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Re/Writing the Orient:

Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, the *Thousand and One Nights*, and the *Hundred and One Nights*

Amanda Batarseh

Canto XXIII marks a tragicomic turning point in the *Orlando Furioso*, as the tension sustaining the titular character's epic stoicism and romantic chivalry falls away to reveal a maniacal anti-hero. This canto's staging of Orlando's madness is, in Albert Ascoli's words, the "center of 'otherness' in the poem,"¹ unsettling the binary of medieval and classical literary traditions that Ariosto draws on, and suggesting a novel genre of literary expression. In this article, I explore one of Ariosto's avenues of disrupting ostensible polarities—his use of dynamic intertextual practices that *write* and *rewrite* the "Orient." I contend that the *Furioso* both expresses and unsettles opposing impulses, something I will argue by reframing Ascoli's elaboration of crisis (a "double focus" upon "concord and discord") to encompass the geo-historical domain of Arabic cultural exchange in the medieval Mediterranean.² Focusing on Ariosto's resounding echoes of the *Thousand and One Nights*' and the lesser-known *Hundred and One Nights*' frame tales, I seek to illuminate the *Furioso*'s double focus upon movement toward and away from Muslim-Arab cultural affiliation, a push-pull that opens a space of difference where literary traditions can converge neither in reconciliation nor domination of one another. I examine in particular how Ariosto's poem captures the ambiguous hybridity of the medieval Mediterranean: beginning with a cursory analysis of the Saracen figure as an unsettled construction of "self" and "other," I then move to a parallel investigation of the poem's dynamic intertextual practices. The *Furioso*'s intertextual episodes include the discovery of fictionalized Arabic poetry in Canto XXIII, as well as a compelling Arabic "cross-over" narrative in Canto XXVIII. The murky path of this Arabic influence and its textual aporia in Ariosto's work—present and yet absent, written and rewritten—mirrors the "East-West" exchanges of the medieval Mediterranean as an ever-shifting terrain defined not only by oppositionality and hostility, but also by curiosity, exchange, and alliance.

The thematic perimeters of the *Furioso* are famously outlined in the poem's opening stanza: "Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori, / le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto."³ These themes—women, knights, arms, loves, chivalries, adventures—constitute the "tangled strands of the text," establishing the poem's central polarities: "*knights and arms*" / "*women and love*."⁴ This sequence announces the poem's emphasis upon dichotomies—on one side epic power (*knights and arms*), and on the other chivalric romance (*women and love*)—even while Ariosto begins to simultaneously and compulsively undermine these dichotomies' fixedness. Also introduced in the first canto (and rearticulating this disruption of polarized structural boundaries), is the literary motif of religio-geographic conflict. While the Arab-Byzantine wars constitute a salient presence

¹ Albert Russell Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 306.

² *Ibid.*, 25.

³ Ludovico Ariosto and Lanfranco Caretti, *Orlando furioso* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 1.

⁴ Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Power and Play in the Orlando Furioso," in *The Play of the Self*, ed. Ronald Bogue and Mihai Spariosu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 189.

in both medieval Arabic and European romance,⁵ it is only in the last decade that questions of religious affiliation and representation have come to the fore in Ariosto scholarship. JoAnn Cavallo's meticulous comparative analysis of Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* (1495) and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516) examines the "East/West divide as a geographical and ideological drive"⁶ in Ariosto's poem, "[subjecting] Boiardo's East Asian and North African protagonists to a process of degradation whereby they lose their earlier positive characteristics."⁷ Ariosto's straightforward allegiance to the "crusading ideology characteristic of Carolingian epic"⁸ has, however, come under scrutiny more recently. Maria Pavlova has examined the embodiment of a positive value system in certain Ariostan Saracen warriors, as estimable if not more so than the value system of their Christian counterparts.⁹ And Stefano Jossa has highlighted the fulfillment of both Christian and Muslim prayers in the poem as an indication that the religious divide functions as a tool for Ariosto to "[develop] discourses other than the religious divide itself."¹⁰

One of the poem's pivotal characters, Ruggiero, straddles the space between the two religio-geographic poles. The son of an African princess and a Christian knight, Ruggiero exemplifies (on the one hand) cultural and religious assimilation with his prophesied conversion to Christianity and founding of the Ferraran d'Este line. This migratory and dynastic plotline of Italian origins signals Ruggiero's epic progenitor, Aeneas, as Boiardo and Ariosto assert their poems' classical and cultural patrimony.¹¹ But (on the other hand), between Boiardo and Ariosto a transformation transpires, resulting in the *Furioso's* depiction of this pivotal character as "no longer the ideal knight who saves others from peril but [...] more akin to a helpless boy who falls into traps and needs to be rescued."¹² While Cavallo suggests that this depiction degrades Ruggiero's character, the comic effect of the knight's frequent missteps (saved repeatedly by his beloved Bradamante) also serves to humanize him. Ariosto's construction of this half-Saracen warrior—neither hero nor villain—exemplifies the poem's ambiguous movements between Muslim-Arab cultural affiliation and disaffiliation. Indeed, Ariosto rarely rests in a single

⁵ See Ulrich Marzolph, Richard van Leeuwen, and Hassan Wassouf, eds., *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 403. The motif of the Arab-Byzantine wars exemplifies the convergence of Arabic and European romance motifs. Arabic romances, or *sīra*, show "significant similarities with the European romances and *chansons de geste* of the Middle Ages, such as the romance of *Zifar*, the cycles of *Amadis de Gaula*, and the cycle of tales focusing on Charlemagne" such as the *Song of Roland* and the *Furioso*, telling of "adventures of knights who wage war against the opposite camp, while at the same time indulging in love affairs and intrigues" (ibid.).

⁶ The conference, "Ariosto and the Arabs: Contexts of the *Orlando Furioso*," was held at the Villa I Tatti in Florence in October of 2017. The conference has been made available by the organizers in full via the link below and brings together a range of scholars on this topic. See Stefano Jossa, "Between Two Worlds: Ariosto's Religion," «Ariosto and the Arabs»: Contexts of the Orlando Furioso," International Conference, Villa I Tatti, Florence, October 18-19, 2017, <https://youtu.be/ejKrVAIWZsU?list=PLxHGx4odvJv6DrWHWEQEvXU0fCGMt1SjV>.

⁷ Jo Ann Cavallo, *The World beyond Europe in the Romance Epics of Boiardo and Ariosto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 4.

⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁹ Maria Pavlova, "Orlando Furioso: The Saracen Perspective," «Ariosto and the Arabs»: Contexts of the Orlando Furioso," International Conference, Villa I Tatti, Florence, October 18-19, 2017, <https://youtu.be/ejKrVAIWZsU?list=PLxHGx4odvJv6DrWHWEQEvXU0fCGMt1SjV>; Maria Pavlova, "Il Fior de Paganìa: Saracens and Their World in Boiardo and Ariosto" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2014).

¹⁰ Jossa, "Between Two Worlds."

¹¹ In Virgil's epic, Aeneas makes his perilous journey from Asia Minor to Italy, conquering the indigenous population and establishing his line as the progenitor of an imperial Roman heritage.

¹² Cavallo, *The World beyond Europe*, 106.

position in his poem, but rather proceeds in a direction that is “tutt’altro che progressive, di qua e di là, di su e di giù” (“anything but progressive, here and there, up and down”).¹³ Just as he disrupts his own stylistic dichotomy of chivalric-epic traditions, Ariosto perpetually disrupts the fixedness of the religio-geographic binary of “Saracen” (King Agramante and his warriors) and “Christian” (Charlemagne and his Christian knights). We must, therefore, look deeper into the *Furioso*’s historical context to challenge the assertion that Ariosto is “in tune with either crusade spirit or stereotypical views of the Orient”¹⁴ in a way that simplistically casts the Saracen as a negative figure.

The poem’s unsettled divide between Christian “self” and Muslim “other”—at times clearly asserted and at others intentionally subverted—mirrors the divide of Ariosto’s own world. Throughout the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, Italians were preoccupied by both the real and imagined threat posed by the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ The “obsession” with the Turkish threat was far reaching, touching even landlocked cities like Ariosto’s Ferrara and exacerbated by real attacks on Italian territory in the later part of the fifteenth century.¹⁶ And yet, this threat did not lead to a total breakdown of Italian-Turkish relations. The Turks were prominent players in Mediterranean geopolitics and commerce, a presence with whom one could just as well fight as trade, negotiate, or form alliances. The Ottomans thus came to represent both an aggressor and an appealed-to mediator in Italian political and even personal quarrels. It is ambiguity,¹⁷ rather than a cut-and-dry oppositionality, that dictated Turkish-Italian relations in Ariosto’s time, and the *Furioso* in turn captures what Giovanni Ricci describes as “tutto e il contrario di tutto: la pace e la guerra, l’alleanza e il sospetto, la curiosità e il rifiuto” (“everything and the contrary of everything: peace and war, alliance and suspicion, curiosity and rejection”).¹⁸ Furthermore, “[for] the whole of Christian Europe the Turks constituted a grand synecdoche. The Saracens, the Moors and the Arabs might also be called Turks.”¹⁹

¹³ Annalisa Izzo, “Misoginia e filoginia nell’*Orlando furioso*,” *Chroniques Italiennes* 22 (2012): 3-4.

¹⁴ Jossa, “Between Two Worlds.”

¹⁵ Giovanni Ricci, *Ossessione turca: in una retrovia cristiana dell’Europa moderna* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2002); Giovanni Ricci, *I turchi alle porte* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2008).

¹⁶ Ricci, *Ossessione turca*; id., *Appello al turco: i confini infranti del Rinascimento* (Rome: Viella, 2011), 37; Rossella Cancila, “Appealing to the Enemy, Breaking Boundaries,” *Mediterranea—Ricerche Storiche* 16, no. 45 (April 2019): 167.

¹⁷ One common way of expressing this ambiguity was through the trope of the Mediterranean as a space of conversion, a theme popular in both Arabic and European romance. Ruggiero’s conversion, then—even with the objective of assimilation—captures the phenomena of Mediterranean border-crossing and cultural interface. See Robert John Clines, “The Converting Sea: Religious Change and Cross-Cultural Interaction in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” *HIC3 History Compass* 17, no. 1 (2019): 7; Marzolph, Leeuwen, and Wassouf, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 689. If we broaden our conception of conversion beyond religious application to include “collective identity construction, institutional anxieties, literary culture [and] intellectual traditions” (Clines, “The Converting Sea,” 1), we may continue the work of elaborating a Mediterranean reading practice whose premise is cultural interaction, even while the literary pathways and vestiges of that medieval exchange appear often as shadows.

¹⁸ Ricci, *Appello al turco*, 102; id., *Appeal to the Turk: The Broken Boundaries of the Renaissance*, trans. Richard Chapman (Rome: Viella, 2018), 98.

¹⁹ Giovanni Ricci, “Popul La Più Parte Circonciso’: Ariosto in Ferrara and the Muslim World of His Time,” «Ariosto and the Arabs»: Contexts of the Orlando Furioso, International Conference, Villa I Tatti, Florence, October 18-19, 2017.

The assertion that “medieval Europe had ample opportunities to learn about Arabic literature and culture” is now an unexceptional claim,²⁰ in large part thanks to the interventions of medieval Mediterranean scholars, foremost among them Maria Rosa Menocal. Since the 1980s, such scholars have focused in particular on Andalusia—the region of Iberia under Islamic rule from 711 to 1492—as a multilingual society where Arabic, Latin, and early-Spanish speakers achieved broad cultural advances across the arts and sciences.²¹ While scholars such as Menocal, and more recently Karla Mallette, have emphasized the reciprocal (rather than unidirectional) nature of this exchange, their line of questioning remains a sensitive one: the proposition of an Arab “influence” on European culture still ignites a particular anxiety, threatening as it does to disrupt the more entrenched narratives that for many are bound to the European identity. Mallette, indeed, takes issue with “the word *influence*,” which in itself suggests a unilateral action, “[betraying] the manifest complexity of the cultural transactions of the Spanish and Italian Middle Ages.”²² In her study of the “Arab Mediterranean,” Mallette contends that the realities of medieval Christian-European/Muslim-Arab cultural production do not fit into the facile binary structure suggested by studies of asymmetrical colonial power relations, such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. Rather, medieval Mediterranean encounters—“by turns comforting, wearisome, or noxious”—were shaped in an ambiguous space of ever-shifting power relations, resulting in a dynamic constellation of cultural hybridities.²³

Even if Said’s *Orientalism* fails as a universal model for analyzing “East/West” encounters in the Middle Ages, it does not follow that methodologies of postcolonial analysis, developed largely in conversation with *Orientalism*, are of no merit. On the contrary, Mallette’s own analyses are informed by that same Saidian exposition of subaltern voices, excluded or obscured

²⁰ Unexceptional, that is, despite certain “scholarly resistance to the role that less tangible Arabic cultural categories, such as literature” may have had in European cultural formations. Sahar Amer, *Crossing Borders: Love between Women in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 13.

²¹ Prospectively christened the Twelfth Century Renaissance, this period describes cultural capitals in Iberia and Sicily as pivotal intellectual and cultural centers, essential to succeeding European intellectual movements from the Renaissance to Enlightenment. The amalgamated cultures in these Islamicate and former-Islamicate regions of Iberian al-Andalus and Norman Sicily enabled a radical transfer of knowledge. Concurring and overlapping with the translation of Arabic scientific and philosophic texts was the concomitant, although less tangible, transmission of music, art, architecture and literature. See Lisa Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 33; María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Anthony Sells, *The Literature of Al-Andalus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Karla Mallette, *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

²² Karla Mallette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean: Toward a New Philology and a Counter-Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 49. Here Mallette pinpoints the anxiety of Arab influence to nineteenth-century European and North American philology, the conclusions and methodologies of which she contends were guided by national narratives of dominant or originary cultural traditions. Mallette locates a compulsion among nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Western philologists to assert the submission of Arabic cultural forms to European ones, inscribing a dominant “Spanish” or “Italian” spirit back into instances of linguistic and literary hybridity. In response to this anxiety of influence, Mallette proposes a “new philology” that might reconceive of origin in dialectical terms as polygenesis. As a corrective maneuver, she exposes a selection of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Italian, Sicilian, and Maltese scholars, which she calls counter-orientalists because, rather than othering Arab cultural heritage as an archetypal Orientalist practice, they insist upon its integrality to the Spanish and Italian past and present. Through this reinscriptive act, she subverts hegemonic narratives of European literary history and historiography that selectively exclude the significance of a medieval “Arab Mediterranean” and scholarship on that topic.

²³ See also Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, 13.

by hegemonic discourse. Indeed, a dynamic facet of postcolonial scholarship itself is the effort to interrogate the potential and the limits of postcolonial approaches to the pre-modern.²⁴ As David Lloyd asserts, a “differential” view of colonialisms requires us to “understand the designation ‘colonial’ to be, in Marx’s sense, a ‘rational abstraction’ rather than a transhistorical concept.”²⁵ Only when explicit colonial structures are established “in their full material actuality” can we start talking about the constitutive elements of all “colonialism.”²⁶ That the *Furioso*, then, does not voice a “modern” colonial ambition need not prevent later readers from ascribing to it affirmations of European ascendancy, asserting *a posteriori* its links to colonial discourse. But this in turn does not equate a total corroboration of Arab otherness in the poem, which would blind us to the text’s competing expressions of Arab cultural *proximity*.²⁷ Decolonizing our reading of the *Furioso*, therefore, does not necessitate a mimetic imposition of Said’s orientalist critique onto Ariosto’s work, which would be just another case of Western scholarship claiming to represent and possess the Muslim-Arab “East.” Rather, we can proceed with a Saidian *contrapuntal*²⁸ unpacking of the *Furioso*’s cultural polyphony, exploring how the text narrates the “Oriental” encounter in terms more complex than simple oppositionality.²⁹ I will begin by looking into the poem’s intertextual practices with an eye for traces of Arabic literary cross-fertilization.

An Arabic-Italian Ode in Canto XXIII

The very catalyst for Orlando’s psychotic break is the *Furioso*’s famous instance of “Orientalized inscription.”³⁰ When Orlando stumbles upon Angelica and Medoro’s *locus amoenus* in Canto XXIII, his blindness to Angelica’s true feelings is displaced by the literal writing on the wall, an erotic ode inscribed inside a cave. While the poem is written in Arabic, a

²⁴ These scholars interrogate what it means to deploy an ostensibly temporally and politically bounded theoretical framework to an antecedent period. See Shankar Raman, *Renaissance Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), and Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren, *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval through Modern* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Shankar poses this problem as inscribed in the designation *post-colonial*, a field which “has generally set itself against the linear time of ‘progress’” despite being “haunted by the figure of linear ‘development’ that it sets out to dismantle” (49). Ingham and Warren cleared the way for postcolonial studies in pre-modern periods by interrogating the “ideological force of the West’s colonizing claim to be ‘modern’” (2), reproduced in a restrictive alignment of colonialism with modernity.

²⁵ David Lloyd, “After History: Historicism and Irish Postcolonial Studies,” in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Clare Carroll and Patricia King (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 52.

²⁶ Raman, *Renaissance Literature*, 47.

²⁷ David Aberbach, “European National Poetry, Islam and the Defeat of the Medieval Church,” *NANA Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 4 (2012): 603-23. Aberbach reads the poetry of the medieval period with particular emphasis upon its expression of oppositionality to the Ottoman empire and Islam. Poems such as *The Song of Roland* and the *Orlando Furioso* defined themselves, contends Aberbach, as early national epics against an encroaching Muslim empire. Medieval poetry, he states, “suggests that Islam forced Christian Europe into far greater political and economic autonomy, and cultural creativity, than would have been likely otherwise” (605).

²⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, distributed by Random House, 1993), 66.

²⁹ Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, 13; Mallette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean*, 18-19.

³⁰ Pauline Marie Scott, “Writing, Rewriting and Unwriting the Renaissance: Constructing the ‘Otherness’ in Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*; Shakespeare’s *Othello*; Woolf’s *Orlando*; and Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1999).

language Orlando “intendea così bene come latino” (“knew as well as he knew Latin”),³¹ the reader only has access to the ode in Italian translation:

Liete piante, verdi erbe, limpide acque,
spelunca opaca e di fredde ombre grata,
dove la bella Angelica che nacque
di Galafron, da molti invano amata,
spesso ne le mie braccia nuda giacque;
de la commodita che qui m’è data,
io povero Medor ricompensarvi
d’altro non posso, che d’ognor lodarvi³²

(Happy plants, verdant grass, limpid waters, dark, shadowy cave, pleasant and cool, where fair Angelica, born of Galafron, and loved in vain by many, often lay naked in my arms. I, poor Medor, cannot repay you for your indulgence otherwise than by ever praising you)³³

It is no coincidence that this erotic poem is inscribed in Arabic, a clear reminder of Medoro and Angelica’s non-European origins (from North Africa and China respectively), and coming precisely when issues of subversion—here, female sexual agency and perceived infidelity—are made central to the concerns of the poem. However, even while the “gap between Arabic writing and its Italian transcription” may simulate a “space of difference,” containing within itself that imagined “‘dangerous’ sensuality/carnality of ‘the Orient’,”³⁴ the translation of Medoro’s words does not serve an exclusively *othering* function. Rather, Ariosto deploys this “space of difference” as a tool to “develop discourses other than”³⁵ the cultural and linguistic divide itself. Medoro’s poem is resoundingly humanist, articulated “in a slow exquisite Petrarchan” madrigal “offering the vision of pastoral innocence and joy that haunted the poets and artists of this period.”³⁶ And, indeed, if a degradation of the Saracen “other” were the translation’s sole purpose, its success would be at best dubious. While Medoro’s ode triggers Orlando’s descent into madness, the gruesome acts of Orlando’s violent break come from within Orlando alone. After he destroys the remnants of the lovers’ abode, he rips off his clothes and runs into the woods where he kills animals with his bare hands. His subsequent homicides escalate the terror: a roaming “pazzo” (“madman”) he beheads one innocent bystander with his bare hands—“uno ne piglia, e del capo lo scema” (“he grabbed one and took of his head”)—and then “...usò per mazza adosso al resto” (“used the victim’s body to club the rest”).³⁷ Describing this violent frenzy, Ariosto engages a humanist discourse regarding man’s mental and physical exceptionality: it is man’s intellectual and physical capacities that make him superior, and Orlando’s diminished state renders his previous virtues (implicitly masculine) ineffectual,

³¹ Ariosto and Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 811; Ludovico Ariosto and Guido Waldman, *Orlando Furioso* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 279.

³² Ariosto and Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 811, XXIII.108-09.

³³ Ariosto and Waldman, *Orlando Furioso*, 278.

³⁴ Scott, “Writing, Rewriting and Unwriting the Renaissance,” 58.

³⁵ Jossa, “Between Two Worlds.”

³⁶ D. S. Carne-Ross, “The One and the Many: A Reading of the Orlando Furioso,” *Arion Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 3, no. 2 (1976): 189.

³⁷ Ariosto and Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 822-23, XXIV.5-6; Ariosto and Waldman, *Orlando Furioso*, 283.

beyond recognition.³⁸ The “space of difference” represented by the Arabic poem—that catalyst of Orlando’s madness—is here not the topic of Ariosto’s humanist discourse, but rather something that prompts and facilitates that discourse.

Canto XXIII’s fictional intertextual reference is, then, multifunctional—both an avenue for Ariosto’s humanist expression and an articulation of the anxiety and curiosity characterizing Muslim-Arab cultural interchange in the Mediterranean. Indeed, Orlando’s own fluency in Arabic conveys this dual focus. While in this instance his multilingualism causes him great pain, compromising his sanity, this multilingualism is described in the same stanza as having been lifesaving in past encounters.³⁹ The duplicity of language and intertext here is evocative of Menocal’s concept of Euro-Arab poetic polygenesis, the compelling resonances she identifies between Andalusian Hiberno-Arabic poetry and the style and form of the European vernacular lyric.⁴⁰ To date, there is no definitive evidence of Ariosto’s material access to Arabic poetry: I am not contending that Ariosto’s fictional Arabic-Italian poem is an assertion of Arab “influence” on the Italian lyric. Rather, Canto XXIII’s fictional intertextuality signifies a more nuanced gesture toward the cross-fertilizing network of literary practices in the medieval Mediterranean, a nod toward an Arabic poetic tradition that Ariosto was at least plausibly aware of. And more forthrightly, Medoro’s poem foreshadows the *Furioso*’s more explicit intertextual resonances in Canto XXVIII, with its homage to the *Thousand* and *Hundred and One Nights*.

The *Orlando Furioso*, the *Thousand and One Nights*, and the *Hundred and One Nights*

Canto XXVIII of the *Furioso* opens with the Algerian king, Rodomonte, having just suffered romantic disillusionment, stopping at a hostel and listening as the innkeeper tells a tale of a women’s treachery. In this tale, King Astolfo of Lombardia, who believes himself to be the most attractive of men, asks a courtier if he has ever seen another “di forma così ben composto” (“as well built”).⁴¹ To the king’s displeasure, the courtier responds that his brother, Iocondo, would compete with the king’s beauty, and so the king invites this brother to the court. Iocondo, after setting out on his journey to meet the king, realizes he has forgotten a necklace given to him by his wife, and, returning to retrieve it, discovers her and her lover *in flagrante delicto*. Assaulted by a “sdegno assalito” (“fit of fury”),⁴² Iocondo is tempted to kill them, but leaves instead in secrecy and shame.

³⁸ See Valeria Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). Finucci contends that the way masculinity is constructed as a masquerade in this canto constitutes Ariosto’s critique of this façade, in much the same way that he deconstructs the façade of chivalry as an antiquated trope.

³⁹ Ariosto and Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 811, XXIII.110. This section describes Ariosto’s knowledge of Arabic as both a present threat to his sanity and a past advantage in dangerous encounters: “gli schivò più volte e danni ed onte / che si trovo tr ail popul saracino / ma non si vanti, se già n’ebbe frutto; ch’un danno or n’ha, che può scontargli il tutto” (“his grasp [of Arabic] had saved him more than once from injury and insult when he was among the Saracens. But he was not to boast if formerly his knowledge had helped him – the pain it now brought him quite discounted every former advantage”).

⁴⁰ Maria Rosa Menocal, *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). According to this proposition, early romance poetics were informed by Andalusian Arabic poetry. These poetic traditions emerged at roughly the same time, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in overlapping regions of the Iberian Peninsula and the Pyrenees, deployed shared motifs of adulterous love, poetic structures of end rhyme and stress meter, and were composed in vernacular rather than formal literary language.

⁴¹ Ariosto and Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 856, XXVIII.6; Ariosto and Waldman, *Orlando Furioso*, 340.

⁴² Ariosto and Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 1002, XXVIII.22; Ariosto and Waldman, *Orlando Furioso*, 341.

By the time Iocondo arrives to meet Astolfo, “era stato all’aria del bel viso un affanno di cor tanto nocivo [...] che piú non pareva quell che’esser solia” (“a canker at the heart [...] had so blighted his handsome face that he no longer looked the man he once was”).⁴³ The cure for his illness comes only with the discovery of another woman’s betrayal. Coming upon a crack in the wall, Iocondo witnesses the queen “entwined in a sort of wrestling match” with a *nano* (a person with dwarfism).⁴⁴ Marveling at the king’s misfortune, Iocondo believes his situation less dire and is thus relieved of his shame. He becomes happy again and returns to his normal appearance: “sembra un cherubin” (“he seems a cherubim”), his cheeks “rubicondo” (“rosy”).⁴⁵ Seeing this, Astolfo berates him to reveal the cure to his ailment, which Iocondo eventually does, thus revealing both his and the king’s own cuckolding. Astolfo is despondent, but Iocondo then proposes a journey of sexual conquest.⁴⁶ The two men scour the countryside, despoiling as many married women as they can, until they grow tired and settle down. Certain of the infidelity of all women, the men conclude that the best solution is to share one wife, eventually finding a Spaniard in Valencia willing to sell his daughter, Fiammetta. When, however, even Fiammetta proves disloyal,⁴⁷ rather than being angered the two men are immensely amused by her cunning. Resolved that these trials have proved that their wives are no less chaste than any others, Iocondo and Astolfo return to their spouses in Italy.

This story’s resemblance to the story of King Shahryar and Shahrazade, frame tale of the *Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf laylah wa-laylah*), is commonly noted⁴⁸—not only for their shared particulars but also for their treatment of the popular *mākir an-nisā’* (“cunning of women”) motif.⁴⁹ In the *Thousand and One Nights*’ version, King Shahzaman goes to visit his brother, King Shahryar, with whom he shares rule over the Sassanid kingdom of India and China. Forgetting something at home, Shahzaman returns and witnesses his wife’s infidelity, promptly slaying the adulterers in bed and resuming his journey. The king is grief stricken upon arrival at his brother’s palace, visibly yellow in color (“ašfar lawnihi”) and weak in his body (“ḍu’f jismihi”), but unwilling to explain his illness.⁵⁰ One day, while Shahryar is away hunting, Shahzaman secretly discovers the infidelity of his brother’s wife, witnessing her and her servants in an orgiastic display in the queen’s garden. Shahzaman’s good spirits return, seeing this spectacle as a betrayal worse than his own. Shahryar convinces his brother to reveal the cause of his renewed health, and is subsequently brought to witness his own wife’s deceit in secret. Shahryar’s madness begins here, when we are told that “his reason flew from his head” (“ṭāra

⁴³ Ariosto and Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 1005, XXVIII.29; Ariosto and Waldman, *Orlando Furioso*, 342.

⁴⁴ Ariosto and Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 1006, XXVIII.34; Ariosto and Waldman, *Orlando Furioso*, 343.

⁴⁵ Ariosto and Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 1008, XXVIII.39; Ariosto and Waldman, *Orlando Furioso*, 343.

⁴⁶ Ariosto and Caretti, *Orlando furioso*, 110, XXVIII.45; Ariosto and Waldman, *Orlando Furioso*, 344: “Lasciàn [...] queste ingrâte, / e proviamo se son l’altre così molli: / facciàn de le lor femine ad altrui / quel ch’altri de le nostre hanno fatto a nui” (“Let us leave these heartless women [...] and try all the rest to see if they are equally pliant: let us do to other men’s wives as they have done to ours”).

⁴⁷ Fiammetta’s disloyalty, signaling the motif of women’s treachery, is undercut by the fact that her so-called marriage equates to little more than bondage, sold essentially into sexual slavery.

⁴⁸ The correspondence between Canto XXVIII of the *Orlando Furioso* and the frame tale of *The Thousand and One Nights* and *The Hundred and One Nights* was noted by Emmanuel Cosquin in 1909. Emmanuel Cosquin, “Le Prologue-cadre des *Mille et une Nuits*, les légendes perses et le livre d’Esther,” *Revue biblique* 6, no. 1 (1909): 7-49. See also Marzolph, Leeuwen, and Wassouf, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 483-84.

⁴⁹ Claudia Ott, “Orlando and the World of the Arabian Nights,” «Ariosto and the Arabs»: Contexts of the Orlando Furioso, International Conference, Villa I Tatti, Florence, 2017); Aldo D. Scaglione, “Shahryar, Giocondo, Kote’rviky: Three Versions of the Motif of the Faithless Woman,” *Oriens* 11, no. 1-2 (1958): 151-61.

⁵⁰ Muhammad Ali Baydun, ed., *Alf laylah wa-laylah* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-’ilmiyah, 2003), 5.

‘aqluhu min ra’sihi”).⁵¹ Shahryar suggests that they embark on a journey to hear the stories of other men who have been likewise dishonored. But rather than quelling his madness, the journey enflames it, Shahryar returning to the castle, “[breaking] the neck of his wife” (“rama ‘unqa zawjatihi”) and killing her maids and male slaves.⁵² He vows never to keep a wife for more than one night, slaying one each morning before marrying another. It is into this dire situation that Shahrazad, the daughter of the vizier, enters, offering to marry the king and devising a plan together with her sister, Dinarzad, to extend her life through storytelling.

Canto XXVIII of the *Furioso* retains core elements from the *Thousand and One Nights* frame tale—the unexpected discovery of adultery; concealment as a means of witnessing infidelity; embarking on a journey to remedy the subversion of patriarchal dominance—but the stories differ on key points. Most significantly, Ariosto’s story of Iocondo and King Astolfo introduces the theme of male vanity, the king’s competitive motive for summoning not his brother but a stranger to court. But this difference suggests a third intertext, a reference to *The Hundred and One Nights* (*Mi’at laylah wa-laylah*), a lesser-known “sister” cycle⁵³ to the *Thousand and One Nights*.⁵⁴ In the *Hundred and One Nights*’ version, an unnamed Indian king is famed for an annual beauty festival in which he brings out a “great Indian mirror”⁵⁵ and asks the assembled guests: “hal ta’amūna aḥadan fī ad-dunya aḥsan minī ṣūra” (“Do you know anyone more handsome than me?”).⁵⁶ During one of these galas, an elderly man informs the king that there is, indeed, a young man who rivals his beauty, the son of a merchant in the distant city of Khorasan (a region of modern-day Iran). The king compels the old man to depart for Khorasan and bring him the youth, named Zahr al-Basātīn, for assessment. Arriving in Khorasan, the elder convinces the young man’s father to let him travel, but upon their departure from home, young Zahr “[realizes] that he [has] left behind something” and returns to find his wife asleep next to her lover.⁵⁷

Discovering this betrayal, the youth loses his mind: “ḥīla baynihi wa bayna ‘aqlihi” (“a barrier came up between him and his reason”)⁵⁸ as his hand went “straight to the hilt of his sword.”⁵⁹ After killing his wife and her lover, Zahr returns to the Indian traveler, who immediately notices a change in his color (“lawnuhu”) and in his manner/appearance

⁵¹ Ibid., 6.

⁵² Ibid., 7.

⁵³ Claudia Ott and Elisabetta Benigni, eds., *Cento e una notte*, trans. Isabella di Meane (Turin: Einaudi, 2017), 2.

⁵⁴ In Ott’s recent translation of the *Hundred and One Nights*, based on its oldest known manuscript held in the Aga Khan Museum, she dates the object to the early thirteenth century: the colophon dates the manuscript 632 *hijrī*, approximately 1234 C.E. (ibid., 9). While Robert Irwin has challenged this early dating (Robert Irwin, “Introduction,” in *A Hundred and One Nights*, ed. Philip F. Kennedy and Maurice A. Pomerantz, trans. Bruce Fudge [New York: New York University Press, 2017], xxv), the scholars agree that the frame narrative itself is both significantly older than the physical manuscript held in the Aga Khan and the sister-narrative contained in the *Thousand* (Ott and Benigni, *Cento e una notte*, 7; Irwin, “Introduction,” xxi). The *Hundred* frame tale shares remarkable resonances with a Chinese Buddhist collection, the *Triptaka*, that is believed to have been translated from Sanskrit in the third century *hijrī* (approximately the ninth century C.E.) and to have originated in roughly the first century B.C.E.

⁵⁵ Bruce Fudge, *A Hundred and One Nights*, ed. Philip F. Kennedy and Maurice A. Pomerantz (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 3.

⁵⁶ Bruce Fudge, ed., *Kitāb mi’at laylah wa-laylah* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 9; Fudge, *A Hundred and One Nights*, 3.

⁵⁷ Fudge, *A Hundred and One Nights*, 6.

⁵⁸ Fudge, *Kitāb mi’at laylah wa-laylah*, 12; Fudge, *A Hundred and One Nights*, 6.

⁵⁹ Fudge, *A Hundred and One Nights*, 6.

(“šakluhu”).⁶⁰ Arriving in India, Zahr’s sickly look dismays the king, who attempts without success to improve the boy’s health through pampering. The youth recovers only upon the secret discovery of the king’s own cuckolding: wandering the castle, he comes upon a series of small doors leading to the palace’s upper levels and a spectacular view of the grounds. Overlooking the gardens, Zahr spies the queen with her lover and soon makes a full recovery from his melancholy. With the return of the youth’s unrivalled beauty, the king threatens to kill Zahr if he does not reveal what has provoked the improvement of his appearance (“šūratuka”) and color (“lawnuka”),⁶¹ and Zahr relates his story in full. Witnessing the queen’s betrayal for himself, the king executes the adulterous pair and Zahr returns home to Khorasan. The story of the Indian king then merges with that of the *Thousand and One Nights*’ frame tale, the king marrying a new wife each night and killing her the next morning until he is finally confronted with Shahrazad. In this version, however, Shahrazad’s sister Dinarzad is the new wife, with Shahrazad planning to save her by telling nightly stories to the king.

In these varying accounts of betrayal, discovery, and planned revenge, certain elements are shared by all three versions, most notably a focus upon Iocondo/Shahzaman/Zahr’s physical appearance: his natural beauty and the distortion of his guise and color when he is ill. Iocondo’s “bel viso” (“handsome face”) is ravaged by melancholy and then restored to its healthy, rosy complexion (“rubicondo”).⁶² Shahzaman arrives at the palace yellow in color (“ašfar lawnihi”) and weak in his body (“du‘f jismihi”),⁶³ and Zahr is described in the same terms of worsened and then improved coloring (“lawnuhu”), manner/appearance (“šakluhu”) and manner/bodily appearance (“šūratuka”).⁶⁴ The absence of the male vanity theme, however, in the *Thousand and One Nights*’ frame tale, suggests the *Hundred and One Nights* as a possible source for Ariosto. Indeed, Claudia Ott has recently argued as much, identifying a geo-linguistic crossover from the *Hundred and One Nights* to the *Furioso*.

Ott focuses on the *Furioso*’s story of Angelica, and the mysterious etymology of “Albracca,” her home in Cathay (China). Ott asks, “Why China and why Albracca,” a toponym that has no known meaning or significance in Italian.⁶⁵ She proposes that the answer is found in the *Hundred and One Night*’s “Story of Canfour Island” (“Ḥadīṭ ḡazīrat al-kanfūr”), a tale not included in the *Thousand and One Nights*.⁶⁶ This story tells of a world traveler whose journeys have taken him as far as China, to the marvelous city of Al-Barqā. In Arabic, *al-barqā* possesses various meanings, including “multi-colored, black and white, or stony ground.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, not only is Al-Barqā a place name deployed across Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula, but it also possesses a certain lyric tone, mentioned in numerous Arabic poems.⁶⁸ That *al-barqā* in Arabic could have become Albracca in Italian is even more convincing given that Arabic texts are typically unvoiced.⁶⁹ The Italian transcription of *al-barqā* as *al-braqā*/Albracca requires only the displacement, whether purposeful or in error, of a single invisible Arabic short vowel (*a*, in Arabic the *fatha*).

⁶⁰ Fudge, *Kitāb mi’at laylah wa-laylah*, 12.

⁶¹ Ibid., 16.

⁶² Lodovico Ariosto, Lanfranco Caretti, and Italo Calvino, *Orlando furioso* (Torino: Einaudi, 2005), 971.

⁶³ Ali Baydun, *Alf laylah wa-laylah*, 5.

⁶⁴ Fudge, *Kitāb mi’at laylah wa-laylah*, 12.

⁶⁵ Ott, “Orlando and the World of the Arabian Nights.”

⁶⁶ Ott; Ott and Benigni, *Cento e una notte*.

⁶⁷ Ott, “Orlando and the World of the Arabian Nights.”

⁶⁸ Ott and Benigni, *Cento e una notte*, 15.

⁶⁹ Meaning that these texts do not contain short vowel markings.

Ott's compelling link does not, however, indicate that the *Furioso* was influenced only by the *Hundred and One Nights*: strong connections to the *Thousand and One Nights* remain. The journey taken by both Iocondo/Astolfo and Shahzaman/Shahryar (to cure their grief and restore patriarchal dominance) is missing from the *Hundred and One Nights* version, for example. While all three narratives describe the men's *momentary* madness at the discovery of infidelity (Iocondo, assaulted by a "fit of fury"; Shazaman, whose "reason flew from his head"; and Zahr who "lost his mind"), examples of *prolonged* insanity are only present in the *Furioso* (Orlando in Canto XXIII) and the *Thousand and One Nights* (Shahyar). Unlike the *Hundred and One Nights*, in which Shahrazad has "no pretensions of saving her community or reforming the king [...] [through reflection] on moral issues,"⁷⁰ a fundamental objective of Shahrazad's storytelling in the *Thousand and One Nights* is, indeed, to save the kingdom's women, and then the kingdom itself by redeeming Shahyar through didactic tales. Her stories frequently bear relevance to her own situation, or deal with broader issues of justice, mercy, and the relationship between punishment and crime. The *Thousand and One Nights* and the *Furioso* likewise issue similar warnings against the madness of unbridled power. Furthermore, both works stress the redemptive powers of storytelling and poetry, elevating the potential of both artistic creation and creator, both of which work to restore Shahryar and Orlando's sanity and, thus, their capacities for judicious leadership.⁷¹ That the *Furioso*, the *Thousand and One Nights*, and the *Hundred and One Nights* share compelling resonances, however, is not an indicator of either an exclusive or direct link between Ariosto and an Arabic copy or Italian translation of these manuscripts (as exciting as such a revelation would be). It reveals, rather, the multi-directional, and often unclear, network of literary transmissions connecting the Mediterranean.

The *Nights*' Transmission and the *Furioso*'s Intertextuality: Writing/Rewriting the "Orient"

While the *Hundred and One Nights*' geo-historical references and its use of North African (*maġribī*)/Andalusian (*andalusī*)⁷² Arabic prompt Ott to propose that the collection originated in the "Arab-Occident," we need not exclusively pursue a single fixed origin for such works: in the culture of Mediterranean cross-fertilization, mobility and transmission were the key. As Karla Mallette puts it, we are dealing with a "network of narrative [knitting] together the shores of the sea": "We can't always construct when and where transmission occurs. We don't always have an 'original' which is mirrored in a translation. Sometimes what remains is this kind of murky cluster of resemblances. Shadowy reflections in a mirror. The original version is a dream."⁷³ If locating definitive origins and verifying explicit routes, dates, and means of transmission is often impossible,⁷⁴ shedding light on the textual traces and shadows that vaguely map out the Mediterranean cultural network can be far more feasible. The *Hundred and One Nights*' North African/Andalusian characteristics, for instance, suggest its Mediterranean localization, negotiating different Euro-Arab cultural forms and reaping all the benefits of "la vicinanza

⁷⁰ Fudge, *A Hundred and One Nights*, xvii.

⁷¹ Mazzotta, "Power and Play in the Orlando Furioso," 199.

⁷² Ott and Benigni, *Cento e una notte*.

⁷³ Karla Mallette, "Endings: Storytelling from a Mediterranean Perspective," «Ariosto and the Arabs»: Contexts of the Orlando Furioso, International Conference, Villa I Tatti, Florence, October 18-19, 2017.

⁷⁴ "[There is] no plausible explanation of how the [*Nights*' frame narrative] might have reached [Ariosto in] Italy" (Fudge, *A Hundred and One Nights*, xxii).

geografica dell'Italia ad al-Andalus e le tradizionali vie di trasmissione della letteratura arabo-spagnola verso l'Europa centrale" ("the close geographic proximity of Italy to Andalusia and the traditional pathways of transmission of Arabic-Spanish literature towards Central Europe").⁷⁵

Such a process of constant negotiation—writing and rewriting—is indeed integral to the broader history of the *Nights* cycles' presence in Europe. It is unlikely that any work of non-Western origin has had more impact on Western culture than the *Thousand and One Nights*. Among the most famous of story collections in world literature, it exists in numerous translations and adaptations and has served as an inexhaustible source of inspiration in literature, theatre, film, and music. While rewritings of the *Thousand and One Nights* have "contributed decisively to the West's perception of the 'Orient'"⁷⁶ they have also inscribed layers of Western ownership into the cycle itself: the stories are now part of the Western imagination. As with the permutations of the title from Arabic (*Alf laylah wa-laylah* ["a thousand nights and a night"]) to Antoine Galland's eighteenth-century *Les mille et une nuits* to the reimagined English version of Galland's text, the *Arabian Nights' Entertainment*, the *Nights* are characterized by polygenesis, possessing "multiple births across a multitude of cultural boundaries" and particularly "across the divide between the Arab world and the West."⁷⁷ This polygenesis characterizes both the *Arabian Nights* as European texts, and the *Thousand and One Nights* and *Hundred and One Nights* as Arabic collections, of which there are numerous versions. These Arabic rewritings possess an even longer history of incorporating narrative traditions of ancient to medieval China, India, Iraq, Persia, Syria, and Egypt. Many of the cycle's tales migrated from the fourth-century BCE Sanskrit narrative cycle, the *Panchatantra* (translated into Arabic in the eighth century as *Kalila wa-dimna*), while the *Nights'* characteristic narrative structure (i.e., Shahrazad's storytelling to the king) is rooted in a Persian prototype, the *Hazār Afsāna* (*A Thousand Tales*), an influence confirmed by Arab scholars in the tenth century.⁷⁸ These tales were not known for high artistic achievement, but rather considered a form of popular entertainment for private and public consumption alike. This popular rather than elite literary status helps explain how the *Nights* may have travelled across the Mediterranean in "fragments"⁷⁹ long before Galland's eighteenth-century translation, which had long been presumed the tales' point of "introduction into Western consciousness."⁸⁰

One method of mapping the fragmentary transmission of these cycles is through the lens of trade. Rosamond Mack, examining the transmission of goods between the Muslim-Arab world and Italy, here describes the popularity of *bacini*, Islamic earthenware bowls: "The one characteristic common to the various popular and influential Oriental objects was their portable size, which meant they could arrive in quantity and spread widely. Ceramics that were mediocre by Islamic standards were long admired throughout Italy and had a significant impact on Italian

⁷⁵ Ott and Benigni, *Cento e una notte*, 15.

⁷⁶ Ulrich Marzolph, "Introduction," in *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, ed. Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 1:xxiii; see also Rana Kabbani, "The Arabian Nights as an Orientalist Text," in *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 25-26.

⁷⁷ Mallette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean*, 28.

⁷⁸ The oldest manuscript of the *Nights* is a fragment, *Kitāb fīhi hadīth alf laylah* (*A Book Containing the Tale of a Thousand Nights*), proving that by the ninth century the collection was already known by the title *Alf laylah wa-laylah*. The earliest recorded mention of the collection appears in al-Mas'ūdī's tenth-century *Murūj al-dhahab*, in which he mentions the *Nights* and the Baghdadi bookseller, Ibn al-Nadīm's synopsis of *Alf laylah wa-laylah*, which delineates the characteristic Shahryar/Shahrazad frame tale.

⁷⁹ Mallette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean*, 204.

⁸⁰ Marzolph, "Introduction," xxiii.

pottery.”⁸¹ The sentiment could well be applied to the transmission of the *Nights* cycles, essentially popular texts made portable through fragmentation (individual free-standing tales) perhaps arriving to medieval Europe in pieces, and “spread[ing] widely” due to their foreign appeal. While the tales may have been “mediocre by Islamic standards,” their popular appeal as entertainment, simple language and narrative structure⁸² facilitated European rewriting/retelling and adaptation. Mack illustrates this reinscriptional process, by which objects from the Muslim world were made to serve new functions: “Egyptian and Syrian ewers and basins, originally made for ritual hand washing before prayers and meals” were repurposed for “the wine of the Eucharist,” or an “inlaid brass bucket that an Egyptian or Syrian might have carried to the community bathhouse” was repurposed to hold “holy water in northern Italy.”⁸³

This reinscription was facilitated by the exchange of trade, and encompassed artisanal products as well as works of art.⁸⁴ Francesca Corrao, in her examination of Arabic literary traditions in Sicily, explores the role of this artistic exchange in the transmission of the *Nights* cycle. While Arab rule in Sicily lasted only from the ninth to the tenth century, the hybridity of Muslim culture endured into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, extended under Norman rulers such as William II and Frederick II, who cultivated Muslim scholarship, arts, architecture, and poetry.⁸⁵ Corrao contends that oral transmission played a larger role in spreading the *Nights*’ tales in Sicily than documented translation, citing correspondences with popular Sicilian

⁸¹ Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 2.

⁸² See Irwin, “Introduction,” xviii-xix; Hasan El Shamy, “The Oral Connections of the Arabian Nights,” in *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, ed. Ulrich Marzolph and Richard Van Leeuwen (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 9-13; Claudia Ott, “From the Coffeehouse into the Manuscript: The Storyteller,” *Oriente Moderno*. 83, no. 2 (2003): 443. It is now believed that the style in which the *Nights* collections were composed—repetitive in language, structure and motifs—facilitated both oral transmission by *hakawātiyūn* (storytellers) and written transmission, functioning as a roadmap that individual might copy or from which they might deviate. While El-Shamy suggests that the literary devices and structures of the text substantiates oral transmission, Irwin contends that the *Nights* tales were transmitted primarily via written manuscripts. The entry in *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia* states: “the internal evidence of language, idiom, and narrative techniques of the *Arabian Nights* suggest an oral source. [...] Frequently employed topical expressions common to oral techniques include repetitions, stereotypical descriptions, changes of perspective within a story, and the insertion of the phrase ‘and the storyteller said ...’. These characteristics support the hypothesis that the preserved written text of the *Arabian Nights* probably constitute [...] a mnemonic device of storytellers who improvised freely during their performance. Seen from this perspective, the collection’s evolution occurred via the two different tracks of oral transmission on the one hand, and occasional recording in written form on the other. The written texts and the oral variants mutually influenced each other. This process may also help to account for the different versions of the *Arabian Nights* that have appeared in different places and different periods” (660-61).

⁸³ Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 5.

⁸⁴ Mack also illustrates an exceptional instance of this rewriting process in her discussion of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century popular deployment by Italian painters of “totally factitious Oriental scripts” to create “pseudo-Arabic” decorative elements (*ibid.*, 51). Painters used pseudo-Arabic to embellish textiles, gilt halos, and frames for religious paintings, properly associating Arabic with the Holy Land and erroneously imbuing it with early Christian religious significance. Mack explains that the culture of Mediterranean trade facilitated the arrival of goods from Africa and Asia, and that the “Islamic honorific textiles that inspired these garments are the principle source for the symbolism and misunderstanding of Oriental scripts in Italian painting” (51).

⁸⁵ Francesca Maria Corrao, “The Arabian Nights in Sicily,” *Fabula: Zeitschrift für Erzählforschung/Journal of Folktale Studies/Revue d’Etudes sur le Conte Populaire* 45, no. 3 (2004): 237; See also Karla Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100-1250: A Literary History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Here Mallette relates the Andalusian Ibn Jubayr’s twelfth-century account of a visit to Sicily describing the mixed culture emerging from Muslim-Christian cohabitation.

folklore.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, written transmission certainly played its part, as in the case of the *Book of Sindbad*⁸⁷ (another cycle depicting the “trickery and unfaithfulness of women,” possessing links with the *Nights*), which was disseminated through both Sicilian folklore⁸⁸ and European-language manuscripts. This transmission was facilitated by translation, for instance into Greek (*Syntipas*) and Spanish (*Sendebār*). The book was ultimately renamed the *Seven Sages of Rome* in Europe:

The Sindbad/Seven Sages material seems to have worked its way gradually across the Mediterranean, appearing in Arabic in Abbasid Baghdad, in Syriac soon after, in Greek during the eleventh century and in Latin and Persian during the twelfth. During the thirteenth century it entered the orbit of European letters; it was translated into the Romance vernaculars as well as Hebrew.⁸⁹

The non-linear movement and polygenesis of the *Book of Sindbad/Seven Sages* mirrors how the *Nights* cycles seem to have moved across temporal, spatial, and linguistic boundaries, sometimes in part and sometimes in full, sometimes in direct translation, other times in a translation of a translation, and other times still through *rewriting*. While we cannot say with certainty how the *Nights* arrived in Ariosto’s Italy—perhaps via Andalusia and a Spanish translation—it is clear that its transcription and transmission in the Mediterranean occurred in a “cultural context where many other works of classical Arabic literature” were taking similar routes.⁹⁰ And in addition to the medieval translation movements of Spain and Sicily, “retranslation occurred outside these hubs and persisted for centuries after the height of” the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁹¹ Indeed, “Northern Italy was a center for translation of imaginative narrative” and we have “early manuscripts from the Veneto of the *Seven Sages of Rome*.”⁹² On this point we should note the geographical proximity of the Veneto to Ariosto’s Ferrara.

While translation practices can be key in understanding textual transmission, they can also present limits and lacunae. A case in point is the *Book of Sindbad/Seven Sages*, the thirteenth-century Spanish version of which “languished uncopied on a library shelf, generating no new manuscripts copies” because it “did not speak to a thirteenth-century Romance-speaking audience.”⁹³ And those Arabic fragments that *did* make it into European works—like the elements of the *Nights* cycle that appear in the *Furioso*—were not taken up objectively, but through modifications and “act[s] of interpretation,”⁹⁴ acts of strong rewriting and repurposing.⁹⁵

⁸⁶ Corrao, “The Arabian Nights in Sicily,” 238. The correspondence between Arabic and Sicilian folklore extends to the frame tale narrative of “King Shahryar and his Brother,” and that pivotal motif of women’s “trickery and unfaithfulness.” The Sicilian version depicts a husband that “has been told about his wife’s unfaithfulness and pretends to leave the house in order to discover the trick” (242). At least one known rendition of this motif appears in Italian literature before Ariosto’s poem, in Giovanni Sercambi’s *Novella d’Astolfo* (1348-1424), and other instances follow Ariosto’s, including Giovanni Francesco’s *Tredici piacevoli notti* (1578) and Giambattista Basile’s *Il Pentamerone* (c. 1630).

⁸⁷ Not to be confused with the tales of Sindbad the sailor, a late addition to the *Thousand and One Nights*, following Galland’s eighteenth-century French version.

⁸⁸ Corrao, “The Arabian Nights in Sicily,” 241.

⁸⁹ Mallette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean*, 213.

⁹⁰ Ott, “Orlando and the World of the Arabian Nights.”

⁹¹ Karla Mallette, “Translation in the Pre-Modern World,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20, no. 1 (2017): 23.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹³ Mallette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean*, 215.

⁹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 36.

Eleonora Stoppino, in her analysis of the *Furioso*'s intertextual deployment of medieval sources, offers an excellent framework for understanding such literary exchanges. Stoppino posits that conventional hierarchical readings of Ariosto's poem have consistently obfuscated medieval sources, "interpreted as merely raw 'matter' [...] renewed and infused with meaning by classical 'forms' of the humanist era."⁹⁶ Subverting this hierarchy, Stoppino highlights Ariosto's "[revitalization of] classical tales through their medieval rereadings," and in so doing she posits a horizontal rather than vertical genealogy of the poem.⁹⁷ While the echoes of Arabic literature in the *Furioso* are not as numerous as the medieval sources Stoppino identifies, her approach (focusing on practices of "imitation and emulation") opens novel pathways that are equally applicable to Arabic intertexts.⁹⁸ A horizontal approach to textual borrowing disrupts conventional genealogies of both the *Furioso*'s and the *Nights*' cycles, on the one hand expanding the terrain of the *Furioso*'s intertextual scope, and on the other hand unsettling the conventional narrative of Arabic literature's late entrance into Europe (a misguided timeline instigated, as I have mentioned, by eighteenth-century Orientalist translation of the *Nights*).

This last point summarizes the approach I have urged in this article, a polyphonic rather than monovocal reading of the Arabic influence in the *Furioso*. This is what Said had in mind in *Culture and Imperialism* when he said that by looking "back at the cultural archive" with attention to polyphony we may "begin to reread it not univocally but contrapuntally."⁹⁹ In a similar vein, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of a "Third Space" has advocated a view of cultural hybridity not as a straightforward appropriation of one culture by another, but rather as a new space that opens as a result of both cultures perceiving and accounting for the distance between each other, the distance between "self" and "other" that gives way to new mode of being (much like the poststructuralist notion of meaning coming out of the perceived space between sign and signifier).¹⁰⁰ Today, with old anxieties about the "Arab influence" on European classics somewhat relaxed, we are in a position to apply such approaches to our readings of the *Furioso*. The Arabic echoes I have pointed to in Ariosto's poem—his complex Saracen figures and layered literary allusions—attest to a context in which "self" and "other" were neither fully reconciled nor entirely disparate, but rather in constant negotiation. Ariosto's *re/writing* of the "Orient," then, does not merely cross borders but throws those borders into question, leaving us with a text that is a rich subject for new scholarly approaches to the Mediterranean cultural complex.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Through "[departures] from the Arabic original [by playing] up different aspects of the narrative" (Malette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean*, 215).

⁹⁶ Eleonora Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the Orlando Furioso* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 8-9.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 178. See also Christian Rivoletti, "Canto XLV," in *Lettura dell'Orlando furioso*, ed. Guido Baldassarri et al. (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2016), 545-66.

⁹⁸ Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 176.

⁹⁹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 51.

¹⁰⁰ This "Third Space" is defined by ambivalence, because there is no way that "context can be mimetically read from the content" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 36).

¹⁰¹ See Yasser Elhariry and Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, *Critically Mediterranean: Temporalities, Aesthetics, and Deployments of a Sea in Crisis* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).