Utopian Fantasy or Dystopian Nightmare?
Trajectories of Desire in Classical Arabic and Chinese Fiction

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1. Desire Matters

"I bought a large quantity of merchandise and made preparations for a long voyage. Then I set sail together with a company of merchants in a river-ship bound for Basrah. There we put to sea and, voyaging many days and nights from isle to isle and from shore to shore, buying and selling and bartering wherever the ship anchored, we came at length to a little island as fair as the Garden of Eden. Here, the captain of our ship cast anchor and put out the landing-planks.

The passengers went ashore and set to work to light a fire. Some busied themselves with cooking and washing, some fell to eating and drinking and making merry, while others, like myself, set out to explore the island. Whilst we were thus engaged we suddenly heard the captain cry out to us from the ship: 'All aboard, quickly! Abandon everything and run for your lives! The mercy of Allah be upon you, for this is no island but a gigantic whale floating on the bosom of the sea, on whose back the sands have settled and trees have grown since the world was young! When you lit the fire it felt the heat and stirred. Make haste, I say; or soon the whale will plunge into the sea and you will all be lost!'

Hearing the Captain's cries, the passengers made for the ship in panic-stricken flight, leaving behind their cooking-pots and other belongings. Some reached the ship in safety, but others did not; for suddenly the island shook beneath our feet and, submerged by mountainous waves, sank with all that stood upon it to

> the bottom of the roaring sea. Together with my unfortunate companions I was engulfed by the merciless tide ... (3-4)."[1]

This quotation from 'The First Voyage of Sindbād the Sailor' gives us a tightly woven but panoramic glimpse of the career of 'desire' both in the adventures of Sindbād and storytelling in the *Arabian Nights*. Desire, as contemporary 'Western' theories[2] put it, serves as a force, drive or mechanism that makes possible negotiations in the power relations between passion and reason, individual and society, freedom and conformity, anarchy and harmony, knowledge and ignorance, and the text (in the sense of creative writing) and the world. Desire is never simply sexual but tends to be more about the sovereignty of the individual subject caught in a symbolic order ruled by the law of the father, symbolic order being the web of power relations mapped by culture, society and state.[3] It is necessarily transgressive; its very transgressivity assures its agency in the power games that are seemingly outside the subject's control. It maps the trajectories of a desiring subject that finds expression in the text, whether composed from words, images or sounds, which represents, interrogates, and subverts the world. It takes advantage of the ways in which language, as a semiological system, opens up vistas, in the multitude ways of organizing signs and defining signifier's relation to the signified, to tinker with the symbolic order ruling it and the world it tries to represent. Desire is by definition political and its trajectories more often than not articulate a utopian vision even when they are at the height of their dystopian despair. In the wake of this articulation,

[1] All quotations from 'Seven Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor' are from *Alf layla wa layla*, Dār Ṣādir's reprint of Būlāq. This story is not included in the Muhsin Mahdi edition. Translation by N. J. Dawood, *Tales*, pp. 115-116.

[2] There is no theory of desire as such, even though desire is crucial in any theory of power, discourse, identity, subjectivity, and literature. For a survey of the ways in which 'Western' theory articulates the role of desire in critical thought, see, for example, P. Fuery, *Theories*. The bibliography serves as a convenient guide to the various discussions of desire in psychoanalysis, discourse analysis, semiology, narratology and gender studies.

[3] For a convenient survey and discussion of the triangular relationship of desire, subjectivity and power, see J. Butler, *Psychic*.

worldviews are questioned, alternatives are proposed, and stories are told. Pre-modern Arabic writing, fictional or documentary, is no stranger to the influence of desire that is either palpably present or clandestinely ‘playing in the dark’. ‘The Seven Voyages of Sindbād the Sailor’ provides a blueprint for an enquiry into the politics of desire in narrative, story-telling and writing.

The ‘scene’ quoted from ‘Sindbād the Sailor’ sets up the type of story that will follow and the political discourse that will drive a narrative haunted by desire. The pattern and movement of the story are a cliché in the uniquely *Arabian Nights* ‘arabesque’. Story within story, doubling, parallel juxtaposition, repetition, and rampant havoc wreaked by the extra-ordinary are but some of the features familiar to connoisseurs of the *Nights*. The story of Sindbād the Sailor is framed by that of Sindbād the Porter, for example, the world of the sea is contrasted to the world of the land, and Sindbād the Sailor must go on seven journeys not one. There is, however, something strikingly surprising in the ways the two worlds of the sea and land are brought to bear on each other.

That the land is a place of safety and harmony and the sea a site of danger and anarchy is a lesson already heard and learned in other stories about the inevitable confluence and eventual antagonism between the worlds of the sea and the land in the *Arabian Nights*. In three stories of the confluence between the two worlds, the initial seeming harmony between the land and the sea quickly disintegrates to reveal the sea’s capacity to overwhelm the world of the land with its immensity, darkness and tumult. In ‘The Fisherman and the Demon’, a kingdom is enchanted into a sea and its citizens into fishes (of four colours) by a sorceress in a moment of wrath upon discovering that her husband, the young king, wounded her lover. It is restored to its former glory, as a kingdom on land, only when the adulteress queen and her black demon

lover are killed. In 'The Story of Ğullanār', the perfect bliss brought on by King Šahrimān's marriage to Ğullanār, a sea princess, in the first part of the story soon, in narrative time, falls foul of their son Badr Bāsim's foray into the world of the sea in the second part. The friendship between ᶜAbd Allāh the seaman and ᶜAbd Allāh the landman, which beings as a story of mutual admiration between the land and the sea, is brought to abrupt end by the seaman's realization, or is it decision?, that Islam as practiced on land does not parallel that under the sea. In these three stories, a final choice has to be made between the land and the sea. The land usually comes out the winner. Even the genie in the bottle in 'The Fisherman and the Demon' forsakes the sea, his prison, and chooses to roam freely on and above land. The world of the sea may mirror the world of the land, however different the people, the animals and the plants of the two worlds are, but the sea is not the world parallel to that of the land and it must be, in the end, rejected in favour of the latter. This, however, is not the universe of Sindbād the Sailor.

Sindbād the Sailor, rather, straddles two worlds, longing for one when in the other. These two worlds are not antithetical, complementary or duplicates of each other. They are similar but different. Yet they overlap in such a way that one cannot exist without the other. The whale is of both worlds but belongs to neither. In slumber it is an island, a 'Garden of Eden' for sea weary sailors—*ka annahā rawḍa min riyāḍ al-ğanna* (4: 3), but awake it is an extra-ordinary sea creature that can turn the world upside down, land into sea, taking the sailors with it into the depth of the sea, to their death. The very moment of being swept away into the sea, of being thrown into an unknown fate, of being embraced by danger, marks also Sindbād's initiation into adventure. Sindbād will no longer be the complacent youth who squandered his inheritance away and was forced into trade. The first journey, undertaken in need, plants the

seeds of ‘desire’ in him, and as of this moment he will throw himself again and again into danger because of that double ‘desire’ for both adventure and home, for the sea and the land. The remaining six voyages are all framed by a double desire, each beginning with something like “*wa ištāqat nafsī ilā al-safar wa al-tiğāra wa al-tafarruğ ᶜalā bilād al-nās*” (4: 8, 12, 18, 25, 30, 34)[4] and ending with an unspoken yearning for home and family.[5] The desire’s station in the ‘slippage’ between the land and the sea complicates readings of stories based in the confluence and antagonism of the two worlds.

The two seemingly parallel but profoundly divergent worlds, represented by the land and the sea in these *Nights* stories, are each delineated and mapped, as I shall demonstrate, by desire and its movements. More important, the trajectories of desire seem crucial in legitimating or outlawing the world they construct. If desire follows the ‘right’ path utopia may lie in wait at the end of the journey, but should it take a ‘wrong’ turn, mayhem is certain to ensue, the *Nights* stories that take upon themselves the task of juxtaposing the ethics and politics of the two worlds (of land and sea) seem to say. The land is, in these stories, an idealized world existing in perfect harmony in which its citizens live in blissful happiness, a utopia,[6] unless it become overwhelmed by the world of the sea, a dystopia, which is ruled by anarchy. If desire delineates, directly or discursively, a path towards a kind of utopia firmly embedded in a ‘symbolic order’ in ‘The Fisherman and the Demon’, ‘Ğullanār’ and ‘The Seaman and the Landman’, it can also follow a path of dystopian destruction heedless of the ‘law of the father’. When desire goes on a rampage, harmony disintegrates into anarchy and safety is

[4] The desire for travel is on occasion formulated as “*wa ḥaddaṯanī nafsī bi al-safar*”.

[5] There is only one instance in which his longing for his family is clearly stated as “*qad ištaqtu ilā ahlī wa bilādī wa ᶜiyālī*” (vol. 4, pp. 33).

[6] There is a vast array of critical literature on utopian writings in the ‘West’, most of which is directly relevant to political theory and religious discourses, sociological analysis and even literary representation pertinent to political discourses. R. Levitas’s *Utopia* is one among many handy surveys of utopia in ‘Western’ thought in the 20th century.

replaced by danger. Utopia, in its metaphoric sense, collapses into dystopia. There can be no adventure, as we find out in ‘The Fisherman and the Demon’, when the sea becomes a trap for its residents and a source for drooled upon dishes in the royal kitchen.

The way desire hovers between utopia and dystopia in ‘Sindbād the Sailor’, both situated, as it were, on the whale, then, speaks to and of its own complexly ambiguous ethical status, political role, and aesthetic potential. The state of a political community depends entirely on the ethics of desire operative, or allowed to operate, within this very political community. In this, these *Nights* stories have, I will also show, internalized the discourses on desire and utopia externalized in pre-modern Arabic writings. At the same time, they provide a corrective; in fact, they question the very desirability of utopia in the world of storytelling and writing. The story of desire in pre-modern Arabic narrative may not be a straightforward one, but for those who listen attentively it gives key clues in an understanding of the ‘symbolic order’ paradigmatic in the construction of the classical textual world as well as world of texts. Desire’s to-and-fro movements between, let us say, utopia and dystopia, fantasy and nightmare in the textual world of the *Nights* tells a tale of a simultaneous necessity of order and disorder, observance and transgression, and obedience and rebellion in the world of texts, of writing.

2. Utopia and Kingship

When the clever fisherman is led to the fabulous ‘sea’ that houses a wealth of fishes in white, red, blue and yellow, he should have suspected that something is afoot. In his recent experience, the sea is not the well of riches that one is accustomed to thinking of, but an abyss where demons lurk beneath the surface. And, why should he trust the demon who, only a very

few moments ago, was intent on killing him? But narrative here cannot allow any skepticism on his part, for without his sudden, inexplicable blind faith, even only for a split second, in the repentance of the demon and, more importantly, in divine justice, the moral of the story will never be imparted. 'The Fisherman and the Demon' is, in part, about reigning discord in to order. The demon, fed up with his long wait for rescue in the bottle, rebels against a code of conduct expected of a 'rescued' subject. He is necessarily outmaneuvered by the fisherman and cowed again into obedience to the same code of conduct against which he rebelled earlier. The reasons for his failure will be revealed in the interstices of the web of stories, one overlapping into another, that make(s) up this cycle of stories. The story of his encounter with the fisherman, however, drops a crucial hint. He gains his freedom by observing the code of conduct appropriate to a being in his situation. He is obligated to reward the fisherman for freeing him. The fisherman himself is a meticulous observer of the proper code of conduct of a man that befits his situation, of a citizen of utopia. He is honest, kind, generous, upright and, more significantly, free of greed or 'unreasonable' will—he never throws his fishing net into the sea more than four times a day (Dār Ṣādir 1: 18; Mahdi 86).[7] He only desires to make an honest living and to provide adequately for his family, which is after all proper and legitimate. The demon's initial desire to kill him, by comparison, seems 'unreasonable', improper and illegitimate. The story does not allow the demon to win the day and duly subdues and redirects his 'unreasonable' desire as it follows a logic that finds articulation in the narrative's unraveling. The fisherman's encounter with the demon is only a preamble to a bigger story of a good king reigning in a desire gone terrifyingly mad.

The four-colour fishes the fisherman secures in his net from a lake he is taken to by the demon

[7] All quotations from and references to 'The Story of the Fisherman and the Demon' are from Dār Ṣādir reprint of Būlāq, and Muhsin Mahdi ed.

are a catch worthy of kings and they expectedly end up in the royal kitchen. But the fishes never get cooked and the good king is always thwarted from a coveted taste. As the pan heats up and they are thrown in, a genie or demon will part the kitchen wall and converse with the fishes only to burn the fishes to a crisp before disappearing through the crack in the wall again. This is clearly a narrative ruse. It whets the king's appetite, as well as ours, for the 'truth' behind the strange events in the kitchen. The king sets out for the lake where the fishes originate. He scours the area and comes upon a great palace where he finds a young king whose lower half has been turned into stone. He was, he tells the older king, betrayed by his queen, his cousin. She was a sorceress forced into the royal marriage but was in love with a demon from the Qāf Mountain. She drugged him every night then went to her lover. When he found out, followed her to her love nest, and struck the demon lover and left his wife untouched, his wife turned him into a half statue and his kingdom a lake and his subjects the fishes in the lake. The visiting king promises the enchanted king to right the wrong. And he does. He kills the demon lover, impersonates him, tricks the sorceress into breaking the spell, and kills her. Normal life and harmony do return but all is not the same. This kingdom becomes ransom for its own eventual good fortune. The saved kingdom is integrated into (or swallowed up by) the saviour's kingdom. The young king follows the gallant older king home and remains there as a grateful boon companion. The vizier of his rescuer now rules his former kingdom.

This ending makes sense in accordance with the logic set up by a narrative that has found a way to weave two previously independent stories into one, 'The Fisherman and the Demon' and 'The Enchanted King'.[8] The overall happy ending (the two kings marrying the two

[8] For details, see D. Pinault, *Story-telling*, pp. 31-81 ("Chapter Two: The Fisherman and the Genie/ Enchanted Prince Cycle").

daughters of the fisherman) may seem shockingly gratuitous at first reading, but on second thought it manifests itself as a sensible conclusion to narrative strands gathered in by a symbolic order based in a paradigmatic kingship that drives the narrative, which in turn defines this kingship. In this cycle of stories, the juxtaposition of two carefully patterned worlds, one of the land and the other of the sea, purposefully or inadvertently, reveals the workings of this symbolic order as both the motor driving stories and the matrix structuring them. There are a number of overlapping, juxtaposed parallels and contrasts within the broader context of the contrast between the land and the sea, which all contribute to the final shape of these two overlapping but contrasting worlds, as well as the worlds of 'The Fisherman and the Demon' and 'The Enchanted King'. The Prophet Sulaymān and the saviour king, and the saviour king and the fisherman in 'The Fisherman and the Demon', and the demon here and the queen in 'The Enchanted King' are parallels that work against contrasts set up elsewhere in the same narrative. They, moreover, accentuate the differences between the fisherman and the demon, the saviour king and the enchanted king, the enchanted king and the demon lover, and the demon and the demon lover. In this labyrinth of narrative intersections, the fisherman seems the nexus on which the seemingly disparate narrative strands hang.

The fisherman is, upon close scrutiny, the representative of the king and kingship, who is catalyst in bringing together the world of the land and that of the sea, and the two forms of kingship operating in them respectively. He is a model citizen who embodies the principles of a utopian kingship overseen and maintained by the king, whose authority and legitimacy are derived from faith, symbolized in this cycle by the Prophet Sulaymān. The fisherman has clear advantage over the demon from the outset. The demon, after all, is banished to the

bottom of the sea for refusing to obey Sulaymān (Dār Ṣādir 1: 19; Mahdi 90). Obedience, in this context, is not simply kowtowing to or paying lip service to the authority of Sulaymān. Rather, it entails abiding by a code of conduct that will, as will become clear later, ensure individual salvation that is entirely dependent both on his 'reasonableness' and on the peace and harmony in the world. The demon has to learn this vital lesson from the fisherman. He exits the bottle in exuberance and thinks that in the aftermath of Sulaymān's death he will no longer have to fear Sulaymān's power or obey his edicts. What he wills, the powerful genie that he is, will be! But this is not how the world works. The genie is outwitted by the fisherman and ends up back in the bottle until he promises to observe one simple principle: not to punish the one who has done him good. This principle is a contextualized summation of justice *('adl*) based on rewarding the 'good' *(ǧamīl*) and punishing the 'bad' (*qabīḥ*), and the attendant 'righting' the 'wrong'. The cycle of 'King Yūnān and the Physician Dūbān' reinforces the former and the saviour king's rescue of the enchanted king the latter.

The stories that make up the 'King Yūnān and the Physician Dūbān' cycle are cautionary tales of things going terribly wrong for the king and his kingship when he allows for the violation of this principle. When Yūnān decides to cut off the head of Dūbān, the physician who cured him, or to 'punish good with evil',[9] he precipitates his own death and the ruin of his kingdom by breaching the unwritten contract he had signed on to when he became king. The lines of poetry Dūbān's cut-off head recites as it watches Yūnān die of Dūbān's poison are instructive:

> "For long they ruled us arbitrarily,
>
> But suddenly vanished their powerful rule.

[9] '*An tuqābil al-malīḥ bi al-qabīḥ'*, as Dūbān says to Yūnān (p. 102), which is rendered into English as 'You reward good with evil' in Husain Haddawy, p. 45.

Had they been just, they would have happily

Lived, but they oppressed, and punishing fate

Afflicted them with ruin deservedly,

And on the morrow the world taunted them,

'Tis tit for tat; blame not just destiny'."[10]

Here, the fate of rule (*ḥukūma*), or more aptly kingship, is upheld by its aḏerence to justice (*inṣāf*, which is synonymous with *ᶜadl*), and when it turns to oppression (*baġy*, which is synonymous with *ẓulm*), only affliction and ruin (*āfāt wa miḥan*) lie ahead. When the demon's will encounters the might of this principle, it is necessarily domesticated; otherwise the demon, like Yūnān, will be fated to die. Destiny is not random, the last hemistich, 'blame not just destiny', states clearly. It is rather a matter of 'tit for tat', or results of actions taken. The demon learns from the 'Yūnān and Dūbān' cycle that his intent, as the fisherman put to him, "I did you a good turn, and you are about to repay me with a bad one" (Dār Ṣādir 1: 19; Mahdi 91),[11] will have dire consequences. Here, the source of actions becomes crucial in how destiny is played out.

The fisherman is able to outwit the demon not only because he is cleverer but also because his actions are driven by 'reason' (*ᶜaql*), not its 'opposite'. At the critical moment, when the fisherman realizes that 'reasoning' with the demon will not lead to his salvation and resorts to tricking the demon back into the bottle, he reminds himself that, "He is only a demon, while I am a human being, whom God has endowed with reason and thereby made superior to him. He may use demonic wiles on me, but I will use my reason to deal with him".[12] (Mahdi 91;

[10] Dār Ṣādir, vol. 1, p. 26; Mahdi, p. 105; trans. Haddawy (based on the text edited by Muhsin Mahdi), *Arabian Nights*, p. 47.

[11] This is Haddawy's translation of "*faᶜaltu maᶜak ǧamīlan tuqābilnī bi al-qabīḥ*" (Haddawy, 34).

[12] "*Hāḏā ǧinnī wa anā insiyy wa aᶜṭānī Allāh ᶜaqlan wa faḍḍalanī ᶜalayhi wa hā anā udabbir ᶜalayhi bi ᶜaqlī wa huwa yudabbir bi ǧinnihi"* (p. 91).

Haddawy 35). The reference to *ᶜaql* here is parallel to that made by Dūbān, also at a critical moment, when he realizes that Yūnān will under no circumstance spare his life. Weeping, Dūbān cites these two lines to seemingly mock his own naïveté:

> "Maimuna was a foolish girl (*inna Maymūna lā ᶜaqla lahā*),
>
> Though from a sage descended (*wa abūhā min dawī al-ᶜaql ḫuliq*),
>
> And many with pretense to skill,
>
> Are e'en on dry land upended."[13]

There is a double-entendre here. It refers to both his own folly—how could he have been so foolish as to think his good deed will be rewarded not punished!, and to the king's foolishness, his slip in 'reason', an English approximation of *ᶜaql*, which in Arabic has its own set of connotations, referents and associates pervasive in pre-modern Arabic writing of all kinds that are deeply rooted in Arabic-Islamic worldview, heir to the region's ancient civilizations. *ᶜAql*, and its attendant qualities, in fact, form the kernel around which kingship and community are envisioned and constructed.

3. The Symbolic Order

ᶜAql is defined in *Lisān al-ᶜarab* as the ability to curb or forbid (*ḥağr* or alternatively *ḥiğr*) and to stop an action (*nahy*), a kind of intelligence (*nuhā*) that is opposite '*ḥumq*'. *Ḥumq*, or *ḥamāqa*, is the subject of a treatise known as *Aḫbār al-ḥamqā wa al-mughaffalīn*,[14] which Ibn al-Ğawzī (d. 597/1200) wrote as a supplement to his earlier *Kitāb al-Aḏkiyāʾ*.[15] The meaning

[13] Mahdi, p. 102; Haddawy, p. 45. Text from Mahdi. The lines in Dār Ṣādir reads slightly differently, but the gist is the same: Maymūna is deprived of the marks of reason (*Maymūna min simāt al-ᶜaql ᶜāriya*),/ Even though her father was descended from a line of sages. He never walked oon land or settled anywhere,/ Unless guided by its light, and avoided slipping he did (Dār Ṣādir vol. 1, pp. 19). Translation is mine.

[14] Ibn al-Ğawzī, *Ḥamqā*.

[15] Ibn al-Ğawzī, *Aḏkiyāʾ*.

of ‘*ḥamāqa*’, according to Ibn al-Ǧawzī, is derived from the use of the word in connection with ‘*sūq*’ to denote the stagnation of market, “*maᵓḫūḏa min ḥamāqat al-sūq iḏā kasadat*” (22). A person of stagnant mind or opinion (*kāsid al-ᶜaql wa al-raᵓy*) should not be consulted on matters of war (22). He gives the example of *al-baqla al-ḥamqā* that sprouts on the path of water or camel (22) and, needless to say, gets washed away or eaten. ‘*Ḥumq*’, more precisely, means using a wrong means to achieve a sound end (*maᶜnā al-ḥumq wa al-taġfīl huwa al-ġalaṭ fī al-wasīla wa al-ṭarīq ilā al-maṭlūb maᶜa ṣiḥḥat al-maqṣūd*) (22).[16]

ᶜAql, in this context, is defined in *Kitāb al-Aḏkiyā'* as an innate ability (*ġarīẓa*) that has four manifestations: thinking in the abstract (*istaᶜadda li qubūl al-ᶜulūm al-naẓariyya wa tadbīr al-ṣināᶜāt al-ḫafiyya al-fikriyya*); discernment of what is possible and what is impossible and why (*al-ᶜilm bi ǧawāz al-ǧā'izāt wa istiḥālat al-mustaḥīlāt*); experiential knowledge (*ᶜulūm tustafād min al-taǧārib*); and suppression of desires requiring instant gratification [and leading on to temporary pleasure] (*muntahā quwwatihi al-ġarīziyya ilā an taqmaᶜ al-šahwa al-dāᶜiya ilā al-laḏḏa al-ᶜāǧila*) (10-11). *ᶜAql* is, moreover, made up of three qualities: *ḏihn*, the force of the potential for learning (*quwwat al-nafs al-muhayyaᵓ li iktisāb al-ārāᵓ*); *fahm*, the excellence of this potential's preparedness [to do its work] (*ǧawdat al-tahayyuᵓ li hāḏihi al-quwwa*); and *ḏakāᵓ*, the speed in which this potential works (*ǧūdat ḥids min hāḏihi al-quwwa taqaᶜ fī zaman qaṣīr ġayr mumahhal*) (11).

The importance of *ᶜaql*, according to Ibn al-Ǧawzī in *Ḏamm al-hawā*,[17] lies in its benefit to humankind at both individual and societal levels. It is that ‘potential ability’ of an individual, which leads him to knowledge of God and His Prophets and demands obedience to their

[16] Editors' note. Those who read Italian may find the following discussion of the various definitions of ḥamāqa useful: A. Ghersetti, “Paradigmi”.

[17] Ibn al-Ǧawzī, *Ḏamm,* ed. ᶜAbd al-Wāḥid and rev. M. al-Ġazālī. (Editors' note. Those who read German may find the following title useful: S. Leder, *Ibn al-Ǧauzī*).

commands. It enables one to anticipate the consequences of actions taken, therefore, to take stock of situations and act without jeopardizing their own interest. It empowers humans to make use of other creatures (animals) and put them to their service. It encourages virtues and deters vices, buttresses resolutions and strengthens determinations. In other words, it is responsible for bringing about what is good (*faḍāʾil*) and banishing what is bad (*ma yašīn*) (10).[18] This last identified quality of an individual, to be good, is a summation of all the attendant virtues of *ᶜaql*, and is necessarily linked to the demands of communal life on the individual, to do good. For only the one in possession of *ᶜaql*, the *ᶜāqil*, will be able to see the consequences of their virtues or vices on themselves and others (15). In his view of the role of *ᶜaql* in individual and societal life, Ibn al-Ǧawzī is heir to a long tradition of discourses on community and, more particularly, leadership of this community. It echoes what is already found in *adab*, more particularly, in the 'mirror for princes' genre, and in utopian writings of the philosophical kind, where *ᶜaql* and *ᶜadl*, reason and justice, are always inextricably linked.

Ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ (d. cir. 139/757), through the voice of Bidpāy in *Kalīla wa Dimna*,[19] one of the seminal works of *adab* that will find reverberations in all later works of the genre,[20] regards *ᶜaql*, which entails *ḥilm* (forbearance), *ṣabr* (patience and endurance) and *waqār* (sobriety and dignity), as an equal partner to three other qualities required in a king: *ḥikma* (wisdom), which encompasses *ᶜilm* (knowledge), *adab* (culture) and *rawiyya* (deliberation); *ᶜiffa* (uprightness), which finds expression in *ḥayāʾ* (modesty), *karam* (generosity), *ṣiyāna*

18 This is my summary of Ibn al-Ǧawzī's main points in *ibid.*, p. 10. For a general discussion of the various definitions of *ᶜaql* in Ibn al-Ǧawzī, see A. Ghersetti, "Conception".

19 References and quotations are from Ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ, *Kalīla wa Dimna*, ed. Šams al-Dīn. (Editors' note. Those who read Italian may find the following useful: M. Cassarino, *Aspetto*).

20 See, for example, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), "*Kitāb al-sulṭān*" in *ᶜUyūn*, vol. 1, pp. 1-106; and Ibn ᶜAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), "*Kitāb al-luʾluʾa fī al-sulṭān*" in *al-ᶜIqd*, ed. Amīn, al-Zayn and al-Ibyārī, vol. I, pp. 7-92.

(upkeep of honour) and *anafa* (pride); and *ᶜadl* (justice), which is manifest in *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *iḥsān* (doing good), *murāqaba* (observation of actions and their consequences on and of self and others) and *ḥusn al-ḫuluq* (proper conduct) (17). Al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), two centuries later, also identifies justice as one of the twelve qualities required in the leader of a community, whom he calls Imam, linking it to abilities associated with *ᶜaql* in his treatise on 'the perfect state', what he calls *al-madīna al-fāḍila*.[21] Of the twelve qualities al-Fārābī enumerates, six are of immediate relevance to the points made by Ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ and Ibn al-Ǧawzī:

> "(2) He should by nature be good at understanding and perceiving (*ǧayyid al-fahm wa al-taṣawwur*, 246) everything said to him, and grasp it in his mind according to what the speaker intends and what the thing itself demands (247)... (4) He should be well provided with ready intelligence and very bright (*an yakūn ǧayyid al-fiṭna ḏakiyyan*, 246); when he sees the slightest indication of a thing, he should grasp it in the way indicated (247)... (6) He should be fond of learning and acquiring knowledge, be devoted to it and grasp things easily, without finding the effort painful, nor feeling discomfort about the toil which it entails (249). (7) He should by nature be fond of truth and truthful men and hate falsehood and liars (249)... (9) He should by nature be generous and fond of honour, his soul rising above everything that is ugly and base, and to loftier things[22]... (11) He should by nature be fond of justice (*al-ᶜadl*) and of just people, and hate oppression and injustice and those who practise them, giving himself and others their due, and urging people to act justly and showing pity to those who are oppressed by injustice; he should lend his support to what he considers to be beautiful and noble and just; he should not be reluctant to give in nor should he be stubborn and obstinate if he is asked to do justice; but he should be reluctant to give in if he

[21] *Ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, trans. Walzer. All Arabic and English quotations are from this edition, unless otherwise specified. Even numbers refer to the Arabic text, and odd numbers to Walzer's English translation.

[22] This is my translation of the Arabic text appearing on p. 248. Walzer's translation in this instance is inadequate and off the mark.

> is asked to do injustice and evil altogether (249). (12) He should be strong in setting his mind firmly (*qawī al-ᶜazīma*, 248) upon the thing, which, in his view, ought to be done, and daringly and bravely carry it out without fear and weak-mindedness (249)."

The argument being made here is that *ᶜaql* presides over a utopian world, not in the sense of al-Fārābī's first intellect that gives forth emanations of more intellects, but more in the sense of the driving force behind and paradigm structuring learning and knowledge, culture and proper conduct. This paradigm and its components serve as a framework for maintaining and administering justice. Justice is most visible in the manifestation of the principles of 'rewarding good and punishing evil' and 'righting wrong' that lie at the heart of the story of 'Fisherman and the Demon'. When these principles are upset, it is an indication that *ᶜaql*, as paradigm and driving force, has been violated, and utopia has turned into dystopia.

Ḥamāqa, or *ḥumq*, is not the only antonym of *ᶜaql*. Al-Fārābī juxtaposes his utopian "*al-madīna al-fāḍila*" to "*al-madīna al-ğāhiliyya* (ignorant city)",[23] "*al-madīna al-fāsiqa* (sinful city)", "*al-madīna al-mubaddala* (the city which has deliberately changed its character)", and "*al-madīna al-ḍālla* (the city which has missed the right path through faulty judgment)" (252, 253). These dystopian worlds, despite the differing names, are all misguidedly driven by "[t]he only good things they recognize are some of those which are superficially thought of as good among the things which are considered to be the aims in life such as bodily health, wealth, enjoyment of pleasures, freedoms of to follow one's desires (*muḫallā wa hawāhu*, 254), and being held in honour and esteem" (255). *Ğahl*, *fusq*, *tabdīl* and *ḍalāl* are, in a sense, all antonyms of *ᶜaql*, each of which may imply a different process in the formation of a community, but all communities identified are oblivious to anything outside worldly pursuits

[23] This is Walzer's translation. *Ğāhiliyya* may be taken to be derived from *ğahl*, which is the opposite of *ḥilm*, and in this case, it means reacting without recourse to *ᶜaql*, i.e., guided only by emotions.

and immediate gratification of needs and desires. It is no wonder, then, that al-Fārābī stipulates for the leader of his 'perfect state' that "(8) He should by nature not crave for food and drink and sexual intercourse, and have a natural aversion to gambling and hatred of the pleasures which these pursuits provide (249)". And, "(10) Dirham and dinar and other worldly pursuits should be of little value in his view (249)". The four items named here, food, drink, money and sex, are all objects of desire that, having turned into obsession, can disrupt and disable the workings of *ᶜaql*.

The other crucial antithesis to *ᶜaql* is, understandably, *hawā*, a word denoting emotions ranging from simple first inclination to love, passion and obsession, that leads to and is driven by desire (*šahwa*). Ibn al-Ǧawzī's *D̲amm al-hawā* is more a treatise on desire and less a straightforward exploration of profane love as Giffen sees it.[24] *Hawā* is always twin to *šahwa* in his writing, seen as early as the title of the second chapter of the work, "*fī d̲amm al-hawā wa al-šahawāt*". *Hawā*, the real enemy (*ᶜaduww*), or antithesis of *ᶜaql*, is condemned only when it exceeds the boundaries of an initial inclination (*mayl*) and develops into a full-fledged desire, or will (*irāda*), that seeks immediate pleasure but necessarily ends in pain or ruin (*D̲amm al-hawā* 12-13); when it arrests *ᶜaql*'s ability to suppress desire he speaks of in *Kitāb al-Ad̲kiyāʾ* (10). When *hawā* takes control of *ᶜaql*, dramatized as the rampage of desire in the *Nights* the sea brings on to land, the world is turned upside down, utopia into dystopia. The initial encounter between the juxtaposed fisherman and the demon facilitates and brings about another set of encounter and juxtaposition, that of the saviour king and the enchanted king. The saviour king, it is inferred from the state of affairs in his kingdom, embodied by the fisherman, is an epitome of *ᶜaql*. This is confirmed by his attentiveness to the goings-on in his

[24] L. A. Giffen, *Profane*. On the subject see also J. N. Bell, *Love*.

kingdom, and his swift action in 'righting the wrong' once he discovers the story of the enchanted prince. His astute observance of *ᶜaql* paradigmatic of the symbolic order defining kingship brings him well-deserved reward—he expands his kingdom into an empire. This is not true from the perspective of the enchanted prince who, though saved, must give up his kingdom to the saviour king's vizier and serve his saviour as courtier. But what is the colossal wrong that cannot be redeemed except with a kingdom?

4. Dystopia and the Rule of Desire

The contrast between the kingdom ruled by the older king and that by his younger counterpart provides a clue. There is no 'unhealthy' desire in the former. The king lives by the rules of the symbolic order overseen by *ᶜaql* and makes sure that it pervades his kingdom. His conduct bespeak of the qualities of a king required by Ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ and of a leader of utopia by al-Fārābī. His appetite for food, a tantalizing dish to be made out of the four-colour fishes, is tempered by a stateliness conveyed in Ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ's *ᶜaql*, *ḥikma*, *ᶜiffa* and *ᶜadl*. When he is thrice deprived of an eagerly anticipated delicacy, he does not chop off the cook's, the vizier's or the fisherman's head, as Hārūn al-Rašīd often threatens to do to his officers and servants when things do not go his way. Rather, he embarks on an investigative journey that will take him to an injustice in need of redress. His justice is swift. He, as al-Fārābī would have the leader of his 'perfect state' do, carries out what he thinks ought to be done decisively, ridding the enchanted kingdom of the queen and her demon lover. Such a king, unsurprisingly in a utopian world, has the loyalty of his officers and obedience of his subjects. His vizier safeguards his kingdom on his behalf while he is away for a year, and the fisherman upholds the symbolic order. That the fisherman is able to 'domesticate' the demon and the

'sea' is a dead-give-away clue to the state of harmony that permeates the kingdom of which he is citizen.

The 'enchanted kingdom' contrarily falls under the spell of desire, of *hawā* and its attendant *šahwa*. The queen and her demon lover in the 'Enchanted King' are, like the demon in 'The Fisherman and the Demon', driven by their unruly *hawā*. Their actions, determined by their desire, *šahwa*, for each other (Dār Ṣādir 1: 31; Mahdi 117), lead to indiscretion, provoke a reaction from the king, and condemn the kingdom to a sub-human mode of existence. There is, however, something un-Šahriyār like in the young king's reaction that distinguishes him from his saviour. Like Šahriyār, he king thinks he is happily married (to his cousin) until he discovers his wife's betrayal. Unlike Šahriyār, who kills the adulterers in a swift, decisive action, this king fails to rectify the situation. He follows his wife, upon hearing the murmurs of his maids, and spies her in action with her demon lover. He rushes to kill his rival and wounds him, then hurries in his departure without making certain of the demon's death and, more poignantly, does not even attempt to punish his wife. When he spares his wife his kingdom falls prey to black magic, and he loses half of his humanity, and his kingdom turns into a sea and subjects fishes. For, unlike the fisherman who curbs the demon's *hawā*, he fails to rule desire in his kingdom. Called by one of his maids *muġaffal* (Dār Ṣādir 1: 30),[25] a near synonym of *aḥmaq* for Ibn al-Ǧawzī (*Aḫbār al-ḥamqā* 22), he himself being subject to the sway of *hawā*, as the love poems he recites show, and lets his queen, desire, take over. There is no redemption for a un-Šahrayār-like king. He may be saved but he loses his entitlement to the crown. No king under the influence of *hawā* can administer justice—reward the right and punish the wrong—when he is not in enough possession of *ᶜaql* to control desire.

25 *Ablam* in Mahdi (p. 116), translated as 'stupid' by Haddawy (p. 56), denotes a kind of *baqla* in Arabic lexicography.

The contrast of the enchanted kingdom to its former carnation and, more particularly, to the other kingdom, accentuated by the parallel roles of the demons and the queen in the stories, brings to the fore the utopian promise of the land and dystopian tendency of the sea. The sea is the home of dark forces, a playground of the demons, and a world run by desire. It is a place where *ᶜaql* yields control to *hawā*. *ᶜAql*, according to Ibn al-Ğawzī in *Kitāb al-Aḏkiyāʾ*, is the most important feature that distinguishes humans from animals (10). Its malfunction, as the story of 'The Enchanted King' tells us, reduces humans to animals, to the colourful fishes who have no say in what happens to them. *ᶜAql* is, more over, contrasted to *ğunūn* (madness) that is, in Arabic lexicography, a description of the diminished capacity of reason (*nuqṣān al-ᶜaql*) when its workings are concealed (from *s-t-r*) or engulfed in darkness. A genie is so called because it is invisible to the eye, or, more appropriately for the *Nights*, hidden in the depth of the sea, as in 'The Fisherman and the Demon', or tucked away in a secret dome outside the city-kingdom, as in 'The Enchanted King'. *Mağnūn*, the conventional term for a madman, is someone who has given in to *hawā*, whether the term is understood as loss of reason or possession by a genie. In either case, the consequence is exactly the same. There is, then, something intriguing about the domestication of the demon in the story of 'The Fisherman and the Demon'. All is not lost, it seems, and perhaps, like in the story of 'The Enchanted King', the sea may be turned back into the land, dystopia into utopia. There is, however, a condition, as the integration of the two kingdoms in this cycle of stories impart to us: reason must regain control. When reason returns, there is another possible, more cheerful outcome for the king, when desire is not simply eradicated but rather educated into love, as 'The Story of Ğullanār' tells us.

'Ğullanār' can be vexingly disorienting because it reads like a fairytale made of two distinct

parts each of a different genre[26] notwithstanding the genealogical continuity. The short first part is a love story about the eponymous sea princess who, after a quarrel with her brother Ṣāliḥ,[27] runs away from home in a huff, determined to marry the first worthy landman she meets. As luck would have it, she is sold to Šahrimān,[28] an elderly 'good' king pining for an heir. It is love at first sight for the king. He forsakes the 'three thousand beauties in the palace'[29]and devotes himself to loving her. A year and nine months later she gives birth to a son, Badr Bāsim. The twice-as-long second part is a love quest or, more appropriately, an adventure. Šahrimān is now dead and Badr Bāsim is king. He must marry, Ṣāliḥ advises his sister Ğullanār, and a suitable bride must be found. But who is worthy of her son, the Queen frets, the best of both worlds, of the sea and the land? A sea princess, Ğawhara, is in the one, but hush, Ṣāliḥ cautions, let us make sure Badr Bāsim is asleep before I describe her to you, for she has the power to make anyone fall in love with her upon hearing her description. Badr Bāsim feigns sleep and eavesdrops on his mother and uncle, and before he knows it he is in a 'sea of love':[30] "*wa ṣāra fī qalbihi min ağlihā laḥīb al-nār wa ġaraqa fī baḥr lā udrik lahu sāḥil wa lā qarār*" (Dār Ṣādir 5: 273).[31] He leaves behind his mother's back and follows his uncle to the sea. From that moment things spiral out of control.

They go to Ğawhara's father, King al-Samandal,[32] but he rudely turns them down. Ṣāliḥ unleashes his army on al-Samandal and in the end captures him and puts him in jail. Alas, Ğawhara is gone, having run away from the mayhem. Badr Bāsim haplessly follows suit and

26 See M. Gerhardt, *Art*, pp. 305-306.

27 *Ṣāyiḥ* in Mahdi.

28 Nameless in Mahdi.

29 This phrase is taken from a poem written by Po Chi-yu, a T'ang Dynasty poet, in commemoration of Yang Kuei-fei, the favourite concubine of emperor Yang Ming-huang who, like the elderly king in 'Ğullanār', was so in love with her that he became monogamous. 'Three thousand beauties' refers to all the royal concubines.

30 Phrase borrowed from a film of the same title, a 1989 police drama about crimes of passion directed by Harold Becker.

31 In Mahdi: "*wa fī qalbihi min hādihi al-ğāriya nār lā taṭfā wa lahīb lā yaḫfā*" (p. 501).

32 Al-Šamandal in Mahdi.

catches up with her. She, of course, will never marry the cause of her homelessness and, more to the point, without proper protocol. She transforms him into a bird and leaves him to his fate. He is captured and taken to a king whose queen recognizes his humanity and returns him to human form. The king decides to escort him to his uncle but their ship sink on the way. Badr Bāsim survives only to end up in Queen Lāb's death trap of a bed. She is the infamous witch who uses men like sex toys and discards them when she tires. Badr Bāsim does not mind until he discovers that his queen is in love with another man she has transformed into a bird and that she often transforms herself into a bird in order to make love with him. With the help of an old sage, he escapes her attempt at transforming him into a mule and transforms her into one. He is to take her away, anywhere, the old sage tells him, but never to give her to anyone. Of course he forgets and for a thousand gold dinars he sells Lāb to her parents. He is recaptured, taken back to Queen Lāb's palace, and imprisoned in a cage as a hideously ugly bird. A sympathetic slave-girl, on the advice of the old sage, sneaks him to his mother Ǧullanār, who restores him and destroys Queen Lāb. Suddenly, all is well again. Al-Samandal agrees to the marriage proposal and orders his daughter, Ǧawhara, to acquiesce to his will and she does and they all live happily ever after.

There is nothing more frustrating than a lame story with a banal plot about a group of foolish people carrying on in a most stupid fashion. Does no one in the story use his head? Who on earth falls in love by merely hearing about a woman's beauty? What makes al-Samandal reject Badr Bāsim who, in all accounts, is more than equal to Ǧawhara? What is the deal with Ṣāliḥ? Does he think force can secure a match for his nephew and ensure his marital bliss? And what of Badr Bāsim, who is supposedly the most powerful, courageous, and just king of his time ("*wa kāna awḥad ahl zamānihi fī al-ᶜizz wa al-šaǧāᶜa wa al-ᶜadl fī al-nās*", Dār

Ṣādir 5: 271)?[33] He, according to his mother and uncle, is of unequalled "*ḥusn, ǧamāl, ᶜaql, dīn, adab, muruwwa, mulk, ḥasab* and *nasab*" (Dār Ṣādir 5: 272; Mahdi 245). His actions do not answer to the adjectives bestowed upon him. Rather, he comes across a rash youth led astray by his unchecked passions. His succumbing to Lāb's allure makes no sense, especially after the loud warning he receives from the old sage. And, the resolution of the crisis, Lāb's capture of Badr Bāsim, makes little sense. These are the inevitable conclusions one comes to reading the second part of 'Ǧullanār', looking for a fantastic adventure of a young, dashing, intelligent king finding true love. But perhaps all the foolishness is intended in the second part of 'The Story of Ǧullanār'.

5. The Education of Desire[34]

Its stark contrast to part one cannot be innocent, especially viewed from the perspective of the *Arabian Nights*' narrative logic governing the relation between the land and the sea I have already explored. The sedate and serene marriage of Šahrimān and Ǧullanār on land is the epitome of reason, after all Šahrimān is known as *ᶜāqil* (Dār Ṣādir 5: 268).[35] The tumultuous courtship of Badr Bāsim and Ǧawhara is, on the other hand, *aḥmaq*, just like al-Samandal (Dār Ṣādir 5: 273; Mahdi 501) and takes place in the world of the sea, dystopia. The tumult ends only when Ǧullanār retrieves her son and returns to the land, utopia. *ᶜAql*, the law of utopia, is manifest in Šahrimān and Ǧullanār's love, and *ḥamāqa*, the rule of the game in dystopia, is *hawā* exemplified by all the characters living their passions to the hilt. In their passionate life, they are in danger of losing *ᶜaql* altogether. While al-Samandal mocks Ṣāliḥ

33 In Mahdi: "*wa kāna awḥad ahl zamānihi fī al-furūsiyya wa al-šaǧāᶜa wa al-ᶜadl fī al-raᶜiyya*" (p. 498).

34 For the importance of the idea of 'the education of desire' in conceptualization of utopia as social transformation, see Levitas, *Utopia*, p. 124. Levitas, of course, does not discuss the impact of this process in driving narrative, shaping story or structuring text.

35 This adjective is not used in Mahdi, but the description adequately conveys this quality of the king.

for seeking Ǧawhara's hand for Badr Bāsim, "*hal naqaṣa ᶜaqluka li hāḏihi al-ġāya*?" (Dār Ṣādir 2: 252),[36] Ṣāliḥ in turn thinks of him as '*aḥmaq*' and finds him '*ġāfil*' (unaware of the goings-on around him) when he returns with his army to take over the kingdom (Dār Ṣādir 2: 253; Mahdi 507). Badr Bāsim, on the other hand, loses his ability to articulate and communicate, a feature of a human endowed with *ᶜaql* in Arabic lexicography, when he is repeatedly transformed into a bird, in fact, a bird with an unstoppable appetite for food. When he is turned into a bird for the first time and taken to a king he binges on human food offered to him (Dār Ṣādir 2: 256; Mahdi 513). However, this happens to him only in the world of the sea and never in the world of the land. Here, *ḥamāqa*, associated with desire, anarchy and war, is juxtaposed to *ᶜaql*, the foundation of love, harmony and peace. These two epistémes, just like in 'The Fisherman and the Demon' cycle, structure storytelling here, each serving as a literary trope underpinning a narrative of the contrast between utopia and dystopia. This contrast is accentuated when Ǧullanār brings together the two worlds.

In doing so, Ǧullanār also unleashes dystopia onto utopia. Her initial yearlong silence seems to have kept the sea at bay. As soon as she speaks, the land opens up to the sea. Her mother and brother are invited along, and her son is initiated into the world of the sea, and in a blink of the eye the sea overwhelms the land. The contamination is not entirely catastrophic. The misadventures Badr Bāsim suffers and survives, albeit it haplessly, educates him into his father's true heir; he finally knows love, or is happily married in the *Arabian Nights'* speak. The seemingly pointless second part of the story becomes poignant against the background of its preamble. The story is, from the perspective of utopia, one of unabashed optimism. Utopia may have to work hard towards domesticating desire but in the end dystopia does not have to be more than a nightmarish episode that can be overcome, tamed and transcended. Perhaps a

[36] In Mahdi: "*Ēš ṣāb ᶜaqlak*" (505).

dystopian nightmare is essential in the preservation and maintenance of utopia. Utopia grows in strength and comes to spread its control when it masters desire. And mastery necessarily comes with education and experience. The foolish characters in the story—Badr Bāsim, Ṣāliḥ, al-Samandal and, to a certain extent, Ǧawhara, having lived through a life run over by desire, give in to love; they give up *ḥamāqa* in favour of *ᶜaql*, especially after the destruction of Lāb, queen of runaway desire.

Kingship in the *Arabian Nights*, I have posited elsewhere,[37] is often spoken of in the language of love. Its legitimacy and effectiveness are premised on educating desire into love, self-interest into loyalty to an 'other', be that king, wife, subject, or community. Marriage in this context is a metaphor for the contract that binds the king to his officers, subjects and, above all, kingship and kingdom. It is a contract based on *ᶜaql* that, when allowed to be the operative word in a story, ensures harmony, prosperity and continuity of the kingdom of the story. Love is commitment, not only of a king to a queen but also of kingship to *ᶜaql*. Love, *ḥubb* or *maḥabba*, as Arabic theories of love tell us, may be founded on *ᶜaql*, in fact, it is best when it is what develops among the *ᶜāqilūn*—between king and vizier, friend and friend, or man and woman. When in charge, *ᶜaql*, as in *al-ᶜaql ᶜan al-ǧimāᶜ* (refrain from sexual intercourse) in Arabic lexicography, stops love from turning into a kind of excessive *ᶜišq* driven by sexual desire (*šahwat ǧimāᶜ*) and that results in madness or mortal peril.[38] The two parts of 'Ǧullanār' together, then, teach one important lesson about the difference between love and desire. Father and son, Šahrimān and Badr Bāsim, have similar trajectories in their transformation into a befitting king of utopia. Šahrimān, "sensible, discerning, and pious man

[37] See W. Ouyang, "Epical".

[38] See, for example, Muḥammad b. Dāwūd (d. 297/910), *K. al-Zahra*, ed. al-Sāmarrāʾī, pp. 55-57 and 58-59; Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), *Ṭawq*, ed. al-Qāsimī, pp. 27-35; Ibn al-Ǧawzī (d. 597/1200), *Ḏamm*, pp. 289-295; Ibn Qayyim al-Ǧawziyya (d. 751/1350), *Rawḍa*, ed. Rabāb, pp. 20-40, 49-64; Ibn Abī Ḥaǧala (d. 776/1375), *Ṣabāba*, pp. 11-13; and al-Nuwayrī (d. 732/1332), *Nihāya*, vol. II, pp. 125-131.

who judged fairly between the strong and the weak and treated the offenders with mercy" (Mahdi 481; Haddawy 383),[39] has only one weakness, an appetite for sex and "enjoyed having many women and concubines" (Mahdi 481; Haddawy 384).[40] He is without an heir until he learns to abandon the pure joy of sex for the commitment of responsible love. When he 'really' falls in love with Ǧullanār and becomes 'exclusively' devoted to her, he is finally blessed with a son. Badr Bāsim begins as a good ruler—"judging fairly between the strong and the weak and exacting from the prince the right of the beggar" (Mahdi 499; Haddawy 399; Dār Ṣādir 5: 272)—but, like his father, must first go mad with desire then learn love in order to become a true king. That desire is susceptible to love's education marks the story's distinction from 'The Enchanted King', and explains the two young kings' different destinies. It, however, highlights the symbiosis between desire and love, and between the two worlds of the sea and land in the Arabic textual world.

The two worlds emerging out of narrative in these stories are clearly the work of imagination, fantastic imaginings that take as their material cosmological configurations loosely based in the Islamic sacred text and faith but more in the sources from regional pre-Islamic and other 'Eastern' cultures. That the ordinary (humans) can domesticate the extra-ordinary (genies, demons) points to a will to impose, in all naïveté, kingship, as an ideal world where justice, harmony and happiness prevail, on the ordering of the cosmos. The world is only utopia when the order it wills upon itself is followed to the tee. Where there is rupture in this order it easily descends into dystopia where humanity is lost (humans become fishes, animals or birds), the 'father' of the order is incapacitated, and lawlessness prevails. Utopia in this context is a fantasy structured by kingship, and dystopia a nightmare mired in chaos in the absence of

[39] Not in Dār Ṣādir.
[40] Not in Dār Ṣādir, though it mentions that he has a hundred concubines (vol. 5, p. 264).

proper kingship. But the story of the disgraced enchanted king is only an episode in the framing story of 'The Fisherman and the Demon' that in turn sets up the story of the saviour king. It is, so to speak, a nightmare within a fantasy that is destined for an awakening, or more aptly, enlightenment. The dystopian nightmare dissolves into the utopian fantasy when desire is destroyed, as in 'The Fisherman and the Demon', or educated into love, as in 'Ǧullanār'.

The ways in which utopia and dystopia co-exist, overlap and interact, however, make the relationship between them more ambivalent than what the happy ending would have us believe. Ǧullanār, the titular protagonist, cuts a paradoxical figure too in the story as a creature of the sea and the discourse of co-dependent utopia and dystopia. She who unleashes desire from and on those around her is also a paragon of reason and wisdom. She tests her husband for a year before she confesses that she returns his love and is with child. When her son goes missing she does not panic but instead, patient and steadfast, she returns to watch over his kingdom on his behalf. And when at last she learns of her son's whereabouts she rescues him and restores him to the throne. Perhaps the discourse is more complex and the opposition between utopia and dystopia is not as stark as day and night. May be utopia is not what it cuts out to be as object of fantasy. Does not ᶜAbd Allāh the seaman reject the world of ᶜAbd Allāh the landman at the end of their long friendship upon hearing that the Muslims on earth mourn their dead (Dār Ṣādir 6: 576)? The rejection may be couched in ideological terms—that it is appropriate for Muslims to rejoice equally in birth and death because both are God's gift and manifestation of his will—but it fits in with the logic of the narrative too.

In 'The Story of ᶜAbd Allāh and Seaman and ᶜAbd Allāh the Landman',[41] the sea is the source of grace. The landman is a poor fisherman who has to live on the generosity of another ᶜAbd Allāh, the baker, until he captures the seaman, who in exchange for earthly fruits and

[41] This story is not included in Mahdi.

nuts brings the landman pearls, corals and other jewels from the sea. The landman's sudden riches attract suspicion and at some point he is accused of thievery. The king, however, does the right thing, finds out the truth and, rewards the landman by making him son-in-law (never mind his wife and ten children) and right-hand vizier (never mind his lack of qualifications). When the king finds out what a loyal friend the baker has been, the latter too is adopted by the palace and becomes the left-hand vizier. Kingship is working, it seems, and the land is a good world to be in. There is, however, something unsettlingly mercenary about the king's encouragement of the landman's weekly rendez-vous with the seaman. The palace, it seems, would do anything to secure the treasures the seaman brings, even emptying its pantries of food. There is a hint that the prosperity of the kingdom is, after all, dependent on the gifts from the sea and, more importantly, that greed, a desire for worldly goods, has slightly gone out control. But perhaps the more devastating blow to this utopia is the implicit rejection of the ideology underpinning it. The utopia on land the seaman yearns to hear about and see—the world of Islam—has, according to him, completely misunderstood Islam. The table is at last turned on the land. The land is for a change the sea's dystopia.

The hint dropped here of disillusion with kingship and its underpinning ideology—an extra-ordinary interpretation of Islam—remains only a tantalizing clue, especially in the absence of a more clearly delineated trajectory of desire here. It is true that the kingdom's appetite for the riches of the sea is insatiable, but there is no hint of desire gone mad or justice undone. The story leaves us in a lurch. We find ourselves suddenly abandoned because our guide, the seaman, is an eccentric who decides to simply walk off the story in a huff. This bizarre ending should generate a number of questions in need of answers. How are we to make sense of it? What is so outrageous about mourning the dead? There is nothing un-Islamic about it. What is

really wrong with utopia? What makes another landman in the *Arabian Nights*, Sindbād the Sailor, fall in love with the sea? It cannot be just wanderlust, can it? What makes the sea, on occasion, a better world to be in? If only there were a story of counter migration, of migration from the land to the sea, to tell us what it is like to be a human resident alien in the sea! The *Arabian Nights* may be silent on the subject, but pre-modern Chinese fiction is not. Perhaps what is found in Chinese stories may help to fill a lacuna left by the *Nights* in our understanding of the function of love and desire in narrative informed by the ways in which the two epistémes construct utopia and dystopia.

6. Utopia is Dystopia

The world of Chinese fiction, early or late, popular or literati, is not very different from that of the *Arabian Nights*, even though the expressions may seem divergent. Its use of desire as a literary trope through which the symbolic order is established and questioned, as in the *Arabian Nights*, is universal. Pre-modern Chinese fiction has been more fortunate than its Arabic counterpart in that there is a longer tradition of history and commentary that makes it easier for curious readers to contextualize it and grasp its entanglement with the broader Chinese worldview(s). That classical Chinese fiction is political partaking in the ideological contests (among Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism) of its time is not in dispute. Current debates centre rather on details of history and politics. Who is the real author? What are the popular sources of a literati novel? Are popular stories of oral origin or do they mimic orality? What are the politics of re-writing earlier stories? Is the story Confucian, Buddhist or Taoist or does it satirize all?[42]

[42] Complex and detailed discussions of these issues in pre-modern Chinese fiction may be found in P. Hanan, *Vernacular*; R.E. Hegel, *Novel*; C.T. Hsia, *Classic*; W.L. Idema, *Vernacular*; V.H. Mair, *Contributions*; A.H. Plaks (ed.), *Narrative*; id., "Early Chinese Short Story"; id., *Four Masterworks*.

There is in general a consensus that a story, short or long, is framed by a meta-narrative articulated in the form of 'kingship' structured by Confucian ethics. The king, or emperor, is expected to rule benevolently and justly, righting wrong and punishing evil. His subjects are expected to serve him and the kingdom loyally. However, one is only entitled to serve the emperor if he succeeds in the civil service examination. Service in turn guarantees his, as well as his family's high social status and prosperity (mainly wealth) in the world. Loyalty, moreover, extends from emperor to parents, teachers, friends, colleagues, and underlings. Sexuality, needless to say, is similarly tightly 'controlled'.[43] The Confucian world is located in here and now, this life and this kingdom. Buddhism brings to this setup a before- and after-life and a series of endless reincarnations, as well as principles of *karma* and retribution across generation. More importantly, it situates the Middle Kingdom, the empire, within a world beyond the here and now overseen by the Buddha. Taoism adds a subversive element. It views the world in a broader cosmos, made up of the five elements of gold, wood, water, fire, and earth, that includes animals and extra-ordinary creatures. It more significantly disdains the community-centred Confucian order in favour of individual freedom, which itself is a way of privileging nature (Tao) over culture (Confucianism).

Buddhism and Taoism in Chinese fiction are often of popular varieties that incorporate local and foreign (particularly Indian) myth and lore in such a way that the origins of its motifs, themes and tropes are not always traceable. Nevertheless, a pantheon of 'gods' headed by the Jade Emperor is discernible as the bigger cosmological system that governs the Middle Kingdom on the basis of a concoction of Buddhist and Taoist principles. It is not surprisingly, then, that there is an abundance of stories about extra-land parts of the world, the worlds of

[43] See, for example, H. Eirfring (ed.), *Love*; M.W. Huang, *Desire*; W.Li, *Enchantment*; K. McMahon, *Misers*.

the sea and sky and what lies beneath, above, between and beyond, and their inhabitants, fairies, demons and monsters.[44] The world of the sea, especially the dragon kingdoms that inhabit and control every lake, river and sea, occupies a special place in Chinese mythology and fiction.[45] Dragons are guardians of water, one of the five foundational elements of the cosmos, and play an important role in maintaining the health of the cosmos. They are responsible for generating and distributing cloud, rain, thunder, lightening, storm, flood and drought. Dragon kingdoms are practically mirror images of kingdoms on the land (emperors on the land are spoken of as dragons). They have similar social and military hierarchies (including all sea creatures), albeit without the scholarly tier, and follow relatively similar code of conduct centered on the idea of loyalty. They too are answerable to the Jade Emperor.[46]

Dragons and humans, as equal members of the cosmos, interact regularly and their actions have impact on each other's worlds. Disputes are not uncommon. In the sixteenth century *Journey to the West* the dragons are instrumental in the story. The Monkey King for example storms a dragon palace and acquires his weapon there.[47] Another dragon king files a 'wrongful death suit' against the T'ang emperor Tai-tsung with the king of the underworld because the emperor has promised to stay his execution to be carried out by his grand minister. The dragon king was to be punished for disobeying a heavenly edict and causing 'unwritten' human suffering and death. The T'ang emperor is dragged down to the underworld to answer to the charges and is, of course, exonerated at the end of the process. On his way back to the underground world he sees masses of suffering spirits because they

[44] See, for example, R. Huntington, *Alien Kind*; M. K. Spring, "Animal Allegories"; and J. T. Zeitlin, *Historian*.

[45] For the development of the figure of dragon princess in Chinese mythology, religions and fiction, see E. H. Schafer, *Divine Woman*.

[46] See, for example, Q. Zhao, *Dragons*.

[47] Subject of chapter 3 in *The Journey to the West*, particularly vol. 1, pp. 102-107.

lived a corrupt life above ground. When he returns to his palace he orders that true Buddhism be brought home from India, the West, and unleashes the journey to the West.[48] *The Journey to the West*, a fictional account of a real monk's travels to India to obtain Buddhist sutras, is commonly regarded as a satire of the Buddhist quest for enlightenment, the Taoist voodoos, and the Confucian civil service system. The stories contained within, including dragon stories, are informed by views of the human condition, affirming, subverting or rejecting the ways in which humans conduct themselves in the world.[49]

The novel is arguably about taming worldly desires, symbolized by the monk's flesh endlessly coveted by uncountable monsters and demons, as a first step towards enlightenment, *nirvana*, paving the way to individual salvation in both here and hereafter premised on an enlightened lifestyle similar to the one prescribed in the *Nights*; to be good and to do good. When this set of ethics manifests itself in the person of an emperor, such as T'ang Tai-tsung, then the narrativized empire comes to resemble the utopian kingdom of the *Nights*. Paradoxically, as in the *Nights*, desire is often the mechanism through which subversion is effected. The satire of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism here, it may also be argued, is located in the monk's lack of desire, therefore, curiosity to distinguish between good and bad. He is more like al-Samandal in 'Ǧullanār', a '*muġaffal*' in Ibn al-Ǧawzī's book. He repeatedly falls into the traps of the monsters and demons, always blind to their evil intentions and quick to admonish, punish or banish the Monkey, his one and only true champion, when the latter alerts him to the treachery ahead. Ambivalence towards desire, in pre-modern Chinese fiction, is in this sense very similar to that of the *Nights*, even though the details of the symbolic order informing and structuring this ambivalence may seem on the surface,

[48] Subject of chapters 10, 11 and 12 in *The Journey to the West*, vol. 1, pp. 214-281.

[49] See, more particularly, A. H. Plaks, "Hsi-yu chi: Transcendence of Emptiness" (chapter 3, *Four Masterworks*, pp. 183-276); and A. C. Yu, "Introduction", *Journey to the West*, vol. 1, pp. 1-62.

understandably, quite different. This more-than-skin-deep similarity, I hope to show, opens up a genuine vista for the two traditions to shed light on each other.

'The Story of Liu Yi',[50] a story belonging to the late T'ang (618-907) genre of *ch'uan-qi* fictional biography[51] by Li Chaowei, tells the tale of a match made-in-heaven, so to speak, between an earthly scholar and a sea princess, of the interaction between the sea world and the land world, very much in the similar vein of the *Nights* stories I have already discussed. Liu Yi is a young scholar from the Yi-feng period (676-678) on his way home to (Xiangyin) having failed in the civil service examination. He remembers a friend on his way and takes a detour (to Jingyang) for a visit. He suddenly sees a strikingly beautiful but very distressed woman on the roadside shepherding some sheep. He stops to offer help. She tells him that she is the youngest daughter of the dragon king of the Lake Donting married by her parents to the younger son of the dragon king of the River Jing. Her husband and parents-in-law have been mistreating her and because she complained have now banished her to the riverbank to shepherd the rain workers. Would he, she begs, take a message to her parents to come for her rescue? He chivalrously agrees and before he take his leave, he asks, "you will not avoid me once you get home, will you?", to which she replies, "of course not, I will treat you like family" (9: 3411). Liu Yi does get the message to the king of Lake Donting and in a flash the dragon princess is rescued by his uncle, Lord Qiantang, and brought home restored to full beauty and glory. In fact, before he knows it, Lord Qiantang is proposing to him, and he is turning down the proposal in anger only to regret his hasty refusal when he says goodbye to the princess. He returns home and becomes a rich man from the gifts given by the dragon

[50] First collected in *Taiping guangji* (accounts widely gathered in the Taiping era), compiled by Li Fang (925-96) *et al.*, 'The Story of Liu Yi' appears in chapter 419, vol. 9, pp. 3410-3417.

[51] For the origins, development and features of this genre, see P. Hanan, *Chinese*; T. H. Kam, *Rise*; S. M. Yim, *Structure*.

kings. Alas, he is not a happy man. He moves from one place to another, and his wives keep dying on him. Finally, he marries for the third time a woman who reminds him of the dragon princess. When she bears him a son a year later she reveals to him that she is indeed the dragon princess and that she has been in love since they first met. Through her he acquires immortality and together they live happily ever after.

'The Story of Liu Yi'[52] may be read as a love story written very much in the *Arabian Nights* fashion. Love is not immediate gratification of desire and must endure the test of time. The initial stirring of attraction, from the part of Liu Yi, is immediately quashed by reason, in this case, defined by Confucian mores. He explains to his wife in a conversation following the recognition scene that his 'Freudian slip' was not meant as an expression of feeling or love, even though later he thought of no one but the dragon princess. His initial rejection of her uncle's offer to marry her, a decision he regretted as soon as it was uttered, was in part a response to Lord Qiantang's crude and threatening way of making the offer. It was also required by his sense of honour. He did what he did out of a sense of duty (chivalry) and was not conniving at another's life in order to possess his wife. And, he was not going to give in to Lord Qiantiang's coercion (9: 3416). The happiness he eventually earns, from the perspective of his moral universe, is premised on patience and endurance but, more importantly, on educating desire into love. The story tells us that even though he thought of the dragon princess all the time, he learns to love his third wife completely. He is lucky then that the wife he truly loves turns out to be the dragon princess he has not been able to forget. His 'sense of honour' could have easily cost him his happiness if the dragon princess had been less

[52] 'The Story of Liu Yi' is one of the most popular 'love' stories from the pre-modern period that is subject to frequent anthologizing and, more importantly, rewriting. Later re-writings, such as the Yuan Dynasty (1276-1368) musical play (*zaju*), tend to focus on the love story between Liu Yi and the dragon princess and ignore other details of ideological subersions. See *Liu Yi*, transl. D. Hawkes, particularly "Introduction", pp. 1-27.

persistent in pursuing her desire.

Recognizing his feelings, even as early as their first encounter, and his regrets at refusing her uncle's offer, she convinces her parents to let her wait for him (they almost married her to another dragon prince), and when the right moment comes along she marries him as an ordinary land woman. She then patiently abides by time until she is certain of his love for her, more precisely after the birth of their son, and discloses her true identity. She clearly operates within a moral universe not hampered by the rules governing human behaviour. She may be careful, subtle and emotionally intelligent in courting Liu Yi, but she also pursues her desire in a single-minded fashion. Her world allows her to do that without recrimination. She is like Ǧullanār, and her world resembles Ǧullanār's sea. There is, however, a decisive difference: the world of the sea is not condemned as a hotbed of dark forces. On the contrary, it is a place where happiness can be found because desire is not feared, barred or punished. Her uncle, Lord Qiantang, for example, is an impetuous king often guided by his passion in his actions. At one time he was exiled to Lake Donting because of a number of 'natural disasters' his impetuous behaviour caused. His rescue of his niece was equally impetuous to say the least. He took immediate action as soon as he caught wind of his niece's distress (poof, he is gone and back). He practically wipes out the River Jing kingdom and the land communities around it. He does, like his niece, get results. His behaviour, rash from a certain perspective, is in this case rewarded despite all the killings that take place. His kingship is restored to him because his actions prove his worth as king—he is quick to right a wrong.

The juxtaposition of the land and sea in this Chinese story tells a tale of the role of desire in happiness. Liu Yi who follows the rules of his world is, it seems, destined to live an unfulfilled and unhappy life. He escapes only when his dragon princess rescues him from a

fate worse than death, and migrates to the sea. His happiness may be interpreted as his reward for righting a wrong, but it comes not from his world but another. Where desire is stifled happiness is not possible. The contrast between his two lives is clear: disappointment and melancholy followed by prosperity and bliss. The system in place seems to stand in the way of happiness. Liu Yi realizes this at the end. He forsakes this world completely and disappears into the sea, especially when the T'ang emperor takes an interest in the 'supernatural' and to begins to recruit people like Liu Yi to serve the empire. A relative, an official in the imperial system, has a chance encounter with him years later, and looks at Liu Yi's freedom and happiness with envy. "You are destined to be an immortal and I dried-up bones!" (9: 3417). Liu Yi gives him fifty life-prolonging pills and says, "don't hang around in the human world too long, you are just bringing trouble onto yourself!" (9: 3417). Before long, his relative disappears from this world too.

This story, it is clear, takes a jibe at the Confucian way of life, particularly its 'domestication' of desire. Liu Yi confesses that he was stopped from expressing his feelings towards the dragon princess by *li* (reason), equivalent to *ᶜaql* in Arabic, and *yi* (loyalty), the by-product of what may be termed in Arabic as love. These two defining principles of Confucianism are the opposite poles of *ch'in*, which operates very much like *hawā*, and *yu*, which is precisely *šahwa*. The story exposes the role of *li* and *yi* in, on occasion, imprisoning Confucian 'scholars' in a world of stagnation and unhappiness. It, more fundamentally, questions the Confucian worldview structured by duty, premised on *li* and *yi* to the detriment of happiness, founded in part on the satisfaction of *ch'in* and *yu*. In a brief epilogue, author Li Chaowei speaks tantalizingly of the intelligence, *lin*, of the non-human living creatures and how, without the benefit of an education, they instinctually do the right things (9: 3417). He offers

no further explication, but perhaps one may be found in adjacent texts.

The period in which ‘Liu Yi’ was written, the ninth century, coincided with the proliferation of pseudo-historical writings on anomalies (extra-ordinary events, places and creatures) and of stories of the supernatural intruding on the human world (animals transmogrifying into humans and taking part in their life). These writings, scrutinized as “strange writing”[53] and “the discourse on the foxes and ghosts”,[54] are said to be part of the dialogism taking place in Chinese culture before the tenth century, when Buddhism and Taoism were making inroads into Confucianism. The supernatural, the strange, and the extra-ordinary help to create a world larger than and beyond that which is delineated by Confucianism. The particular cultural dialogue in ‘Liu Yi’ is between Taoism, which represents a form of multiculturalism in its absorption of ‘local’ popular traditions, and Confucianism, which is ‘Han’-centric. This dialogue is often termed as a debate between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’. ‘Liu Yi’ takes the side of ‘nature’, or Taoism, and exposes the limitation of the Confucian worldview and order. The sea, in this context, is the crux around which a challenge to the land is constructed and from which this challenge is launched. Perhaps ᶜAbd Allāh the seaman’s boycott of ᶜAbd Allāh the landman is similarly a challenge to the limitation of the worldview and order structuring the land. There is one serious consequence of this ‘limitation’ that bubbles beneath the surface of these stories and emerges out of the water daringly in ‘The Seven Voyages of Sindbād the Sailor’.

7. Transgression and Writing

Utopia, recent critical analyses of utopian literature show, is by definition totalitarian,

[53] See R. Ford Campany, *Strange*.

[54] See T. L. Chan, *Discourses*. Even though the book focuses on the eighteenth century, it does trace the motifs of foxes and ghosts to early Chinese writing and fiction.

tyrannical and oppressive because, for utopia to be utopia, absolute order must be maintained at all cost. There is no room for desire in utopia because it is charged up with transgressive impulses and wanderlust. Desire must necessarily be educated, and fitted into the utopian strait jacket. With the 'domestication' of desire, utopia closes in on itself and in its isolation it becomes, so to speak, frozen in time and place. In other words, there is no life in utopia: every one must live a regimented life like a robot. There can be no curiosity, no wonder, and no wandering, without which new knowledge may not be created and no stories will be told. There is no 'life' in utopia and there can be no stories. Utopia, from the perspective of storytelling, is nightmare. When desire breaks out of the strait jacket and disturbs the order of things, adventures are possible again and stories are generated. When desire frees itsself of the strait jacket, comes back to life and disturbs the order of things, the world changes. Stories run ahead of themselves when desire 'lands'; they unfold when the fisherman rescues the demon, when Ǧullanār marries Šahrimān, when ^{c}Abd Allāh the landman befriends ^{c}Abd Allāh the seaman, when Liu Yu meets the dragon princess, and when Sindbād puts out to sea. The stories I have discussed above all begin when desire is born. Dystopia, from this perspective, is fantasy. Utopia and dystopia are, however, a happily married 'ancient' co-dependent couple. They cannot do without each other; in fact, one defines the other. *Ǧanna*, the name given to the Garden of Eden, has ambivalent connotations. It is so called because it is covered with such lush greenery that earth is concealed. This concealment, as 'The Story of Sindbād the Sailor' tells us, masks the flip side of its identity, a sea monster that hides behind the veil provided by its greenery as well as the sea. It is, in this sense, like the genies (*ǧinn*, *ǧānn*) in the *Nights* that prowl beneath the surface of the sea. Arrival at the Garden of Eden is ever so sweet because it is always preceded by hardship, by the dangers at sea and by death.

Settling permanently there, however, stifles curiosity, adventure and life. In the wake of his fifth voyage, Sindbād settles down at home and becomes even richer until, one day, he meets up with other merchants who have just returned from a journey abroad. Sindbād suddenly remembers the happiness he felt whenever he came home from a sojourn abroad and the elation of seeing family and friends again. Nostalgia for those feelings would serve as the impulse behind his sixth voyage (4: 30).[55] Sindbād the Sailor necessarily straddles the two worlds, of the sea and the land, of dystopia and utopia, because running away from utopia makes storytelling possible and meaningful. The symbolic order that desire loves to disrupt is paradoxically what makes meaning, storytelling and writing possible. The concept of '*ᶜuqalāᵓ al-maǧānīn*' in Arabic, like *lin* in Chinese, comes to be the poignant paradox expressive of the importance of transgression in a profound understanding of the ways in which humans and the world around them work, in epiphany.

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[55] '*Fa ᶜinda ḏālika taḏakkartu ayyām qudūmī min al-safar wa faraḥī liqāᵓ ahlī wa aṣḥābī wa aḥbābī wa faraḥī bi duḫūlī bilādī fa ištāqat nafsī ilā al-safar wa al-tiǧāra*' (vol. 4, pp. 30).

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