Romance as Genre in "The Thousand and One Nights": Part I

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# ROMANCE AS GENRE IN
## "*The Thousand and One Nights*"

## PART I

Modern study of *The Thousand and One Nights* has followed several paths.[1] One early but continuous concern has been historical, tracing the

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[1] For this article I rely principally on the Būlāq edition of *The Thousand and One Nights: Alf Layla wa Layla*, 2 vols. (Būlāq, 1252/1835), reprinted by Maktabat al-Muthannā in Baghdad (n.d.), hereafter B. I have occasionally supplemented this by consulting W. H. Macnaughten, *The Alif Laila or Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*, 4 vols., (Calcutta, 1839-42), hereafter C. II: and Muhsin Mahdi, ed., *The Thousand and One Nights, From the Earliest Known Sources*, 3 pts., (Leiden, 1984-), hereafter M. For the Arabic text of ʿAlā' al-Dīn and His Marvellous Lamp," I have used H. Zotenberg, *Histoire de ʿAlā' al-Dīn ou La lampe merveilleuse; texte arabe, avec une Notice sur quelques manuscrits des 1001 Nuits* (Paris, 1883). In order to avoid an unwieldy apparatus of references, I generally refer to individual stories by their protagonists' names. Below is an alphabetical list of these names and the stories in which they appear; the English titles correspond to those which M. Gerhardt uses in her *The Art of Story-Telling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden, 1963), 18-27.

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Fāḍil: "The Story of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Fāḍil and His Beloved," B. 2:576-95; C.II 4:630-76.
Abū Ḥasan: "The Story of Abū Ḥasan from Khurasan," B. 2:543-51; C.II 4:557-64.
Abū Muḥammad: "The Story of Abū Muḥammad Lazybones," B. 1:473-80; C.II 2:187-204.
ʿAlā' al-Dīn: "The Story of ʿAlā' al-Dīn and the Marvellous Lamp," Zotenberg, *Histoire*, Arabic text 1-86.
ʿAlā' al-Dīn Abū Shāmāt: "The Story of ʿAlā' al-Dīn Abū Shāmāt," B. 1:416-44; C.II 2:64-125.
ʿAlī ibn Bakkār: "The Story of ʿAlī ibn Bakkār and Shams al-Nahār," B. 1:320-43; C.II 1:761-811; M. 1:380-433.
ʿAlī the Persian: "The Story of ʿAlī the Persian," B. 1:468-69; C.II 2:176-80.
ʿAlī Shār: "The Story of ʿAlī Shār and Zumurrud," B. 1:484-503; C.II 2:212-51.
ʿAlī Zaibaq: "The Adventures of ʿAlī Zaibaq," (in Dalīla) B. 2:199-215; C.II 3:444-80.
Ardashīr: "The Story of Ardashīr and Ḥayāt al-Nufūs," B. 2:215-42; C.II 3:480-540.
ʿAzīz: "The Story of ʿAzīz and ʿAzīza," (in Tāj al-Mulūk, which is in "ʿUmar ibn al-Nuʿmān") B. 1:235-54; C.II 1:563-611.
Blacksmith: "The Story of the Blacksmith Who Could Handle Fire," B. 1:645-46; C.II 2:557-61.
Dalīla: "The Story of the Tricks of Crafty Dalīla," B. 2:187-215; C.II 3:416-80.
Eldest Lady: "The Story of the Eldest Lady," (in Porter and Three Ladies) B. 1:44-47; C.II 1:121-130; M. 1:209-19.
Envier: "The Story of the Envier and the Envied," (in Second Mendicant, which is in Porter and Three Ladies), not in B.; C.II 1:90-92; M. 1:164-78.
First Mendicant: "The Story of the First Mendicant," (in Porter and Three Ladies), B. 1:31-34; C.II 1:74-81; M. 1:144-55.
Ghānim ibn Ayyūb: "The Story of Ghānim ibn Ayyūb, the Distracted Slave of Love," B. 1:125-39; C.II 1:320-51.
Ḥasan Badr al-Dīn: "The Story of the Wazirs Nūr al-Dīn and Shams al-Dīn," B. 1:54-73; C.II 1:148-99; M. 1:225-79.

story-collection's literary development and textual history. A second line
of study, which might be termed panoramic, regards the work from an
holistic perspective, combining historical, philological, folkloristic,
literary, and, occasionally, sociological concerns to present an overview
of the work. A third, and recently prominent, trend consists of analysis

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Ḥasan al-Baṣrī: "The Story of Ḥasan from al-Baṣra, the Jeweller,"B. 2:294-359; C.II
    4:3-151.
Ḥāsib Karīm al-Dīn: "The Story of the Serpent Queen," B. 1:657-711; C.II 2:582-699.
Ibrāhīm and Jamīla: "The Story of Ibrāhīm and Jamīla," B. 2:534-43; C.II 4:535-57.
Jānshāh: "The Story of Jānshāh," (in Ḥāsib Karīm al-Dīn) B. 1:672-702; C.II: 617-687.
Jaudar: "The Story of Jaudar and His Brothers," B. 2:80-105; C.II 3:194-236.
Khalīfa: "The Story of the Fisherman Khalīfa," B. 2:359-77; C.II 4:151-91.
Lady Doorkeeper: "The Story of the Lady Doorkeeper," (in Porter and Three Ladies)
    B. 1:47-50; C.II 1:130-40; M. 1:201-09.
Man from Upper Egypt: "The Story of the Man from Upper Egypt and His Frankish
    Wife,"B. 2:455-57; C.II 4:353-57.
Man Who Never Laughed: "The Story of the Man Who Never Laughed Any More in
    His Life," (in Sindbād) B. 2:66-69; C.II 3:146-54.
Masrūr and Zain al-Mawāṣif: "The Story of Masrūr and Zain al-Mawāṣif," B. 2:377-
    405; C.II 4:191-246.
Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī: "The Story of Hārūn al-Rashīd and the Pseudo-Caliph," B.
    1:459-68; C.II 2:157-76.
Niʿma ibn al-Rabīʿ: "The Story of Niʿma al-Rabīʿ and His Slave-Girl Nuʿm," (in
    Qamar al-Zamān) B. 1:404-14; C.II 2:36-59; M. 1:652-80.
Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī: "The Story of Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī and Anīs al-Jalīs," B. 1:106-25; C.II
    1:278-320; M. 1:434-71.
Nūr al-Dīn and Maryam: "The Story of Nūr al-Dīn and Maryam the Belt-Maker," B.
    2:405-55; C.II 4:246-353.
Porter and Ladies: "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies," B. 1:25-51; C.II
    1:56-142; M. 1:115-219.
Qamar al-Aqmār: "The Story of the Ebony Horse," B. 1:534-46; C.II 2:318-45.
Qamar al-Zamān: "The Story of Qamar al-Zamān," B. 1:343-416; C.II 1:811-2:36; M.
    1:533-688.
Qamar al-Zamān and Beloved: "The Story of Qamar al-Zamān and His Beloved," B.
    2:551-76; C.II 4:564-630.
Saif al-Mulūk: "The Story of Prince Saif al-Mulūk and the Princess Badīʿat al-Jamāl,"
    B. 2:263-94; C.II 1:81-102.
Second Mendicant: "The Story of the Second Mendicant," (in Porter and Three Ladies)
    B. 1:34-41; C.II 1:81-102; M. 1:155-78.
Shahriyār and Shahrizād: "The Story of King Shahriyār and His Brother King
    Shahzamān," B. 1:2-6, 2:6-19; C.II 1:1-10, 4:730-31; M. 1:67-72.
Sindbād: "The Story of the Malice of Women, or of the King, His Son, His Favorite,
    and the Seven Wazirs," B. 2:52-86; C.II 3:158-94.
Sindbād the Sailor: "The Story of Sindbād the Sailor, B. 2:3-37; C.II 3:4-83.
Tāj al-Mulūk: "The Story of Tāj al-Mulūk and the Princess Dunyā," (in "ʿUmar ibn
    al-Nuʿmān") B. 1:228-90; C.II 1:552-650.
Third Mendicant: "The Story of the Third Mendicant," (in Porter and Three Ladies)
    B. 1:41-44; C.II 1:102-21; M. 1:178-200.
Two Black Slaves: "The Story of the Eunuch Bukhait"; "The Story of the Eunuch
    Kāfūr," (both in Ghānim ibn Ayyūb): Bukhait B. 1:127-28; C.II 1:324-25; Kāfūr
    B. 1:128-30; C.II 1:325-31.
Uns al-Wujūd: "The Story of Uns al-Wujūd and al-Ward fī'l-Akmān," B. 1:546-62;
    C.II 2:345-76.

of individual tales. Early examples of this latter approach were largely historical in bent; but, reflecting the general move in literary studies from emphasis on diachronic to synchronic concerns, most recent examples concentrate on literary criticism and analysis.[2]

All these lines of inquiry are fruitful; much remains to be done in each, for mature understanding of the *Nights* is only in its initial stages. This study, however, approaches the collection from a slightly different methodological viewpoint: that of genre analysis, in particular analysis of the genre of romance. This approach is not completely new. Scholars such as Burton, Littman, and Gerhardt all classify Nights stories into types, while analysis of individual tales usually at least presume that particular stories fall into some category: love story, fairy tale, rogue story, travel tale, etc. This study, however, attempts to mediate between the large scale, and thus often superficial, classifications of panoramic presentations and the usually insufficiently formulated generic assump-

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[2] Important examples of the historical approach are N. Abbott, "A Ninth-Century Fragment of the 'Thousand Nights,' New Light on the Early History of the *Arabian Nights*," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (1949), 129-64; D. B. Macdonald, "Lost MSS. of the Arabian Nights and a Projected Edition of that of Galland," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1911), 219-21; *id.*, "Maximillian Habicht and His Recension of the 1001 Nights," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1909), 685-704; *id.*, "A Preliminary Classification of Some Manuscripts of the Arabian Nights," in *A Volume of Oriental Studies, Presented to E. G. Browne*, ed. T. W. Arnold and R. A. Nicholson (Cambridge, 1922), 304-21; *id.*, "The Earlier History of the Arabian Nights," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1924), 353-97; J. Oestrup, *Studier over Tusind og en Nat* (Copenhagen, 1891); R. Paret, *Der Ritter-Roman von ʿUmar An-Nuʿmān* (Tübingen, 1927); B. Parry, "The Origin of the Book of Sindbad," *Fabula* (1960), 1-94; H. Zotenberg, *Histoire*; and most recently and deserving special mention M. Mahdi's recent edition of the old Syrian recension of the *Nights*, which we have designated M.

Examples of "panoramic" studies include R. Burton, "Terminal Essay," in *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night, A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments* (New York; Heritage Press, 1962), 3653-3871; E. Littman, "Anhang: Zur Entstehung und Geschichte von Tausendundeiner Nacht," in *Die Erzählungen aus den Tausendundeinem Nächten*, 6 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1954), 6:647-738; M. Gerhardt's literary critical study, *The Art of Story-Telling*; and F. Ghazoul's recent *The Arabian Nights: A Structural Analysis* (Cairo, 1980). S. Qalamāwī's *Alf laila wa-laila* (Cairo, 1966), with its combination of historical, sociological and thematic concerns, might also be included in this category, as could N. Elisséef's folkloristic theme study, *Thèmes et motifs des Milles et Une Nuit, essai de classification* (Beirut, 1949).

Examples of analyses of individual tales are A. Hamori's two studies in his *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton, 1974), 145-80; and his "Notes on Two Love Stories from the Thousand and One Nights," *Studia Islamica* (1966), 65-80, and "A Comic Romance from the Thousand and One Nights; The Tale of the Two Vezirs," *Arabica* (1983), 38-56; and A. Miquel, *Sept contes de Mille et Une Nuits* (Paris, 1981); and P. Molan, "Sindbād the Sailor: A Commentary on the Ethics of Violence," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1978), 237-47, and "Maʾrūf the Cobbler: The Mythic Structure of an Arabian Nights Tale," *Edebiyat* (1978), 121-35. For a full bibliography of early *Nights* studies, see Gerhardt, *The Art of Story-Telling*.

tions of individual tale analyses.[3] This perspective perforce entails a measure of generalization, a factor of which the critic must be aware, but it also has several advantages. Although each story and the *Nights* as a whole may be perceived as individual entities, they may also be viewed as integral parts of larger, complex literary structures. By providing a theoretical framework within which perceptions of intertextual relationships can be organized, genre study offers a useful vantage-point to investigate these structures. Not the least of the advantages of this is that one does not become overwhelmed by the narrative diversity that the *Nights*, with its variegated textures and tones, represents.[4] Moreover, genre analysis also opens the work to external study. Although *The Thousand and One Nights* is an individual work, it may also be viewed as a microcosm of medieval Arabic and, to some degree, Islamic popular literature. Hence, understanding of the goals and conventions of genres found in the collection can provide a critical spring-board from which to approach other examples of these genres—romance, *sīra*, pious tale, fable, ribald story, humorous anecdote, etc.—that exist outside of it. From this viewpoint, genre study of the *Nights* becomes a first step towards systematic investigation of a large body of as yet insufficiently studied medieval Arabic and Islamic popular narrative.[5] Finally, from

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[3] Burton divides the *Nights* into fable, fairy tale, and historical anecdote, *Thousand Nights*, 3687-3718; Littman into Märchen, Romane und Novellen (with subdivisions), Sagen und Legenden, Lehrhafte Geschichten, Humoresken, and Anekdoten, *Die Erzählungen*,6:682-736; Gerhardt into love stories, crime stories, travel stories, fairy tales, learning-wisdom-pious tales, *The Art of Story-Telling*, 119-374; compare also Ghazoul, "It is unnecessary and indeed cumbersome to compare every enframed story to the framing one. It suffices to compare configurations of diverse narrative genres of the enframed with the frame," *The Arabian Nights*, 20. Generic assumptions in analyses of individual tales are usually obvious, and sometimes expressly stated in their titles.

[4] Panoramic critics often face this drawback unless they, like Qalamāwī, adopt a thematic approach. This is evident in such studies as Gerhardt's and Ghazoul's where analyses of individual genres or perspectives can be excellent, Ghazoul on fable, for instance, but where it is difficult to offer equally balanced or insightful portraits of all aspects of the collection.

[5] Medieval Arabic romances besides those contained in the *Nights* may be found in the following collections: *Azād Bakht* (Ten Wazirs), *al-Tair al-nāṭiq, Kitāb al-ʿanqāʾ, Alf yaum wa-yaum*, and *Kitāb al-ḥikāyāt al-ʿajība wa-l-akhbār al-gharība*, the latter edited by Hans Wehr (Wiesbaden, 1956). These and other stories pertinent to the study of romance still await serious study, as do other stories and collections relevant to the study of medieval Islamic (Persian, Turkish, etc.) romance. Good overviews of the corpus of what we term medieval Arabic popular literature may be found in vols. 7 and 8 of W. Ahlwardt, *Verzeichnis der Arabischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, 10 vols. (Berlin, 1887-99) and V. Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages Arabes ou relatifs aux Arabes, publiés dans l'Europe chrétienne de 1810 à 1885, 12 vols.* (Liège, 1892-1922). Of pertinence to this view of the *Nights* as a microcosm of medieval Arabic popular literature is M. Mahdi's hypothesis that the late Egyptian recension of the collection, usually termed ZOR, is the creation of the 18th century, one stemming from the desire of Arab storytellers and European tourists to have a "complete" version of the work, see M. 1:18-19.

the perspective of the study of world literature, genre analysis provides a methodological vantage-point from which to offer meaningful comparisons of tales unconnected to those in the *Nights* by proven genetic links of an historical or cultural nature. In sum, the study of genre opens the *Nights* to comparison: internally, among stories and groups of stories within the work itself; externally, within the context of the study of medieval Arabic and Islamic popular literature and, on a wider scale, of world literature.[6]

Prior to embarking on an analysis of romance as it exists in *The Thousand and One Nights*, two brief theoretical excursions are necessary. Before employing the terms "genre" and "romance," it is necessary to have a clear idea of what, within the context of this study, they imply.

I

Few dispute that literary works can be classified into genres.[7] Indeed, E. D. Hirsch has persuasively argued that individual utterances and, by implication, the complex systems of utterances of which literary works consist can only be effectively understood within a context of linguistic and literary conventions, norms, and traditions shared by speaker (author) and receiver (audience).[8] Just as, to use Saussurian terminology, a child develops a conception of and competence in the *langue* of a particular language through continued exposure to individual *paroles*, the literary initiate comes to understand lyric, epic, or romance by experiencing enough examples of the phenomenon to formulate a general conception of generic conventions and rules. This conception thereafter guides and, to a certain extent, determines responses in later encounters with literary works. Shared tradition between author and audience is essential to literary communication, because it saves each from having to create and learn anew *langues* with each new literary production. Generic

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[6] Cf. Claudio Guillén: "The search for universals will be a central task for future literary studies, as it is for linguistics today. Second, this search will surely depend on the assimilation of a great deal of knowledge concerning the non-Western literatures, or to put it in academic terms, on the work of comparative literature scholars who have been trained as Orientalists," *Literature as System: Essays Towards the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton, 1971), 114. Also quoted in J. T. Monroe, *The Art of Badīᶜ az-Zamān al-Hamadhānī as Picaresque Narrative* (Beirut, 1983), 15, n. 12.

[7] Even Benedetto Croce did not object to the concept of genre *per se*, only to its use as the basis for prescriptive rules having evaluative consequences. See B. Croce, *Aesthetics: As Science of Expression and General Linguistics*, trans. D. Ainslie, (Boston, 1983; fst. ed., New York, 1909), 35-38.

[8] See the section "Genre and the Idea of the Whole," in E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, 1967), 71-77.

perception is thus an integral, if not always explicitly cognized, aspect of literary experience.[9]

Traditionally, the study of genre has wrestled with two related problems: definition and scope. Aristotle, for example, sought to define genres according to modes of imitation (i.e., the medium, objects, and manner of imitation) and their psychological effects. Because he spends most of the *Poetics* further refining his analytic framework for studying partial aspects of these modes (according to plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song), however, his method—despite the obvious brilliance of his achievement—has sometimes been a source of confusion, especially when later critics came to consider his observations as "laws."[10] Analysis of parts is, of course, essential. But appropriate understanding of parts depends on a correct estimation of how they interrelate within and with the whole. From this point of view, Aristotle's exposition is marked by a surprising lack of emphasis on what he himself might term "the final cause" of a genre.[11] Genre, it seems to me, is most usefully understood and defined, on the most general level, not in terms of modes of imitation but of purpose. As Hirsch says,

> the genre purpose must be in some sense an *idea*, a notion of the type
> of meaning to be communicated, otherwise there would be nothing to

[9] Thus F. de Saussure, "In separating language [*langue*] from speaking [*parole*] we are at the same time separating: (1) what is social from what is individual; and (2) what is essential from what is accessory and more or less accidental. Language is not a function of the speaker; it is a product that is passively assimilated by the individual," *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. W. Baskin, rev. ed. (New York, 1974); compare C. Guillén, "no poet is likely to raise his voice in an environment devoid of poetic models; and today the formal model called genre exerts a normative impact, not in the old knuckle-rapping sense but insofar as it offers a challenge, a foil, a series of guidelines," *Literature as System*, 122-23. Cf. also Hirsch, *Validity*, 111 and R. Wellek and A. Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 3rd. ed. (New York, 1970), 226.

The determinative nature of generic assumptions within audiences may be seen from public rejection of "modern" literary works which work against them; the novels of Joyce two generations ago come to mind. Within the context of study of medieval Arabic literature, one does not have to look far to find negative reactions on the part of western readers to works considered classics by Arabs, a response which again may be largely based on different generic assumptions within the two audiences. See, for example, reactions to the *maqāmāt* genre cited in Monroe, *The Art of Badīʿ az-Zamān*, pp. 87-89; similar attitudes towards medieval Arabic poetry also exist. For a review of western critical attitudes towards the popular *sīra*, see P. Heath, "A Critical Review of Modern Scholarship on *Sīrat ʿAntar ibn Shaddād* and the Popular *Sīra*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* (1985), 19-44. See also Ghazoul, *The Arabian Nights*, pp. 69-70.

[10] See S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th ed. (New York, 1951), 7-17; Croce, *Aesthetics*, 35-38; Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 229-31; and W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and C. Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (London, 1957), 159-61, 325-26.

[11] See Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory*, 23 for Aristotle's definition of tragedy itself and 119-214, esp. 207ff., for Butcher's comments. See also Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, 52-53.

guide the author's will ... the author has an idea of what he wants to convey—not an abstract concept, of course, but an idea equivalent to what we call an intrinsic genre. In the course of realizing this idea, he wills the meaning which subserves it.[12]

Generic purpose may be partially conceived in terms of immediate emotional response, the "pity and fear" of tragedy, the laughter of comedy, the fear provoked by the modern chiller. But deeper understanding is necessarily based on apprehensions of more profound psychological, moral, and cosmological issues, and it is the task of genre analysis, at its broadest level, to identify and clarify these. Once a genre's purpose or, as Claudio Guillén has termed it, its "informing drive" is understood, formal and material aspects of literary works (to maintain Aristotelian terminology a moment longer)—concerns of literary composition, structure, and rhetoric—fall into proper perspective.[13] Once again, we have the hermeneutic circle. One understands the whole only through analysis of parts, one can properly evaluate the significance of the parts only by attaining an appropriate understanding of the whole.[14]

In order to analyze Nights romances, I rely here on the method proposed by Tzvetan Todorov. He divides internal literary analysis into three levels: the semantic, the syntactic, and the verbal. The semantic level analyzes themes; the syntactic, narrative structure ("the relations which the parts of the work sustain among themselves"); and the verbal, aspects of rhetoric, voice, point of view, and so on.[15] To these must be added the concerns of external literary study: the inter-relationships of works existing in a single period and culture, the historical development of genres, and the relationships of genres to the social context in which they exist and to which they relate. Obviously, these categories together form a complete program of poetics; there is no question that any measure of exhaustiveness in regard to any one of them can be achieved,

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[12] Hirsch, Validity, 101. But see also n. 19 against the idea of purpose as a Neo-Aristotelian entelechy. Hirsch's definition of intrinsic genre is: "It is that sense of the whole by means of which an interpreter can correctly understand any part of its determinacy," 86. Compare Guillén, "form is the presence in a created, man-made object of a 'cause'," Literature as System, 111.

[13] Guillén, Literature as System, 111-12. Cf. also F. Jameson, "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," New Literary History (1975-76), 139-40.

[14] Hirsch, Validity, 78-79 and the definition of intrinsic genre quoted above in note 12. For the concept of the hermeneutic circle, see M. Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (London, 1962), 188-95. See also, L. Spitzer, Linguistics and Literary History (Princeton, 1948), 1-29.

[15] T. Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, trans. R. Howard (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973), 20 and 157-58.

or even contemplated, here.[16] But at least they provide general methodological guideposts for our discussion.

The concerns of literary history raise the second problem of genre study, that of scope. It is possible to argue that generic analysis can only be validly conducted within the context of clear and provable historical and cultural linkage; that is, it consists of tracing influences and discerning innovation. From this point of view, romance begins with the narratives of Chrétien de Troyes in twelfth-century France. Study of the genre's development would start at this point, trace this author's influence on his immediate successors, Wolfram von Eschenbach, for example, and then follow the accumulative design of influence, modification, and innovation in the genre in the centuries that followed, through the works of such writers as Boiardo, Aristo, Tasso, Malory, and Spenser, taking into account particularities of talent, intent, influence, literary heritage, and general historical environment in regard to each case. By this means one formulates the "idea" of the genre of romance in medieval and renaissance Europe.[17]

Another approach posits the existence of literary universals. It assumes that despite the different ways in which genres manifest themselves through time and place, they still possess intrinsic integrity. Romance thus exists as a potential means of literary expression at any time and place, because it is an innate option of human literary discourse, a natural way for man to organize certain perceptions of life. From this perspective, genre study consists of investigating the range of unity and diversity that the overall *langue* of a genre possesses by examining individual *paroles*. Hence hellenistic novels, medieval chivalric romances, renaissance romantic epics and allegories, gothic novels and certain strains of historical novels, romantic poetry, and modern fantasy and science fiction, to remain for the moment only within the boundaries of western literature, could be presumed to be different permutations, to various degrees, of the same basic generic "idea." The task of analysis,

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[16] For a more complete exposition of Todorov's approach, see his *Introduction to Poetics*, trans. R. Howard, *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis, 1981). Of course the remarks on romance in *The Thousand and One Nights* offered below could be more detailed and developed; yet incomplete as they may be, they at least offer a preliminary overview of the genre that can be used as a basis for further study.

[17] See, for example, W. T. H. Jackson's chapter on French romance in his *Medieval Literature: A History and a Guide* (New York, 1966), 81-100; part one of G. Hough's *A Preface to the Fairie Queen* (New York, 1963); the various articles in R. S. Loomis, *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1959); and the chapter "Romances" in R. Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and their Posterity* (Princeton, 1966), 335-436.

then, is to clarify the various ways historical genres and individual works represent and participate in this idea.[18]

The extent to which one becomes a proponent of either the *historical* or *theoretical* approach to the study of genre, as the two viewpoints have been termed, is influenced to some degree by one's view of human nature.[19] If one agrees with a scholar such as D. W. Robertson that human nature changes within the context of different historical environments, then the idea of literary universals is analytically absurd. But if one accepts the assumption that human nature contains universals, then the perception of literature as a unified, although still inadequately explored, system of structures containing its own universals, as critics such as Frye, Todorov, and Guillén assert, becomes a valid project.[20] The present study approaches the subject within the general framework of this second approach; but without impugning the usefulness of historical study which, from this perspective, becomes one way of studying systems of genres, of investigating specific generic *langues*, grounded in particularities of historical and cultural environment, that constitute the overall generic metalanguage.

Literary works are by nature complex. Precise generic classification can often appear difficult, for individual works frequently appear to contain elements of various genres. W. P. Ker observed long ago, for in-

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[18] Cf. N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957) and also *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), although the concept of genre espoused here differs from his concept of mode. See also R. Schole's revision of Frye's theory of modes in *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven, 1974), 117-29; and P. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton, 1979).

[19] Cf. R. Bjornson's remarks on the situation of the study of the picaresque novel, "Scholarly discussions of the picaresque are generally based upon one of two assumptions: either it is regarded as a historical phenomenon, or it is viewed in terms of an ideal type. Both approaches have their disadvantages, and both must somehow resolve the difficult problems of defining a category which has no *a priori* existence and of determining which works legitimately belong in that category. If a narrow historical definition is adopted, the critic is prevented from drawing fruitful analogies among works which have much in common, despite the fact that none of them were directly influenced by the others. However, when critics derive abstract generalizations from an inductive examination of one or more novels, their definitions tend to be circular, because works drawn upon to establish the model necessarily manifest the principal characteristics of the model itself," *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction* (Madison, 1977), 4-5. Also of interest here is C. Brookes-Rose, "Historical genres/theoretical genres: Todorov on the fantastic," in her *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in narrative and structure, especially on the fantastic* (Cambridge, 1981), 55-71, although her use of the terminology differs from what is proposed above.

[20] The quarrel becomes at this point one between historicists and structuralists. For Robertson's views, see his *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, 1962), vii-ix, 3-6. For the suggestion that genres can arise *polygenetically*, i.e. that similar historical circumstances in separate cultures can produce similar genres, see Monroe, *The Art of Badīʿ az-Zamān*, 16-18.

stance, that strains of romance exist in works that one would ordinarily primarily consider epics.[21] It is here that the idea of the *dominant*, as outlined by Roman Jacobson, becomes useful.[22] Romances are not pure generic entities, but ones in which romance elements dominate. Episodes in a narrative such as *Sīrat ʿAntar ibn Shaddād* or *Sīrat Saif ibn Dhī Yazan* may be primarily epic or romance; but one finally classifies the work as a whole according to the generic strain that cumulatively predominates. The idea of the dominant simplifies another problem of generic scope, the concept of the "law of genre."[23] Genre analysis is founded upon description; but it usually involves, at some point, prescription. One encounters narratives where the rules of one's definition are only partially fulfilled. As long as such observations remain analytic in nature, they constitute a natural part of the critical process. But it is a different matter if obedience or disobedience to such rules assumes evaluative connotations. The purpose of generic definition is to further critical understanding. Although it should enable one to judge stories better, such evaluation does not stem mechanically from obedience to the definition's rules. The extent to which a *Nights* tale complies or fails to comply with generic norms does not make it a better or worse story. Indeed, some of the most interesting *Nights* stories are those that only partially comply with generic standards, or even play against them.[24] In sum, laws of genre exist for clarification, not retribution. Here again the concept of the dominant proves useful, since it promotes an apprehension of genre that entails a spectrum of gradation. Romances are not stories that fulfil generic definition completely, but those in which it predominates.[25]

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[21] W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature* (New York: Dover, 1957), 321-22. F. Jameson makes the important point that the concept of genre is just as useful for studying "eclectic" works, works that appear to offer a mixture of genres, as it is for studying works that appear to fall into the mainstream of one genre or another, see "Magical Narratives," 150-154.

[22] R. Jacobson, "The Dominant," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 82-87.

[23] See above, notes 7 and 10. See also J. Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchel (Chicago, 1981), 51-77. (A volume of articles that originally appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 1980 and Summer, 1981.)

[24] Cf., for example, the *Nights* stories Masrūr and Zain al-Mawāṣif, Khalīfa, Sindbād the Sailor, and "The Story of ʿUmar ibn al-Nuʿmān" (is it *sīra* or romance?). Also pertinent here is the concept of *anti-genre* or counter-genre, see Guillén, *Literature as System*, 135-58; for the idea of *anti-sīra*, see Ghazoul, *The Arabian Nights*, 75-90; and, applied to the genre of *maqāmāt*, Monroe, *The Art of Badīʿ az-Zamān*, 19-38.

[25] Indeed, it is difficult to entertain the notion of genre without simultaneously assuming the existence of an overall interrelated framework or system of genres. For examples of such spectrums, proposed for analytic rather than evaluative ends, see Frye and Scholes on modes, as cited above in note 18. See also Guillén, *Literature as System*, 121-22, and Jameson as cited above in note 21.

A final question of scope is that of analytic sample. The description of romance offered here is based, at least in the first instance, on *Thousand and One Nights* tales themselves. To widen this study's focus, as many stories are touched upon as possible. But there is no need for such references to be inclusive. As Todorov has pointed out, it is not necessary to study all of a genre's members to describe it. One works deductively:

> We actually deal with a relatively limited number of cases, from these we deduce a general hypothesis, and we verify this hypothesis by other cases, correcting (or rejecting) it as need be. Whatever the number of phenomena (or literary works in this case) studied, we are never justified in extrapolating universal laws from them; it is not the quantity of observation, but the logical coherence of the theory that finally matters.[26]

The following pages attempt to outline such a coherent theory, useful for understanding *Nights* tales in the first instance, but also relevant as a preliminary basis of comparison with other romances, initially within the context of medieval Arabic and Islamic popular literature and ultimately in the context of world literature. It is not, however, intended as a static hypothesis, but rather one that exists in a dialectical relationship with the narratives it attempts to describe.

## II

The anonymous fourteenth-century author of *Sir Orfeo* begins his story thus:

> Often we read lays for the harp that were written to tell us wonderous things. Some were about joy, some of woe, some of treachery and guile, of jests and ribaldry, some of fairy things, but mostly they told of love.[27]

More recently, W. T. H. Jackson writes that romance:

> is a genre hard to define, since it includes works of widely different style and subject matter, but it may be said in general that it was written for entertainment, not instruction; that its personages were idealized; that it did not shrink from the introduction of the exotic and magical; and, perhaps most important, that love was one of its principle themes. All of these statements could be challenged by reference to particular poems, but in general they are true.[28]

Both these descriptions of romance ring true, but as generic definitions they are by themselves incomplete. This is because they describe

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[26] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 4.
[27] *Sir Orfeo* in *Medieval Romances*, ed. R. S. Loomis and L. H. Loomis (New York, 1957), 314.
[28] Jackson, *Medieval Literature*, p. 11.

romance's materials rather than its purpose, its "informing drive."
Typical of the genre as they may be ("in general," as Jackson remarks),
one could imagine any or all of these materials existing in other genres,
put to different purposes. Most other brief definitions are similarly par-
tial or oblique. "Romance means nothing," says W. P. Ker, one of its
pioneer modern students, "if it does not convey some notion of mystery
and fantasy." Patricia Parker observes that, "Romance is characterized
primarily as a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a par-
ticular end, objective, or object." Fredric Jameson argues that the most
important "organizational category" in romance is "the conceptual op-
position between good and evil, under which all the other types of at-
tributes and images (light and darkness, high and low, etc.) are clearly
subsumed."[29] Probably none of these statements presumes to provide a
complete generic definition. But they point to the difficulties any such at-
tempt faces. It is here that Todorov's analytic framework does double
service. Not only does it organize one's own perceptions, it puts others'
insights into their proper perspective. In this context, both Ker and
Parker address syntactic aspects of the genre, while Jameson's remark is
aimed at its semantic stratum.

One modern critic who offers a theoretical account of romance that ap-
proaches completeness is Northrop Frye. His description, presented in
*Anatomy of Criticism* and further developed in *The Secular Scripture*, must be
viewed within the larger context of Frye's overall critical theory. To sum-
marize the details of this theory here and romance's place in it is beyond
the scope of this essay; but it is necessary briefly to review what is perhaps
Frye's central insight concerning the genre: romance's place within the
broad spectrum of literary discourse.[30] Reacting against what might be
termed the "realistic prejudice" predominant in much modern literary
thought, Frye posits literature's prime mode of discourse—historically,
psychologically, and aesthetically—to be not realism but myth.[31] For
Frye "myth is the imitation of action near or at the conceivable limits of
desire." It presents a "world of total metaphor, in which everything is
potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a
single body."[32] Realism, on the other hand, presents the empirical
universe, the world of the senses, with all the limitations on human ac-

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[29] Ker, *Epic and Romance*, 4; Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 4; Jameson, "Magical Nar-
ratives," 140.
[30] See Frye, *Anatomy*, 33, 36-37, 56-58, 131-62, 186-206; and *The Secular Scripture*. For
a useful analysis of Frye's theory, see R. D. Denham, *Northrop Frye and Critical Method*
(University Park, 1978).
[31] Frye, *Anatomy*, 49-52 and 62-67; and Denham, *Northrop Frye*, 47-50.
[32] Frye, *Anatomy*, 136.

tivity that this entails. To use a Freudian analogy, myth offers the nar-
rative structures of the pleasure principle while realism offers that of the
reality principle. Between these two extremes lies romance. For Frye
romance represents the tendency to ''displace myth in the human direc-
tion and yet in contrast to 'realism,' to conventionalize content in an
idealized direction.''[33] Put another way, it is ''the search of the libido or
desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reali-
ty but will still contain that reality.''[34] This view of romance serves both
to explain and normalize essential aspects of the genre's ''world''; the
tensions that exist within it between the particular and the conventional,
the probable and the improbable, the natural and the supernatural, the
moral and the amoral.

The term that Frye uses to denote the incursion of realism, with its
ever-present demand for plausibility, into the domain of myth is *displace-
ment*.[35] Displacement has two connotations for Frye, since myth and
realism represent opposing literary extremes at two levels. On the
fictional—the imaginative—level, realism's mimetic particularism
displaces the idealized conventions that constitute literature's ''formulaic
units,'' while its preference for probable action and obedience to the laws
of nature displaces the complete freedom of action that characterizes
myth. On the moral level, realism's awareness of social strictures
displaces myth's essential amorality; it ''tries to collapse the distance be-
tween the moral and the desirable.''[36]

Armed with this apprehension of how to place romance within a larger
framework of literary discourse, it is now possible to attempt a definition
of the genre, drawn primarily from the *Nights* itself but also from within
the context of an awareness of other works usually considered its
members. On the semantic level, the primary theme of romance, a fun-
damental aspect of the genre's ''informing drive,'' *investigates the concerns
of honor as balanced between the demands of love and social propriety, within the
context of Fate*: ''investigates,'' because matters of direction, parameter,
and outcome are not necessarily prescribed; ''honor,'' because this is a
concept which represents a convergence between individual and social
values (one is usually honorable if one maintains one's own standards of
self-worth, but these are usually based on and congruent with those of
society); ''love,'' because this is romance's dominant, although not ex-
clusive, realm of human interest and activity, a central arena where one's

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[33] *Ibid.*, 137.
[34] *Ibid.*, 193.
[35] *Ibid.*, 136-38 and 155-56. See also Denham, *Northrop Frye*, 64-66.
[36] Frye, *Anatomy*, 134-40, for realism. For his remark on literature's ''formulaic
units,'' see *idem*, *The Secular Scripture*, 36ff. The quote from Denham is in *Northrop Frye*, 64.

"honor" is tested; "social propriety," because society's objective rules of conduct must be dealt with, in one way or another, while one pursues one's own subjective love interest; and "Fate," because it is a prime postulate of the genre that poetic justice exists, that there is a supra-human force rewarding those who adhere to honor's dictates and punishing those who do not.[37]

Two dimensions are important on the syntactic level. The first involves the narrative setting or "world" of romance. In basic accord with Frye's description, romance here inhabits that narrative realm falling between myth and realism, fantasy and naturalism, wish fulfilment and reality. It is the tension between these polarities, as they are variously expressed, that produces much of the genre's narrative suspense. The second dimension involves patterns of action typical of romance. Put simply, these represent trials of the standards of honor posited in the definition's semantic level, and movement towards or away from such trials. Narrative tension here stems from the uncertainty involved in characters' choices about their courses of action and the degree of success or failure they encounter on their ways. Analysis of tales themselves will clarify the predominant ways in which these patterns of action are fictionally manifested in the *Nights*.[38]

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[37] This definition is my own. Compare with W. T. H. Jackson on French romances: "Both in love-making and adventure the great motivating force was honor," *Medieval Literature*, 82. Honor, of course, is also a central element of the thematic stratum of epic, thus C. M. Bowra, "In their attempts to classify mankind into different types the early Greek philosophers gave a special place to those men who live for action and for the honor which comes of it," *Heroic Poetry* (London, 1952), 1. But the concept of honor differs in epic and romance, since the arena of activity pertaining to each differs. Hence an analogous definition of the theme of epic would be: *to investigate the concerns of honor as balanced between death and social propriety, within the context of Fate.* For the epic hero masters his destiny by being willing to die for honor. One is struck by the Freudian symmetry of these two definitions, one centering on the concerns of *eros*, the other of *thanatos*.

In regard to other works usually considered romances, a partial list of works from European literature that have influenced my thinking includes: *Three Greek Romances: Longus, Xenophon, Dio Chrysostom*, trans. M. Hades (Indianapolis; New York, 1953); Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. W. W. Comfort (London, 1973); *Medieval Romances*, ed. R. S. Loomis and L. H. Loomis (New York, 1957); Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. M. H. Mustard and C. E. Passafe (New York, 1961); Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1967); *The Death of King Arthur*, trans. J. Cable (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1971); *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, trans P. Matarasso (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1969); L. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, 2 vols, trans. B. Reynolds (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1975-77); T. Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, trans. Edward Fairfax (New York, 1963).

[38] In terms of narrative structure, I propose that the general sequence of events in romance follows this pattern. But the combination by which this pattern can be represented varies from story to story. Some follow it in a straightforward manner, others double it, or interlace it with similar patterns, or insert embedded episodes following it. Moreover, it is useful here to keep in mind the distinction Roland Barthes offered between narrative *functions* and *indices*. Different periods and cultures will garb their charac-

On the verbal level, two primary aspects deserve consideration. The first involves the genre's dominant voice. Despite a common notion that romance's primary purpose is to entertain, *Nights* tales themselves view it as to instruct. For all of their elements of wonder, fantasy, and magic, *Nights* tales take themselves quite seriously, viewing themselves as *exempla* rather than entertainment. This aspect of the genre's voice is reinforced by a second verbal strategy, the genre's preferred "radical of presentation," to adopt another of Frye's terms. This is *epos*, direct communication between storyteller and audience.[39] One of the interesting aspects of the *Nights* is the various ways it uses its framing structures to ensure that this dimension of voice is emphasized.

All aspects of this definition find clarification and elaboration in the pages that follow. One final theoretical point, however, deserves mention. It should be by now obvious that the methodological framework of this analysis is modern and western oriented. But the question arises as to what, if anything, the medieval Arabic theory of romance was. As far as I have been able to ascertain, medieval Arabic popular romance is a genre without a poetics; primarily, it seems, due to the genre's social provenance and context. How far this observation is in fact true, however, is a question that deserves further investigation.[40]

## III

Prior to presenting general descriptions of the issues involved in each of the three strata of our definition of romance, it will be useful to examine aspects of narrative semantics and syntax (saving the verbal dimension until later) in specific, concrete contexts. To this end, let us examine these dimensions of narrative in three short tales. The first of these is "The Story of the Blacksmith Who Could Handle Fire." This story is not primarily a romance, but analysis of it is useful since it offers,

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ters and set their stories in different contexts, that is, use different indices; compare, for example, the royal, bourgeoise, or lower class protagonists and settings found in the *Nights* itself, or compare how a *Nights* noble is portrayed with how a medieval European knight is portrayed in one of the Arthurian romances. Settings and frames of reference, I would argue, differ, but narrative structure remains basically the same. See R. Barthes, "Structural Analysis of Narratives," in *Image, Music, Text,* trans. S. Heath (New York, 1977), 79-124, esp. 91-97. For two versions of Frye's conception of romance's patterns of action, see *Anatomy,* 198-203, and *The Secular Scripture,* 97ff.

[39] For the concept of "radicals of presentation," see Frye, *Anatomy,* 246-51.

[40] See Guillén, *Literature as System,* 125-26 for the idea of a "genre without a poetics." It would be interesting to investigate related Islamic traditions, such as medieval Persian and Ottoman literatures, to see the extent that the tradition of elite romance produced such a poetics.

through contrast, entry into certain concerns typical of the genre. A summary of this tale is as follows:

> A pious man hears of a blacksmith who can put his hands into fire without being burned. Curious about a phenomenon he is certain is a mark of Divine grace, he visits the blacksmith and eventually learns the reason for the miracle. The blacksmith relates that he was once in love with a certain slave-girl. He long tried to force himself on her, but she continually resisted. Once, famine broke out, so that she was forced to beg for food at his door. Twice he offered to give her food if she yielded herself to him; twice she refused, saying that she preferred death to dishonor.[41] The third time God touched his heart.[42] The blacksmith repented his selfishness and gave her food unconditionally. When the girl saw this she asked God to bless him and spare him from flames in this world and the next. From this moment he was able to touch fire without hurt. For herself, she prayed for the release of her spirit. This prayer was answered; she died soon afterwards.

The primary intent of this tale is pious. It suggests that Divine grace befalls those who heed God's call to put priority on the spiritual dimension of life. Nonetheless, it also contains key elements of romance, since the themes it selects to test its protagonists' piety are those of love and social propriety. Narrative suspense springs from two questions. Will the blacksmith take advantage of the slave-girl's predicament to force himself upon her, even though this would be a dishonorable act, motivated purely by carnal desire? And will the slave-girl, suffering the most desperate straits of physical need, abandon her moral standards, based on love of God and compliance with the rules of His faith? For both the choice is between the concerns of this world—carnal desire, physical hunger—and those of the next, a realm where spirit transcends the body's instinctual demands. Much of the tale's emotive force stems from the way these two questions are not only posed or represented, but resolved. The girl's prayer that the blacksmith be "spared from fire in this world and the next," a phrase one initially takes as being metaphoric, at least as far as this world is concerned, becomes exactly and literally fulfilled.[43] The blacksmith does indeed become immune to the effects of fire. Moreover, the girl herself choses the logical next step in her own spiritual development. Having been forced by physical need to beg and thus submit herself to spiritual temptation, she decides to leave the realm of matter altogether. She prays for death. But if the theme of balancing honorably the concerns of love and social propriety, the latter cast in religious terms here, are typical of romance, their structuring in the tale is not. Rather

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[41] Cf. the Arabic: *fa-qālat al-maut wa-la maʿṣiyat Allāh*, B. 1:645.
[42] Cf. the Arabic: *tadāraknī Allāh taʿāla bi-luṭf-hi*, B. 1:646.
[43] Cf. the Arabic: *fa-ḥarrim ʿalai-hi al-nār fī al-dunya wa-al-ākhira.* B. 1:646.

than requiring its protagonists to meet or balance the demands of both
these concerns on an equal basis, the tale charts their paths along
separate, although parallel, courses. The blacksmith and the slave-girl
can never logically become lovers, for they begin and end the story at
separate points of spiritual maturity. While his dilemma centers on the
choice between carnal and spiritual love, she has transcended human
love altogether; her trial focuses on falling short or meeting the demands
of spiritual love and the rules of her faith. For her to accept life on the
blacksmith's terms, even given the level of maturity he finally achieves,
would involve spiritual regression. Providing herself no longer of his
world, she wills herself out of it.

The narrative domain in which the protagonists abide is somewhat
typical of romance. It is a realm where poetic justice, with its actively en-
forced laws of cosmic reward and punishment, reigns supreme—both
characters are awarded the fate they deserve. On the other hand, impor-
tant characteristics push this tale towards myth. Protagonists' contact
with the Divine, for one thing, is direct. God Himself inspires the
blacksmith's change of heart; He answers the girl's prayers immediately.
Moreover, both characters are supernaturally transfigured by their ex-
periences: he beyond certain of Nature's laws, she out of Nature
altogether. Here, then, we encounter certain of the genre's borderlines.
These can be further delineated by examining ''The Story of the Envier
and the Envied.''

> A virtuous man is envied by his neighbor, who constantly works to do
> him harm. The former finally decides to move to another town, where he
> becomes famous for his piety. His enemy, however, pursues him and
> eventually manages to push him into a well. Here he overhears jinn
> discussing the appropriate remedy for the illness suffered by the King's
> daughter, who has been possessed by a jinni. Extracting himself from the
> well, the envied heals the princess when her father approaches him for ad-
> vice on the matter. The King marries the two and eventually, by public
> demand, the envied becomes first wazir and then, with his father-in-law's
> demise, King. One day he sees the envier amongst a crowd, but rather
> than punishing him, he gives his enemy gifts.

Again, the extent to which this tale should be considered as full-fledged
romance is open to question. On the semantic level, for instance, the
story only treats love obliquely. Nevertheless, honorable conduct and
success in love are linked here, if only indirectly. And poetic justice fully
controls events. The envied is consistantly rewarded for his virtuous con-
duct, while his enemy appears only to escape punishment through a
typically magnanimous gesture on the part of the hero. From the point
of view of narrative structure, however, this tale reveals features typical
of romance. In contrast to the blacksmith's tale, protagonists' relation to

the Divine is here indirect, displaced. The envied does attain special
knowledge at one point, but he does so through a temporary, undesired,
visitation to a netherworld that apparently represents the borderline be-
tween nature and supernature; communication comes through jinn
rather than direct Divine inspiration. And, in spite of the hero's reputa-
tion for piety, the success he achieves is framed purely in human, social
terms. He marries a princess, becomes wazir, and then king. He himself
remains physically unchanged, clearly "of this world." Let us move fur-
ther towards the heart of romance with "The Story of Ni'ma and
Nu'm."

> Al-Rabī ibn Ḥātim, a wealthy notable of Kufa, one day buys a young
> slave-girl. His son, Ni'ma, and the slave girl, Nu'm, grow up together.
> Loving each other dearly from babyhood, at the age of ten they become
> man and concubine.⁴⁴ For four years they live together in bliss. But then
> the local governor, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, learns of Nu'm's beauty and
> musical talents and decides to steal her as a gift for his master, the Caliph
> 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān. He sends an old woman, who disguises
> herself as a holy person, to befriend the young couple. She gains their con-
> fidence and one day lures Nu'm outside the house, where al-Ḥajjāj has
> her seized and sent to the Caliph. Still loving Ni'ma, the girl falls ill. The
> Caliph is much taken with her, but declines to sleep with her until she
> recovers and tries to have her cured.
>
> When Ni'ma discovers the disappearance of his beloved, he first seeks
> recourse with the authorities. Gaining little help from al-Ḥajjāj and his
> chief-of-police, Ni'ma also falls ill. His father discovers what has truly
> happened and engages a learned Persian physician to treat his son.
> Realizing that Ni'ma is suffering from love-sickness and hearing his tale,
> the physician offers his help. He and Ni'ma, now disguised as the Per-
> sian's son, set out for Damascus. Word of the physician's skill spreads
> there, and Nu'm's nurse comes to him seeking a remedy for her mistress.
> Ni'ma encloses a note in the prepared remedy, which indeed cures the
> pining girl. With the nurse's help, she tries to sneak Ni'ma, disguised as
> a slave girl, into her apartments. He loses his way in the palace, however,
> and ends up in the rooms of the Caliph's sister. Hearing his story, she
> decides to help him. She calls in Nu'm and is in the process of enjoying
> her singing when the Caliph enters. His sister tells him the lovers' story
> in the abstract and asks his opinion of how a just ruler would handle the
> case. When he replies that he should be merciful and restore the lovers
> to each other, he traps himself. He has little choice but to follow his own
> counsel when his sister reveals the couple's identities. The Caliph bestows
> gifts upon them, makes the Persian physician an advisor, and sends the
> lovers home, where they enjoy life until their days' end.

This tale brings us fully within the domain of romance. Semantically,
narrative suspense stems from the question of whether the couple's love

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⁴⁴ This according to C.II and M.; B. is confused here (B. 1:404) although it has their
ages right later (B. 1:408).

will hold true in the face of apparently insurmountable obstacles, whether
the justness of their case will prove indisputable, and, given affirmative
answers to these points, whether the lovers will, even so, be successfully
reunited. Ni'ma and Nu'm do remain faithful in love; both suffer ex-
tremes of love-sickness but ultimately prove themselves willing to risk all
to be rejoined—sneaking into the Caliph's palace, after all, has its
dangers! In regard to social propriety, their case seems strong as well.
Having loved one another since childhood, the couple have consecrated
their love in a socially acceptable fashion. Moreover, Nu'm was deceit-
fully betrayed and unlawfully abducted. Not least, Ni'ma has been
robbed of his property. Their case would seem to be indisputable, were
it not for the identity of their prospective opponent. The Caliph has a
case of his own. He wields supreme temporal authority, owns the girl
himself, as far as he knows, since she was sent to him as a gift (under false
pretenses perhaps, but this is not his fault), and he himself has the sancti-
ty of his household violated. The potential complications that could arise
from a conflict of two "just" cases, however, are forestalled by the
Caliph himself. Offering a disinterested opinion, he suddenly finds
himself an interested party; but having committed himself, he relents
with good grace.

The tale's structure is that of romance as well. Realistic in outward
tone and setting as it may seem (although full of coincidence, it never
transgresses the laws of nature), the story presents a narrative world
where the demarcation between appearance and reality is blurred. The
tale is full of deceit and discovery, pretense and revelation. Al-Ḥajjāj's
old hag disguises herself as her opposite, a holy woman, and on this false
pretense manages to gain entrance into Ni'ma and Nu'm's home and
confidence. Al-Ḥajjāj, as governor the supposed upholder of law and
order, himself breaks the law to abduct the girl and then sends her to the
Caliph under false auspices. Thereafter, he and his chief-of-police feign
ignorance about the whole matter when petitioned by Ni'ma. For his
part, Ni'ma disguises himself as well, first as the physician's son and then
as a slave-girl. Nu'm's duenna, instead of protecting her charge's chasti-
ty for her royal master as is her duty, helps her sneak her lover into the
palace; while the Caliph's sister initially conceals the real import of the
question she puts to her brother. The tale's action moves in a context
where, as far as the characters are concerned, matters are rarely as they
seem, where characters are constantly brought up short on their assump-
tions of reality, where veils of illusion are continuously lowered and then
drawn away.

Fate also plays its usual active role. Although the lovers provide the
will to resolve their crisis, Fate provides the way. The Persian physician,

Nuʿm's nurse, and the Caliph's sister all "just happen" to appear at the appropriate times with the right combination of knowledge, access, and influence needed to further the lovers' cause. On the other hand, the role the lovers themselves play should not be overlooked. It is because they prove themselves deserving of help, because their love is true and their cause is just, that each of the intermediaries becomes sympathetic to their plight and offers help.[45] Niʿma and Nuʿm attain the fate they prove they deserve.

The tale's plot structure moves on a line of safety-trial-return to safety. For its characters, these stages represent movements of not just temporal but also moral progression. Their honor being tested, Niʿma and Nuʿm affirm their love but also learn from their experiences. They develop as characters. Wrapped at the story's beginning in a cocoon of childhood security and guilessness, they wend their ways through realms of danger and deceit to emerge, at the tale's end, as adults, able to understand and cope with the ways of the world. They move from innocence, to ex-perience, to a renewed state of innocence which encompasses ex-perience.[46] Although they have their mentors—Niʿma's father, the Per-sian physician, Nuʿm's nurse, the Caliph's sister—it is ultimately the lovers themselves who risk all for their love. This progression of innocence-trial-experience has structural parallels and echoes throughout the narrative. The symbols of innocence are the state and trappings of childhood, a realm that presumes the inviolateness of the home, con-tinuous parental protection and guidance, social status based on that of the family, and, finally, personal identity defined by the external context of one's parents' identities. But circumstances remove Nuʿm and Niʿma from this shared realm of safety out into the dangerous world-at-large. Both initially face decisions that, given their naiveté, they are incompe-tent to make. Niʿma foolishly allows a total stranger into his house with-out recognizing or guarding against the potential dangers involved; Nuʿm thoughtlessly disregards social convention and her mother-in-law's advice and goes out with the old women unattended. Her abduction pulls the two protagonists away from parents, childhood home, and even home-city; their social status and identities are temporarily called into question, obscured. And they end up in that most fearsome of all places for a child, the home of a strange adult, and in this case a particularly

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[45] The Persian also accepts because of al-Rabīʿ's offer of a generous reward (B. 1:408). For the nurse's and Caliph's sister's reactions, see B. 1:410.

[46] This differs from Frye, who portrays the movement as one from innocence to ex-perience to return-to-innocence, without positing any moral or psychological develop-ment in characters. See Frye, *Anatomy*, 161-62 and 196-206; and *idem, The Secular Scripture*, 129-156.

powerful one at that, a limbo where rules of conduct are unfamiliar, filled with the constant danger of transgression through ignorance, heedlessness, or misjudgement. But they do not despair. They cope with and eventually transcend the dangers that this world presents. Having initially been deceived by al-Ḥajjāj and his agents, they in turn resolve their dilemma by, in some sense, deceiving the Caliph. Then, having achieved their goal, they return home to be reunited with their family, their geographical context and social status reattained, their union of love recognized, even ratified, by the Caliph's good-will and gifts. Their personas are no longer defined only by external contexts; having been tested, they have won not only each other, but themselves. Near the tale's beginning, Nuʿm had sung to Niʿma:

> If you were a master on whose bounty I could live,
> A sword with which I could destroy the necks of unlucky fates,
> What need would I have of intercession with Zaid or ʿUmar
> Instead of you, if my paths upon me became strait.[47]

By the story's end, this is the state which the couple, with their newly found maturity, have attained.

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(Part II will appear
in volume XIX)
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[47] B. 1:404. This and all following translations are my own, except note 77 (Part II).