality and closedness through intertextuality. Nevertheless, *The Hakawati* does end—cleverly though with the term “Listen” (513). Consider that the last embedded section of *The Hakawati* refers to and retells, albeit in an incredibly succinct and abridged form, many of the stories that it has already told. The text begins setting up a foundation for iteration by specifically repeating in its final telling of some of the stories that it has already told. Thus, by ending itself with the same word that it begins with, *The Hakawati* gestures to its cyclic storytelling style, suggesting that the whole book is perhaps Osama’s story that he will be (re)telling to his father. Essentially, the end becomes the implicit beginning of the text.

This reversal is further reinforced by the entropic organization of *The Hakawati*, suggesting a level of self-similarity in the text. According to the notion of entropy in relation to time, as time progresses, the numbers of ways in which things can be organized increases. In other words, with time, the possibilities of organization and structure increase, and in relation to *The Hakawati*, the relationships of embedded story sections to each other should also increase. However, they do not—instead, they

decrease. Although the text opens with the possibility of numerous arrangements of embedded sections, it ends with a very particular, tightly knit arrangement of embedded story sections. This decrease in possibilities (of embedded section arrangements) in *The Hakawati* with its supposed progression (for time progresses as a text is being read) reinforces the sense of reversal in the text. Since as the text progresses entropy seems to decrease in it, perhaps time itself is also not progressing in the text—perhaps time is actually regressing. Consequently, the end of *The Hakawati* would be the start of its time: the end of the text would be its beginning. Thus, although *The Hakawati* is an unchanging, written text and cannot have an infinite series of self-similar addendums, like the oral version of the *Arabian Nights*, it does end on an infinite note. *The Hakawati* ends by repeating itself and redirecting its reading to its beginning. Thus, the text becomes infinitely reiterative, a repeated fractal sequence. Fractals require a level of congruency at every level of iteration, and in *The Hakawati* every level of iteration, the whole text, is and can only be identical. Ergo, it is the perfect fractal text.

#### **Chapter Four: *The Flower of the Thousand and One Nights***

Pier Paolo Pasolini, a well-known Italian film director and intellectual, adapts the *Arabian Nights*<sup>69</sup> in his *Trilogy of Life* series, which also includes Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*<sup>70</sup> and Boccaccio's *Decameron*<sup>71</sup>. In this series, he attempts to capture the essence of what he saw as some of the most influential stories of all time for a quickly approaching media era, in which he feared that the place of such collections of stories would be lost. Although he considered his cinematic adaptations of these classic texts as failures in terms of his own project, the films nonetheless visually interpreted many of the conventions of traditional storytelling in ways that are both faithful to their original texts and move beyond them in certain ways, as the medium of film requires, while simultaneously addressing social, political, and economic issues contemporaneous to the film.

Pasolini's *Il Fiore Delle Mille e Una Notte*, literally *The Flower of the Thousand and One Nights*, or *Arabian Nights*, in its English rendering, presents several of the stories from the classic *Arabian Nights*; however, it does so with one very significant difference: Pasolini's *Nights* lacks the iconic frame tale of the original text. Although Pasolini's *Nights* maintains the frame narrative structure of the *Nights*, it foregoes both the renowned storyteller Scheherazade as well as the traditional frame of King Shahrayar forcing her to tell tales nightly. Not only does

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<sup>69</sup> *Arabian Nights*, Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Perf. Franco Merli, Ines Pellegrini, Ninetto Davoli, Franco Citti, Tessa Bouche, et al, DVD (Shock Entertainment, 1974).

<sup>70</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Perf. Hugh Griffith, Laura Betti, Ninetto Davoli, Franco Citti, Joesphine Chaplin, et al, DVD (Shock Entertainment, 1972).

<sup>71</sup> *The Decameron*, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Perf. Franco Citti, Ninetto Davoli, Jovan Jocanovic, Vincenzo Amato, Angela Luce, Giuseppe Zigaina, et al, DVD (Shock Entertainment, 1971).

Pasolini unmoor the tales of the classical *Nights* in his film by deleting the eternally flexible frame tale that connects all the stories of the text to each other, even if only indirectly, but he also removes its primary context: its famed frame narrative.

However, through this bold move, Pasolini simultaneously creates for himself a space in which a new framing context can be positioned that would not only distinguish his *Nights* from the classical text but also allow his text to approach framing in possibly more innovative ways.

The primary frame tale of Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* functions differently from the classical frame tale of the original *Arabian Nights* in that the former has no principal narrator who propels the plot but rather it possesses a chief addressee, the one to whom stories are addressed. The primary framing story of Pasolini's *Nights* involves two main characters, Zumurrud and Nuredin. The former is a slave who chooses the latter as her master; the latter, Nuredin, however, is naïve and allows his slave, Zumurrud, to be kidnapped (twice). The story consists of Nuredin and Zumurrud searching for each other, with Nuredin actively running around towns and villages calling out his beloved slave's name and Zumurrud, who falls into kingship of a prosperous city, holding feasts to try to attract her loved one back to her (since, as king, she cannot leave her kingdom). All the narrated framed stories in this frame tale are told to Nuredin; hence, he may be considered the frame tale's protagonist, or the primary character with which the audience identifies. This is further established at multiple points in Pasolini's *Nights* through cut ins and aways of close-ups of Nuredin's face and those of the various storytellers that imply that it is from

Nuredin's eyes that the audience views the storytellers. Moreover, when Nuredin, for example, inches closer to a storyteller to hear her story, the camera moves with him, aligning the audience so that it further identifies with him and his movements (41:43-41:59). Thus, Nuredin's search for his beloved Zumurrud sets the tempo of the framing tale and creates isolated sequences that can be considered stories.

There are two types of stories in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, those that are framed as part of the framing tale itself and those that are couched within it as narrated framed tales; the former will be referred to as diegetically framed and the latter as metadiegetically framed. Diegetically framed stories are typically bracketed by scenes of Nuredin frantically running around calling out his beloved slave Zumurrud's name. When one of these brackets is followed by Nuredin seeming sleepy, the audience is signaled that a diegetically framed story is about to begin; for example, Nuredin falls asleep just as the story of the two women who haul him up in a basket begins (37:20-38:28). Metadiegetically framed stories, unlike diegetically framed ones, do not necessarily begin or end on the basis of Nuredin's story's narrative tension, his frantic search and desire for Zumurrud, but rather they are usually clearly narrated in Pasolini's *Nights* characters such as by Zumurrud, the Lady, Aziz, or the dervish Shahzmah. Although most of the metadiegetically framed stories in Pasolini's *Nights* are initially framed by a narrator's voice, most do not have final narrative frames or frame endings. Many of the stories in Pasolini's *Nights*, however, are simply understood as ending because they have the sense of an ending, a preclosure point, in which, for example, the protagonist walks away from the camera

seemingly off-screen as seen in the story of the dervish Shahzmah (1:35:36). Thus, there is a discrepancy between the initial and final framings of metadiegetically framed stories, which results in a feeling of possible openness or continuity at the end of framed tales.

Many of the frame narrative techniques that Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* employs, both original and borrowed from the traditional *Arabian Nights*, may be best illustrated through a close analysis of story set from the film, such as "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies." Pasolini's *Nights* adapts this famous story set from the classical text by shifting its stories from their original framings, including new stories, and deleting several stories and key characters. In the classic *Arabian Nights*, "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" is the tale of a bachelor who is hired by a lady, "the shopper," as a porter (Haddawy 67). She shops extensively, has him carry her purchases to her home, and introduces him to her two sisters; then, they all enjoy a day of merriment, drunkenness, and flirting in the sisters' pool (Haddawy 67-76). The one condition the sisters have is that the porter does not ask any questions of them (Haddawy 76). Soon, three one-eyed dervishes arrive at the door, and they too are allowed in the sisters' home under the same condition (Haddawy 76-77). After them, the Caliph arrives disguised with his two friends, and they are also let in under the same condition; the ten all enjoy one another's company (Haddawy 78-79). Soon, however, strange events start taking place (Haddawy 80-83), provoking the Caliph to ask the sisters their tales; consequently, the sisters threaten to kill everyone in the room unless each tell his story (Haddawy 84-85). The porter tells his, followed by the

three dervishes, the caliph, and his two friends (Haddway 86-133). The next day, the Caliph invites everyone from the previous night's company to his palace, and he has the women finally relate their stories (Haddway 133-148). He then marries the women to the dervishes, and everyone's marvelous stories are recorded (Haddway 149-150).

Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* only adapts parts of "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies," introducing several new stories and rearranging familiar ones. Nuredin from the primary frame tale of the film becomes the porter in Pasolini's rendition of "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies"; thus, this story in Pasolini's *Nights* is included as a diegetically framed story in the frame narrative. Pasolini's *Nights* completely drops some of the more complicated components of "The Tale of the Porter and the Three Ladies," such as the ladies' stories, perhaps because of the time constraints associated with a typical feature length film. Nonetheless, Pasolini's *Nights* stays more or less faithful to certain story segments and tales, including the pool scene of flirting with the three ladies and the porter, probably because it is true to the sexually innocent and playful nature of the *Trilogy of Life* series as well as the tales of two of the dervishes. Although these components of "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" copy the classical *Nights* in terms of their content, their narrative framing and structure are quite distinct in Pasolini's *Nights*. For example, instead of having the dervishes exist in the framing story of "The Porter and the Three Ladies," as they do in the traditional *Nights*, in the film the dervishes are embedded within a story that one of the ladies reads, and it is in this

framed tale that the dervishes relate their stories. Moreover, Pasolini's *Nights* includes an intermediary metadiegetic story level in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" not found in the original *Nights*: what will be referred to as "The Story of Prince Tagi." This secondary story level, or metadiegetically framed story, in turn frames the stories of Princess Dunya and her dream, Aziz and Aziza, and the dervishes Shahzmah and Yunan.

While in the traditional *Arabian Nights* the relationship between framing and framed stories is quite straightforward, this relationship is not as simple in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*. In the former, the relationship between a framing and framed tale is clearly created and dictated by the narrative voice, in this case the voice of Scheherazade. Not only does she introduce the framed tale by beginning it, but she also dictates the order of narration: for example, "[Scheherazade narrated:] I heard, O King, that the fisherman said to the demon: [...]" (37). In Pasolini's *Nights*, however, this narrative lineage is not dictated by any common narrative voice; because the stories in the film are not usually clearly delineated as they are in the traditional text, they often seem to flow together or run into each other. Thus, in Pasolini's *Nights*, it is not the narrative voice alone that creates the frame; the establishing shots, the sound track, transitional scenes, key visual markers, and points of view, among other elements of film, work in conjunction with the narrative voice to create the sense of a frame.

The narrative structure of Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, like that of the traditional *Arabian Nights*, does make use the narrative voice at times, but only at very specific

moments because the narrative voice is not as necessary in cinema, in which shots can also aid in establishing frame narratives, as it is in a written or oral text, in which the written or spoken voice is the sole means of communication. In Pasolini's version of "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies," for example, a voice-over may be used to initially narratively bracket a tale, as illustrated at the start of "The Tale of Prince Tagi" (41:29); however, even before the voice-over of the tale begins, an establishing shot is shown: an extreme long shot of the city moving towards an expanse of palm trees (41:29). This shot, although not technically part of Prince Tagi's story, becomes part of the transitioning frame that signals to the reader an imminent shift from the diegetic to the metadiegetic story level, or vice versa. In Pasolini's *Nights*, panoramic extreme long shots of villages, cities, oases, mountainsides, etc. function as a means of transporting the audience to far away places, removing (or returning) them to certain settings. The camera uses this technique as the narrative equivalent of "once upon a time, in a land far, far away...", indicating to the audience that it is going to be narratively transported.

Concurrent with the establishing shot of the city and palm trees in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" is the voice-over of the Lady, playing in the background and narratively framing the metadiegetic framed story. The voice-over does not act as a sound bridge into Tagi's story, continuing into it; instead, it begins and ends within the diegetic framed story of the Lady. The establishing shot of the city and palm trees cuts to a long shot that illustrates the mise en scene of the storytelling experience in the house of the three sisters (40:41). The entire company is

seated on the roof of their house surrounded by food and drink, with Nuredin on the left hand side, the two sisters on the right, and the storyteller-Lady in the center (40:41). This long shot is followed by medium long shots of the Lady, the two sisters, and finally Nuredin, who moves closer to the Lady, as does the camera, following him as she continues reading about a young prince by the name of Tagi (41:43-41:59). The Lady's voice and the shot of Nuredin are cut with a silent establishing shot of a palace on a hill, followed by scenes of a woman dreaming, the same young woman working on a parchment, a young man hunting a gazelle, and the same young man accosting another man (42:01; 42:09-42:40; 43:51-43:03; 43:03-44:19; 44:23). At this point, there is a return to the establishing shot of the city and palm trees accompanied by another voice-over of the Lady (44:36). She retroactively narrates what Prince Tagi does as the actions of the young hunter from the previous scene, creating a connection between her narration and its visual representation in the previous scenes. Because in the Lady's first narrating scene she speaks only generally about Prince Tagi and the following scenes show a woman with no apparent connection to Prince Tagi dreaming, there is a sense of disconnect between the Lady's voice-over and the visual narration that follows. This is remedied to some degree by the Lady's second voice over, which acts as the more direct diegetic framing of the metadiegetic story to follow, mimicking the way in which the narrator of a traditional frame narrative, such as Scheherazade, might relate a tale.

Although the transitions between the diegetic level to various metadiegetic levels in the story set of "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" often have

initial voice-overs or voiced narrative frames, never once is there a voice bridge, or a continuation of a character's voice from one story level into another. As soon as the audience is supposed to understand that it has entered a framed story by when it begins to watch a story directly, the narrator's voice is silenced, allowing the framed story to simply "play" out, so to speak. For example, "The Story of Aziz and Aziza" begins with Aziz being asked to relate his story by Prince Tagi, at which point there is a close-up shot of his face, and he begins, sobbing: "My name is Aziz, and I was engaged to my cousin Aziza. On the day of the wedding, when I was all ready, I went to bathe" (45:53). As soon as Aziz finishes saying the word "bathe," his narration is cut and interrupted with a scene of him smiling, coming out of the door of what seems to be a bathhouse within a typical medina setting (45:53). Aziz's narrating voice completely disappears from the scene and is replaced by a cinematic narration of his story. Although Aziz's story is initially framed narratively through his own voice, his narrative voice is quickly replaced by the camera's visualization of his story. Thus, the camera lens can be imagined as a cinematic substitute for the traditional narrative voice of the storyteller. Moreover, part of the reason the narrative voice in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* does not carry over into framed stories is because the narrative voice usually becomes unnecessary in the framed environment in which shots speak for themselves. For example, whereas a storyteller must convey background information, such as setting, history, and detail through lengthy narration, a camera lens can often convey these elements simply through the mise en scene of a single shot, as seen in the example of Aziz coming out of the bathhouse, in which

setting, ambiance, and mood are conveyed within the span of a few shots. Thus, the lack of voice bridges in Pasolini's *Nights* is indicative of cinema's limited reliance on the narrative voice even when adapting a frame narrative structure.

In Pasolini's version of "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies," the Lady is clearly established as the storyteller of the metadiegetic framed stories, but the film also establishes a primary addressee. The traditional *Arabian Nights* does not put as much significance on the role of the addressee, occupied by Scheherazade's sister Dinarzad and/or King Shahrayar. Ultimately, while the stories may be related to these two characters, it is still readers or listeners that imagine the stories in their own minds' eyes. In film, however, the framed stories that are imagined onscreen must undoubtedly be from someone's perspective, hence the necessity of an audience that receives the narration of the stories. In "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies," the role of addressee is assigned to Nuredin as evidenced through various shots. Following the initial establishing shot of the city and palm trees accompanied by the Lady's first voice-over, there is a brief scene in which Nuredin moves closer to the narrating Lady and he as does, the camera follows him (41:43-41:59). The lens moves with Nuredin, identifying with him and positioning the audience to do so as well; thus, the viewers of the film align themselves with Nuredin and his position as addressee of the story narrated by the Lady. Moreover, the camera focuses on Nuredin's eyes, through which the will be imagined, emphasized by his rubbing of them (41:49-41-52). The next voice-over by the Lady is again followed by a medium long shot of Nuredin acutely watching and listening to her as an avid narratee,

reinforcing his position as addressee (44:46-44:50). Unlike the written or oral storytelling dynamic, which is primarily reliant on the storyteller and the audience (readers or listeners, respectively) of the story, the cinematic storytelling dynamic depends on a triangulation of the storyteller, the addressee, and the audience (viewers).

Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* makes it a point to differentiate between story and narrative, and thus also between storyteller and narrator as well as addressee and narratee. While both stories and narratives have some similar elements, such as the fabula and syuzhet, they differ significantly in terms of contextualization and function. Stories possess a certain kind of physicality or sensuality that narratives do not necessarily need. While stories have a narrative component, narratives do not need to be in the form of stories. Stories must be told through some kind of medium; they require storytellers to relate them; and they also necessitate addressees to whom they are related. Stories can be told through a storyteller's voice, read from a book, or seen onscreen; in any case, stories must be conveyed and received through the senses, such as sight, touch, and/or hearing. Storytellers must be actual people, existing as humans with emotions, needs, and most importantly bodies. Similarly, the addressees or audiences of a story must consist of real people with bodies who listen to stories—or decide not to listen to them or even choose to interrupt them at times. Moreover, stories always exist in a context, in real time, and thus they have a sense of historicity about them. For example, in the classical *Arabian Nights*, Scheherazade is a storyteller represented as a person with a body, a fact that is only highlighted by the

fact that her body is endangered with death on a nightly basis. Moreover, it is her voice, detectable by the senses, that relates her stories to her addressees, the King Shahrayar and Dinarzad, who can only receive her story through listening to her story, very much a bodily experience.

Narratives, on the other hand, do not require the kind of physicality and contextualization that stories do. Narratives consist of a series of events conveyed by a narrator, in the form of a narrative, to the narratee. Stories are narratives by default, but narratives need not be stories; thus, narratives are reduced versions of stories, abstractions of them. For example, Princess Dunya's pigeon dream is a narrative that is told as several stories: it is experienced in the form of a dream by Princess Dunya (42:20-43:36); it is told as a story in the form of writing on Princess Dunya's scroll (45:19); it is told by the gardener to Aziz and Prince Tagi as an oral story (1:16:56-1:17:07); it is arranged in a mosaic on the ceiling of Princess Dunya's room (1:18:18, 1:50:44); it is painted on parchment by Prince Tagi, presumably as an outline for the mosaic (1:18:21); and it is told once again by the gardener, this time to Princess Dunya (1:51:53-1:52:05). In all these cases, the narrative of Princess Dunya's pigeon dream is more or less the same; however, the stories are different in each case because each has its own context, historicity, addressee, etc. Moreover, the narrator and narratee are functions of the narrative and do not necessarily need to be physical, sensual, corporeal, or contextual in the way that storytellers and addressees do in stories. In this way, narratees and narrators are addressees and storytellers from a purely functional purpose, respectively; thus, while all addressees must include the

narratee function, narratees need not be addressees. Narrators are the body-less, floating voices of the narrative being related; they consist of the function of a storyteller without his/her specificity and physicality. Similarly, a narratee occupies the functional position of one who receives a narrative; however, narratees do not have bodies or a context outside of their function in relation to the narrative.

Ergo, if Nuredin is to be understood as both the narratee and addressee of Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, then it is clear that he resists his function as the former, desiring to exist as the latter instead. Nuredin, the protagonist of the primary frame tale of Pasolini's *Nights*, "The Story of Zumurrud and Nuredin," to a large degree, propels the plot of the story forward. Additionally, it is Nuredin's search for his beloved slave Zumurrud that usually creates transitions from the primary framing tale to diegetic framed stories and/or into metadiegetic framed stories. The primary framing tale signals its transitions to the various levels of framed tales through its protagonist, Nuredin, who is also the protagonist of the diegetic framed tales and the addressee of the metadiegetic framed tales. As the protagonist of the diegetic framed tales, Nuredin also simultaneously functions as the addressee of these tales. Not only is he the recipient of the action in the episodes that further the plot, such as the two ladies pulling him up in a basket and seducing him (37:04) or the Lady hiring him as porter (40:30), but he is also the one who ends the diegetic framed stories, making them into stories that he then carries with him. In other words, instead of continuing to remain in a single context, such as that of the two sisters who pull him up or the Lady and her two sisters, Nuredin instead chooses to end his interactions in these

contexts, “cutting” and ending various episodes so that they *turn into* stories that he can then carry with himself as the plot progresses, thus functioning both as the actor and addressee, or receiver, of these stories. Notably, Nuredin does not act simply as a narratee because by participating in the stories himself, by physically driving them and being affected by their contexts and historicities, he goes beyond merely existing as the function of a narratee, also becoming an addressee.

When “The Story of Zumurrud and Nuredin” in Pasolini’s *Nights* is about to transition to a metadiegetic framed story, the transition is preceded by Nuredin resisting his role as the narratee of the forthcoming tale by emphasizing his existence as an addressee instead. For example, in “The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies” when the Lady begins reading, after a quick shot of her two sisters, the camera turns to Nuredin and follows his movements, positioning the audience to identify with him (41:39; 41:47; 41:48). Nuredin though is depicted rubbing his eyes, as if he is about to fall asleep, which is the act of an addressee, not a narratee; the latter simply functions as the receiver of a tale and cannot physically exert himself in this way (41:49-41-52). Thus, while the character of the Lady more readily succumbs to her role as the narrative voice, with her voice twice literally detaching from her body during the establishing shots between her story and that of Princess Dunya and also between her story and that of Prince Tagi, Nuredin resists his role (41:31; 44:37). Although Nuredin does, to some extent, function as a narratee, especially when the story he occupies transitions to other levels and a metadiegetic framed story monopolizes the screen, he still reminds the audience of his very real bodily existence

before the transition is complete. Not only is the act of rubbing his eyes or falling asleep a physical reminder of Nuredin's bodily existence, but it is also an act of defiance against the metadiegetic framed narrative because one cannot receive a narrative and thus function as its narratee if one is asleep or unconscious. Clearly, Nuredin resists the reductive abilities of narrative through sleep, which can be interpreted as his choosing not to receive a narrative, or conversely, Nuredin transforming the narrative into a story by embedding it in the context of his body by seeing the story in his dreams instead of as a floating narrative, the way in which narrative is presented in the film.

In most scenes in "The Story of Nuredin and Zumurrud," Nuredin is not actually shown as sleeping but as sleepy through the rubbing of his eyes or his drowsy stance, both of which have different implications (41:49-41:52, 36:42-36:58). The rubbing of his eyes is a signal, a reminder, for the audience to resist rather than simply an act of resistance in and of itself. The audience or viewers of Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* are meant to identify with Nuredin not only as the protagonist of the story, but more importantly also as the addressee. It is through Nuredin's eyes and ears that the audience sees and hears the film's stories because it is he who follows the stories in Pasolini's *Nights*. Thus, when Nuredin reminds the audience of his bodily existence and physicality by acting human through the rubbing of his eyes, he demonstrates his resistive potential, also encouraging the audience members to remember their own physicality and bodies so they too do not simply function as removed and reduced narratees. In terms of oral or written storytelling, addressees

might interrupt their reception of a story to get up and use the bathroom, rub their eyes, or add a comment or a note in the margins, respectively. Often, the addressees of oral or written texts are its audience members, with a story being told directly to listeners or readers, respectively, and not mediated by in-text addressees. However, even when this is not the case, as in the classical *Arabian Nights*, in which King Shahrayar and Dinarzard are the in-text addressees to whom Scheherazade tells her stories, the audience still often receives the story without mediation. For example, in the classical *Nights*, readers/listeners receive stories as if they were present in the flesh and simply listening in on the stories, overhearing them, alongside the other two addressees, joining them in a sense. In cinema, however, this is not possible, especially if a film is being watched in theatres. Audience members are expected to sit quietly through the entire screening of a film, unable and/or discouraged to interrupt it, the only plausible form of physical resistance to their function as narratees being the closing of their eyes, i.e. sleeping, as Nuredin does.

Pasolini is very much an advocate of people not being treated as mere functions but as actual beings with bodies, as exemplified by his use of the primary frame tale's protagonist and his tendency to sleep; however, this is not his only use of Nuredin. The director also uses Nuredin to remind audience members that they are real people who can act upon situations and create them themselves, just as Nuredin does in terms of the diegetic framed tales. The opening scene of both the film and "The Story of Zumurrud and Nuredin" aptly illustrates Pasolini's politics in this regard. In this scene, a man tries to sell Zumurrud, but her owner has applied a

condition to the transaction: she must choose her own buyer (2:50-2:55). Several men make offers to purchase Zumurrud, but she insults them on the basis of their physical appearances; for example “I don’t want a monkey beard,” “You’re no good, God has only given you one eye,” and “You have a soft candle in your pants. It rises when you sleep, and sleeps when you rise. God pity whoever lies with you!” (2:35; 2:42; 3:05). Finally, her gaze falls upon Nuredin, and she ultimately chooses him as her master (3:27; 3:34). She picks him because of his physical appearance, “He has smooth cheeks and his beauty enchants me,” and gives him a thousand dinars with which to purchase her, essentially gifting herself to him (3:45, 4:18). In this scene, Pasolini uses several means to oppose the reduction of people to mere functions. First, by having Zumurrud insult the various potentially substitutable buyers on the basis of their physical appearances, Pasolini again reminds the audience that these men—and the audience members as well—should not function merely as consumers. Furthermore, Pasolini emphasizes that both the men and audience members are individualized people, with bodies and physical presences that exist in the context of the real world. Moreover, by having Zumurrud gift herself to Nuredin, Pasolini usurps the notion of the person existing as a commodity, a replaceable or substitutable function of the market, because gifts exist specifically outside the market economy. Zumurrud selects Nuredin to be her “master,” although partner or beloved might be better terms for their relationship, based on his physical appearance, which, although not strikingly beautiful in terms of Hollywood’s consumerized notions of beauty, is beautiful in accordance to her individualized gaze. Pasolini presents non-commercial

beauty/looks by choosing to have average-looking Italians, such as Nuredin or the boys who attack the dervish Shahzmah's caravan (1:19:01-1:19:14), play many of the characters in the film instead of having only stereotypically beautiful bodies, like the kinds collected by Hollywood, starring in his film. Pasolini was against the monopolization of the big screen by a limited range of bodies considered commercially beautiful such that ordinary people were no longer able to see bodies like their own in cinema.

This emphasis on and celebration of the body is one of the trademarks of Pasolini's films, as is apparent in his *Arabian Nights*. Often, naked bodies and genitalia are depicted onscreen unexpectedly, jarring the viewer at times, such as when Zumurrud removes the white cloth wrapped around a dead sentry's pelvic area (29:52-30:00). She is not shown taking any of the guard's other clothes off except his loincloth (29:52). Moreover, when she does take the cloth off, the camera does not focus on Zumurrud, although she is one of the main characters of the primary framing tale, lingering instead on the cropped genitalia of this very minor character in the film (29:54-30:00). Pasolini occupies the screen and the visual senses of the audience with those parts of the human body that are most often ignored or controlled so that the body and its corporeality cannot be ignored. This is part of Pasolini's attempt to have his characters resist being mere functions in narrative and act instead as components of stories. The prompt of the presence of bodies is not needed in oral storytelling environments, in which the sights, smells, and sounds of the audience simultaneously interrupt and add to the tale. The reminder is similarly unnecessary in written

storytelling environments, in which the medium of the story must usually be physically dealt with in some way; for example, paperback or digital books must be held in one's hands. With film, it is possible for these physical and/or sensual aspects to be arranged and taken care of within the production of the viewing experience so that viewers are only required to have their bodies present at the time of the screening. For example, even though audience members' bodies are present during screenings, many films attempt precisely to make it seem like viewers' bodies are not present and that viewers are simply experiencing or receiving the narrative. These films are considered to be very good—viewers often say something along the lines of “I didn't even realize it had ended” or “I had completely forgotten that I needed to go to the bathroom” when they see such a film—because these films reduce viewers. Pasolini, however, does not desire this reduction of viewers, wanting rather to remind viewers of their active role in watching a movie as addressees with bodies rather than narratees.

There are moments, however, in the adaptation of the *Arabian Nights* in which Pasolini does attempt to limit the awareness of the position or perspective of the addressee, such as when the primary framing tale or a diegetic framed tale transitions to a metadiegetic framed tale. In transitional scenes before a metadiegetic framed tale, even though Nuredin may resist his complete reduction from an addressee to a narratee, he still functions in part as the implied narratee of the metadiegetic framed tale. Moreover, through its manipulated identification with Nuredin, the audience too becomes a partial, albeit removed, narratee. Once a metadiegetic framed narrative has

begun in the film, Nuredin disappears from the screen or the camera's vision in his capacity as an addressee, that is a bodily receiver of stories, although he still exists as a narratee in that the narratives continue to be imagined from his perspective. It is through Nuredin's filtered reception of the narrative that the audience receives the tales of Pasolini's *Nights*; however, without Nuredin present onscreen, it appears that the audience receives the narratives without mediation. Professor of Film and Media Studies Laura Mulvey terms this suture, that is the capacity of the film to manipulate images such that viewers forget that what they are watching is actually mediated, making the (re-)presentation and reorganization of scenes simply appear natural and real.<sup>72</sup> Thus, while the camera films and frames the metadiegetic narrative, the audience, because of its identification with Nuredin as narratee, views the metadiegetic framed narrative as simply a narrative of (re-)presented scenes from reality, that is shots filmed in reality and presented again in film. For similar reasons, the narrative voice from the diegetic framing tale, such as that of the Lady in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies," does not carry over into the metadiegetic framed text, in this case "The Tale of Prince Tagi"; if it did, the effect of suture would be disrupted because the audience would constantly be aware of a level of framing and mediation. The audience's direct viewing of the metadiegetic framed narrative reveals that, in cinema, narratives do not need mediation through another medium because the medium of film is already sufficient. Thus, there is generally no need for

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<sup>72</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989).

a story to be simultaneously screened and verbally narrated because then the narrative would be twice mediated, making it redundant.

By limiting the physical presence of the addressee in the metadiegetic framed stories of his adaptation of the *Arabian Nights*, Pasolini allows the audience to become fully immersed in the story level it is viewing at any particular moment instead of concentrating on the relationships of the various levels of narratives to each other except for at the moments of their transitions. A concentration on these relationships would lead to the audience realizing the relationships of power between the stories, with one story framing another and controlling how the framed is read, for example. Pasolini was against these kinds of power relationships in terms of narrative, among other things, and he subverted them by specifically letting each metadiegetic framed narrative play out for itself after its initial framing and/or transition, becoming a diegetic narrative in a sense. Perhaps it is for this reason that “The Story of Prince Tagi” and “The Story of Princess Dunya” are purposefully situated as framed narratives in relation to “The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies”; it is because the two former stories are equally framed by the latter instead of as narratives embedded in each other that there is the possibility of them later interlacing. Had these two stories been embedded in each other initially, they would have formed a hierarchical relationship in which the embedding tale would have affected and had authority over the reading of the embedded tale. Although this is also seemingly the case with framed tales, Pasolini specifically employs framed tales to resist this authoritative hierarchy, in terms of which story controls and affects the

reading of another, by often disappearing the frames of metadiegetic stories. For example, the frame of “The Story of the Porter and Three Ladies” for the most part disappears when “The Story of Prince Tagi” begins. On the other hand, interlacing in Pasolini’s *Nights*, allows stories to maintain their independence because they weave through and with each other in more equitable relationships such that each story intersects and acts on the other, even allowing for the possibility of the eventual unification of two stories. However, although Pasolini means for interlacing stories to have an equitable relationship, as in the case of “The Story of Princess Dunya” and “The Story of Prince Tagi,” it seems that the narrative and plot of Prince Tagi’s story still carries greater narrative weight towards the end of the unified story of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi. Moreover, if each story is represented to some degree by its namesake protagonist, then it seems that by the end of the unified the story, the plotline of Princess Dunya’s story succumbs to that of Prince Tagi, just like the character of Princess Dunya herself, with tears in her eyes as she is about to perform fellatio, succumbs to Prince Tagi (1:53:27).

Unlike oral and written stories, cinematic stories flatten the world by (re-)presenting reality instead of representing it. Whereas oral and written stories must represent reality through words for their listeners and readers, soliciting their audiences’ imaginations to create the worlds that their stories are trying to convey, cinema can (re-)present those worlds to its audience—or rather, (re-)present one flattened world. Cinema offers a rearranged version of the world to its audience, eliminating the need for imaginary worlds. Cinema takes clips of reality, shots of

constructed and/or acted out events in the real world, and uses them to (re)create narrative in film. By doing this, however, cinema conflates the worlds of reality and imagination so that the ontological differences between the fantastical and real worlds no longer exist. For example, the demon in “The Story of the Dervish-Shahzmah” must be (re-)presented onscreen, that is filmed in the real world, even while the demon is being represented or the actor is standing in for the imaginary creature. Although demons do not really exist, the film must create a demon that is real and can be filmed, and thus Pasolini creates the demon by having him take on the form of a foreigner or “other” and by also having various characters create a context and engage in dialogue in which the demon is labeled as such. Hence, the demon is (re-)presented as a demon through differences in his appearance as compared to other human characters; however, the demon is still being represented because the audience still knows that the man playing the demon on screen is not truly a demon. Nonetheless, within Pasolini’s *Arabian Nights*, a world is manufactured in which the inherent differences between the fantastical and real no longer exist, as with the demon becoming representable, in the same ways as they do in the real world. In this way, the world of the film becomes a less layered world, in which all things exist in terms of their (re-)presentation on an equal, flatter plane.

Pasolini thus plays with the idea of reality and representation/(re-)presentation in his film, even applying reverse mimesis: a movement from representation to presence or from representation in one medium to representation in another medium, where the latter appears more “present” or real. For example, the scene in which the

shot of the gazelle painted on Princess Dunya's scroll is cut by the shot of an actual gazelle suggests that representation can lead to reality (43:03). This is the perfect analogy of what Pasolini is attempting to do in his cinematic adaptation of the classical *Arabian Nights*, that is take the representation of a series of stories and make it real, or more present at least. This reverse mimesis further suggests that instead of losing some inherent essence or realness in subsequent iterations of stories and narratives that perhaps some essence or realness can rather be gained with each case of iteration, or at least each case of cinematic iteration.

Despite the "real" gain cinema as a medium may offer storytelling, there is still a sense of imaginative loss. Whereas in oral and written texts, the fabula or context of the plot requires an imaginative effort on the part of the audience, in cinema it does not; however, significantly, in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, the syuzhet or the structure of the narrative appropriates the need for the imagination. With written and oral texts, readers or listeners must participate in the text's activations to some degree, usually by imagining or reading the stories of the text. In terms of cinema, however, it is possible for the audience to simply watch a movie without any participation of this sort, i.e. without any kind of imaginative effort. However, Pasolini's *Nights* attempts to resurrect audience participation in cinema precisely through its narrative structure by presenting stories in a dreamlike fashion such that various scenes and stories blur into each other without clear, straightforward transitions. Often in dreams, the rules of time and space do not apply, and one dream may transition to another without any apparent reason, as the stories in Pasolini's

*Nights* do (for example, the compressions of time in Aziz's story (e.g.: 54:49) or lack of clear transition from the story of Shahzmah to that of Yunan (1:35:56-1:36:48)). Although the fabulas of the stories of Pasolini's *Nights* are already imagined for its audience, the audience may often find itself unsure of which story it is watching in the first place. Because of this orchestrated ambiguity, the audience of Pasolini's *Nights* is still involved with the activation of the film's imaginary component—not in imagining its scenes but in imagining the structuring of the various stories included within the film. It becomes the audience's responsibility to some extent to imagine the connections between the various framing and framed layers of stories in Pasolini's *Nights*.

The camera's translation into a visual storyteller, however, has its limits in Pasolini's cinematic adaption. While digital animation in film currently allows fantastic creatures and epic scenes to be easily depicted, this was not the case during Pasolini's time, making it difficult to film fairy tales and fantastic stories without making them seem ridiculous. A traditional storyteller may leave most, if not all, of the imagination of a story up to his/her audience, at most acting out certain scenes or mimicking particular voices and facial expressions during the storytelling process. Still, the task of imagining the narrated story remains in the minds of the listeners or readers. The camera, conversely, no longer necessitates this imaginative flexing because it (re)creates characters, their expressions, costumes, settings, movements, etc. onscreen for the audience. In this way, scenes in cinema are substituted for the

imagination of the audience, a critical component of the storyteller-audience relationship in both oral and written storytelling.

That being said, especially during Pasolini's time, there were very real limits in terms of what a camera lens could capture. Firstly, the lens could not convey abstract ideas, emotions, thoughts, perceptions, etc. It could undoubtedly convey the sense of these, like emotions through facial expressions or perception by aligning the camera lens with a particular character's line of sight. However, often in order to express these abstractions, cinema would return to conventions of narrative. For example, the easiest, although perhaps not the most effective, way for a character onscreen to communicate to the audience that she is feeling a certain emotion is to simply say so, i.e. to narrate her own state. Thus, narrative assists in communicating that which is not readily visible and thus readily documentable and conveyable by a camera lens. Secondly, during Pasolini's time, the camera could not convey what Islam quite appropriately refers to as "those who inhabit the realm of the unseen": djinns, demons, angels, God, magical creatures, monsters, devils, etc. Notably, Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* does depict a demon in "The Tale of the Dervish-Shahzmah," but this demon is not created essentially as a demon; that is, he is constructed primarily in contrast to what is considered natural or human through the color of his hair, his off attire, and his stoic facial expression (1:24:26). In other words, he is not, visually speaking, fantastic in anyway, and were he not contextualized and labeled as a demon, he might be difficult to distinguish from a foreigner. Because the audience is no longer responsible for imagining framed stories

in cinema, it becomes the responsibility of the camera lens to imagine all the characters, scenes, and settings of a story. When cinema reaches its limits in terms of depicting the imaginary, as in the case of portraying elements of the unseen, it primarily turns to literary conventions or narrative to state that which cannot (yet) be imagined onscreen.

This difficulty in portraying elements of the unseen world is further highlighted in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* during one of the only instances in the film when a diegetic storyteller interrupts his metadiegetic framed tale to offer an explanation. Towards the end of the story of Shahzmah, the first dervish in "The Story of Prince Tagi," a sorceress princess transforms Shahzmah from a monkey back into a human; soon, however, the shot of the kind princess is replaced with a dancing flame (1:34:35). The scene of the dancing flame is cut with a medium close-up of Shahzmah's face; he explains, "She sacrificed her life for me" (1:35:47). In "The Second Dervish's Tale" in the original *Arabian Nights*, the sorceress princess and the demon that had turned the dervish into a monkey have an epic battle, in which they turn into various animals that fight each other until finally the princess vanquishes the demon (Haddawy 111). Unfortunately, she misses one part of the demon, and he wounds her with an arrow; consequently, she is consumed by fire and turned into "a heap of ashes" (Haddawy 111-112). With the limited technology of the time, it would have been nearly impossible for Pasolini to film this epic fight and maintain its gravity. Hence, the film relies on narrative to relate this portion of the plot, as seen when the framed story is returned to the level of the framing story so that the

storyteller, Shahzmah, can communicate what cannot be illustrated cinematically. Thus, while cinema moves beyond oral and written conventions, it must still incorporate them at certain instances of its production when it encounters its limitations.

Within the story set of “The Tale of the Porter and the Three Ladies,” there are several levels of framed stories, including “The Tale of Princess Dunya and her Dream,” “The Tale of Prince Tagi,” “The Tale of Aziz and Aziza,” “The Dervish-Shahzmah’s Tale,” and “The Dervish-Yunan’s Tale”; however, some of these tales are difficult to distinguish as entirely separate stories from one another because they interlace via shared framings as well as common visual and aural markers. “The Tale of Princess Dunya and her Dream( : “The Tale of the Two Pigeons”)” and “The Tale of Prince Tagi”—or simply “The Tale of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi”—are difficult to distinguish because while they seem to be two independent stories, they seem to have an interlaced structure highlighted by their initial framing. In “The Story of the Porter and Three Ladies,” when the Lady begins reading “The Tale of Prince Tagi” to Nuredin and her two sisters, the storytelling scene on the rooftop is cut with a static and silent extreme long shot of a palace atop a hill (42:00). This functions as an establishing shot for transitioning into Princess Dunya’s tale, and yet immediately before it is shown, it was Prince Tagi’s, not Princess Dunya’s, tale that was being narrated. Thus, it would seem that Princess Dunya’s tale is missing a frame or must rely on the initial framing voice-over of Prince Tagi’s tale to function as its frame as well. Moreover, the clip following the scene of Princess Dunya dreaming does not

return to the diegetic framing story, but rather jumps into a scene from Prince Tagi's story. In this way, were it not for the initial narrative frame of his story by the Lady, it would seem that Prince Tagi's story might have been embedded with that of Princess Dunya. Instead, the stories seem to have an interlaced story structure, beginning as two independent stories, Prince Tagi's with a narrative frame and Princess Dunya's without, and ending as a single, interlaced story: "The Tale of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi."

Another key sequence in "The Tale of Princess Dunya" that is difficult to discern as an independent story is the dream of the two pigeons. In "The Tale of Princess Dunya," the opening and establishing shot of the palace is cut by a close-up of a parchment; soon after, the camera tilts upwards to reveal Princess Dunya sleeping on her bed (42:08). This shot is followed by cut ins and cut aways of close-ups of Princess Dunya's sleeping face and her pigeon dream sequence, linking the dream to her; meanwhile, a very particular sound track that will be referred to as "Dunya's Dream" plays in the background (42:20). It is unclear at this point whether or not the dream sequence can be considered a tale in its own right. Because sleeping often functions as a transition between diegetic stories in "The Tale of Zumurrud and Nuredin," perhaps it can be inferred that dreams can potentially be stories or even that stories are like dreams because they are often imagined in a dreamlike state. Still, the pigeon dream sequence is concretely connected to Dunya, as exemplified by the cut ins and aways of her face and the dream sequence, suggesting that the pigeon dream is dependent on her. However, the cut ins and aways could also be suggesting that the

pigeon dream is interlaced with Dunya's tale. Princess Dunya herself treats her dream as a story from which one should learn a lesson, basing her relations with men upon it. Moreover, later, in "The Story of Prince Tagi," the pigeon dream sequence is analyzed, modified, and adapted from being simply a story in the form of a dream—or perhaps a story on parchment if Dunya writes of it on her scroll—to being depicted in as a story in an intricate mosaic. Thus, even if the pigeon dream is not firmly established as an independent story within "The Tale of Princess Dunya," it is unclear as to whether in other portions of Pasolini's film the pigeon dream sequence is treated as an independent tale.

Much like *The Hakawati*, Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* also makes use of common markers, in addition to the initial establishing shot and/or frame, between stories. While in *The Hakawati* these common markers, such as names (like "Fatima") and talismans (like the hand of Fatima), are used to make stories and their relationships more ambiguous, in Pasolini's *Nights*, they are employed to the opposite effect: they create clarity and links between levels of framing. In "The Story of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi," there are two prominent markers that are repeated throughout many of the framed stories: the parchment and "Dunya's Dream."

Although viewers of Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* may understand that they have transitioned tales once "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" is cut with a new establishing shot, it is still unclear as to who the dreaming woman (Princess Dunya) is and what her link is to Prince Tagi, the one about whom the Lady is narrating; the revelation, or rather the creation, of this link is made through the

parchment, particularly through the gazelle painted on it. The establishing extreme long shot of the palace on the hill at the start of Princess Dunya's tale is cut with a close-up of the parchment, on which are painted two gazelles with some writing in Arabic underneath them (42:02). If the establishing shot is disregarded as merely a transitional marker, then the parchment becomes the first shot of the metadiegetic framed story that the audience sees. Later in the metadiegetic level, when the narrative shifts from Princess Dunya's story to that of Prince Tagi, it is once again the parchment that is used visually and thematically to connect the two stories: the end of Princess Dunya's scene lingers on the painted gazelle on the parchment before cutting to an actual gazelle being hunted by a man on horseback (Prince Tagi) (44:02-44:03). The parchment acts as a common marker, linking the story of Princess Dunya to that of Prince Tagi through the transition that its gazelle provide. Visually, the painted gazelle cut to the real gazelle, creating a visual bridge between the two stories. Thematically, the gazelle allude to their role in Arabic poetry as a sexual metaphor for the beloved. Princess Dunya is the owner and creator of the gazelle on the parchment, linking the figure of the gazelle to her, while Prince Tagi hunts a gazelle and later seeks the owner of the scroll, implying that he romantically, or rather sexually, hunts Princess Dunya.

While the gazelle on the parchment act as a link between the stories of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi, the parchment as a more general common marker also links other stories associated with "The Story of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi" to each other, taking on some of the roles that a shared frame narrative might

have. Immediately after his hunting episode, Prince Tagi encounters a man, Aziz, who accidentally drops a scroll in front of the prince and then attempts to hide it (44:23-44:36; 44:50-45:06). Prince Tagi asks Aziz about his story and that of the scroll's author, at which point Aziz begins his story (45:39-45:43); hence, it is the discovery of the scroll that catalyzes the telling of Aziz's framed story. Although the revelation to the audience that this parchment is the same one on which Princess Dunya was working earlier in the film is delayed in Aziz's story, the parchment's identity is eventually established. The scroll thus weaves through not only Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi's stories but also that of Aziz and Aziza. It presumably passes from Princess Dunya's hands to Budur's to Aziza's (59:20) (to Aziz's mother for entrustment) to Aziz's (1:13:35) to Tagi's (45:14), and in each passing, the parchment ties the involved characters and their stories back to the initial scene of the metadiegetic framed story, that of Princess Dunya's dream. In this way, the parchment connects the stories to each other, compensating to some degree for the lack of a frame narrative, such as the story of Scheherazade and King Shahrayar in the original *Arabian Nights*, or a consistent storyteller, like Scheherazade. Thus, the camera substitutes the voice of the common narrator and/or common framing narrative with a common visual marker that weaves in and out of various related stories. Whereas in the original *Nights*, all its stories, although not necessarily directly connected to each other, must be connected in some way to the frame narrative, in Pasolini's *Nights* the tales within a metadiegetic framed story must in some way

coalesce with each other with the common marker, such as the parchment, acting as the catalyst for this type of interlacing and framing.

Background music or soundtracks play a role similar to that of the parchment in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, subtly tying together and layering various scenes in the metadiegetic framed story of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi. The theme music of "The Story of Princess Dunya," "Dunya's Dream," is first introduced in the initial scene of Princess Dunya dreaming about the two pigeons (42:20-44:03). "Dunya's Dream," which also plays in the story of Prince Tagi and that of Aziz and Aziza, is an example of a leitmotif, a recurring musical motif or theme associated with a person, place, idea, object, emotion, etc. Although the soundtrack itself may be slightly varied in its repeated playings, a leitmotif remains recognizable by the audience. Thus, subsequent playings of the leitmotif of "Dunya's Dream" may be slightly varied from the original, resulting in manipulated emphases on particular shots. For example, in the last scene of "The Story of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi," the soundtrack of "Dunya's Dream" is slightly modified. The oboe playing is exaggerated at the moment that Prince Tagi lifts his jubba, or gown, encouraging Princess Dunya, who is in tears, to perform fellatio on him (1:53:22-1:53:29). The distinct oboe playing calls the audience's attention to this moment, emphasizing both Prince Tagi's pleasure and Princess Dunya's submissive state. The scene is meant to highlight the power hierarchies between the elite through the metaphoric discrepancies in gender relations in this sexual encounter. Moreover, the iteration of this leitmotif also simultaneously

reminds viewers of Princess Dunya's pigeon dream, perhaps even questioning men's loyalty and love for women, as Princess Dunya's dream initially leads her to question.

The leitmotif of "Dunya's Dream" is repeated not only during several scenes in Prince Tagi and Princess Dunya's stories, but it also features in the story of Aziz and Aziza, especially at moments when the parchment is present. The music is first repeated when Aziz accidentally reveals the scroll to Prince Tagi (45:13), then when Aziza asks for the scroll Budur has given Aziz continuing into scene of Aziz penetrating Budur with his genitalia-shaped arrow (59:29-1:04:32), then again when Prince Tagi wakes from his fainting spell having decided to pursue Princess Dunya (1:14:22-1:14:38), and finally when Princess Dunya first sees the ceiling mosaic Prince Tagi has made for her of the two pigeons' altered story (1:51:27) continuing into the scenes of Princess Dunya encountering Prince Tagi and pleasing him (1:52:59-1:54:29). Although there may not be an explicit connection between these scenes, a correlation is nonetheless implied through the repetition of the music in the background as a common marker. Every repetition of "Dunya's Dream" arguably reactivates in the viewers' minds the previous scenes in which it was played such that, for example, the scene in which the scroll is passed from Aziz to Prince Tagi reminds viewers of the scene in which the scroll was first introduced or, for example, the scene in which Princess Dunya orally pleases Prince Tagi reminds viewers of the scene in which Aziz penetrates Budur with his penis-shaped arrow. Consequently, the replaying of "Dunya's Dream" at key moments in Pasolini's *Nights* both layers various scenes of the film, such that the soundtrack's reiteration reminds the audience

of its previous playings, and creates a link between the film's various stories, associating them with each other in the way that the parchment also does as a common marker.

While it is possible for readers or listeners of the original *Arabian Nights* to imagine the stories that they read or hear, respectively, the audience of a movie cannot necessarily do the same because the stories are already visually imagined for them; Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, however, attempts to reintroduce some part of the imaginative component of the original *Nights* to the film through the use of dreams. The adaptation opens with the following epigraph: "Truth lies not in one dream, but in many dreams" (1:53). As such, it comes as no surprise that Pasolini's *Nights* abandons the structure of the single overarching frame narrative, as used in the classic *Nights*, for a more fluid frame narrative in which there exist both diegetic framed stories and multiple levels of metadiegetic framed stories. Returning to the notion of the dream though, dreams are defined as an involuntary sequence of feelings, ideas, images, stories, thoughts, and imaginings that exist in the mind without a definite purpose. Although audience members are awake when they view films, unlike most dreamers, the feelings, ideas, images, etc. they see onscreen are also, on their parts, involuntarily imagined. In this way, each story sequence in Pasolini's *Nights* may be read as a dream. Moreover, by suggesting that stories are like dreams, oneiric in their structure, the stories in Pasolini's *Nights* may be justified in their loose, fluid, and seemingly illogical structure, which often only makes sense as the film progresses.

Because of the way in which stories are presented in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, it is often difficult to determine what should be considered a story versus what should be considered a dream—or if these things should be differentiated at all. The first scene in “The Tale of Princess Dunya” opens with the princess dreaming of two pigeons (42:20). In her dream, these pigeons are in love with each other; while the female is trapped, however, the male goes away, leaving the female pining for him. The dream is intercut with close-ups of Princess Dunya's anxious sleeping face, establishing the dream as hers. The close-ups of Princess Dunya's face and eyes also parallel the close-ups of Nuredin's face and eyes, suggesting that the dream is focalized from Dunya's perspective, much like the metadiegetic framed stories are focalized from Nuredin's perspective. Although the dream lacks a narrator, it takes on story-like qualities by having a very specific focalizer from whose eyes the story is seen, or rather behind whose closed eyes the story is imagined. Moreover, because there are stories in Pasolini's *Nights* that lack clear narrative voices, like the story of the dervish Yunan for example, it is quite possible that a narrator is not a necessary component of a cinematic story as it may be in a written or oral story, suggesting that perhaps a dream can be a story. Admittedly though, dreams are part of characters' psyches and are often used as a means of explaining their various dispositions, hence functioning as character portraits might function in a written narrative. Nonetheless, in Pasolini's *Nights*, it seems that Dunya's dream functions as a story because later on in “The Story of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi,” Dunya's dream is clearly treated as a text in its retelling and translation in mosaic form. Furthermore, this adaptation of

the pigeon dream into a different medium parallels Pasolini's own adaptation of the original *Arabian Nights* into film; dreams that are not narratives, however, cannot necessarily be modified in this way. Thus, not only do the stories in Pasolini's *Nights* take on oneiric qualities, but dreams also take on narrative qualities.

Therefore, it seems that Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* has an oneiric structure, or a dreamlike structure, in which stories are presented as, transition as, and act like dreams and thus their addressees as dreamers. This is further enforced by the fact that the primary framing tale, "The Tale of Zumurrud and Nuredin," only transitions to a diegetic framed text or a metadiegetic framed text, when the protagonist and primary addressee of the film, Nuredin, has entered an oneiric state. This oneiric state afflicts Nuredin so often that it almost seems as if he sleepwalks through most of the film. Because the audience of Pasolini's *Nights* is meant to identify with the oneiric Nuredin as the addressee of the various framed tales, the audience too enters a dreamlike state when witnessing the stories onscreen. When watching a film, audience members for the most part are restricted in their movement and cannot act upon the sequence of events they are observing, paralleling the experience of dreamers.

Clearly, dreaming plays an important role in "The Tale of Nuredin and Zumurrud," especially considering the frequency with which Nuredin falls asleep is considered. In Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, the primary character and chief narrate Nuredin, with whom the audience is meant to identify, tends to fall asleep, especially at particularly inopportune moments. Initially, he falls asleep because he is drugged

by the Christian (21:49-22:00); however, he seems to have been in a sleep-like state even before he was poisoned because the Christian clearly puts the drug on his food in front of his very eyes and he still consumes it, as if he is elsewhere mentally (21:34). Notably, immediately before this scene, Nuredin has just finished listening to and imagining a story set narrated by Zumurrud. Hence, if stories are to be considered like dreams, then it is only logical that when he goes out to the Christian, he is in a dreamlike state, a state to which he soon returns. Next, Nuredin falls asleep when he is supposed to be alert and waiting for his beloved Zumurrud to meet him (26:10). After this episode, he falls asleep in basket resting on the street (36:58). Soon after, when the Lady begins to read “The Story of Prince Tagi,” he is again seen rubbing his eyes, as if he is about to fall asleep (41:49-41-52). At the end of “The Story of the Porter and Three Ladies,” Nuredin is seen asleep on the sisters’ roof (1:56:32). Finally, although not necessarily asleep in this scene, it seems that Nuredin daydreams of a lion in the desert and speaks to it concerning his futile search for his beloved slave Zumurrud (1:57:05-1:58:10). Each time Nuredin is shown to fall asleep or be falling asleep, the plot of “The Tale of Nuredin and Zumurrud” is catalyzed, and the narrative is propelled forward, for example, by the resultant kidnappings of Zumurrud or by playful diegetic frame stories that ensue, like that of the two ladies who raise the sleeping Nuredin in the basket. Sleeping, dreaming, and/or daydreaming serve as transitions between stories in the primary frame tale, suggesting that dreaming is an imaginative state similar to one that listeners or readers of stories enter.

Moreover, instances of sleeping and/or dreaming in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* allow the stories of the film not only to transition and progress but also to compress and expand time such that it no longer moves forward predictably. For example, in "The Story of Aziz and Aziza," temporality takes on the fluid characteristics that it might have in dreams through compression, with three scenes turning into eight days of Aziz not eating or drinking (54:49). Later, the audience finds out that Aziz has been sleeping with Budur for a whole year when it seemed that only one scene earlier a mere eight days had passed since he had first seen her (1:09:27). Towards the end of "The Story of Aziz and Aziza," a year is compressed into a simple fade out: the shot of Aziz's wife-to-be and him having sex fades into a shot of his wife holding their daughter, and the audience soon learns from the woman that they have been living together for a year (1:10:41). Thus, time compresses within units as small as scenes, conversations, and shots, taking what seems to be days and transforming it into years, forcing the viewer to renegotiate and reinterpret the significance of a story on this basis. Conversely, later, in "The Story of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi" time expands. When the dervish Shahzmah begins telling his tale while working on the mosaic of the pigeons, the audience can hear the gardener singing a song in Arabic in the background (1:18:59). When, while still working on the mosaic with Yunan, Shahzmah interrupts his own tale to explain something, the gardener is still singing the same song in the background (1:35:47). Finally, when the dervishes' stories, which convey events that took place over the course of years, end and the film returns to the story of Prince Tagi, the gardener is still singing the same song in the

background and the mosaic of the modified pigeons' story is complete (1:50:43). The viewers' experience of long periods of time within the framed stories exemplifies the way in which stories can expand time as well, in this case, beyond the length of what seems to be a single song sung by the gardener in the framing story. Thus, time in Pasolini's *Nights* is compressed and expanded, much in the way it is in dreams, with years compressed into minutes and minutes expanded into years.

Another way to read the relationship between the time of "The Tale of Prince Tagi" and that of the dervishes' tales is in terms of layering. The time of "The Tale of Prince Tagi," that is the time in which the dervishes tell their tales, is represented through the gardener's song. It is a time of repetition and languor encapsulated by the *mise-en-scene* and culture of the story as illustrated by the slow progression of work and by stories being told to while away the time. The gardener, moreover, constantly sings the same song such that it becomes difficult to discern whether he continuously sings it throughout "The Story of Prince Tagi" or simply repeatedly sings the same song on different occasions (1:17:59; 1:50:45; 1:52:41). Furthermore, it is questionable whether this distinction even matters since time seems to progress slowly in either case without much seeming to change. This slow pace and indifference to time is further exemplified in the kinds of activities that are partaken in "The Tale of Prince Tagi": stories that are said to be long are told without any concern for time, like the story of Aziz and Aziza, and instead of focusing entirely on work, entertainment such as storytelling is used to further fill or stretch time (45:43, 1:18:58). This slow, steady, and repetitive time is one layer of time in Pasolini's

*Arabian Nights* whereas the time of the dervishes' stories is another layer. In the dervishes' stories, unlike that of Prince Tagi, events are constantly take place in scene after scene: young boys and girls are murdered, thieves attack caravans, ships are wrecked, demons fly around, black knights are toppled, etc. The time of the stories of the dervishes is one of adventure and fantasy, filled with quick shots and juxtaposed scenes, unlike the time of "The Story of Prince Tagi," in which most of the activity takes place within the same desert and garden in a time that is monotonous and seeming endless. Thus, the relationship of the framing story, that of Prince Tagi, and framed stories, those of the dervishes, illustrates the layered representation of multiple temporalities, perhaps like the layered temporalities audience members occupy: those of their waking and sleeping states.

Another technique in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* that intensifies stories' resemblances to dreams, allowing stories to flow into one another much like dreams do, is missing frames. The transition between the stories of the two dervishes in "The Tale of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi" is a good example of the way in which stories blur into each other, especially without direct or clear frame brackets. The first dervish's tale is framed and presented straightforwardly: it opens with an initial narrative bracket of Shahzmah's storytelling voice, and towards the end it is briefly interrupted by Shahzmah (1:18:58, 1:34:47). Although Shahzmah's tale does not have a closing narrative bracket, it does have the sense of an ending in the scene in which Shahzmah takes on a poor man's clothes and walks away in a static shot, increasing in depth and decreasing in visibility (1:35:18-1:35:57). He seems to walk out of the

shot and thus out of the film, thus ending his story. At this point, however, the narrative does not return from the framed story to the framing one, that of Prince Tagi and Princess Dunya, so that the second dervish Yunan can begin to narrate his tale. Instead, the ending scene from Shahzmah's tale is cut with a shot of an obscured, unidentifiable dervish walking out of a boat washed up on shore and briefly speaking to a fisherman (1:35:57-1:36:48). The audience is unsettled at this point: it does not know whether this scene is a continuation of Shahzmah's tale, the second dervish Yunan initiating his tale, or a completely new tale altogether beginning. Within a few seconds into the scene, as the dervish becomes more visible, the audience realizes that he is neither Shahzmah or Yunan, but rather a third, new dervish (perhaps an allusion to the third dervish in the original *Arabian Nights*?) (1:36:06). After the scene with the new dervish has ended, the next scene introduces Yunan, and viewers have a better sense of whose story they are watching (1:37:30). Several scenes into Yunan's story, the audience can begin to assume that the voice he hears in his head may be that of the new dervish, and at this point, the audience may begin to link the intermediary scene between the end of Shahzmah's story and the beginning of Yunan's story to the rest of Yunan's story. In fact, it is only at the very end of Yunan's story, when the fisherman hands him the new dervish's clothes, accompanied by symbolic wind chime sounds, that the link between Yunan's story and the transitioning scene can be confirmed with surety by the audience (1:49:55). In this way, the connection between the scenes or story segments is delayed (as also seen in the explanation of the significance of the parchment in Aziz's story) or only

loosely connected in the audience members' minds. This parallels the loose or delayed connections often found in dreams, which tie in various ideas, emotions, scenes, and images in dreamers' minds in often seemingly incoherent ways.

Pasolini's *Nights* attempts to imitate the fluid structure of dreams by letting various stories run into each other in the way that dreams often do, so that Shahzmah's story seemingly melds into that of the two other dervishes, the new dervish and Yunan.

Notably, although Yunan's story does not have an initial narrative bracket, it does have a sense of an ending modeling the preclosure scene at the end of Shahzmah's tale. Thus, the dervishes' tales echo each other, so that even though the two visual narratives are distinct, they are framed as a pair, imitating the way in which a single sleeping session may include multiple dreams.

The dervishes' tales not only echo each other, but they also act as a montage particularly at the moment of transition from the dervish Shahzmah's tale to that of the dervish Yunan. At the moment of transition, there is a quick succession of scenes: the ending scene of Shahzmah's tale, the floating scene of the newly introduced dervish, and the beginning scene of Yunan's tale. By juxtaposing these scenes without an introduction or contextual frame, the film collapses time and space between the stories of these two/three dervishes, suggesting either that time and space are not critical to the narrative or that narrative allows the limitations of time and space to be overcome in some ways. This rapid succession of scenes also forces the audience to grapple with the abundance of new and uncontextualized information that is being presented to them such that certain ambiguous or undefined moments in the

narrative carry greater intensity and subsequently need more concentration on the part of the audience than others. Hence, the stories in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* can be analyzed according to another rhythm, that of the amount of energy and focus the audience is meant to exert when viewing various scenes and stories, much like the energy that goes into remembering or interpreting dreams. In the case of the transition between the dervishes' tales, the audience simultaneously works as the dervishes are working both in the telling of their tale and the telling of the pigeons' tale, i.e. the construction of altered pigeons' tale the mosaic.

Unlike in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, in which oneiric states function to conceive and catalyze stories, in the classical *Nights*, stories are used precisely to defer sleep and dreams; it is not the dreamer but the most alert character in the *Nights*, Scheherazade, who both narrates and focalizes stories. Within the framing story of the classical *Nights*, Scheherazade's voice shifts from being her own as a storyteller to that of an omniscient narrator dually functioning as an omniscient focalizer (except for in "The Story of Nur al-Din Ali ibn-Bakkar and the Slave-Girl Shams al-Nahar"). Although King Shahrayar and Dinarzad are the primary addressees of Scheherazade's tales, the stories Scheherazade narrates are not presented from the perspective of these two to readers and listeners. Thus, readers and listeners of the traditional *Nights* are free to imagine the stories as Scheherazade narrates and focalizes them. If focalization can be understood as the eyes or perspective through which a story is seen, then, actually, it seems that Scheherazade is not the sole focalizer of the *Nights*. Indeed, both Scheherazade and the readers and

listeners of the *Nights* are simultaneous and dual focalizers of the framed stories, for although Scheherazade narrates them and primarily focalizes the framed stories in her presentation of them, they are ultimately imagined in the minds of the readers, thus being seen in their minds' eyes.

In cinema, this imaginative component of storytelling significantly shifts, such that it is not so much the scenes or images of stories that must be imagined, but rather their connections, meaning that the very nature of focalization in cinema also changes. In Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, for example, stories no longer maintain audience members as partial focalizers. Instead, focalizers of the metadiegetic frames stories in Pasolini's *Nights* are established through close-ups of various characters' faces cut in and away with those of narrators. Because the narrator and focalizer are often one and the same character in Pasolini's *Nights*, when they are not, shots of these two different characters are often intercut in such a way that these figures are shown as interdependent. For example, in "The Story of the Porter and Three Ladies," it is the Lady who reads "The Tale of Prince Tagi"; hers is clearly meant to be the storytelling voice of the tale, for even when her narrative voice floats, disembodied in the establishing shot, it is soon reunited with the image of her reading "The Tale of Prince Tagi." The tale, however, as the lens follows it is not focalized or imagined through her eyes; instead, it is imagined through the eyes of Nuredin, who creeps closer to the Lady as she reads (41:54-41:59). The camera presents a medium close-up of the Lady followed a medium close-up of her sisters and then Nuredin, on whom it lingers on and whom it follows, identifying itself and thus the audience with him

(41:43-41:59). Furthermore, the camera focuses on his eyes, which he rubs, as if he is about to fall asleep and dream of or imagine the story being told, further implying that the ensuing story/dream will be presented through his mind's eye (41:49-41-52). In this way, the audience's imaginative, focalizing function is substituted with an onscreen character. In "The Story of Princess Dunya and Prince Tagi," Prince Tagi is the focalizing narratee who listens to and imagines the stories of Aziz and Aziza, Shahzmah, and Yunan as well as reimagining the story/dream of the pigeons. Because in cinema the audience does not imagine the stories it watches itself, the focalizer is a critical character, the figure through whose eyes framed stories are essentially filmed. In Pasolini's *Nights*, this significance is further highlighted by the fact that the role of focalizer is usually occupied by the key figure of a story, its protagonist.

The fractured consciousness of the focalizer of the primary frame of Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, which lends to the film's oneiric, interrupted narrative structure, is revealed in Nuredin's interactions with the Christian in the primary framing story. Initially, when Zumurrud is in the marketplace being advertised by her seller, the Christian watches her closely as she ridicules potential buyers and is about to select Nuredin as her master (3:20). At this moment, as a slave, Zumurrud can be understood both as being representative of the lumpen proletariat because she is not a wage earner at the same time that she is a colonized subject, a local citizen of North Africa or the Middle East. Nuredin can also be understood as representing the colonized; however, he is not part of the lumpen proletariat. Rather, he is representative of the proletariat as a wage earner, an identity that is later confirmed

when he goes to the market to sell goods (7:55). The white man who watches Zumurrud in the market is representative of Westerners because of his starkly different skin, hair, and eye color as compared to the rest of the local characters and his identity as a Christian; thus, his gaze becomes that of the male, western, colonist (7:51). Later, when Zumurrud resides with Nuredin, she gives him a tapestry she had woven the night before, telling him to sell it in the market to anyone but a man with blue eyes who she fears will separate them, that is divide the lumpen proletariat and the proletariat (7:27-7:40). Pasolini believed that it was only when the lumpen proletariat would freely give itself to the proletariat, like Zumurrud had freely given herself to Nuredin, joining forces with it/him, that a political, social, and economic revolution would take place. Therefore, when Zumurrud speaks of her fear of the blue-eyed man separating her and her beloved, she is actually speaking of the colonist dividing the lumpen proletarian and the proletariat in the colonized world so that they are unable to unite and overthrow the economically parasitic, occupying imperialist force. After initially resisting the Christian's ridiculously high offer for Zumurrud's tapestry, the lumpen proletariat's work, Nuredin eventually gives into the seemingly profitable deal (8:31). However, the Christian then follows him home as if he owns Nuredin now that he has given him some money (8:43-9:20). Thus, the Christian in "The Story of Zumurrud and Nuredin" acts much like how the colonizing power does towards the worker/colonized: following the colonized subject, initially staying in the colonized's land for trade and/or other economic reasons and then acting as if it, the colonizing power, owns the colonized subject. Moreover, interestingly enough, in

many Islamic cultures, blue eyes are said to bring bad luck and curses, such as the evil eye of envy. It is for this reason that many Muslims keep a glass blue eye with them, believing that if the evil eye of envy is cast upon them, the glass blue eye will absorb the curse and shatter. Thus, when the blue-eyed Christian follows Nuredin home, it is as if the evil eye is trailing him, foreshadowing the separation he and Zumurrud will suffer, just as she predicted. In this way, Pasolini suggests that the colonialist is the cursed force that initially separates the lumpen proletariat and proletariat, keeping the revolution from occurring.

It is only after the colonizing Christian enters his home that Nuredin begins to enter into seemingly uncontrollable oneiric states because the presence of the Christian affects Nuredin's sense of time and continuity. The presence of the colonizer in the colonized's home/land disrupts the sense of continuity and/or wakefulness that an un-colonized person would normally have. In the classical *Arabian Nights*, there is no figure of the colonizer and hence, Scheherazade, the un-colonized, Muslim subject, is ever awake, the complete opposite of the constantly sleepy, colonized Nuredin. Scheherazade, in fact, stays awake all night for years so that she can continuously relate stories and, through them, tradition since it is both a means and the means of transmission. In this sense, Scheherazade's ever-waking state allows her to relate tradition through stories, or history, in a continuous, uninterrupted fashion; whereas, Nuredin's story, his sense of history as a colonized subject, is constantly interrupted. Although the Christian colonizer only interrupts one part "The Story of Zumurrud and Nuredin," initially separating Nuredin, the colonized

proletariat, from his beloved Zumurrud, the colonized lumpen proletariat, this event catalyzes other separations and interruptions. This initial interruption in Nuredin's story fractures the continuity and transmission of his story, representative of the colonized's sense of history and time. Thus, the Christian/colonizer adds another comparative layer of time to Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*: the progressive, continuous time of the colonizing world versus the stagnant, fractured time of the colonized world. The time of the colonizing world progresses with economic transactions, as seen through the progression of the plot of the primary framing tale when the blue-eyed Christian purchases Zumurrud's tapestry. The time of the colonized world, however, is always hindered from progressing due to various setbacks, such as the arrival of the colonizing Christian; it also seems even to stagnate at times because of its repetitiveness. For example, Nuredin constantly calls out for Zumurrud in the same fashion with similar bands of young boys tailing him in various parts of Pasolini's *Nights*, eventually making such scenes appear repetitive and redundant (23:00; 23:40; 28:43; 36:28; 36:35; 1:56:43; 1:56:57). The colonized proletariat Nuredin must overcome the initial setback of the colonizer stealing his resource/partner, his loving slave, his beloved Zumurrud of the lumpen proletariat, by reuniting with her. It is only when this happens that Nuredin's eyes snap wide open and the narrative can finally end because the revolution will implicitly occur with Zumurrud and Nuredin jointly ruling the new kingdom together (2:04:07; 2:04:31). A sense of continuity is established through the reunification of Zumurrud and Nuredin and in their implied continuing relationship together. Significantly, their sexual relationship, a metaphor

for their social, political, and economic relationship as the proletariat and the lumpen proletariat, is equitable, pleasurable, and mutually beneficial, unlike the sexual relationship, again a metaphor, among genders or different bodies of the elite, as seen through the interactions between Prince Tagi and Princess Dunya, which are always in the context of hierarchical power relations and submission (of women) (2:04:06-2:04:30; 1:52:47-1:54:29). Finally, because once having reunited with Zumurrud and gained the possibility of independence, Nuredin no longer needs to be in an oneiric state as a colonized subject, neither does the audience through its identification with him. Thus, at this point, the audience can extricate itself from Pasolini's dreamlike adaptation through the film's timely ending.

## Conclusion

To briefly recap, this thesis project is a study of the narrative structure of the *Arabian Nights* and its postmodern adaptations: Rabih Alameddine's *The Hakawati* and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Flower of the Thousand and One Nights*. The progenitor of these adaptations, the classical *Arabian Nights* itself, was originally an oral text renowned for its frame narrative. Its famous frame tale, that of Scheherazade's nightly storytelling to her husband King Shahrayar, couches all the tales that follow in the text, framing them and informing their readings. The nature of framing dictates the relationship of framing and framed stories to each other, such that a need in the former influences the content of the latter and the latter can relieve a tension in the former through the process of its telling. In the case of the *Nights*' frame tale, the tensions that need to be relieved are the lack of sexual consummation between King Shahrayar and Scheherazade and the imminent death of Scheherazade by her vengeful husband. In the frame tale of the *Nights*, Scheherazade often tells multiple levels of stories within stories, making sure to ritually list the order of narration of any frame tale, reciting in order the names of the people who related the framed stories that she is about to tell both at the beginning of her nightly storytelling sessions and at the start of a new tale.

This genealogical pronouncement in the *Arabian Nights* as well as many of the text's other styles and characteristics, including its iconic frame structure, have their roots in the Islamic culture. Although what may be considered "Islamic" is difficult to define, for the purposes of this paper, it includes the culture that stems

from the religion, or essentially an Islamic aesthetic. Within the Islamic culture, heterogeneous as it was and continues to be, textile has undoubtedly occupied a central position, functioning within a range of roles, including clothing, currency, architectural materials, furniture, status symbols, burial shrouds, courts, etc. Thus, textile permeates all levels and areas of the Islamic culture; moreover, because of the prevalence of cultural transference as a practice within the Islamic aesthetic, textiles and their design(s) not only pervade various realms of Islamic life but they also affect other media as well. The most common textile design, inherent in the very structure of the medium, is weaving or interlace. This pattern not only exists at the level of creating textiles, but it is also reflected in the superficial, visual culture of textile, with many carpets taking on interlace designs, for example. The pattern of interlace evolves and mutates to include framing and embedding, which also spread under textile's heavy influence on other media such as mosaic and architecture. Eventually, from architecture, these interlacing and framing designs are mapped onto the Arabic script, ultimately bleeding into Islamic narrative style. Hence, in the Islamic culture, framing and interlacing styles stemming originally from textile penetrate as far as storytelling structure, even affecting the telling of the *Arabian Nights*.

Textile is not the only component of the Islamic culture that shapes the syuzhet of the *Arabian Nights*; much of the classical text's ritualistic storytelling format draws inspiration from and parallels the primary text of Islam: the *Quran*. The *Quran*, both like Islam and the *Nights*, is a heterogeneous text, covering a wide range of topics narratively with stories upon stories, and, like the *Nights*, the *Quran* also

presents its stories within a single text. In its attempt to maintain a cohesive identity, Islam's holiest text strives to reflect what it considers to be the most unified entity of all: Allah. Perhaps the most important article of Islam is that there is only one God, embodied in the critical principle of *tawhid*: the concept of the oneness of God. Hence, the *Quran*, like the *Nights*, adopts levels of frames such that its stories and chapters, upon every activation, are presented in a uniform fashion, maintaining the semblance of a unity where otherwise there is none. This is perhaps most easily observed in terms of the three-part *basmalic* formula mobilized in the *Quran* and a version of it in the *Nights* as well. The two texts are also orally recited in a similar, ritualistic manner that pays homage to the texts' Arab roots and its appreciation of oral culture.

While much of the *Arabian Nights*' structure and style emanates from the Islamic aesthetic, an understanding of its frame structure requires a narratological examination as well. Mikhail Bakhtin addresses framing and embedding through his explorations of the conversational, dialogic novel, suggesting that languages flow through people and texts such that relationships between people, texts, and/or stories are framed by the languages mobilized in the interactive environments created by participants. The chapter of this project that opens with Bakhtin is further complemented in its discussion of the narratological functions of framing and embedding, through definitions set forth by narratologists like Mieke Bal and Gerald Prince in their introductions to and dictionaries of the field. Many of the implications set forth in their texts serve to reinforce what was analytically gleaned earlier on in

this thesis from the *Nights*; however, Bal and Prince's definitions also allow an array of new questions to be posed, such as the following: can there be invisible frames; can frames break or disappear; do frames stay constant; can frames frame each other; what constitutes a frame; what is the relationship, a la Bakhtin, between framing/embedding and conversation; how can embedding be defined in terms of framing; what is the relationship of interlacing to both framing and embedding; etc.?

Some of these questions are addressed through this paper's readings of and commentaries on the narrative structure of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* and Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. The former provides an example of a combination of framing and embedding and the latter of an interaction between embedding and interlacing. While these texts examine framing at the level of narrative structure, Mieke Bal further examines framing at the very level of narration, dividing the concept into narration through the voice and focalization through sight. In this project, this distinction is mapped onto Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red*, the results of which are later used to better understand narration and focalization in cinema, particularly in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*. Finally, this chapter of the thesis ends with an exploration of framing and embedding at an even more miniscule level than that of narration, i.e. that of the sentence, such the act of narration, or relating speech, is demonstrated as intrinsically performing framing. This relates back to Bakhtin's notion that embedded texts function as a means of allowing the different languages within a text to interact, to converse, or narratologically speaking, to frame each other.

Although the idea for this thesis project initially began with Rabih Alameddine's *The Hakawati*, the chapter on this postmodern text follows that of the *Arabian Nights* since the analysis of *The Hakawati* is significantly marked by the structure and aesthetic origins of the *Nights*. *The Hakawati* is an adaptation of the *Nights* that contains two main story strains: a realistic strain that follows the life of Osama, a contemporary Lebanese-American immigrant visiting his dying father in Lebanon and remembering his extended family's stories; and a fantastical strain that weaves together a number of stories from Islamic folklore but primarily that of Fatima, a luscious lover of the king of hell who is also a servant woman to the emir, and the adventures of the Mamluk King Baybars. The structure of the text is reminiscent of that of the *Nights* in that it seems that these two story strains frame each other; however, unlike the *Nights*, *The Hakawati* has no overarching single frame tale. Instead, both story strains in *The Hakawati* function as frames to each other, effectively embedding each other. Thus, while the discussion of embedding in *The Hakawati* recalls this paper's examination of framing in the *Nights*, the former clearly stemming and drawing inspiration from the latter, the embedding in the former is undeniably novel and different in comparison to the framing in the latter. The two main story strains, among others in *The Hakawati*, frame each other such that the plot and style of the one always informs that of the other. Moreover, many of the embedded story strains in *The Hakawati* begin as framed tales only to later evolve into embedded tales. Similarly, story strains in *The Hakawati*, such as that of Osama, can both embed and interlace with themselves. These styles of framing and

interlacing manipulate readers of *The Hakawati* into subconsciously connecting what are otherwise quite independent tales, forging mental connections between the stories in the minds of readers that ultimately yield new ways to interpret the various story strains of the text. This embedded nature of *The Hakawati* extends beyond the text itself, pulling real world folklore and stories into the text and conversely placing fictional stories from the text in the real world, thus also affecting the reading of this intertextual real world lore.

Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* similarly utilizes real world themes in its text, not only adapting tales from the classical *Arabian Nights*, but also presenting allegories of the contemporary colonialism in itself. The colonial backdrop of the story directly influences the framing of the various tales in Pasolini's version of the *Nights* in that, like the colonized subject's sense of history and temporality, the narrative is repeatedly interrupted and disrupted. The protagonist of the film, Nuredin, is also the primary focalizer of the framed tales in the film; however, as a colonial subject belonging to the proletariat who has been forcefully separated from his beloved, a colonial subject belonging to the lumpen proletariat, by the colonizing elite, he is in a constant state of suspension through sleepiness. This sleepiness, a result of being rendered impotent by the colonizer, affects the ways in which the narrative progresses, with sleeplike states acting as transitions between levels of stories and with the dreamlike states in the film also allowing the framed stories to be presented diegetically, in the way that dreams, although embedded with the story of a person's life, are imagined directly as unframed stories in which the dreamer

participates. Moreover, the narratee Nuredin's spells of sleepiness function as acts of resistance against the reductive casting of him simply as an abstract, body-less narratee in relation to the framed narratives in the film instead of a sensual, tangible audience member or addressee of the various narrated stories in the film. By rubbing his eyes, for example, Nuredin not only reminds the real audience of Pasolini's *Nights* of his body and concrete existence, but he also attempts to signal to the audience to self-reflect for a moment, to realize their own bodies and existences beyond simply being viewers or consumers of the film.

In the exploration and investigation of these various texts, the *Arabian Nights*, *The Hakawati*, and Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, through narratological and Islamic aesthetic lenses, I was unable to draw any single, overarching conclusion; rather, this thesis project consists of a series of conclusions—some embedded within each chapter and some in the conversations between the various chapters. In the analysis of the *Arabian Nights*, it slowly became apparent to me that as an oral text, the written version of the *Nights* makes provisions for a flexibility that attempts to mimic the malleability of oral texts, a privilege envied by later mediums, such as written and cinematic texts, which attempt to imitate this characteristic of the *Nights*' style. The serial text of the *Nights*, with its open frame structure, allows for the continual addition of stories, night after night, not only for Scheherazade within the text, but for the weary real world *hakawati* reciting the *Nights*, lacking the desire to always relate lengthy classical tales, longing to tell tales he has heard hanging around street urchins, but only able to do through the voice of Scheherazade. Similarly, because of

the *Nights*' serial propensity, the open frame of the *Nights*, with its added stories and displaced voices, allows Scheherazade or any of its real world narrators for that matter, to speak in voices and tell tales otherwise forbidden to them based on their gender or social positions. In the manner of Bakhtin, the *Nights*-like frame allows for infinite possibilities of unspeakable conversations to take place, like, for example. a wife admonishing her cruel husband or a charged criminal speaking out against his unfair ruler.

Another way in which the frame of the *Arabian Nights* illustrates its capacity for infiniteness is through Borges' version of the 272<sup>nd</sup> night of the text, a design drawn from a dominant theme within the Islamic aesthetic. Because in orthodox Islamic culture, adherents of the faith are forbidden to illustrate animate beings, much Islamic artwork is limited to vegetation and calligraphy, especially in and on religious buildings. Thus, most sacred vegetation one can depict, the gardens of paradise, becomes a repeated motif amongst Islamic structures, from the palm tree like pillars present in most mosques to the small, ever-blooming flowers that decorate Mughal mausoleums. Still, the desire to depict God or at least his greatness persists within Islam, such that these gardens become metaphors for God's character, taking on perfect geometric shapes and designs that attempt to visually convey God's simultaneously infinite and unified nature. With this in mind, it becomes evident that the self-similar, continuous style of the fractal that dominates Islamic visual culture, from the insides of domes to *muqarnas* to carpets to marbled frames, is simply a reflection of God's character. However, because of the cultural transference so

prevalent in Islamic culture, this fractal style does not limit itself to religious visual culture, infiltrating more popular and even secular Islamic texts, most notably perhaps the *Arabian Nights*. What better narrative fractal can one imagine than the final night of the *Nights*, in which dear Scheherazade, tired like the weary *hakawati*, narrates the story of herself telling the story of herself telling the story of herself...

This is only one of the Islamic styles that permeates the *Arabian Nights*, among them also being the *basmalic* formula. In both the *Nights* and the *Quran*, a ritual is established to which the reciter of stories adhere, in the case of the former Scheherazade and in that of the latter Muslims. When Muslims recite the *Quran*, they must first recite two phrases, the former begging for God's refuge from Satan and the latter invoking God before beginning the recitation of the holy text. After saying these two phrases and then reciting the *Quran*, Muslims end their session of recitation with a phrase that translates from Arabic as "Allah says truth" followed by a moment of silence. Similarly, in the *Nights*, every night of storytelling begins with Scheherazade (and often her sister Dinarzad) seeking refuge from the King's wrath and also then invoking him. In this instance, King Shahrivar simultaneously occupies the role of Satan, the evil agent who has the potential to destroy the reciter, and the God, the merciful agent who has the capability to pardon the reciter. Paralleling the Muslim's final portion of the *basmalic* formula, Scheherazade also lapses into silence after reciting her story, waiting for her lord, the determiner of her fate, to make his final judgment with regards to her future. Thus, the *Nights* sustains a rhythm familiar to the Islamicized ear and that speaks to the Islamic aesthetic.

Much of the Islamic aesthetic, as seen through the continued significance of the spoken word and the voiced recitation of the *Quran*, upholds a culture of orality. Arab and Bedouin lifestyles in general greatly appreciate poets and storytellers as public figures since their performances were one of the main pastimes in these communities as well as many others in the Muslim world. This oral atmosphere is integral to the *Arabian Nights*, especially when it was primarily an oral text; however, even as a written text, this oralistic nature is maintained in the *Nights* through the frame narrative. Because Scheherazade narrates the framed tales to her husband King Shahrayar and her sister Dinarzard, listeners and readers also inadvertently imagine her narrating these tales to them. In other words, the framed stories of the *Nights* are essentially told or voiced to the readers of the text, even if imaginatively, allowing the prohibition of depicting human figures in the Islamic arts to be bypassed through oral illustrations provided by storytellers, which also function to essentially connect the imaginations of an entire community. The listeners (and readers) of the *Nights* share an imagined world, becoming members of the public of the story, allowing the shared social space of the narration of the story to include otherwise intimate scenes and details of characters' lives, "playing" with the normally strict division of the public and private spheres in the Islamic world. Thus, the oral environment of the *Nights*, maintained even in its written form, creates a frame that includes its readers or audience members in an imagined, shared world.

*The Hakawati* also sustains an oral tone through the implicit conversation between the fantastic and realistic story strains in its text. At the very outset of *The*

*Hakawati*, which begins with the fantastic strain, an unknown, unnamed narrator begins to tell the emir's story by first beseeching the reader to listen (5). Already *The Hakawati* mobilizes the oralistic environment of the *Arabian Nights*; however, while the *Nights* attempts to adapt its actual original oral style for the written form, *The Hakawati* merely attempts to mimic this style, adopting the *Nights* adaptation. The oralistic embedding that *The Hakawati* establishes not only aligns it with its progenitor, but it also connects its use of embedding to the practice of framing through its oralistic environment. Like framing, embedding functions as a means of creating a setting in which the framed, or in this case embedded, tale is read. While in the oralistic environment of the *Nights*, stories are framed within Scheherazade's overarching framing story with its two silent listeners, or more generally within the public sphere in which real world listeners may be enjoying some shisha or a cup of chai, in *The Hakawati* the oralistic atmosphere of the embedded tale is that of the embedding tale. In other words, the language or background voices that inform and frame the telling of the embedded tale are indeed those of the embedding tale. The other story strain in *The Hakawati*, that of Osama, similarly has an oralistic feel as any text narrated in the first person does, especially because Osama relates stories about his family. Moreover, similar to the way in which the oral text of the *Nights* was framed by the real world audience that listened to its stories, *The Hakawati* is also framed by the real world of its readers, or rather simultaneously embedded by it and embedding it. Thus, the stories and language of *The Hakawati* dialogue with the

stories and language of the real world and vice versa, such that knowledge of the two tales from each of the realms affects the readings of the other's stories.

Pasolini is acutely aware of the effect of the real world on a text, as is demonstrated in his cinematic adaptation of the *Arabian Nights*. Pasolini attempts to stay true to the nature of the classical *Nights*, including but not limited to its frame narrative, its stories' style, and its interaction with the real world, if only in the oral environment of its telling, as aspect of the *Nights* that *The Hakawati* also clearly attempts to maintain. However, it is plain from Pasolini's text that his endeavors to have a straightforward frame narrative are thwarted by the real life situation of his contemporary Islamic world. Pasolini's version of the *Nights* cannot and ultimately does not ignore the real world frame in which it is being shot and filmed. Thus, Pasolini decides to completely discard Scheherazade frame narrative in his film, choosing instead to mobilize framed stories catalyzed by a single protagonist, Nuredin, a young man who is fueled by a tension in the same category as that of Scheherazade, a sexual tension; however, unlike Scheherazade, he has no desire to delay his consummation with his beloved Zumurrud, but rather to quicken its arrival. Nuredin is unable to reach his Zumurrud for most of the film because his narrative is disrupted by the figure of the Christian, the westerner, the colonizer, who sets in motion a string of interruptions. Nuredin, as a young workingman, spends the entirety of the film searching for his beloved slave, the lumpen proletariat who had gifted herself to him, the proletariat, earlier in the film despite the desire of the "the man with blue eyes" to obtain her. The narration and storytelling style of Pasolini's film is

fragmented precisely because of the real world frame in which it exists, which it cannot escape, and which necessarily informs any rendition of the filmic *Nights* that is created. The film, hence, like *The Hakawati*, speaks and reacts to the realities in which it exists, always bearing its larger context in mind.

This microcosmic interpretation of the real world, with its allegories of socio-political colonizing and economic domination by one part of the world over another, also presents itself in *The Hakawati* within the latter's own contemporary real world context. As mentioned in the Introduction to this project, much of the analysis offered in this thesis is a result of the order of the approach taken, in other words with the presentation of the various chapters reflecting the unfolding and interaction of the various ideas and texts to each other. In rereading *The Hakawati* after having written the chapter on Pasolini's film, it becomes apparent that Alameddine too uses levels of microcosms in his text to reflect larger processes and greater stakes. Because of the methodology of this paper, inserting this discussion in either the chapter on *The Hakawati* or Pasolini's film would have been inappropriate in terms of ordering and categorization. Rather, it is here, in the conclusion of the project, that such an exploration fits because it is here where these texts are discussed in terms of their own merit, the way in which they were initially approached, and the ways in which they speak to each other upon revisitation.

Much like the way in which Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* acts as a microcosm for the social, political, and economical relationships in the real world between the colonizer and the colonized, men and women, and the bourgeoisie and the (lumpen)

proletariat, so too are macrocosms shrunk within the stories of *The Hakawati*.

Alameddine's text has three main worlds: that of Islamic folklore with modern world twists, that of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), and that of a Osama's Druze family. Beginning with the mediatory world, the Lebanese Civil War had at least 18 different belligerent parties fighting for some kind of control of the country, as seen through various episodes in Osama's family members' lives (for example, the abandoning of their home, the hearing of gun shots, the experience of being pulled out of class at the start of the Civil War, etc.) and partially in the character of Elie, Lina's runaway militia leader husband. About a quarter of the population left Lebanon and another quarter was killed or injured during the Civil War; part of Osama's family emigrates from the country while part stays, simply leaving their well-established car dealership. The plethora of groups fighting in for both political and ideological power in this war included religious, secular, ethnic, and national parties. Alameddine positions the Lebanese Civil War as the backdrop for his text while Osama's family story is used to magnify various issues for Druze, Muslim, secular, and relatively well off people at the time. Osama's family becomes the microcosm of much of the national drama that unfolds in the background, displacing Lebanese citizens from their homelands as they escape to first world countries, moving people towards losing their faith, dividing families (such as Osama's own), and leaving behind a nation that exists as its own spectral image, illustrated by *The Hakawati*'s opening chapter. The text begins with Osama visiting Lebanon, driving by the gutted out buildings that were once his home but are now devoid of his family

stories (9-11). Osama's story strain opens in *The Hakawati* with him saying that he feels foreign to himself because the post-Civil War Lebanon he is in now is no longer the Lebanon he once knew, just as his family has grown different, just as he himself has changed (7).

The Lebanese Civil War, although a macrocosm for many of the issues and events that take place in Osama's family, is a microcosm that illustrates the ideological and narrative interactions that are explored on a larger scale in the fantastic story strain of *The Hakawati*. The emir's story strain, while filled with renditions of tales from Islamic folklore, is more than just that. Any reader of this strain immediately realizes that these traditional stories with their usual Islamic flavor have the added zing of female sexuality and homoeroticism; moreover, the stories question and reinterpret commonly understood motifs, for example, the re-positing of the 72 virgins one supposedly receives in heaven as being boring instead of desirous (155-156). This fantastic macrocosmic world attempts to explore and renegotiate the social, political, and religious battles that occur in the microcosm of Osama's story by, for example, making religious narratives secular or infusing secular narratives with religion. One of the most obvious examples of this is when *The Hakawati* connects the story of Abraham to that of Osama's grandfather and of Osama himself. While the story of Abraham can be imagined as being that of Osama's distant ancestor, it has elements of "magic" in it and can also be assumed to relate to the fantastic story strain. In any case, the story of Abraham acts as a sort of macrocosm that reflects the struggles, affects, and relationships that are mirrored and repeated in

the story of Osama's grandfather. Moreover, like in Pasolini's *Nights*, the relationship of these macrocosmic, real world ideological interactions, and in some case clashes, is reflected in the structure of *The Hakawati*. While in Pasolini's *Nights*, the fragmented nature of the colonized proletariat's sense of history leads to an interrupted narrative structure in the film, in *The Hakawati* the two main ideological forces at play, secularism and religion, do not ultimately impede one another and neither do they entirely meld. Rather, they are embedded in each other, such that religious ideology, tradition, and narrative inform real world politics and family structure while secular politics, family life, and stories conversely and simultaneously affect the remembering and interpretations of Islamic lore.

In the words of Osama's grandfather, the *hakawati*, "[N]o matter how good a story is there is more at stake in the telling" (96). Thus, this thesis project has explored the telling of a number of stories, including the *Arabian Nights*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *My Name is Red*, *The Hakawati*, and *The Flower of the Thousand and One Nights* in an attempt to study, discuss, question, and connect the narrative techniques in these texts. While this journey of narrative exploration is no where near comprehensive, it does devote time to the very real thread of frame narrative that links these texts, in the forms of framing, embedding, interlacing, and focalization, within an Islamic aesthetic. Many of the conclusions throughout this paper are primarily based on the order and the methodology of the approach such that each chapter is framed by the discussion that preceded it. Consequently, this conclusion has attempted to touch on and highlight some of the conversations

between these chapters while commenting on those interactions absent from the body of the thesis because of the way in which it is structured. Admittedly, this project does not even attempt to address all of the various adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* or examples of frame narration; rather, it is selective in its sample, choosing a few texts to highlight key narrative structures and transformations from oral to written to cinematic texts as adapted from the storytelling style of the *Nights*. Despite Benjamin's prediction that storytelling has become a lost art form, I believe that it has merely evolved, molding its narrative styles and techniques to fit its contemporary popular mediums and audiences as hopefully illustrated here.

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