AN APPROACH TO THE ARABIAN NIGHTS, AND ITS INFLUENCE ON
THE LEGEND OF THE WANDERING KING BY LAURA GALLEGÓ GARCÍÁ

by

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Abstract

This thesis presents an approach to the Arabian Nights and to Laura Gallego García’s The Legend of the Wandering King through the lenses of the metaphors offered by Jorge Luis Borges in his poem entitled “Metaphors of The One Thousand and One Nights.” The Arabian Nights includes a great variety of tales covering fables, poems, riddles, moral and fantasy stories, tales of epic content, and stories of chivalry. Borges’ metaphors provide a useful tool in analyzing a book that encompasses such a wide range of genres and content.

The metaphor of the river refers to the variety, unity and movement in the stories, and also to the labyrinthine structure that is built up thanks to the recurring rhetorical device of the mise en abyme. The metaphor of the weft of a tapestry refers to the coherence present in the book, despite the fact that the stories are varied. The metaphor of the dream refers to the oneiric content of the book, and anticipates what the book does with time, which is the last of Borges’ metaphors.

These four metaphors allow the reader to identify a clear purpose in the Arabian Nights, one that is related to the fact that the structure we find of stories within stories creates a dream-like world that dismantles the idea of reality. King Schahriyar is a representation of the reader, wandering in a labyrinth of mirage-like stories, in an inner journey that will transform him into another man. The power of storytelling is shown in the frame story of the Arabian Nights, but the book in general also treats human passions and inclinations that have guided King Schahriyar to become the monster he initially is. The book takes us through his moral rehabilitation, and also describes the emotional abysses that he and the reader are forced to confront during such rehabilitation.
The Legend of the Wandering King is a novel for young adults that Gallego García wrote with the Arabian Nights as its influence. Borges’ metaphors allow a revealing interpretation of this book and of its main character, Walid.
Preface

This dissertation is an original and unpublished intellectual work of the author, Laura Quintana Crelis.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii

Preface ......................................................................................................................................... iv

Table of Contents ......................................................................................................................... v

Glossary ......................................................................................................................................... vii

Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................................... viii

Dedication ..................................................................................................................................... ix

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

1.1 Motivation for the Study and Origins of Interest ................................................................. 1

1.2 Research Statement and Discussion .................................................................................... 4

1.3 Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................................ 10

1.4 Research Questions ............................................................................................................. 12

1.5 The Significance of the Study ............................................................................................ 13

1.6 Rationale and Criteria for Primary Text Selection ............................................................. 14

1.7 Selection Criteria ................................................................................................................. 15

Chapter 2: Literature Review ...................................................................................................... 17

2.1 The History of the *Arabian Nights* ................................................................................... 17

2.2 The *Arabian Nights*: Criticism ......................................................................................... 25

2.3 Introducing *The Legend of the Wandering King*, and Reviews ..................................... 40

Chapter 3: Methodology and Critical Framework ...................................................................... 44

Chapter 4: Borges’ Metaphors, *Mise en Abyme* and the *Arabian Nights* ......................... 49

4.1 The River ........................................................................................................................... 49
Glossary

*Haua*: In Arabic, love and abyss. The abyss of love.

**Explanation of texts (according to Auerbach):** A method in which specific characteristics of literary works are extrapolated to achieve a broader connotation covering historical and cultural issues.

*Miliunochesco (“onethousandandonelike”):* An adjective often used in Spanish to describe a scenario that resembles a story from the *Arabian Nights*. It comes from the title of the book, *Mil y una noches* [One Thousand and One Nights].

**Mimesis:** Representation. Modern studies relate mimesis to the representation of reality in literature.

*Mise en abyme:* A French term that means “placed into an abyss.” In literature, it is a narrative structure that builds the illusion that there is another space in the literary work. *Mise en abyme* helps in the representation of oneiric contents. A story is introduced within another story through the narrative voice, which creates a fictitious distance with the reader.

*Sidra:* From Arabic. Means lotus, the flower that indicates the limit of the seventh heaven. The origin of the word is Sdr, which has the connotation of dropping the hair or a veil over the face.

*Rau*: From Arabic. Minstrel.

**Vertigo (according to Milan Kundera):** Not the fear of falling, but the fear of not being able to resist the temptation of jumping.

**Qasida:** A form of poetry of the pre-Islamic Arabia. It is usually a panegyric genre, with just one topic.
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Thanks to my family for their continued support, to Carlos because he brings laughter to our home, to my dear father, to my sister and best friend, and to my children, my greatest treasures.
To my beloved mother, Susana Crelis.

Esta lluvia que ciega los cristales
Alegrará en perdidos arrabales
Las negras uvas de una parra en cierto
Patio que ya no existe.

“La lluvia,” Jorge Luis Borges.

This rain that blinds the windows
Will gladden in lost outskirts
The black grapes on a vine in a certain
Patio that no longer exists.

“The Rain,” by Jorge Luis Borges
Chapter 1: Introduction

The Arabian Nights brings together many tales that were created by a variety of authors to be told aloud. It speaks about many cultures and customs, and inspired books such as The Legend of the Wandering King by Laura Gallego García.

1.1 Motivation for the Study and origins of Interest

They are books . . . so full of humanity, that they make us forget about author and origin, and seem to be created (and so they were, indeed) by mankind as a whole, in a wonderful collaboration, presided by the genius of the species. (Cansinos Assens 14, my translation)

My first memory of the Arabian Nights is linked to my early childhood when my grandfather used to tell me its tales on Sunday mornings if I managed to get to his house before he and my grandmother got up. I have always remembered those days with happiness. When I was older, I read the book for the first time and I thought it was captivating. It was a long book and it took a long time to finish. During that period, I felt like I was actually living inside of the book, that the book was able to create something similar to an actual place that I could enter and enjoy: the real world was now new and brighter, and I thought that only a really extraordinary book could do something like that. After that, I wanted to think, write, and follow the connections between this book and the books that were influenced by it.

I first read the Arabian Nights in the 1983 Mexican edition published by the Spaniard publisher Aguilar (an edition that was intended to be comprehensive, although that could be
considered impossible). This edition was translated by Rafael Cansinos Assens, an important Spanish writer of the Novecentismo—an aesthetic movement related to the literary avant-gardes from the beginning of the twentieth century in Spain—and a polyglot who translated authors such as Dostoyevsky, Goethe, and Shakespeare. Although the book itself is a stunning compilation of works with roots in the folklore and literature of diverse and ancient civilizations and cultures, it was reading it from the perspective offered by this extraordinary critic that determined my approach. Cansinos Assens translated the Arabian Nights into Spanish, directly from Arabic for the first time, and wrote a thorough critical study that he included in Aguilar’s edition as a foreword to the work. This “Estudio literario-critico de Las mil y una noches” [“Literary and Critical Study of One Thousand and One Nights”] (1:13-380) showed me how this one book relates to so many other global stories, and led me to link it with the work of Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges. Borges recognized Cansinos Assens as his teacher (Arte poética 31) and in addition to reflecting on the meaning of the Arabian Nights, he explored many of its elements in his own narrative work in such stories as “The Circular Ruins,” “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” “The Garden of Forking Paths,” (Ficciones) and “The Translators of the 1001 Nights” (History of Eternity).

In its stories, the Arabian Nights comprises and heralds many other literary works. In the “Tale of Three Apples,” (1:517) for example, the origin of the crime novel is implicit, and so are all of its elements: the plot, the victim, the murderer. There is an ancient Cinderella in “The Tale of the Lost Bangle” (3:775). The plot of the opera by Gioachino Rossini, La Gazza Ladra (1817), is in “The Tale of the Loss of the Necklace,” (2:356) which is told by Shahrazad during night 356 in the Aguilar edition. Like the vampires found in gothic novels, the algoles in the Arabian Nights are creatures that can take any form and feed on human flesh. “The Tale of the
Sleeping Awake,” (3:576) according to Cansinos Assens, inspired *Life Is a Dream* by Calderón de la Barca and the first scenes of *The Taming of the Shrew* by Shakespeare (1:3-28), and so it is also a precedent of *First Dream* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. The *Arabian Nights* not only tells ancient stories in its own voice, but is also a fundamental source for later stories. Its influence on Western literature is undoubted. We can find an example of this influence in the works of Jorge Luis Borges, who reflected on the meaning of labyrinths in general, and often directly referred to the *Arabian Nights* in essays such as “Los dos reyes y los dos laberintos” [‘The Two Kings and The Two Labyrinths’] and “Magias parciales del Quijote” [‘Partial Magics of The Quixote’].

In the *Arabian Nights* there is incredible variety, but at the same time there is unity. This book is diverse in its stories, in its scenarios, in its characters, but also repeats certain topics that profoundly particularize it. Borges’ poem “Metaphors of the 1001 Nights” captures this essence of the *Arabian Nights* through four metaphors, all of which aid in more thoroughly understanding the book. Another tool to bear in mind when approaching the book is the *mise en abyme* narrative technique, since the *Arabian Nights* seems to adhere to this structure. My purpose in this research study is to describe these features by drawing on sample tales, and to discuss how they are reflected in a later work of Spanish literature, a contemporary work of literature for young adults: *La leyenda del rey errante* [*The Legend of the Wandering King*] by Laura Gallego García, published in 2002, and translated into English in 2005.
1.2 Research Statement and Discussion

I am examining in this research the influence of the *Arabian Nights* on Spanish literature and culture. The *Arabian Nights* arrived late to Spain in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the translation to Spanish from the German edition by Gustave Weil. Spain had remained isolated due to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. At that time, books such as *The Orientals* (1829) by Victor Hugo and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844) by Alexandre Dumas stimulated interest in the Asian cultures. However, and despite the fact that Spain had polyglots and Arabists who could have done the work, no Spanish literary translator translated the *Arabian Nights* into Spanish. In “Terminal Essay,” Richard Burton (who translated and published the *Arabian Nights* in 1885) comments on the translations of the book into many languages, stating that “although Spain and Italy have produced many and remarkable Orientalists, I cannot find that they have taken the trouble to translate *The Nights* for themselves: cheap and gaudy versions of Galland seem to have satisfied the public” (10:114).

Cansinos Assens points out in his prologue (1:367) that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, due to the presence of the Arabs in Spain, works such as *The Book of Calila and Dimna* (1251) and *The Forty Viziers* were translated for the first time. He says that the Court of Alfonso X was an intellectual center. The Moorish influence and Arabic words are omnipresent in medieval literature. In this context, Cansinos Assens wonders why the *Arabian Nights* was not translated earlier, why the Arabs in the Courts of Córdoba and Granada did not bring this work to Spain when the first manuscripts were being popularized in the East. The Umayyad Caliph in Córdoba had copyists who were in charge of translating any interesting manuscript that came from the East. Poets of the Andalusian Islam were traveling back and forth, and the commercial
route to and from Berbería was also a literary path allowing trade of great works and great ideas. However, until the sixteenth century there were no traces of the book in Spanish literature.

Cansinos Assens says that in *El Patrañuelo* by Juan de Timoneda (published for the first time in 1567) there is an event that is similar to “The Tale of Fifth Brother of the Barber of Bagdad,” (1:636) but he also says that the origin of this coincidence is in Italy (1:17). Cervantes does not mention the text either, although he was a prisoner in Algiers and wrote “The Tale of the Captive,” which could be from the *Arabian Nights* because of its content. He then inserted this story into the chapter 39 in *Don Quixote*. It is similar to “The Tale of Ali Nuru-d-Din and Maryem” (2:799). According to Cansinos Assens:

> In all our literature, rhymed or prose, of the media and subsequent centuries, there is no mention whatsoever directly or indirectly to the famous book, and the *moriscos*, who among us are and have left us so many and interesting legends of their race in *aljamiado*, tell us nothing of it . . . . The thing is so rare that the Orientals have fantasized about the existence of an Arabic manuscript of *Arabian Nights* in the Jalifiana library of Córdoba and a Spanish translation of the Middle centuries, both, naturally, lost. (1:368, my translation)

> The explanation of the absence of translation could be that, as an outcome of the Reconquest in Spain in the sixteenth century, there was a rejection of everything that was Moorish, and an ongoing effort of recovery of a national identity. Cansinos Assens states that the war of Reconquest was a crusade and that everything Moorish was considered heresy (1:369). The sixteenth century Spaniards distrusted Moorish vestiges. Cansinos Assens also argues that it would have been truly extraordinary to have a version of the *Arabian Nights* written in Spanish by a Moor or a converted Jew:
(…) in Spain *The Thousand and One Nights* are at home and barely seem exotic. Many scenarios are still here . . . as well as models (…) There are many Spanish expressions identical to those of the original text that express emotions and habits similar to the ones described there. There is an analogy of feelings and psychological reactions among the Orientals and us. The task of translating the book is very straightforward for a translator to Spanish, while it is much more difficult for non-Spanish translators, who confront in it all sorts of exoticisms: Spanish culture has Arab names that designate feelings, places, and even garments. Characters such as the capped, the matchmaker, the rogue, the beggar, the check, the bandit, etc., belong to Spanish literature as well as to the Oriental and their modes of conduct, gestures, and airs, do not surprise us. (1:370, my translation)

As an example of this similarity between Arab and Spanish cultures, Cansinos Assens states that Burton uses the word *mantilla* to express the exact equivalent of the veil that women used to cover themselves in Baghdad (1:370). Borges once said that, in his travels, he had felt more of the Orient of *Arabian Nights* in Córdoba and Granada than in some cities of the East (“Las mil y una noches” 232).

In his essay entitled “Las mil y una noches” [‘The Thousand and One Nights’], Borges refers to the discovery of the Middle East by Western nations. He says that, gradually, a strange and extraordinary world appeared through objects and evidences, such as huge and dangerous monsters (lions and elephants), and delicate fabrics (like silk). But, he refers particularly to the *Arabian Nights* as a fundamental text that influenced the development of Romanticism and that modified the idea of the world through the introduction of wonder at a time when Western thought seemed to be bound solely by reason. The imagery of the book is present in multiple later literary works, such as *Candide* by Voltaire, *New Arabian Nights* by Robert Louis
Stevenson, or “The Thousand and Second Tale of Scheherazade” by Edgar Allan Poe. New versions of the best-known tales of the book are common also in children's literature: “Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp,”“The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor” and “Ali Baba, and the Forty Thieves.”

In the Spanish-speaking countries, a demonstration of the importance of the Arabian Nights and its integration into the Spanish mentality is manifested in the way that the title of the book has been transformed into an adjective and has been incorporated into the language. Although the Royal Spanish Academy has not accepted the word in the dictionary yet, miliunochesco (“onethousandandonelike”) is commonly used as an adjective to describe a special scenario in which a story from the Arabian Nights could occur. Words of Arab origin abound in Spanish, which indicates Spanish culture’s affiliation with that of the Middle East, but in this case the word comes not from Arabic but only the book, and more specifically, from the title of the book.

Although the introduction of the Arabian Nights into Spanish literature and reading happened relatively late, its influence on Spanish-language children’s literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is very significant. Authors in Latin American countries and Spain have written multiple works inspired by the book and have created new versions of the traditional tales. Auliya by Verónica Murguía, Footprints on the Sand and The Enchanted Ring by María Teresa Andruetto, and The Legend of the Wandering King by Laura Gallego García are examples of works that reproduce scenes and characters from the Arabian Nights.

The first translations that came to Spain were from Gustav Weil’s German edition (1841), and the translation to Spanish of the French version by Antoine Galland, also in 1841. It is important to highlight the translation by the important Spanish writer Vicente Blasco Ibáñez,
which, like that of Galland, comes from French, in this case, from that of J. C. Mardrus. Rafael Casinos Assens wrote the first translation to Spanish directly from the Arabic (1954). His version aims to be comprehensive, literal, and faithful to the text.

The Arabian Nights is a monumental text that could even be considered infinite. Writers such as Jorge Luis Borges attempted to add their own story to the corpus (an example of this is the short story “The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths,” included in his book Ficciones, which he first published in the magazine El hogar, saying that it was a translation of a story from the Arabian Nights, not a work by him as it actually was), and De Quincey, as Borges has said, imagined alternative derivations for Aladdin (“Las mil y una noches” 241). Implicit in the structure of the book is the feeling that the storytelling structure will never reach conclusion; that each story will never end, that it is long and vertiginous, perhaps because one of its purposes seems to be to reproduce and to specify an interpretation of the sense of time. It is possible to believe that it would be impossible to exhaust its topics, characters, and scenarios.

My thesis is an analysis of the Arabian Nights using Borges’ metaphors included in his poem “Metaphors of the Thousand and One Nights” (see Appendix A) as a critical lens. I will also investigate the fantasy novel for young adults by Laura Gallego García entitled The Legend of the Wandering King, translated into English from Spanish in 2005. The Legend of the Wandering King is the seventh book by Laura Gallego García and was published by Editorial SM in 2002, after winning the El Barco de Vapor Award in 2001. It takes place in the desert, in a series of Bedouin scenarios, and its most important motif is the love for poetry, specifically the qasidas or poetry of the desert. I chose this book because it was written under the inspiration of the Arabian Nights, by one of the most important authors of fantasy books in Spain, and because
it succeeds in representing the most important themes of the *Arabian Nights*. Also its approach to poetry is very interesting.

I will use the critical commentary and literary works of Borges as a critical lens to examine the *Arabian Nights*. Borges recognized Cansinos Assens as a very important influence for him, and was deeply interested in the *Arabian Nights*. My interest lies in several of the metaphors that, according to Borges, speak about the essential nature of the *Arabian Nights*. It may be that Borges’ interpretations of the infinite and labyrinthine structure of the *Arabian Nights* appear later in his own work, in which, among so many other things, he tries to create a sense of the labyrinthine nature of time as he does in his short story “The Garden of Forking Paths” (*Ficciones* 472-480).

Another aspect upon which I will focus my analysis is a narrative method and structure present in the *Arabian Nights*: the *mise en abyme*. This interweaving of one story within another is a condition that defines the *Arabian Nights* and produces a sense of perspective that can be interpreted as building an abyss within the text. The intention of creating this literary convention in a literary work has multiple interpretations—in the *Arabian Nights*, this effect produces the sense of infinity.

Finally, in my research I intend to observe the way in which the most important themes of the *Arabian Nights* materialize in Laura Gallego García’s *The Legend of the Wandering King*. As mentioned above, although the *Arabian Nights* had no presence in Spain until the nineteenth century, since its translation into Spanish, it has deeply influenced the Hispanic literary imagination, as it did the imaginations of so many other cultures and countries. These bustling and fantastic universes in which extraordinary creatures abound and where the characters’ destinies created by fate are so surprising, are exceptionally seductive for readers around the
world and for the Spanish-speaking public in particular. My research aims to track some of the reasons and issues that give the text its unity, and to observe how all of this is presented in Gallego García’s work.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the metaphors postulated by Jorge Luis Borges regarding elements that constitute the *Arabian Nights* and to explore their manifestation in a selection of the tales. This is followed by a close reading of the same elements in Laura Gallego García’s *The Legend of the Wandering King*, a contemporary award-winning novel for younger readers, published in 2002.

Borges has reflected widely on the *Arabian Nights*. In the poem entitled “Metaphors of the Thousand and One Nights,” he identifies four images that best express the nature of the book. I think those images are effective and accurate. They are the river, the weft of a tapestry, a dream, and time (233-237).

The first image, the river, shows the way in which the stories drift, chained to each other, towards bifurcations in which they change and multiply. Shahrazad tells the story of King Omar Bin al-Nu’uman and later the story of this King branches into the two stories of his children, Sharrkan and Zau al-Makan. These tales then lead to others. The river, that is the text, contains the multitude of stories that take place by the will of fate or chance, which is experienced as the same thing, as Shahrazad will say many times throughout the book. These seemingly erratic plot conditions cause the reader to lose track of what occurs in the story. The reader may even become lost in the abundant symmetries of subjects, characters, and scenarios. A structure like
this naturally contributes to the meaning of the whole work, and we might even think of it as its backbone.

In the poem, Borges also refers to “the weft of a tapestry,” (37) which can refer to the coherent and, at the same time, labyrinthine nature of the book. The concept speaks about order in chaos; it leads to the impression that the book is made of the substance of dreams. Dreams are the third metaphor that Borges uses to interpret the book. This dream-like space builds even more vague and indeterminate borders for the readers.

Time is the last of Borges’ metaphors in the poem and the one that concludes his vision of the book. Borges uses this last metaphor to encompass other earlier-mentioned concepts. Approaching the Arabian Nights through the critical lens of Borges’ four metaphors adds value to the book because it brings a personal view to the epic work. It is also interesting to examine the ways in which Borges’ metaphors are present in Gallego García’s text.

The mise en abyme is a narrative technique that shows the vertiginous effect produced by two overlapping stories. Of this technique, Helena Beristáin states:

The common feature of the variants of the abyssal structure found in literature (but also in other arts such as painting, sculpture, architecture) consists, then, of the fact that they all create the illusion of generating another space (the whole or parts of a work within the same or within another work), a space in which a mirror, a gaze, a play with perspective is implied or explicit. (241, my translation)

The labyrinth Shahrazad builds by chaining stories, and within which King Schahriyar becomes lost, is also a mechanism that represents infinity. Reflection on this subject and this structure is essential in any analysis of the Arabian Nights.
The purpose of my research is to examine a selection of stories in order to see how Borges’ metaphors express the essential nature of the text, and how the structure of *mise en abyme* or the abyss is constructed in the succession of Shahrazad tales. As Laura Gallego García’s *The Legend of the Wandering King* attempts to reproduce the experience the reader receives from the structure of the *Arabian Nights*, I will explore whether and how she has incorporated Borges’ metaphors, and I will examine if she used the *mise en abyme* structure in her novel.

1.4 Research Questions

My research questions refer to the structure of the *Arabian Nights* and to some of its specific motifs. The most important question pertains to how the structure serves to create the notion of infinity, which is essential in the interpretation of the book. Borges has said that to Arabs, the number 1000 is associated with infinity and that the title of the book adds one to the infinite (“Las mil y una noches” 232). I will be using Borges’ four metaphors and the narrative strategy called *mise en abyme* as a critical framework to build upon in my analysis of this complex structure. These metaphors comprise my critical lenses and are helpful to identify the uniqueness of this exceptional literary work.

The specific research questions are:
1. How is the narrative voice in the *Arabian Nights* constructed? How does Shahrazad’s voice branch out in the voice of other characters when the stories grow and lead to other stories?
2. How do Borges’ metaphors work in the *Arabian Nights*? In what sense does the metaphor of the river talks about the multiplicity of the text’s scenes, characters, and anecdotes? How does
this “living mirror” (233) reflect the vast universe of this abundant and boisterous world that the text creates? How does the weft of a tapestry metaphor express the order in this multiple world? In what sense might we think that the Arabian Nights builds an oneiric universe, a space that we could relate to the atmosphere of a dream? How does the metaphor of a map of time relates to the Arabian Nights?

3. How does the rhetorical device mise en abyme appear in the Arabian Nights and what is the meaning of the labyrinth in this work? How is the idea of the abyss related to that of the labyrinth?

4. Does Laura Gallego García reproduce these fundamental elements of the book in The Legend of the Wandering King? How are these features reflected in The Legend of the Wandering King and to what effect?

1.5 The Significance of the Study

The objective of my work will be to explore Borges’ perspective towards the Arabian Nights, to identify the elements and literary devices he notes as the most crucial in the Arabian Nights, and to relate these elements to Gallego García’s text. I will try to reproduce, in my critical work, the building of successive authorial gazes because I think this is the best way to talk about a book that is made up of glances and mirrors. A key author in current Spanish literature, Luis Goytisolo, has insisted on the importance of the Arabian Nights in the Spanish imagination and of Arabic as a wasted legacy in Spain (Interview). He even learned to speak Arabic in order to hear the tales spoken in the original language, in the zocos—traditional markets of Marrakech—the first Spanish writer to do so since Arciprestre de Hita. I think that my
work could contribute to the conversation about a salient text that so many important authors of the Spanish tradition recognize as a vital ingredient of their culture. My research aims to bring to light certain notions related to the *Arabian Nights*, and to explore the works’ influence on Gallego García’s contemporary novel.

I think it is important to point out that the Cansinos Assens’ critical study about *El libro de las mil y una noches* [*Book of the Thousand and One Nights*] is probably accessible to readers only through Borges’ interpretation and comments in “One Thousand and One Nights” (232-241). Cansinos Assens was an important author in his time, but his work has been largely forgotten. He was an extraordinary Arabist, polyglot, and a sharp critic, and his interpretations of the *Arabian Nights* are extraordinary and indeed enrich the reading of it. It would be interesting to open up a discussion about some of Cansinos Assens’ and Borges’ interpretations. In my literature review of the critical writings on the *Arabian Nights*, I intend to approach Borges’ work and Cansinos Assens’ critical study, because I think their work is very valuable. In the findings section of my research, I will be using Borges’ work (and, of course, the *Arabian Nights* itself) as a framework from which to build on his ideas in order to explore the primary text by Laura Gallego García.

### 1.6 Rationale and Criteria for Primary Text Selection

I have purposefully selected specific tales from the *Arabian Nights* according to their themes and topics and the possibility of identifying in them certain concepts. Some stories illustrate the *mise en abyme* and others show the variety and the order to which Borges refers when he talks about the metaphors that best express the content of the *Arabian Nights*. There are
tales of an oneiric content. I selected fourteen at the outset as my original pool of tales, and then I reduced the list to four, one for each metaphor. I have selected tales that deal with multiple topics to reveal the incredible variety of the book.

My initial intention was to show the influence of the book on works written originally in Spanish. I chose as my original pool of Spanish-language writers, the three authors for children that I consider to be important and representative: Verónica Murguía, who is the first Mexican writer to win the Gran Angular award, granted by the publishing house SM in Spain, and who wrote Auliya at the beginning of her career, a book inspired by Arabian Nights; Laura Gallego García, who is one the most important fantasy writers in Spanish and, drawing on the themes of the Arabian Nights, wrote The Legend of the Wandering King; María Teresa Andruetto, who won the International Board on Books for Young People’s Hans Christian Andersen Prize in 2012 and who wrote two books based on the Arabian Nights: Huellas en la arena [Footprints on the Sand] and El anillo encantado [The Enchanted Ring]. Both Andruetto and Murguía retold some stories from the Arabian Nights in other of their books. However, out of all these works, only Gallego García’s has been translated into English and therefore fits the criteria that I have chosen for my analysis. I decided to focus on it as my primary children’s literature text as it is available in English.

1.7 Selection Criteria

- Tales from the Arabian Nights that illustrate Borges’ metaphors: a river, the weft of a tapestry, dreams, and time.
- Tales from the Arabian Nights that illustrate the narrative strategy mise en abyme.
A children’s book created following the model of the *Arabian Nights* and originally written in Spanish. This book has to be available in an English translation and written by a well-respected author. It was a positive factor in favor of the book I chose, that it won an important award for children’s literature in Spain.

Primary texts selected from the stories of the *Arabian Nights* (the nights are enumerated according to Aguilar’s edition):

**The Story of the Third Saluk:** The story of Achib, who first meets his fate when he accidentally kills a friend. He is sent to Paradise but soon loses it because of his curiosity.

**The Story of the Hashish-Eater:** A fisherman confuses the moon's reflection on the floor with a lake and sits down to fish.

**The Story of Nur al-Din and His Son:** The story of three generations of men, their dreams and travels.

**The Story of King Schahriyar and Shahrazad:** The story that introduces and concludes the book.

And, the primary children’s literature text:

**The Legend of the Wandering King** by Laura Gallego García tells the story of a Prince who wants to be a poet and who loses the literary competitions against a simple man multiple times. Humiliation makes him bitter and vengeful, so he tries to destroy the life of the man who defeated him. Winner of the Barco de Vapor Award in 2001, granted by the publishing house SM in Spain.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

A reflection concerning the *Arabian Nights* must be introduced by making reference to certain books that have approached this subject matter before, and to the history of a book of such importance. There is no criticism around *The Legend of the Wandering King*, but there are interesting reviews that speak about the book.

2.1 The History of the *Arabian Nights*

The Arabs claim that nobody can read

The Book of Nights all the way to the end.

The Nights are Time, the one who never sleeps.

Just go on reading while the daylight dies

And Scheherazade will tell you your story.

(“Metaphors of the 1001 Nights” 237)

In a lecture about the *Arabian Nights*, Borges reflects on how aware Western nations are of the Far East and on the astonishment produced by the revelation of a different way of appreciating reality. He tells the legend of the elephant Harun al-Rashid sent as a gift to Charlemagne and he also talks about the lion that became part of the heraldry in the Crusades, about silk, and about Alexander the Great’s trips. Monsters, seamless fabrics, and remote wars spoke of a world unknown and marvelous. But mostly, Borges refers to the *Arabian Nights*, a book that defines its own nature in complex images such as infinite labyrinths. We could almost
say that our perception of the East is built up by the *Arabian Nights* ("Las mil y una noches"
232-241).

The creation process of the *Arabian Nights* involves the anonymous voices of a multitude of men and women who belong to different cultures. It is comprised of three groups of stories originating from India, Persia, and Egypt that were transmitted orally over the centuries. It has been said that in the fifteenth century, the stories were written for the first time in Arabic, although Nadia Abbot’s discovery—in the middle of the twentieth century—of an excerpt published in the ninth century, denies this affirmation (Marzolph 21).

Rafael Cansinos Assens talks about the origin of the work stating:

There is only one thing on which all agree: in the Ario Persian ancestry of this literary phantom, who appears before us dressed in tunic and turban, as a Moor from the Abbasi East, and speaking a flowery and eloquent Arabic, the Arabic spoken in the courts of those khalifs, friends and patrons of poets and writers. (1:14, my translation)

There are several theories regarding the origin of the work. The first one says that the book was written in India, since both the landscape and the general atmosphere are Indian (Cansinos Assens 1:21). The book has great similarities with *Kalila and Dimna*, for example, but also with the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Although in *Kalila and Dimna* the characters are animals, the structure is similar, and the fantastic background includes a theological mythology with angels, fairies, and genies similar to those present in other Indian books.

Cansinos Assens says that the Orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall put forward the hypothesis that the book was originally created in Persia (1:132). He notes that Persian literature is an adaptation to scale of Indian creations, and says that the *Arabian Nights* is made to human scale. The Persian book *Hasar Afsanah*, now lost, was considered by many the direct antecedent
of the Arabian Nights, but it is impossible to verify that. Richard Burton, one of the most important translators of the text into English, shared the conviction that the origin of the book is Persian. He said that although the book was arabized, both scenarios and characters were Persian (qtd in Cansinos Assens 1: 28)

A third hypothesis suggests that the origin of the book is Arabic and that it was written in Syria, in spite of the fact that in the stories there are references to exotic countries such as India, Persia, and China. Cansinos Assens refers to Silvestre De Sacy, a nineteenth-century French Orientalist, who said that the customs illustrated in the book are from Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo, and that references to other places are the product of the many narrators’ imaginations (Cansinos Assens 1: 28). On the other hand, Nadia Abbot’s discovery of the oldest fragment of the book contributes to the idea that its origin is Arabic (1:21). Ulrich Marzolph says that it is possible that this text is a translation of an earlier manuscript written in another language altogether (qtd. in Muhsin 122).

As a last hypothesis, Cansinos Assens considers the one formulated by the Dutch Orientalist Gaeje the most believable (1:26). Gaeje points out the similarities between the Arabian Nights and the Bible and he says that the story of Shahrazad and Schahriyar is an exaggeration of the events found in The Book of Esther. Shahrazad would be a combination of Esther and Judith, and the marital drama of Ahasuerus would correspond to that of Schahriyar. Cansinos Assens says that Shahrazad’s story in the Arabian Nights had to have been written by a Jewish writer. He explains, “If you look closely, all the Book of the Nights is dotted with Hebraic constellations; all that is said about Solomon and his power over men and geniuses is of Talmudic origin, as well as many of the edifying anecdotes that are interspersed in it” (1:28).
Orientalists and translators have offered their own explanations about the origin of the book. Both Gustave Weil and Joseph Charles Mardrus say that the author is Arabic (Cansinos Assens 1:24-26). Burton believes that the work was Persian and that it was arabized later. Madame Blavatzky (the Russian theosophist) asserts, according to Cansinos Assens, that its origin is in India, that it is an esoteric book and that its stories have the value of revelation to the spiritually initiated (Cansinos Assens 30). The depth of marvel in the book, the existence in it of wonderful Roj birds, flying horses, ogres, and snake princesses all endorse this possibility.

The authorship of the book is also a mystery. Researchers have often said that its rhapsodic and heterogeneous nature proves the hypothesis that it is the product of a plurality of authors (Cansinos Assens 1:31). Antoine Galland published a French version of the book in 1704. His work, *Les mille et une nuits: contes árabes traduit en français*, includes the stories he heard recounted by the reciters in the cafés of Istanbul and Syria, as well as an early manuscript. Cansinos Assens said that “everything is doubtful around the Arab manuscript that Galland used” (1:33, my translation). Borges comments that later translators looked for the original manuscript of “Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp” without success, so it is possible that Galland added stories of his own authorship. Since Borges speaks of the immemorial character of the text and the plurality of voices that contribute to this infinite book, he of course defends Galland’s right to add a story authored by himself (“Las mil y una noches” 241).

Galland’s translation is unique. It is a version of the book adapted to the French customs of his time. Cansinos Assens points out the changes that Galland made in his adaptation. He says that the characters greet each other in a French way; they exclaim “Bon Dieu!” instead of “Ua-l-Lah!” and they eat “tarte à la crème.” However he also says that, despite its flaws, Galland’s
translation has great literary value and that this value is the reason for the book’s great success in Europe when it was first published (1:40).

Borges has referred to the context in which the *Arabian Nights* appeared. France was ruled by the cultural policies of Nicolas Boileau, who talked about the cult of reason as the foundational basis of poetry. Borges refers to Boileau’s rhetoric of limitations, which is suddenly defeated by the invasion of this wonderful East. And this East had been created by Galland, who had domesticated a work that perhaps would have been too strange to his contemporaries if he had preserved its true nature (“Las mil y una noches” 236). Many have highlighted that Galland’s translation is dazzling and seductive, and Borges said that Romanticism began when the first reader of the *Arabian Nights* opened the book for the first time. (“Las mil y una noches” 234)

In 1881, John Payne published the first edition of the book in English entitled *The Book of the Thousands Nights and One Night* —only five hundred copies—and distributed it among his friends of the Villon Society. It was a work of nine volumes that now constitutes a bibliographic rarity. Richard Burton, a polyglot traveler and extremely knowledgeable in Asian cultures, published in 1885 his own version of the work, entitled *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, which is characterized by an emphasis on sexual imagery, and that also introduces local accents in the speech of the book to reproduce the itinerant reciters’ voices (Cansinos Assens 1:39-41). Borges notes that in some parts of this version of the book Burton uses the English of the fourteenth century with archaisms and neologisms, which complicate its reading but also makes it very beautiful (“Los traductores de Las 1001 noches” 397). Burton’s effort to be literal took him to the point of trying to reproduce the graphic disposition found in
Arab texts and for this purpose he reduced punctuation and changed logical order (Cansinos Assens 1:40).

In 1889, Joseph Charles Mardrus published his own translation of the book into French, entitled Les Mille et Une Nuits, which has been criticized for its inaccuracy (Cansinos Assens 1:42). While it was intended to be an unabridged version, since the book is based on an oral tradition in which it was constantly modified by its reciters, it is impossible to publish a full and literal version of the Arabian Nights (Cansinos Assens 1:42).

As I stated before, Rafael Cansinos Assens published the first Spanish translation directly from Arabic in the twentieth century, a translation that Borges highly praises (“Las mil y una noches” 240). The book’s edition by the publishing house Aguilar entitled Libro de las mil y una noches (Book of the Thousand and One Nights) published in 1955, included a meticulous and very interesting foreword of 380 pages, entitled “Estudio literario-crítico de Las mil y una noches” [“Literary and Critical Study of One Thousand and One Nights”].

In 1984, Muhsin Mahdi and Husain Haddawi made a new compilation of the stories using the Syrian text. Their English translation, entitled Alf Layla wa Layla ‘The Thousand and One Nights’ is characterized by its linguistic wisdom and a successful reproduction of local speech.

The Arabian Nights has influenced European and American literature as evident in works such as Persian Letters by Montesquieu, The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexandre Dumas, The Lady of the Camellias by Alexandre Dumas, son, Zanoni by Bulwer Lytton, and Extraordinary Stories by Edgar Allan Poe (Cansinos Assens 1:140).

Cansinos Assens says that the Arabian Nights is the epic poem of the Arabs, since it brings together the legends, which are the memory of a culture that is rich and nomadic (1:13).
He compares this book to *Quixote* for the Hispanics, because he says both works consistently represent a culture. The multi-coloured society, the hustle and bustle of the crowds, the unique characters, the precision in the depictions of habits—everything seems to express and define the universe of imagination of a concrete culture (Cansinos Assens 1:14). The *Arabian Nights* collects stories of the Oriental night, full of movement, life and colour, in contrast with the desert’s hot days in which men lie dormant. The nights are endless. Cansinos Assens argues that while Western literature is a son of daylight, “Oriental literature opens, like the Lotus, under the gaze of the Moon” (Cansinos Assens 1:16, my translation). The characters hear during the night the stories that speak of the lives of others, of remote places, adventure, moral dilemmas, danger and happiness. Cansinos Assens asserts that Arabs magnified the night, and points out that the Qur'an speaks more about night than about day (1:17). The origin of the book lies in the stories traveling in that endless night by word of mouth; stories that produce an experience of immediate fascination.

The book tells the story of Shahrazad and King Schahriyar as a framework for other stories. Schahriyar, a misogynistic and omnipotent King, marries and kills one woman after another in revenge because his first wife was unfaithful to him. Shahrazad marries him and during their first night, she tells him a story that, at dawn, stops without an ending. The king, wanting to know how it ends, allows Shahrazad to live one more day.

Although it may seem that Shahrazad’s stories are meant to save her, she risks her own fate in creating female characters that are not always truthful and good. The book includes great female characters, some moral, kind, and full of enthusiasm, but also others that would confirm Schahriyar’s impression that women are evil. In this sense, the book is incoherent and chaotic, but also boundless.
Shahrazad shows a plurality of nuances of human experience with touching, wonderful, uplifting, and sometimes terribly tragic stories. The reader is aware that every night the life of the narrator hangs by a thread and that is why the first intervention of Schahriyar is significant. In Aguilar’s edition, during night 130 (Las mil y una noches, 1: 974), Schahriyar speaks for the first time and asks Shahrazad to tell him a story about birds. Before that, readers have only “heard” his threatening silence.

Shahrazad’s stories are like mirages, dreamlike constructions that are sometimes contradictory, that are built one inside the other. The purpose for Shahrazad is to deceive Schahriyar: she wants to immerse him in a labyrinth of stories so that first he will want to know the ending of a story out of curiosity, but later on he won’t even know if he already heard the ending or not. The king, lost in the seductive world created by Shahrazad, stops seeing the immediate reality and starts looking at the world through the wondrous lens of the stories that she tells him. Cansinos Assens says (1:143) that by means of this experience the King recovers his moral health. But for Shahrazad, the work of storytelling is a struggle for her own survival, and her heroism is manifest in the creations of her imagination. She is hypnotizing the King with her words, which offer fragmentary glimpses of coherent human stories. There is an underlying morality, interwoven dreams, hidden treasures, obedient genies, and a background of wonder that dazzle us. Travel and adventure are present in many of the stories, as is the news of remote places. Borges has spoken at length about the endless condition of a book that consists of tales created by itinerant reciters. He refers to De Quincey (“Las mil y una noches” 240), who in an effort to remember the story of Aladdin, invents an episode in which a sorcerer from the Maghreb puts his ear to the floor to hear—as if listening to a coming train—the steps of all men to find the one capable of exhuming the wonderful lamp from where it is hidden (240).
Borges wrote a short story in 1939 entitled “The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths” and published it anonymously in the magazine *El hogar*. Many years passed before he admitted his authorship (he included the story in his book entitled *El Aleph*, published in 1949). There is a condition in the *Arabian Nights*—probably connected to its antiquity and its mysterious origin—that makes the book a common territory in which everybody’s dreams are legitimated. Perhaps it is this dreamlike condition that makes the reader wander through the lives of a multitude of characters as if he didn’t have his own identity. Mirages are abundant in the *Arabian Nights* and at one point its readers are like Schahriyar, lost just like him in the maze created by Shahrazad’s words.

### 2.2 The *Arabian Nights*: Criticism

In order to discuss the *Arabian Nights* in its context, it is important to talk about the fact that, for Western readers, the book is a representation of the East. Jean Paul Sermain points out that Galland’s translation of the *Arabian Nights* into French in 1704 contributed to arousing the West’s curiosity about the East in general, and for the *Arabian Nights* in particular (14). In his book *Seven Nights*, Borges wonders about the notions of West and East, and about their true meaning (42-43). He says that Western readers were fascinated about that remote world, one that appeared gradually before them through exotic objects, such as silk, all of which brought the idea that there was a mysterious hidden world far away. For Borges, the *Arabian Nights* calls attention to that hidden world, and helps in the recreation of this notion.

Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism*, warns of the dangers of prejudices that construct a concept of the East in Western nations; such a concept is often used to justify colonial and
imperial ambitions. He even comments that the Orient could be considered a European invention, “a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (1). Said considers it important to examine Orientalism because the romanticized images contribute to an inaccurate representation, the purpose of which is to point out the existence of the “other.” McMichael Nurse points out that, for Said, western perceptions of the Orient are a self-serving construct created in order to assign inferiority (199-200).

The Arabian Nights is at the center of this discussion, even without Said addressing it: Said himself does not discuss the Arabian Nights as such in Orientalism, but he does turn his scorn on several of the stories’ scholars and translators, notably the English Arabist Edward W. Lane, and indicts them for fostering prejudice. (Warner 24)

In Seven Nights, Borges notes that even the connotations of the word “Orient” are due to the Arabian Nights (48). Readers of the book recreate a notion of the Orient as an exotic and remote world, different from their own. The Arabian Nights shows beliefs, traditions, and customs, a way of thinking, but its translations also express a particular point of view that is related not just to the translators themselves, but also to the period of time in which they produced their versions of the book. Galland’s translation is such an example. All in all, the Arabian Nights appears to be not one book but many.

As regards the criticism of the book, the number of works is substantial. Robert Irwin, in the Arabian Nights: A Companion, speaks about the difficulty of addressing the large volume of critical work that a book the breadth of the Arabian Nights has inspired. He argues:

[A] critical study of the Nights cannot be based on a reading of Burton’s translation alone. It was of course necessary to compare this version with those of rival translators and all of them with the original Arabic. Then there were the variant versions of the
canonical tales to be read, the wider context of medieval Arab literature to be
investigated, the secondary critical literature to be assessed and the multifarious offspring
and influences of the *Nights* to be tracked down . . . . (2)

The *Arabian Nights* is, therefore, the product of multiple voices, as there are different
versions that stand as the source for different translations. People from many cultures and
languages have formed their own opinions of the book. Irwin observes that the *Arabian Nights* is
a composite work with tales from many countries and cultures, the earliest, from India and Persia
(48). The diversity of the book, combined with the extraordinary diversity of its translations, has
created a magnificent and organic work, difficult to encompass. He notes:

Indeed, there is scarcely a tale in the whole of the *Nights*, which does not have its
precurors, derivatives or analogous versions. Tales evolve into other tales and they
replicate, elaborate, invert, abridge, link and comment on their own structure in an
endless play of transformation . . . . The student of story collections finds himself adrift
on an ocean of stories, an ocean which is boundless, deep and ceaselessly in motion. (65)

In his text “The Translators of 1001 Nights,” Borges talks about the different translations
as if he were talking about different books, as if the translator were the creator of his own
version, as if the book were growing through the voices of the ones who were reading it. Marina
Warner says:

Anyone who reaches the end of the tales of the 1001 Nights will die, the legend says; but
the danger is not very serious, since it is not possible to say, as you might about another
book, that you can put it down because you have finished it. The reason does not lie in its
length, but in its myriad variations and the efflorescence of the structure. (429)
Warner is referring to the fact that it is impossible to read every version of the *Arabian Nights*, since the book is constantly growing through the storytelling and the retelling of the tales. The most important characteristic of this book is that it appears to be infinite—its structure builds the illusion that the book will never end.

In order to work critically with a text such as this, it is important to find a useful lens to understand its content fully. Borges, who was a thoughtful reader of the book, offers that perspective. Irwin explains that “the cultural attic of the *Nights* furnished Borges with metaphysical themes, and Borges found in the Nights precisely what he was hoping to find—doppelgängers, self-reflexiveness, labyrinthine structures and paradoxes, and especially paradoxes of circularity and infinity” (283). These characteristics relate to the *mise en abyme* narrative structure that it is found in the *Arabian Nights*. Warner completes this idea with an additional ingredient: Borges also appreciated the value of the text as a book to offer the child reader. Warner observes:

Jorge Luis Borges took his cue from the nested boxes and self-mirroring regression of the *Nights*. The great reader and fabulist once commented that all great literature becomes children’s literature; he was thinking of the *Odyssey, Don Quixote, Gulliver’s Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe* as well as the *Tales of A Thousand and One Nights*, but his paradox depends on the deep universal pleasures of storytelling for young and old: stories like those in the *Arabian Nights* place the audience in the position of a child, at the mercy of the future, of life and its plots, just as the protagonists of the *Nights* are subject to unknown fates, both terrible and marvelous. (11)

Warner refers to the fact that the book was created to be spoken, that its rhythms, its multiple plots, work to retain the attention of an audience also captivated by the extraordinary
adventures the characters live through, just as King Schahriyar does. As Warner points out, storytelling is a fascinating experience for adults, as it is for children.

In relation to this matter, Muhsin Jassim Ali says, in his essay “The Growth of Scholarly Interest in the Arabian Nights,” that the storyteller, with extraordinary narrative skill, hypnotizes his audience (14). The storyteller is important because he or she enriches a narrative that is alive and changing all the time. A book such as the Arabian Nights, with so many different stories that have been told through different voices, finds its singularity in the fact that it is not the product of one individual but many. Its anonymity evokes not a secret name but the plurality of many lives. To look back to its origin is to peer into the greatness of a culture that expresses itself through multiple voices.

Referring to the translations of the Arabian Nights, Borges addresses this issue in his essay “One Thousand and One Nights.” He speaks about the Arabian Nights as a great cathedral that has been built by generations of men, and says that the book is endless and always changing. (48) For him the Arabian Nights is a living object, since it is able to transform, and in fact has been changing, non-stop, since its creation.

In the poem “The Metaphors of the 1001 Nights,” Borges uses four metaphors to explain the Arabian Nights’ greatness (Appendix A). With these metaphors, he aims to explain the singularity of the book and its capacity to attract and fascinate so many different readers. The first metaphor is that of the river. It is related to the variety of the topics, sceneries, and characters, but also to the fact that the “living mirror” (233) that is the Arabian Nights, as Borges would say in the poem, through repetitions and symmetries, shows the reader that a book can even reflect his own life, as if the reader could exist inside of the book:
For as contemporary critics have remarked, the 1001 Nights is essentially a story about
telling stories, a work that is initially generated and ultimately sustained by the narrative
act. In the process of unfolding, it reflects back upon itself, mirrors itself, indeed tells
about itself and about narrative in general. (Naddaff 14)

The diversity of the Arabian Nights is manifested in the plural voices of the narrators, and
in the abundance of characters and situations, but the symmetry that is present between some of
the stories, the repetitions, speaks of a mirror that moves through the whole narrative showing
the reader that lives and feelings are shared among human beings. Eva Sallis, in her book
Sheherazade, Through the Looking Glass, refers to this unity within variety and to the repetitions
that create the illusion that there is a mirror in the text that reflects reality. Her vision on the book
expands and explains the image of the river that Borges takes as his first metaphor:

The Nights is a world of abundance, enriched or rather multiplied by the cumulative and
repetitious use of the similes. Nearly every girl or boy is the wonder of the age, the most
beautiful, the pinnacle of elegance and eloquence. Each is a rarity amongst such an
abundance or rarities that they become commonplace. It is a world of similes, in which
each person is refracted through things, in which each thing is like another equally
concrete although perhaps more precious thing. Each tale becomes, or resembles or
duplicates a multitude of others. The unique rarity is constantly outdone or equaled by
itself, multiplied with each successive tale. (143)

Variety and unity constitute a very important aspect of the Arabian Nights because they
create a paradox: the richness and abundance of the work is due to the repetition of motifs and
characters, and that repetition opens up possibilities for interpretation. In this context, the oneiric
aspect emerges, and the reader experiences the impression that he or she is under an illusion, that
the book is showing its own artificial structure, that it is revealing its own fictitious nature.

Warner speaks about a particular story in the *Arabian Nights* that illustrates this matter thoroughly:

On the 602nd Night, Sultan Shahriyar finds himself listening to a story… about the son of a king, a young prince with no name, who climbs a tree and then sees a colossal and hideous afrit lie down to rest, laying his huge head in the lap of a beautiful woman whom he has let out of a padlocked chest…. When the prince returns to court, his father the Sultan is so furious that his son has lost the precious ring which he had given him that he sentences him to execution. But the young prince starts telling his father stories to defer the hour….

Shahriyar, listening to Shahrazad past the midpoint of the *Nights*, finds himself looking at gathering shadows in the mirror of his own story of almost two years before: will he fall forever into the pool of Shahrazad’s memory, and we the readers with him? “By Allah, this story is my story and this case is my case.” he cries out in Burton’s translation, where the story eerily matches his even more closely, as it runs on, pulling in Shahrazad and Dunyazad and their father the vizier. The possibility of recognition presses the fanciful tale towards ethics: we the listeners may realise, with a flash of illumination, that we are the subjects—the villains—of the drama. (429-430)

The mirror that shifts through the book at one point looks at the book itself, and so the narrative is suddenly open to the possibility of reflecting upon the nature of fiction, since it has been revealed to be an artificial construction. For a moment the reader breaks the pact he has with the narrative (a pact that involves the suspension of disbelief) and the magic act is broken, so the reader accepts that the text is an artificial device, not the reality itself. This playfulness is a
catalyst for depth and reflection. On the other hand, since it is revealed that the fictional text involves the reader as a character (Schahriyar suddenly finds himself a character for Shahrazad, so the reader of her stories could be a character too), the structure of the *Arabian Nights* suggests that even objective reality could be fictitious.

Borges’ first metaphor expresses the singularity of a book that is full of different stories, themes and characters, which are simultaneously repeated over and over again. The river is multiple, but it is also always the same, and movement is its essential feature. The “living mirror” (233) that reveals the book is almost a litany, but this litany moves forward with small variations, and then the metaphor of the river is complete: Shahrazad’s stories are always the same and at the same time they are new. We, the readers, can imagine Schahriyar hypnotized by this seductive and redundant voice that fills the night with words that seem powerful, as if she could forecast the future.

The structure of the *Arabian Nights* that creates the impression that even reality could be considered fictitious leads to the second of Borges’ metaphors: the “weft of a tapestry.” (233) This tapestry refers, again, to the repetition of themes and motifs (as designs in carpets), and the way this repetition shapes a logical set of events that speak about a coherent universe where everyone’s lives have a meaning and a significance. It also speaks about Shahrazad’s voice and her status as an oracle:

The intricacy and system of a woven carpet imply a strong degree of predictability; the symmetry and recursive repetitions work like oracles: the patterns must come out in a certain sequence, so discerning them becomes paramount but not quite patent. It needs finesse to read a carpet’s complexities. Many of the stories in the *Nights* establish such a pattern and follow it to its outcome; often the outcome is predicted, by a prophecy or a
spell, or it can be anticipated by the reader from the character of the genre. Much pleasure for the reader arises when, like the protagonist or other characters, the story takes an unexpected turn and springs a different dénouement. Or when, as in some cases, the reader succeeds in foreseeing the end result of the character’s action when they fail to do so. In this way, the story ties up its subjects and its audience in crafty knots and self-mirroring devices: the man who recognizes his own house in another man’s dream about a fortune hidden in a courtyard under the floor; the dervish who opens the forbidden door and meets the fate he was trying to escape. These come out according to preordained structural rules. (Warner 80)

Coherence is a very important topic here, because it implies that there is meaning in every act, and that life is significant. Fate is a recurrent concept in the Arabian Nights–related, of course, to religion–and it shapes the characters’ actions and reactions: it serves as the compass that guides the narrative, and no act occurs free from it. Warner speaks about the relationship between text and textile (81) since traditionally the weaving of a rug happens while people talk and share their stories. She discusses the fact that storytelling and the building of a culture happen in concert with this manual work, and speaks about the fact that a word in Arabic for carpet: bissat, also describes a poetic metre.

In his poem, Borges talks about chaos in the Arabian Nights, and he says that in fact this chaos is only apparent, because there is a “hidden order” (233) behind it. He refers to numbers that organize the disorder, and behind these numbers the most important one of all: number one, the number related to God. All things are just one, and unity is the real nature of the abundant world of the Nights. This collection of different objects and characters that we see in a profuse universe through the living mirror or river (Borges’ first metaphor), that varied repertoire that is
drawn in a carpet and retold as tales by multiple voices, is an expression of unity, not of diversity.

The third metaphor associates the *Arabian Nights* with a dream. This metaphor is also linked to the concept of *mise en abyme*, since Borges says that dreams interpenetrate other dreams, building a labyrinth. I think it’s important to remember that the narrative of the *Arabian Nights* has a very deliberate premise: that Shahrazad tells the stories during the night, as if they were apart from the real world, the active world, the world that exists in daylight. Cansinos Assens recreates the image of those nights, filled with stories. He points out that kings in the East usually had minstrels and reciters of stories, and refers specifically to Alexander the Great, who, during his expedition to India, was surrounded all the time by an entourage of narrators, entrusted to liven up his nights (16). Stories are given special weight in this context: the words pronounced in the dark are powerful, and Shahrazad tells them as if she stood outside of history itself, out of time. The stories don’t need to be logical because they are like dreams that Schahriyar is led through by an outside voice that is crafting them for him.

In his book *Slave of Desire*, Daniel Beaumont refers to the idea of stories as dreams in the *Arabian Nights*:

The dreamlike effect of the various sorts of repetitions and recurrences is strengthened by at least one other characteristic of the *Nights*: the anachronisms that abound in the book from the very first story. The kings Shahriyar and Shahzaman are said to be Sasanian monarchs, but the Sasanian dynasty was pre-Islamic, brought down in the Islamic conquests. Yet Shahrazad later in the tale says that she must save the daughters of the Muslims. And soon enough she is telling Shahriyar stories about Harun-al-Rashid, and Ja’far the Barmecid, Harun being the fifth of the Abbasid caliphs, the second great
Islamic dynasty. And some of the latest additions to the book will introduce tobacco and gunpowder. The numerous anachronisms remind us of the way our dreams falsify time to bring forth another sort of truth: that of the unconscious, where, as Freud insists, there is no time. (164)

The idea of falsifying reality and of anachronisms in the Arabian Nights could be related, of course, to the peculiarities in the compilation of the stories, and to the fact that there are multiple authors, but the result is still the creation of a chimerical world that feels part of a dream. There are inconsistencies that the reader simply accepts, and the flow of the story is not interrupted by the incredulity of the reader. We accept contradictions in the Arabian Nights, just as we accept them in our dreams.

Warner says that “Shahrazad’s ransom tale-telling could be described as a single, prolonged act of performative utterance, by which she demonstrates the power of words to affect reality – her own fate and by extension others” (155). Warner also says that:

The enchantments of the Arabian Nights depend of this self-mirroring, magical technique, whereby the audience experience illusions summoned by the words on the page or in the ear, in the same way as the characters in the stories move in a landscape where magic keeps turning illusions into reality and inward apprehensions turn out to be truthful signs, propitious and cautionary (156).

She speaks about self-mirroring techniques that depend on the confusion between reality and fiction. That confusion produced in the reader of the Arabian Nights contributes to a major thematic element: reality is not so real, as fantasy is not so fictitious, and thus we cannot take for granted what we think we know about the world we inhabit.
Beaumont relates time in the *Arabian Nights* to the dreamlike effect produced by anachronisms. Time is the last metaphor Borges identifies as an expression of the *Arabian Nights*: a map of time, as if time could be outlined in a coherent diagram that comprises both a premeditated direction and fate. Again we witness the weft of a tapestry, but on this occasion the image of this representation embraces not just the abundance that is present in a busy world, populated by a huge number of characters and sceneries, but time itself, which includes all characters and anecdotes.

In Borges’ poem, time encompasses everything (translation by Robert Mezey):

Everything. Voice and echo, what the two
Opposite faces of Janus gaze out at,
Worlds of silver, worlds of ruddy gold,
And the long vigil of the constellations. (237)

Lastly, Borges speaks about the impossibility of reading the complete works of the *Arabian Nights*. The book is infinite and, in fact, it even includes the reader. The last two verses say:

Just go on reading while the daylight dies
And Scheherazade will tell you your story. (237)

For Borges, in its own structure, the *Arabian Nights* recreates the possibility of an endless book, since it uses narrative techniques that refer to the story that happens outside of the book, and that includes the reader as a possible character.

In relation to the quality of endlessness of the *Arabian Nights*, Warner says that:

The prior existence of this vast body of stories adds to the oneiric quality of the whole: not exactly a collective unconscious, her library seems to stretch in infinite recession, an
archive of all the stories. The '1001' in the book’s title hints at infinity, and indeed the stories keep multiplying, podding off into different new stories, as well as into multiple versions and translations. The utopian fantasy of the book includes the possibility that someone could act as the keeper of memories on this vast and labyrinthine scale… (144)

The concept of the Arabian Nights as a labyrinth is intrinsic to the book. In the Greek myth of the labyrinth, Ariadne provides the thread that Theseus follows to find his way out of the maze (Graves 454). Warner says that, in the Arabian Nights, Shahrazad is the “keeper of memories,” so she possesses Ariadne-like power because she is the one in charge of the narrative and the one who is aware of her position within the labyrinth of stories. She leads the company of her audience through these stories to finally reach the end.

In “The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society,” André Miquel states:

The precise name “a thousand and one” is... Turkish in origin and means “a great quantity.” I should add that, to counteract the crudeness of the even number, “one” exemplifies perfection, superabundance, generosity, a homage to the little princess Shahrazad, like the bouquet of one thousand red roses with one extra, for the thousand nights of storytelling and passion, the last, odd, one without which... no bouquet is complete. (8)

The element of endless time in the narrative of the Arabian Nights correlates with the fact that the book itself has a name that implies infinity, and also with there being stories inside other stories, with the impossibility of having a definitive edition of the book and its translations being multiple and diverse, with the book’s continuation through the voices of the reciters who still retell the stories in the zocos. Even some characters’ names open the narrative possibilities and
allude to further stories that Shahrazad is not telling (Kan-ma-Kan, for example, means “Once upon a time,” as if the character were introducing a story with his own existence). Dominique Jullien, in her book Les Amoureux de Schéhérazade. Variations modernes sur les Mille et Une Nuits, speaks about this characteristic of the Arabian Nights:

Would the One Thousand and One Nights, a text without an author, without a definitive edition, without unity, be a type of postmodern text? “It’s been said that…”--the recurrent formula of the Nights—offers the work as an endless conversation between the prince and the princess, between the book and its readers. . . . The introspective reading is attached to the mise en abyme of the story and the narrator. (189, my translation)

Jullien sees the mise en abyme active in this interpretation of the endless structure. In reference to the mise en abyme, Helena Beristáin says:

In discourses, specially the artistic ones, there are mechanisms that allow a third-person narrator (located outside of the story that is being told) to enter the internal tales through secret passageways, through hidden paths; even leaving them, and avoiding the text along with the characters, to wander in their company (forward or backward) through the reality of life, where he gets in contact with other characters—narrators and with their respective creations—in what Oscar Hahn called “motive of the communicating worlds” that consists of the “rupture of laws or natural constants.” The mechanism that produces such experiences is the abyss structure in texts. (235, my translation)

Beristáin speaks about the resources the narrator uses to introduce the reader to the book, making him or her a skeptical part of the narrative, a reader that formulates questions about his or her own position and participation in the story. Jullien speaks about an “introspective reading” and “an infinite conversation” between Schahariyar and Shahrazad, that also relates to the mise
en abyme, since the endless stories depend on the king not knowing if the story he is listening to has already ended. Warner situates Shahrazad in the centre of the narrative tensions as a fundamental figure that defines the entire work. She says that “the Arabian Nights present the supreme case for storytelling because Shahrazad wins her life through her art” (5). The purpose of Shahrazad’s tales is her survival, so she is a paradoxical character, since she has all the power over the stories she tells, but at the same time she seems powerless against the king who might kill her at any point of the narrative.

As already pointed out, the image of a mirror shifting through the narrative is a useful tool to understanding the complexities of the Arabian Nights; Shahrazad first seduces King Schahariyar with stories that have a hypnotic power over him, and then she becomes the sole reflection of himself that matters to him because he is reading his own life and motives in her stories. Eventually he will see himself only through her eyes, and that perspective will allow a moral re-education that will fix his broken soul. The mirror is Shahrazad and the reflection in the mirror is Schahariyar, who will be able to see himself more clearly thanks to the re-education of a new awareness of women, as well as men and customs. That is the meaning and purpose of storytelling: not just a diversion but an essential part of what we are—and that’s why it is a matter of life or death in the Arabian Nights. On this matter, Beaumont asserts:

Indeed, the peculiar narrative structure of The Thousand and One Nights exemplifies the point that for narrative the “death drive” is not a metaphor—it is the metaphor. Because human consciousness of death is a sine que non for narrative; Shahrazad tells her stories just because she is conscious of her own death. Death “gives birth” to narrative. (171) Naddaf adds that:
The narrative act in the *1001 Nights* is the most important act that can be performed within this textual universe. Any narrative, no matter how primitive, has the potential to prolong life, to forestall death, just as the absence of narrative . . . promises certain death. Shahrazad provides the sterling example of the narrator who succeeds in staving off and ultimately avoiding death by telling stories, and in so doing she functions as a kind of role model for the subsequent narrators of her tales. (40)

The threat of death hanging over Shahrazad is the driving force for the story: the interminable moment of that long night made of 1001 nights could finish at any moment if the king decides to kill her, so she keeps telling stories to survive. The paradox is that infinite time is defined in the *Arabian Nights* thanks to the menace of a potential abrupt ending. Borges’ image of a map of time that includes the variety of objects and characters in a coherent structure that has a meaning, expresses the essence of the *Arabian Nights*. Death may loom over the storyteller while she speaks, but her words are eternal.

2.3 Introducing *The Legend of the Wandering King*, and Reviews

Laura Gallego García was born in Valencia, Spain, in 1977. She won the Award for Children’s Literature, *Barco de Vapor*, offered by the publishing house SM in 1998, with her book *Finis Mundi*. In 2001, she won again with *La leyenda del rey errante [The Legend of the Wandering King]* which was translated into English by Dan Bell in 2005. She has written thirty-two books, and in 2011 she was awarded one of the most important awards for Children’s Literature in Spain, the *Cervantes Chico*, granted by the Alcalá de Henares City Council.
The Legend of the Wandering King tells the story of a prince, Walid ibn Huyr, who loves poetry and has the ambition of winning the poetry contest in the town of Ukaz. His father tells him that he will earn the right to participate in that contest if he wins the one that is held in his own town first. The prince believes that he will easily win the local contest, but he is defeated three times by a carpet weaver, Hammad ibn al-Hapdad, a man who has lived an intense life and who knows about love and suffering. Bitterness over losing the award makes Walid a different man, one who longs for revenge upon the carpet weaver. When he becomes king, he asks Hammad for the impossible in order to punish him: he forces him to weave a carpet containing the history of mankind. Hammad manages to do it but his creation is an aberration, and every person who sees it loses his mind. When this carpet is lost, Walid leaves his kingdom and begins a journey to find it. The book tells the story of the journey and Walid’s experiences on the journey of pain, love, and knowledge of the desert, which ultimately ends with his transformation into a great-souled man and a great poet.

Although there may be literary criticism in journals on children’s literature, particularly in Spain, I was not able to locate any. The reviews by readers that can be found online are also rare. Some reviews can be found in blogs, but they are often superficial. There are neither reviews in Spanish online bookstores nor in Chapters. There is just one, two lines long, in Barnes and Noble. There are eight reviews on Amazon.com (and the same on Amazon.ca) that express differing opinions, and that reach sometimes opposite conclusions. These reviews show enthusiastic readers who recommend the book, and also readers who point out its limitations. Summaries online are plentiful, but no critical studies and few comments that include personal opinions. When these opinions are present, the comments are neither in depth nor do they show scholarship. The reviews on Amazon.com can be found in Appendix B.
In *School Library Journal*, Patricia Lothrop says that the main character is too flat to accommodate so many contradictions. She adds that: “Gallego García tells readers that her hero is courtly, open-minded, and friendly, but shows him as petty, vain, heartless, and deceitful.” She adds that “the central character is at once too good and too evil to believe in, and too clueless to care about.” She also discusses the fact that “the setting is a sixth-century Arabian court, but readers don’t experience its sounds, odors, or tastes.” The critical focus on the weaknesses in the development of the character and the scenery loses sight of the merits of the work, as it doesn’t present an understanding of the intention of the author and of the whole work (qtd. in amazon.com).

Gillian Engberg (from *Booklist*, also retrieved from Amazon.com) points out the “captivating” nature of the tale and, in reference to the main character, says that he is on a journey of “self-discovery,” and explains the variety of personalities he takes on throughout the work in that Walid tries on “many identities” (qtd. in amazon.com).

Other readers, especially those not writing formal reviews for book review journals, are more enthusiastic. M.H. Shamp, from Columbia Falls, U.S., even compares Laura Gallego García with Jane Austen, and says that the book shows wisdom and understanding. This is the only comment that relates the book to the *Arabian Nights* and talks about the beauty of the space, the desert and the people (“Amazing Book Written by 24 Year Old”).

An interpretation of someone who identifies him or herself as a teacher-librarian, (SeussFan, from Littleton, US) offers an intelligent summary: this is the story of a man who “can redeem a life in which he destroyed others through arrogance and envy.” This reader discusses previous readers’ and reviewers’ comments that she or he considers to be “too harsh,” and says
that “the characters are flat because this is the working out of a folk tale, not meant to be a modern novel” (SeussFan).

Another American customer review by P. Hardy speaks about redemption in the book, and counters the harsh reviews when he says that the book is “certainly a treat for the senses” (“Wandering King delivers a stunning story about redemption”).

The reviews, in general, are favourable and even enthusiastic.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Critical Framework

The methodology I intend to use will be a close reading of the texts, the *Arabian Nights* and *The Legend of the Wandering King*, from the critical framework offered by Jorge Luis Borges, who reflected deeply on the nature of the *Arabian Nights* and its structure. His poem, “Metaphors of One Thousands and One Nights,” condenses the four metaphors that he postulates as fundamental to understanding the *Arabian Nights*. I will also reflect on the *mise en abyme* narrative structure in the context of these books.

I will introduce my approach to literary criticism through a discussion of some influential critics whose methods of analysis have deeply affected my textual interpretation in this study. Literary critics such as Erich Auerbach, Antonio Candido, and Jorge Ruedas de la Serna have talked about the importance of analyzing the literary text through lenses that are chosen after the reading and not before. In their approach, the text demands a particular lens, and the tool for research is used in order to decode the matter that is already in the text and in search for an interpretation.

In his comment on Antonio Candido’s critical method, Jorge Ruedas de la Serna states that the preface to Candido’s book, *Estruendo y liberación* [*Clamour and Liberation*], shows the procedure of reading and analysing of this extraordinary Brazilian literary critic (*Estruendo y liberación* 9-10). In this preface, Candido explains:

At the beginning of my career, I led my works of criticism on a path that I called “functional,” meaning that it had to be attentive to the relationship between the work with the society, and its role in it, point of view certainly conditioned by my sociological background and my political activity. But if I re-read my articles of that time, I see that,
despite that purpose, in me there was always a kind of constant rectifier, who acted to respect the nature of the texts. That is why, at certain moments, I realized that this “functional” point of view is legitimate when the work analyzed can only be explained by referencing the historical and social context; but there are many other works that do not require such an approach, because their meaning relates primarily to fantasy. So, the decisive element, in any case, is the organization of discourse. Hence my efforts, over the years, to look for an integrative criticism, trying to eventually combine more than one point of view, in order to attend to the extraordinary diversity of the works. (Estruendo y liberación 13, my translation)

Candido refers to literary criticism and the relationships it maintains with reality in general and with society in particular. The literary work is a representation of reality, a transfiguration, and that matter constitutes the specific object of literary criticism. Candido calls “relative specificity” the singularity that characterizes every literary text, and says that literary criticism must adapt to the needs of each text. Candido says that perceptive reading is based on a systematization of impressions, and that this kind of critical analysis is an endeavour to avoid a mechanistic approach. In his words, “criticism must adapt to the particular text, and must therefore not be dogmatic or exclusionary” (Estruendo y liberación 13, my translation).

Jorge Ruedas de la Serna, an important Latin American critic who translated Candido’s essays to Spanish from Portuguese and introduced his works to Mexico, pointed out in his article “El método critico de Antonio Candido” ['The critical method of Antonio Candido'] (397) that in order to understand Candido’s method, it is necessary to understand that of Erich Auerbach. Both of them, Candido and Auerbach, regard literary phenomena in a similar way: they think that criticism is a living activity, an art, a literary creation. In both Auerbach and Candido, we
witness the valorization of the subjective vision, of the gaze, of the impressionist way of reading (397).

Auerbach refers to his procedure of reading as an “interpretation of texts” (*Mimesis* 556). His intention is to achieve an understanding of the essence of the literary work; an understanding that is not linked to previous knowledge of the work, that is instrumental to elucidating new content.

The method of textual interpretation gives the interpreter a certain leeway. She can choose and emphasize as she pleases. It must naturally be possible to find what she claims in the text. My interpretations are no doubt guided by a specific purpose. Yet this purpose assumed form only as I went along, playing as it were with my texts and for long stretches of my way I have been guided only by the texts themselves. (*Mimesis* 556)

This method has been enriched by modern thought, including aesthetics, the general linguistics of Benedetto Croce and the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl (which departs from the description of a specific phenomenon to ultimately find the intuition of its excerpt). In this kind of literary criticism, we could say that it is implicit that the critic recreates the work while he is reading it. According to Ruedas de la Serna, Auerbach’s method of interpretation follows the so-called “phenomenological reduction” of the literary text model, which consists of “a microscopic analysis of its linguistic and artistic forms, of the content motives and composition” (403, my translation).

Ruedas de la Serna also argues that Candido transcends Auerbach’s method because he anticipates the theory of reception when he says that a literary work has its own historicity. This being the case, the work would not be a product of the culture of its time, but a product of the literary tradition in which it is inserted (“El método crítico de Antonio Candido” 397).
The emphasis on the importance of the critic’s point of view in the work of recreation contributes to the revalorization of subjectivity: the contribution that the gaze makes to the reading is significant. The critic is not objective but subjective, and that subjectivity is the most valuable part of his or her analysis. If we assume that the literary work is a representation of a reality that is constantly changing (as Auerbach would say), the critic addresses it with his own past and brings his or her own background to the interpretation process. Candido’s literary method compels the reader to incorporate his or her own point of view in the interpretation of the work, since the literary work is alive and allows diverse interpretations.

My intention is to follow the analytical techniques put forth by Auerbach in his book *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, and by Candido in his article “Montecristo o de la venganza” [“Montecristo or About Revenge”]. In *Mimesis*, Auerbach shows the way in which he systematizes his impressions to effect a deep reading of the text, following it in its literality. For Auerbach, the literary work is the mirror of a changeable and expansive reality and the poetical work crystallizes the human experience. The work is a representation that mimics and interprets reality. Candido, on the other hand, speaks about a type of integrative critique that intends to embrace the diversity of the work combining several techniques for reading. He talks of literary analysis as a mental adventure that depends on the perspective and on the personal sensibility of the researcher. He says that criticism should start with the consistent and rigorous reading of a text, a text, which should be considered alive (Estruendo y liberación 14).

In the approach Candido uses to interpret *The Count of Montecristo*, he looks for an excerpt of the text that constitutes a turning point: a moment when everything changes in the narrative because of a certain event. He analyses this moment in order to shed light on the story...
and to understand the character’s motives and actions. Auerbach, on the other hand, chooses an episode that could give clues to help in a better understanding of the structure of a story. Combining the approaches of these two critics as my template, I decided to conduct a close reading of the *Arabian Nights* and *The Legend of the Wandering King* using as a critical framework Borges’ lenses -- his metaphors of the river, the weft of the tapestry, the dream, and time, and the narrative strategy *mise en abyme*, in order to understand the structure of both books and to comment on the singularities and the similarities between the two. To do so, I will look for the moments that change the path of the stories, those moments when the forces are not evenly balanced and the reader sees that the course of the plot has changed. In “The Story of the Blind Man, Baba Abdullah,” for example, the reader might wonder about the moment when Abdullah, who has lost everything for wanting more and is already reduced to begging, asks for people on the streets to slap him on the face. Or about Abrisa, who in “The Story of King Omar bin al-Nu’uman and His Sons Sharkkan and Zau al-Makan,” relies on a slave who will kill her, although she feels that he is a dangerous man. Or about Sinbad the sailor, who wants to justify himself to Sinbad the Landsman, as if he were in front of a mirror. The possibility of looking at himself from the outside, the perspective he has over his own life as a consequence of this reflection, is an expression of the *mise en abyme* that relates to the reproduction of one’s image. The mirror builds infinity, and Sinbad the Landsman is the reflection in the mirror of Sinbad the Sailor. In the *Arabian Nights*, the stories are varied and rich, but the characters are also deep and interesting. The reader can see in them all the contradictions, pain, and depth that are present in human nature. The critical lenses I adapt from Auerbach and Candido allow me to bring the literary analysis of the *Arabian Nights* and *The Legend of the Wandering King* into a comprehensive discourse.
Chapter 4: Borges’ Metaphors, *Mise en Abyme* and the *Arabian Nights*

4.1 The River

The French writer and librarian from the nineteen century, Jean-Charles Nordier, said about the *Arabian Nights*:

Everyone marvelled because of the charm that emanated from the reading. And it is that the truth of the feelings, the novelty of the frames, an imagination rich in prodigies, a colorfulness full of warmth, the appeal of an unpretentious sensitivity and the salt of a grace without caricature, in short, the wittiness and naturalness, pleased everywhere and everyone. (qtd in Cansinos Assens 1:19, my translation)

In this quotation, Nordier refers to the capacity of seduction in the *Arabian Nights*, and to the fact that this seduction springs from the incredible variety of wonders that coalesce in the book. This variety of stories, settings, and characters present in the *Arabian Nights* is what Borges refers to with his metaphor of the river. When Borges talks about the “living mirror,” (233) he enumerates the scenes that can be viewed in that river (a selection of stories of the book), a river that in this case seems to work as a receptacle. One might think that the metaphor of a lake would be more effective, but the river implies movement, and movement is essential in any interpretation of the *Arabian Nights* because of the way in which the stories are linked with one another.

In connection with this metaphor of the river, Borges lists, in the first verses of his poem, a number of elements of the *Arabian Nights*: Aladdin’s genie, imprisoned in the lamp; the stories of Sinbad the sailor; the magnetic mountain that destroys Achib’s vessel. His intention is to show
the diversity of the stories gathered in the book, in order to express a particular condition of the *Arabian Nights*, which is the unity in diversity: the book is one, but at the same time the amount of characters and stories that are contained in that unity is abundant. Cansinos Assens says that “*The One Thousand and One Nights* is not a book, but a book of books” (1:115).


In addition to representing diversity in unity, Borges’ river metaphor illustrates the peculiarity in the construction of the narrative voice in the *Arabian Nights*, one that is characterized by the multiplication of narrators. The abundance of narrators generates a sense of movement that is present throughout the book and that can be illustrated by a river in the movement of its currents. The voice that constitutes the starting point of the book is not even Shahrazad’s: there is someone else, a narrator without a name who tells the story of King Schahriyar (1:382), a king who—after discovering that his wife has been unfaithful to him—travels to find out if all women lie. The narrative voice that tells this first story doesn’t identify itself, and what is revealed through that anonymous voice is King Schahriyar’s determination to marry a new woman every night and kill her at dawn the following day. When Shahrazad decides to marry King Schahriyar, her own father, only referred to as the vizier, tries to
discourage her by telling her a story, so he constitutes the second narrator appearing in the 
*Arabian Nights*. Unconvinced, Shahrazad marries the King, to whom she tells stories starting on their wedding night, being, in this way, the third one of the multitude of narrators in the *Arabian Nights*. With Shahrazad, the first narrative voice with a name appears. The stories that she tells branch into other stories, so the reader is carried along by a narrative voice that multiplies itself.

In this regard, the metaphor of the river is appropriate. The interlinked tales, which are characterized by their diversity in settings and characters, create this illusion of movement that runs through the *Arabian Nights*. The unity is manifested in a conception of the East and in the fact that there is a central framing story that brings all the tales together.

How these stories intertwine and multiply can be seen in “The Story of the Third Saluk” (1:481-500). The first voice belongs to Shahrazad, who is telling tales to King Schahriyar, and the story that she tells him on night nine concerns three girls that invite three *saluk*, or beggars, to their home (1:446). These three beggars also tell their own stories. The third *saluk* is Achib, who tells a story that consists of two parts: in the first part, Achib reaches an island where he watches while a young man is locked in a cave. He decides to save him, and when he talks to him he learns that his father has locked him away to protect him because he is destined to die at the hands of a man named Achib. When Achib hears this, he thinks that is absurd, because he has no intention of killing this boy, of whom he already has grown fond, and he decides to live with him until the time is done. The last day he kills him by accident with a knife that was intended to cut a watermelon.

The second part of the story tells how Achib, who has continued his journey after killing the boy, finds ten young men who are all one-eyed. The young men don’t explain to him what had happened to them, but, in order to satisfy Achib’s curiosity, they cover him with a sheepskin
to entice the Roc bird to carry him to the summit of a mountain where Achib will understand everything for himself. There, Achib discovers a paradise where he lives happily for a whole year. At the end of that year, the girls who have been living with him on the summit of the mountain leave the castle for a week and tell him that he can do whatever he wants while they are gone, but forbid him to open a particular door. After resisting for a period, Achib eventually opens that door and is expelled from paradise, and he loses his left eye when a winged stallion kicks him in the head (1:499).

Achib’s tale is in keeping with the metaphor of the river because it tells the story of a traveler by means of successive voices that elaborate their respective stories. The story of Achib is representative of the whole book, a sort of microcosm for the construction of the Arabian Nights as a single entity, in which a variety of scenarios and characters proliferate. The concept of movement is also perceived in Achib’s life, because he travels constantly, first on a boat and then walking, from one adventure to the next. At the end of the tale, he is an itinerant beggar who asks for charity from door to door, so he is still in motion. By the time the readers meet him, when he has entered the house of the girls to whom he is telling the story of his life, Achib has been destroyed by his experiences, but he is still walking.

Achib’s tale has several interesting ingredients. The first one has to do with the involuntary murder that he commits at the beginning of his tale. The reader has already learned that his ship had crashed into the Magnetic Mountain. Achib thinks that he survived that terrible accident because fate had plans for him, and later we discover that fate’s plans included murdering an innocent boy. At this point of the narrative, the interpretation of the character’s acts is very interesting, because we could read the story in three ways: he killed the boy by accident; he killed him because that was his destiny; or that it was a self-fulfilling prophecy, that
because he heard that the murder was his destiny, an unconscious urge that worked at the margins of his own intentions guided him to fulfill his fate.

This ambiguity in Achib’s retelling is an example of the obscurity that is present throughout the *Arabian Nights*, an obscurity that opens the possibility of alternative readings of the stories, a more complex one that involves the motivations of the characters and speaks with a greater depth about human inclinations.

Something similar happens in the second part of the story. When Achib is in front of the forbidden door, after having opened the previous ones and seen a variety of wonders, he knows that he should stop, that he is about to do something that is prohibited, and yet he cannot resist his curiosity:

(…) and the temptation was stronger than me and I yielded to it and opened the door.

And my eyes didn’t see anything, but a very strong and unpleasant smell hit my nose and I fainted and rolled in the hallway, and the door immediately closed again. (1:498-499, my translation)

Achib knows that behind that door there is nothing agreeable because he has perceived the stench coming out of the room. He faints and the door closes, so he has the chance to save himself: it would be enough not to open the door again. Yet he cannot control himself and opens the door again. He finds a large room and, in that room, a black horse with a white star on its forehead and also white hooves. Achib takes the horse to the garden and mounts it. The horse then spreads two gigantic black wings and flies, leaving the mountain behind. Soon Achib is again in the middle of the desert, and the horse strikes him in the eye with a wing before abandoning him. Achib is now one-eyed. He won’t see that horse again, nor the girls or the mountain. Because of his action, he has lost paradise.
It is important to point out these two moments in the story of the third saluk because they show an element that is often repeated in the *Arabian Nights*: the contradictory nature of the human psyche, a nature that is sometimes self-destructive. The universe of marvels that the *Arabian Nights* presents is not superficial, rather it attends to the intimate truth of our motivations, even of the most obscure ones. In that sense the book achieves an interpretation and expression of human truth.

In dealing with the obscure depths of human nature inherent to the tales, it becomes necessary to introduce the narrative strategy of *mise en abyme* in *Arabian Nights*. Borges refers to the peculiarity in the construction of the *Arabian Nights*. Speaking about the structure of the book in *Seven Nights*, Borges says that, in “One Thousand and One Nights,” – “We may think of those Chinese spheres in which there are other spheres, or of Russian dolls (…) Stories within stories create a strange effect, almost infinite, a sort of vertigo” (53). Stories within stories in the *Arabian Nights* build a labyrinth where King Schahriyar gets lost, and that saves Shahrazad from death. Also, in these labyrinths of stories where the reader also gets lost and where he or she is forced to jump back some pages to remember where he or she is, there are moments, as in those concerning Achib, where the figure of humanity will lean towards self-destruction, and that produces the sense of vertigo to which Borges refers: the character could be happy but the reader watches his determination to sabotage that possibility, a state that is confusing but eloquent and poignant at the same time. Vertigo, as Kundera says, is not linked to the fear of falling but to the temptation of jumping (60).

Borges refers to the stories of the *Arabian Nights* as “an aqueous globe of shapes that shift and vary like clouds” (233): the metaphor of the river is complemented by this metaphor of the sky, and then the river and the sky reflect one another and are ultimately the same thing.
4.2 The Weft of a Tapestry

Even when the pattern of a rug contains no representations of animals or people or things, “A carpet tells a story”, writes the Moroccan poet Abdelkevir Khatibi, “a secret, and is arranged according to one’s wishes, for some erotic encounter, for some prayer, for some entreaty.” Aside from the cultural coincidence of carpet-making and storytelling among nomadic peoples, the flying carpet of the Arabian Nights embodies the fairy way of writing and the fairy way of telling. (Warner 80)

The second metaphor that expresses the essence of the Arabian Nights, according to Borges, is “the weft of a tapestry.” (233) The link between storytelling and the act of weaving carpets makes sense because both tasks shape the world to make it intelligible. Borges says that the book is a reflection of the universe. In this context, the designs in a tapestry are a representation, a stylization, of the outside world. Borges’ poem reproduces the feeling of a mirage that the book builds through symmetries and parallelisms when he says that, like the book, the Universe is a dream. Borges points out that “a wild chaos of unstable, mingled colors and lines” (233) is ruled by “a hidden order.” (233) He says that this chaos is “subject to the whims of Chance,” (233) but he also says that there is coherence; in the numbers that are repeated throughout the book, there is a logic based on the notion that behind these figures is the number One, “the first and last number of the Lord.” (237) If that is so, the Universe makes coherent sense and there is a meaning behind the diversity that is present in the world and in the book. Both the story that is built through words and the designs drawn on a carpet depict the world, and they are both dreams that have their origin in the real world.
“The weft of a tapestry” (233) expresses the nature of a book in that it presents a vision of the universe as a logical structure. The word Borges uses in Spanish instead of weft is *trama*. That word implies, in Spanish, not just the intricate weaving of threads in a carpet, but also the plot of a story. Thus, Borges refers simultaneously to storytelling and to the act of weaving, and he thinks of both as tools representing the Universe. In the *Arabian Nights’* depiction of the universe, chaos is just apparent, because in fact there is an unintelligible order that we can perceive but not decipher. The stories Shahrazad tells show diversity but also unity, and that paradox is the basis of the notion of labyrinth, which is intrinsic to the book.

All the stories mentioned by Borges in relation to this metaphor incorporate numbers. When he speaks about the “seven brothers,” (233) he refers to “The Story of the Barber of Baghdad and his Six Brothers;” the “seven journeys” (233) are the ones of Sinbad; the three wishes refer to “The Three Wishes, or the Man Who Longed to see the Night of Power.” He also refers to “The Story of the Chief of Police: 9,” and to the tale called “Three Wazirs and Three Punishments.”

Borges doesn’t speak about the “The Story of Nur al-Din and his Son,” but this story is useful to exemplify the second metaphor of the weft of a tapestry.

The succession of narrative voices creates the book’s labyrinthine structure, and “The Story of Nut al-Din and his Son” as a story within a story, is no different. This tale appears in “The Story of the Three Apples,” which Shahrazad is telling King Schahriyar, about caliph Harun al-Rashid. Harun al-Rashid is the most human sultan of the entire book. He loves music and beauty, is eager to learn about human nature, is healthy, cheerful and full of the desire to live and enjoy. That is why he wanders at night in the city accompanied by his vizier, Jafar al-Barmaki, as he enjoys learning more about the life of his subjects. But in this story, as Shahrazad
tells it, the audience realizes that Harun al-Rashid’s good nature will become corrupted: while he is deciding the destiny of a man who killed his wife, he threatens Jafar, who is his best friend. (Eventually Harun al-Rashid, obsessed with the idea that someone wants to destroy him, goes insane and kills Jafar and his whole family.) Jafar tells Harun al-Rashid a story meant to save the killer’s life. The story he tells is the “The Story of Nur al-Din and His Son.”

The story maintains a daydream atmosphere. It’s difficult to distinguish reality from fantasy, and even the characters reach a point where they are so confused that even they don’t know if they are dreaming or awake. The story has three parts. In the first one, two brothers (Schams al-Din and Nur al-Din) become viziers of a king when their father dies. In the course of a conversation, they imagine the possibility of getting married the same day, and having children the same day, so that in the future their children, who are first cousins, might marry one another. The problem arises when they speak about the dowry that the father of the girl should give to the father of the boy. They fight and separate, never to see each other again. The argument is absurd, because they are building a future on hypothetical events, but later fate will fulfill these plans to the very last detail.

Nur al-Din leaves the city with plans to return in three days but ends up living the rest of his life abroad. In a poem that has similarities to Borges’ stanza about the first metaphor, Nur al-Din speaks about the virtues of travelling, and about the sense of movement:

Leave, then, the country where you vegetate;
Look for new horizons;
Water gets corrupted if it stagnates
And it’s again, if it runs, a clear mirror. (1:526, my translation)
Movement is present both in the successive voices of the narrators, and in the active lives of the characters.

Nur al-Din is lucky in Basra. He marries the daughter of the vizier and has a son called Badr al-Din Hasan. He doesn’t know that his brother is a living a parallel life, and that he has had a daughter named Sitn al-Husn.

Although this story embraces three generations, the second one, the one of the children, is the most interesting of the three. Badr al-Din Hasan is forced to rely on his wits to survive when his father dies and he falls out of favor with the Sultan of Basra. He is fifteen years old and he is alone. He falls asleep while crying in the graveyard, next to his father tomb, and two genies see him and think that he is the most beautiful thing they have ever seen. They don’t wake him up but take him far away, to the city of Misr, because they want to compare his beauty with that of a girl whom they consider his equal. This girl is his cousin, Shams al-Din’s daughter. The genies bring together these two cousins who were destined to marry before birth, and they fall in love immediately. The boy is asleep when he arrives, and he is asleep when the genies take him back. Now Sitn al-Husn is pregnant with Achib (a homonym of the third zaluk), who will be so named because of the way he is conceived (according to Cansinos Assens, Achib means “marvelous,” 1:525).

Considering the intervention of the genies in the lives of this young couple, Cansinos Assens says that “they decide their fates with an arbitrariness that, in fact, cannot be more logical” (1:524, my translation). He points out something that is also present in Borges’ poem: that although things happen by chance, there is an absolute consistency in everything; in the context of the book we can think that all acts make sense, and that there is no free will because the destinies of the characters are written in advance. Because the book is intended to show, as a
mirror, the nature of the world, we can assume that, just as happens with the characters, our acts are predetermined, and that nothing happens by chance. The book aims to show us an inextricable maze, and to tell us that this maze is coherent, though unknowable.

When Badr al-Din Hasan wakes up almost naked in the city of Misr, left behind by the genies, he believes that everything he has experienced with his beloved was a dream. He becomes a confectioner while his son grows up far away from him. One day this son, Achib, finds him and, to make sure that he is his father, sets up a trap with the help of his grandfather: they lock him in a cabinet and tell him that they are going to kill him. They leave him inside it while they decorate the room as it was the night Hasan met his cousin.

When Badr al-Din Hasan gets out of the cabinet, he thinks that he is dreaming. If he thought before that the night he spent with his cousin was a dream, now he is convinced that time hasn’t passed and that the life he dreamed was the one as a confectioner. He says: “Am I dreaming or awake?” (1:560, my translation), and later he exclaims, in fear: “By Allah! If I hadn’t woken up on time, at these hours I would be crucified in a pillory” (1:561, my translation). At one point the character is so confused that he no longer believes that everything is a dream but the opposite: he thinks that dreams are real and that he could be killed while dreaming. The ending is happy, and Badr al-Din Hasan writes a qasida for the sultan of Misr, who becomes his patron.

In the story that surrounds this story, Harun al-Rashid is dazzled by the wonders that he has heard about the lives of these three generations of men and, because every story that matters should be put in writing in the context of the Arabian Nights, he asks Jafar to do it: Jafar has managed to save the slave that caused the murder of the woman in “The Tale of the Three Apples.”
“The Story of Nur al-Din and His Son” shows the symmetries of an ordered universe that seems to be chaotic. At the beginning, the two brothers dream about their future, and fate manages to realize the things they have imagined through coincidences that seem accidental. Just as it happens with the third saluk, the characters believe that they are choosing their lives, and yet the reality, which happens apart from the character’s will, outlines a consistent destiny, which seems to fit a larger plan that in the book would be determined by fate. In the story of the third saluk, the mise en abyme is present when the character looks into the emptiness and makes decisions that will destroy him. In “The Story of Nur al-Din and His Son,” the fact that the lives of the brothers are so similar at the beginning, builds a mirror between the two of them where they are both reflected, as if they were just one person. The same happens with their children, when the genies find them both so beautiful.

The metaphor of the weft of a tapestry, by Borges, links the designs in a tapestry with the act of storytelling, and all of this with the expression of a reality that seems to be chaotic but that is, in fact, logical. The labyrinths of dreams the book shows are apparent, and both the characters and the readers of the book perceive reality as if they were in a dream. That is why they are unable to decode the signs that surround them. These signs make sense, but this sense is out of reach. Even the structure of the Arabian Nights strives to represent the ambiguous nature of the outside world, and the attractive aspect of this outside world is coherence.

Mise en abyme is present in the labyrinths of the successive voices, in the human lives that reflect other human lives as if they were mirrored, in the abysses of the inexplicable acts, in the dreams that are so believable that seem to be real, in the waking reality that at times is confused with dreams, in the disturbing uncertainty of the characters, who don’t know if they should doubt the truth of their own perceptions, and in the hallucination and confusion of the
characters when the genies use them at will. This story shows a multiple universe in which the reality of everything is in question, but the oneiric matter that stays and that we inhabit makes sense because it is singular. Variety is a simulation in *Arabian Nights*, only a distorted expression of unity.

### 4.3 A Dream

The confusion of Hasan, who at first thinks that he has dreamed the episode in which he meets his beloved, and then that he has dreamed he was a confectioner, leads us to Borges’ third metaphor. This metaphor speaks about the way in which dreams within dreams build an intricate labyrinth. Borges says that the book expresses the dreams of Muslims and Persians, and that those dreams are still being dreamed today. He relates the infinity in the dreams with the paradox by Zeno of Elea: in order to get to a certain point it is necessary to pass through an infinite number of intermediate points; that is why, although human experience would tell us otherwise, movement is impossible. The same happens with dreams, and, in fact, with reality, which is itself but a dream. Borges says that the labyrinth is built with dreams that branch into other dreams, and that when Shahrazad tells Schahriyar the story of them, Schahriyar forgets himself and, just like in dreams, he drifts away without a clear notion of his own identity or of the point he is trying to reach. As the characters are immersed in dreams so too are the readers: our wakefulness is just another mode of dreaming, and that is why our capacity to understand the world is so vague. The audience reads a dream told by Shahrazad and considers her to be a fictional character, but someone could be reading the reader, and so on, unto infinity.
Borges says that “in the book is the Book.” (237) He refers to the night when Shahrazad tells Schahriyar their own story, but also to the fact that the multiplication of narrative voices makes it very difficult to discern the real characters from the fictitious ones. Because Shahrazad is telling the story, we might think that Shahrazad exists. The same happens with the successive characters that speak after her.

The metaphor of a labyrinth as an abyss incorporates the notion of falling. The individual that gets lost in a labyrinth can even lose his or her sense of self, as has been shown so clearly with Schahriyar’s experience. Shahrazad disorients Schahriyar with the intention of losing him in the stories, so that he leaves behind the notion of who he is, of his own identity. The story becomes a living space, and the fictional landscape that Shahrazad creates becomes the only reality that Schahriyar will be able to perceive.

Achib, the third *saluk*, discovers another abyss when he is forced to confront his own curiosity and overlooks the intricate depths of himself. Both the book and the poem that Borges has composed to approach the book speak about the diversity of infinities in which human experience plunges.

“The Story of Two Hashish-Eaters” exemplifies this idea. The tale follows a fisherman who, after eating hashish, goes for a walk in the city, as dusk falls. Soon a full and bright moon lights up the sky. Confused, the fisherman thinks that the reflection of the moon on the ground is a lake and sits down to fish. Cansinos Assens says that this man, who is hallucinating and thus lives outside reality, “takes his dislocated metaphors as positive facts” (3:185, my translation). What he does is, in a sense, similar to what the third *saluk* does before him: the fisherman confronts an objective reality (the fisherman sees something on the ground that confuses him and that needs to be named, just as did the third *saluk*, whose misery is manifested as a closed door)
and solves the enigma. The resolution of the enigma, the revelation of the mystery, is always related to the allocation of a name. The name itself is the consolation by means of which the imagination domesticates a hostile external reality. By naming, the characters take possession of things, and that is how reality becomes intelligible. In Achib’s case, the name is not a nice one: the winged horse is beautiful but it is there to force his obedience, and Achib fails.

The interpretation of the fisherman’s actions is related to the fact that the link between the character and reality is mediated by words: when he sees the lunar reflection on the soil he assumes that it is a lake, and that word, lake, is the sign that he uses to domesticate the reality that disturbs him for a moment. Achib also has access to a name in a similar situation when he discovers what is hidden in the forbidden room, but his misfortune is that the knowledge of that name means that he will be expelled from paradise.

The fisherman catches no fish, because it is impossible, but a dog bites the bait, and then the fisherman, who fights against the force of the dog, yells because he thinks that he will fall into the water and drown. People laugh at him. They get angry because the fisherman insults them while they try to help, and finally he ends up in the hands of a judge, who is, just as he is, a hashish-eater.

As in all the stories of the book, this one drifts toward unexpected places, and at last the fisherman meets the sultan and his vizier, who have been visiting the village in disguise. The fisherman doesn’t get any fish from the illusory lake, but at the end of the story he is rich thanks to the sultan.

The story of the hashish-eater is useful to understand Borges’ four metaphors, not just the one related to dreams, because it also incorporates an aspect that sheds light on the purpose of the whole work: The metaphor of the river speaks about human acts and movement, and in this
case the reader partakes in the adventure of a fisherman who goes to work, as he does every day. Acts that are subject to randomness are, in fact, full of a meaning that is not for us to understand, which is referred to in the metaphor of the weft of a tapestry. The state in which he goes out fishing, because of the hashish, links his experience with the metaphor of the dream, and that is the metaphor that assigns the fisherman’s actions not to the territory of reality but to that of dreams.

The additional element this story offers is that, when the fisherman chooses to create a lake with his imagination, he doesn’t understand what he sees. Earlier the reader saw the third saluk murdering a boy to fulfill a prophecy, and he also saw him destroying his own life with a wrong decision. The two key moments in the third saluk’s life are linked to the narrative structure of the mise en abyme because readers see the character in a dilemma that forces him to make a moral decision. That moral decision requires him to look into the depths of himself to choose a path. In both cases he chooses the wrong path and, guided by fate or by his own tendency to self-destruction, loses himself in the abyss.

In the case of Hasan, the reader does not see the character making decisions, but witnesses how life, or fate, makes the decisions for the character, as it has before with his father and his uncle. The reader sees labyrinths and symmetries in the structure of a coherent universe, which takes place outside of the characters’ will and moral choice. The entire tale suggests that chaos is apparent because it underlies a notion of meaning. In this case, the mise en abyme is in the symmetries between the brothers’ lives, in the symmetries between the son and the daughter, in Hasan’s confusion when he doesn’t know if he is asleep or awake.

In the story of the fisherman, the mise en abyme is present, but incorporates an innovation. There is symmetry in the two moons (the moon and its reflection) when the
fisherman confuses the reflection of the moon on the ground with the moon in the sky; the mise en abyme is also present in the fact that his reality is the product of a hallucination, and so the reader is placed in a dreamlike space. What is different in this story is that, faced with a perplexing enigma, the fisherman chooses to create and so his imagination leads him to create a beautiful lake, an abundant one that offers him an extraordinary fish. It is not important that the lake is just a reflected image and that the fish is, in fact, a dog: what matters is that this character has been able to use his imagination to create a fictional lake. Creation, in this context, illustrates the intention of the book itself in a microcosmic moment that exemplifies the whole, because Shahrazad is doing exactly the same when, facing the abyss of her own impending death, she populates the night space of King Schahriyar with the multiple lives and wonders of the world.

The tale of the fisherman is important because it helps to show Borges’ purpose. Borges uses these four metaphors to speak about the diverse universe of the Arabian Nights with its unity and direction, but his intention is to highlight the value of storytelling. The best testimony of the intention of the work is that the product of Shahrazad’s efforts is a book, a set of stories that constitute the mechanism by the means of which the unintelligible universe makes sense: what the fisherman is doing when creating the lake is a narrative act. It is also a narrative act that saves Shahrazad from death and that saves Shahriyar from the monster that lies in his own depths. All of them are saved by words. In his essay “The Art of Storytelling,” Borges says: “to tell stories is essential.” (70)
4.4 Time

Shahrazad plays the part of an Arabian Penelope, delaying her fate by weaving an endless tapestry of stories. She does not unpick her work, however, but lets it grow. From the vast store of her memory, she holds his curiosity, wins her reprieve and, through her heroic practice, vindicates her sex. (Warner 2)

And then, I will tell you a story in which it will be encrypted, if Allah wants it, the salvation of all women. (1: 392)

The fourth metaphor is a map of time. Borges speaks about the passage of time that causes “the perpetual erosion of the headstones,” (237) and populates it with the steps of men, as if they were the ones who establish the pace, the ones indicating the clock’s progress. He speaks about voices that are real, and echoes that probe the existence of these voices in the past, and he names the “two opposites faces of Janus,” (237) who looks to the past and to the future at the same time. Again, Borges uses symmetries opposing the “worlds of silver” (237) to the “worlds of the ruddy gold,” (237) and all of the scenes are overseen by the timelessness of the stars and their “long vigil.” (237) Borges presents again opposing postulates that tell us that everything is the same thing: time moves but at the same time is static because it is eternal. The same happens with the book that nobody can read “all the way to the end.” (237) Borges closes the poem saying that the book is time, and he involves the reader in the last verse when he says that:

Just go on reading while the daylight dies

And Scheherazade will tell to you your story. (237)
The book contains all, even the reader who is reading at that precise moment.

“The Story of King Schahriyar and His Brother” is the frame for all the other stories. It begins with the invitation King Schahriyar extends to his brother to visit him in his Kingdom. Schah Zaman travels immediately, but along the way he realizes that he has forgotten something in his palace and returns home. There he discovers that his wife has taken advantage of his absence by being unfaithful to him with a slave. He kills them both, and travels to his brother’s palace, but he is so sad that he doesn’t go on a hunting trip with his brother. In the absence of King Schahriyar, his wife also betrays him.

The two kings decide to travel together to see the world in order to fathom the nature of women. They walk for a long time until they see a gigantic genie coming out of the sea with a cabinet in his hands. He opens the cabinet, which has another box inside, and at last a woman gets out. Then he falls asleep.

The woman sees them both, while they are hiding from the genie, and forces them to have sex with her, threatening them and saying that she will wake up the genie if they disobey her. Then she shows them five hundred and seventy rings that belong to the men with whom she has deceived the genie, to punish him for kidnapping her. She tells them that women cannot be trusted and that all of them deceive and betray.

After this both kings presume that they understand women and return to their respective palaces. From that day on, they do the same: they marry a woman every day and kill her at dawn.

When Schahriyar’s vizier cannot find any more women to hand over to the king, he tells his daughter Schahrazad what is happening. Against his advice, she decides to marry the king and develops a plan, along with her sister Dunyazad, to save herself and the lives of other
women. That plan is to tell him stories at night that she will halt halfway through when the day comes.

At the beginning of the book, the link with Shahrazad is strong. When each night ends, Shahrazad interrupts the story and the reader comes back to her room, where she is with the king and he says that he wants to hear the ending: that’s why he lets her live. However, as the book progresses, the reader doesn’t hear Schahriyar’s voice any longer, and the link with the first story erodes. There is just a sentence, repeated regularly, when Schahrazad sees the dawn and cuts “the thread of her charming words” (1:571, my translation). It is not until night 132, in Cansinos Assens’ edition, when for the first time the reader reads a statement by the king, in which he shows regret: “In truth you have edified me, and now I feel sadness having given death to so many women” (1:986, my translation).

When 1001 nights have passed, Schahrazad presents three sons to the king and asks him to let her live. Schahriyar tells her that he has forgiven her long ago, and together they organize a big wedding. Schahrazad tries on seven beautiful dresses of different colors. The king’s brother comes to the palace and shares their happiness. He tells King Schahriyar that he wants to marry Dunyazad, Schahrazad’s sister, and that he wants to redeem himself also. It’s in that moment that the reader finds out that this king, the brother to King Schahriyar, has similarly been killing one woman after another. The couples decide to live together and to rule together also. Schahriyar commands the stories be put in writing, and the four of them live happily until death. Many years later, another king (whom we don’t know by name) orders these stories to be disseminated.

Shahrazad’s story is important because it shows the purpose of the whole work. It contains all of the other stories and gives them unity. It includes the same elements that were discussed in other tales: we see the symmetries between the two brothers who choose to live
identical lives, the night, and in the night the tales that are dreams; we see love that is also an abyss (haua, in Arabic, means both love and abyss); we see the abyss of Schahriyar’s sick conscience.

King Schahriyar is a monster that is cured when he learns about human nature by listening to Shahrazad’s stories, because they offer him a moral education. The unity of the book is in this interpretation of the book as a labyrinth in which the characters face moral dilemmas and, ultimately, their own consciences. The stories show the broad panorama of the dreams of human beings. Shahrazad takes Schahriyar with her as she wanders through this vast world of dreams, and, when he experiences them, he learns about empathy and mercy. Such qualities recall the first lines of the book, in which the omniscient narrator, who tells the story of Schahriyar, introduces the book with an invocation that speaks about Allah’s qualities and calls him “the Compassionating, the Compassionate” (1:379, my translation). Cansinos Assens says that, in Arabic, these two words—rahman y rahim—show the two conditions of piety, and also incorporate a reference to the maternal condition, because rahim means uterus, matrix (1: 379).

God, the One, the unity of all, has its origin in the image of a mother who contains everything. In this context, Shahrazad’s maternal condition is very important.

At the beginning of the book, Schahriyar is similar to another king: Harun al-Rashid, the madman who believes that everyone is chasing him and who kills his childhood friend, Jafar, and Jafar’s whole family. As the book progresses, Shahrazad captures Schahriyar’s imagination and teaches him to be emphatic and to understand others. She does so by showing Schahriyar the wide range of human passions, so he doesn’t follow in Harun al-Rashid’s footsteps.

The Arabian Nights shows labyrinths, and in those labyrinths it shows how characters get into extreme situations in which they are forced to decide, they are forced to say who they are
through decisions that define them. Characters perform extreme acts of will when they suffer, when they have needs, when life places them in a predicament. Because of these acts, they destroy others or themselves. The examples are abundant: Queen Ibrizah puts herself in the hands of a slave that she distrusts, and he kills her (“The Story of King Omar bin al-Nu’uman and His Sons Sharkkan and Zau al-Makan, night 60-102”); Abdullah uses the ointment around his left eye although the dervish has already told him that he will be blind if he does so (“The Story of the Blind Man, Baba Abdullah, nights 634-637”); Achib kills his friend and later opens the forbidden door. Readers see the characters facing empty spaces that force them to make decisions, and in amazement they see them choosing the path that will destroy them. The stories demonstrate these paradoxes in human nature, and surely that also contributes to making Schahriyar sensitive to human pain. The Arabian Nights tells us that pain destroys, that it can even turn us into monsters, as it did with King Schahriyar. All of this is part of the moral education that the book offers King Schahriyar.

In this sense we could say that the task of the book is to tame a reality that has suddenly become an entangled mystery and a horror for King Schahriyar. Before experiencing the betrayal of his wife, Schahriyar saw the world with innocence because he had not yet experienced pain. The power of suffering, in the context of the Arabian Nights, is that it transforms the reality around the character. Schahriyar becomes a monster because he is afraid of suffering and, from the moment in which he is betrayed, assumes that he is capable of reading the reality around him, one that is as monstrous as he is; we narrate our existence while we live it, and Schahriyar chooses to live a tale of horror, as does another King in the book: Harun al-Rashid.

However this is not the legacy of the Arabian Nights, and that is significant to note. Although the book shows us a labyrinth and characters that, when facing the emptiness, harm
others or themselves, the intention of the book is clear in the story of the fisherman who creates a lake of the moon’s reflection, a lake in which he believes with such conviction that he even sits in it to fish. Facing the emptiness, this character creates, and that is also what Shahrazad does. Sharazad is condemned to die, and she chooses to weave tales, one after another, so that she builds a living reality for the king to wander through, until he reaches the point at which this reality is more true for him than that of his injured imagination. Shahrazad’s imagination conquers King Schahriyar.

The Arabian Nights teaches the reader that, when facing the void, he or she can find meaning in creation (and, specifically, in creation by means of words), rather than turning to self-destruction. Schahrazad is the most powerful character in the book because she shows the reader that he or she can embellish the world with words, that words give meaning, that to tell stories is the way to find the path out of the labyrinth. It is fundamental to tell stories about our own lives and about the lives of others, and that is what gives meaning to human acts and inclinations. The characters in the book are lost, as are Schahriyar and the readers, but the stories are the compass that guides them. When, at the end, Schahrazad tells King Schahriyar that she doesn’t have any more stories to tell and she shows him three sons, those sons represent the fertility of the imagination, because, in the context of the story, the reader is expecting to see Schahrazad die, and instead, the resolution and resounding note is of life.
Chapter 5: The Legend of the Wandering King

*The Legend of the Wandering King* by Laura Gallego García tells the story of Walid, the prince of Kinda. At the outset, the author describes him as beautiful of body and soul, a good warrior, loved by his people and a book lover (13-14). However, the subsequent facts don’t confirm this initial depiction. Walid has a passion to write poetry, and in his quest for recognition of his capacity as a poet, he exhibits terrible pettiness and goes on to commit a horrifying crime. The book tells the emotional journey of this character, who will be transformed by his experiences.

In the novel’s prologue, the reader witnesses a proleptic scene in which a bandit kills Walid, and Walid accepts this destiny as if he deserves it. Later, in the first chapter of the book, the story goes back in time, so the reader has the impression that he is going to read the facts that led Walid to this inevitable fate. But what we see by the end of this book is that this prologue speaks of a possible destiny--not the only one--and one that Walid ends up avoiding. In this way, the book’s very structure reflects its thematic treatment on the meaning of time, and on the plurality in the possibilities of being.

This is Walid’s story: he wants to travel to the remote city of Ukaz to participate in a poetry contest. He knows that if he wins, his *qasida* will be written with golden letters and exhibited in the temple of Kaaba. He needs his father’s permission, however, to travel. The king tells him that he will let him go if he is able to win a poetry contest in his own land. They, therefore, organize a competition and Walid loses. Although Walid is very talented, the jury tells him that his *qasida* is empty, that it has neither depth nor heart. Instead a simple carpet weaver, Hammad, wins.
The contest is held two more times, and, in both of them, Walid is defeated by Hammid. Being a very poor man, the carpet weaver strives to win the award in gold because he wants to leave a legacy for his three sons. During the three years of the contest, Walid’s personality turns sour, and failure changes him completely. Walid knows that Hammad will win again, so he devises a way to punish him.

As the third contest approaches, Walid sets a trap. The trap is to compel the winner to take a post as the royal historian. When the weaver wins, Walid shows him the Royal Library and all the documents he has to organize. It’s such a huge job that it will take a lifetime. Hammad, eager to have his life and his family back, convinces Walid to let him go if he finishes the organization of the library. To torture Hammad further, Walid also asks him to weave a carpet to his liking.

Hammad knows Walid hates him, and struggles to organize the library. When he finally achieves this seemingly impossible task, after diligently laboring for several years, he asks Walid for the specifications of the carpet. Walid, who hadn’t expected the task to be ever fulfilled, seeks to destroy this man whom he so vehemently envies, and states that he will release him if he weaves a carpet that contains the entire history of mankind, a history that Hammad has learned while reading all the scrolls in the library.

Walid has become a cruel man. When Hammad is ordered to create an impossible carpet, he is aware that he will never be able to return to his family, and goes insane. He flees to the desert, and after experiencing a vision of the universe, he returns to the castle and dedicates himself to the task of making the carpet. People are now afraid of him: they suspect he has been possessed by genies, and that he is no longer human. Hammad works so ceaselessly that he goes blind—and yet he keeps weaving. Walid, who eventually understands that he’s done something
terrible, is horrified. He begs Hammad to leave and offers the weaver exactly what he asked for: to rejoin his family, but Hammad doesn’t want that anymore: “Go away and let me work,” said Hammad. “Know that you are a mere mortal who has unleashed powers more terrible that a mighty storm, and that as a mortal, you cannot stop their wrath. Not anymore. It is far too late.”

(73)

The weaver finishes the carpet, and then he dies. When Walid looks upon the completed carpet, he is paralyzed with horror:

Then he let out a cry of fright. The lines were moving! The labyrinthine design undulated as if it had a life of its own. Suddenly it began to spin and spin, and chaotic images formed in the king of Kinda’s mind, moving and shifting and twirling around, showing him landscapes and faces and impossible shapes, people who moved too fast to be seen and spoke too fast to be understood.

Walid cried out in a desperate effort to escape from the carpet’s sorcery. He threw the lamp far from him and covered his eyes to keep from seeing any more. In absolute horror, he turned and fled, leaving behind the weaver’s body and the wondrous, monstrous carpet he had created. (77)

Walid becomes king when his father dies but is unable to do his job. Eventually he considers the carpet to be his curse and his treasure, and he is obsessed with it. All men who look at it for a long time go mad. Walid keeps it in a locked room, but Hakim, the raui or minstrel who has been with him always, steals it. Walid’s life in the castle has no purpose after he loses the carpet. The novel follows Walid when he leaves the country to travel tirelessly in search of the carpet.
The novel changes radically when Walid leaves his royal life. The second half of the text is structured in three parts that correspond to three encounters. Walid travels randomly in his search for the carpet. He encounters Hammad’s three sons, who have chosen different lives and have separated. Walid is trying to recover the carpet, but when he contacts each one of the three brothers and lives alongside them, he discovers three new ways of living that enrich his knowledge and his feelings. Walid learns valuable lessons from all of them, and that new knowledge is very important because it links the unfolding story with its starting point: at the beginning of the book, Walid wants to be a poet, he wants to write extraordinary *qasidas*, but lacks depth. Traditionally, the *qasidas* are divided into three parts: the first part is dedicated to the desert, the second part to one’s beloved, and the third part to the patron to whom one is grateful. In the company of the three brothers, Walid has the opportunity to experience the desert, love, and vassalage. At the final resolution of the narrative, Walid has learned everything he needs to know to be able to write a *qasida* worthy of being written in gold letters in the Kaaba. Ironically, however, by the time he has become an accomplished poet, Walid no longer feels the need to sign his *qasida*, and when he finally wins the honour that he had sought in his early life, he now refuses to announce his name to the jury.

The novel is divided into fourteen chapters, a prologue, and an epilogue. It used the third-person point of view, that of the protagonist Walid. The chapter titles refer to the characters of the book, and some of them show Walid’s emotional evolution and the transformations he experiences as the book progresses. If in the first chapter the title refers to Walid as “The Prince,” at the end of the book, in the epilogue, he is “The Wise.” The narrative focuses on the protagonist’s growth and how he achieves, in an unexpected way, the goal that he has been striving to reach since the beginning of the book.
5.1 The River

Borges’ metaphor of the river refers to the unity and variety in characters, sceneries, and anecdotes, and to the physical movement characters experience in the narrative as they travel to different destinations where everything is new. Adventure is an important theme in the Arabian Nights. Another factor related to the metaphor of the river, possibly the most important one, is the succession of voices of the narrators that compose the particular structure of the book. In the Arabian Nights, the abundance of stories causes variety while there is simultaneously unity because of Schahrazad’s voice at the origin of all the stories.

In The Legend of the Wandering King, the most prominent feature that links the story with the Arabian Nights and the metaphor of the river is Walid’s emotional journey. The qualities that characterize Walid, at the beginning of the book, are a product of his immaturity. He is full of hope and is convinced of his extraordinary talent as a poet. Reality, however, proves him wrong, and his frustration, disappointment, and lack of empathy turn him into a cruel man. The process of this transformation occurs over three years during which Walid participates in three poetry contests and loses them all. In that period of time, the reader notes how Walid’s feelings are eroding like the banks of a river: “(…) the victory will be mine’ he says, when he takes part in the contest for the second time, ‘No one will be able to deny that I am the greatest poet in Kinda: It will be my qasida that everyone remembers, not some ragged peasant’s clumsy verses.’” (19)

But that “ragged peasant,” that man who doesn’t even know how to read before becoming the royal historian, always wins, and that is why Walid is driven to hate-filled revenge. Walid causes the death of the weaver, but he is also responsible for the creation of the
extraordinary carpet. The first hint that he has begun to mature and grow as a human being occurs when he eventually accepts his responsibility for Hammad’s death.

The search for the stolen carpet is actually a search for himself, an exploration of the outside world that Walid experiences as if it were an inner journey. In this inner journey, Walid is led by Hammad’s sons, who paradoxically become his teachers, because they give him the chance to learn about life while he is learning, at the same time, to write poetry. Learning poetry is nothing else but the experimentation of all forms of passion. As a young prince he was excluded from experience, but when he becomes a bandit, a Bedouin, and a servant, he has the opportunities to experience the feelings that help him become a full human being and ultimately allow him to write the perfect *qasida*.

When Borges refers to the metaphor of the river, he alludes to some of the stories of the *Arabian Nights* and says that they are “an aqueous globe of shapes that shift and vary like the clouds, and like them subject to the whims of Chance or Destiny.” (233) In *The Legend of the Wandering King*, Walid wonders about the power of his decisions and about the influence of fate:

Walid had always believed that one’s fate is written down in advance — that one only had to follow a well-marked path — but now he saw that his own actions and decisions had led him to this situation. The awareness that he was responsible for what he had done woke powerfully inside him. (107)

When Walid assumes responsibility for his destruction of the carpet weaver’s life, he decides to find the stolen carpet and thinks that the origin of this decision is his own will. Throughout the narrative, we see that Walid believes it is not destiny but he, himself, who chooses the course of his acts and path in life. However, the events of his life are completely
coherent, and they seem to answer to that first impulse, to that urgent need that defined him in his youth: everything moves Walid toward becoming a great poet, the most extraordinary poet of all. Experiences give him the chance to live life with intensity, make him a complete and compassionate human being, and only then he is able to write the *qasida* that has both heart and inner beauty.

The structure of the second half of the novel, in which Walid meets Hammad’s three sons, corresponds to the three parts of the *qasida*. At the beginning of the book, the narrator explains the structure of a *qasida* as having three parts: the first part (the *nasib*) is intended to speak about a beloved woman; the second (the *rahil*) is in praise of the desert; and the third (the *madih*) praises an important person (12-13). Through Walid’s journey, in the company of the three sons, the reader follows the protagonist as he falls in love, gets to truly know the desert, and becomes the vassal of a man whom he eventually loves deeply. These experiences allow him to develop the life experience and sensitivity he needs for his poetry.

When Walid wonders if it was fate that led him or if it was his will, the approach to this issue corresponds to what the reader often sees in the *Arabian Nights*: although it really seems that Walid is choosing his life, the outcomes are consistent with his passion for writing poetry and it seems that fate has led him to take the necessary steps to accomplish a task assigned to him since his birth.

Gallego García states that in this novel she tried to answer a question someone asked her once about fate (5). It seems that, in the context of the text, the answer to this question is a paradox: although it is our will that decides our steps, those steps are written in advance and are predetermined and coherent. In *The Legend of the Wandering King*, the figure that makes us think that the character’s fate is written in advance, and that there are external forces that are not
related to the characters and that will lead them and determine their actions, is the old man in a red turban. When Walid leaves his kingdom behind (a kingdom that will be destroyed in his absence) and begins the search for the carpet, he encounters this old man several times; he helps Walid to see through troubles and guides him in the right direction. Gallego García leaves open the possibility of free will, because she says that there are multiple possible futures that even contradict one another. In the novel, those futures are all written in the carpet. So the character chooses between many fates, but all of those fates are written, predetermined.

The metaphor of the river is an effective lens with which to investigate this novel because of the consistency of all events that are experienced by Walid. The reader sees the events rush by, but all these events occur in order to enrich Walid’s experience so that he may become a deeper human being and extraordinary poet. The journey is an important element in this book, since it is the one that allows the protagonist to find himself. In the resolution, Walid is no longer a prince, the Kingdom of Kinda has been long destroyed, and he is a modest, sensible, and mature man. He is in love and loving and is now able to understand the secret of Hammad’s being and his poetry. Life taught him to feel intensely, to understand others, and that is why his poetry has become a thing of value.

5.2 The Weft of a Tapestry

In *The Legend of the Wandering King*, the element that seems to link the book with the *Arabian Nights* is the carpet Hammad weaves, which contains the entire history of mankind. At the beginning of the narrative, Hammad is a sensitive man that writes three beautiful *qasidas*, but after reading and filing all the scrolls in the library, after being inspired by genies, he is no longer
human, and later the genies will say his power of creation was divine. His work is a masterpiece, and throughout the book the reader sees that there is no one worthy to look at the carpet. All men become insane when they gaze upon the carpet, until Walid approaches it bringing all of his experiences with him, and proves that he is capable of gazing deeply into the carpet and understanding its content. Hammad and Walid have a deep antipathy toward each other, but they also are similar. It is as if they are two necessary pieces in a game that had as its purpose the creation of the extraordinary carpet. Hammad needed Walid to push him to the bottom of the abyss and find in his despair the first origin of the work, although then the inexplicable forces of the desert intervene and give him the inspiration to create the carpet.

Borges says chaos is consistent and that there are “tutelary numbers” (233) in the *Arabian Nights* that indicate an order aimed at number One, that is, God. In *The Legend of the Wandering King*, numbers are also significant. Seven are the towers of the Palace of Dhat Kahal where Walid was born. Three are the contests and years in which Walid struggles to have his *qasida* written in gold in the Kaaba. Hammad sleeps seven days and seven nights when he discovers that he must weave a carpet that contains the entire history of mankind. Three are the sons of Hammad. Three are the thieves who steal the carpet. Three are the encounters Walid experiences when he becomes the Wandering King. Seven are the genies that appear before Walid in the desert, and seven are the keys with which Walid wants to lock up the extraordinary carpet. The numerical symbolism is important because it represents a signaling of coherence. The parallelism with the *Arabian Nights*, and probably with much of traditional folklore, is easy to see in this insistence to give additional meaning to numbers, in an effort to make them suggest coherence and direction. While Walid’s character is that of a desperate man that reaches the extremes of anger, pettiness, hatred, love, and repentance, it seems like all of his acts are necessary steps in
the path that he has to travel. When the book ends, the reader is left with the feeling that nothing was accidental, that everything was necessary. The masterpiece, the carpet, is the product of a host of amazing coincidences.

When Borges refers to the metaphor of the tapestry expressing the meaning of the Arabian Nights, he compares it with the universe that contains everything and that is delimited by a “hidden order” (233) Hammad’s carpet is similar because it also embraces all existing things and even time itself including the events that have not yet occurred. Borges also notes the power of the book to incorporate all the reasons, all the stories, and even the reader. When the characters of The Legend of the Wandering King see the carpet they become insane because they cannot embrace, with their imagination, the abundance of what they see. That carpet is a monstrosity, but at the same time is a treasure, and it constitutes the testimony that proves that the history of mankind makes sense.

Gallego García tells the story of a man who matures, who improves, who rises from his own limitations through knowledge and experience. At the end of the book, Walid is the only one who is worthy to see the carpet because he has matured and is no longer the cruel man who caused Hammad’s death. Hammad was destined to do great things, but so was Walid. At the beginning of the book, the jury told him that someday he could become the best of the poets. When, at the end, Walid recites an impeccable poem that touches all, but refuses to say his name aloud, it seems that he has reached that apex.

The strongest parallel between the Arabian Nights and The Legend of the Wandering King is that all acts, all anecdotes, seem to have a single purpose, which is the creation of a literary work. In the Arabian Nights, and thanks to the structural strategy of mise en abyme that incorporates stories within other stories, the act of telling is an explicit phenomenon, in which
there is a narrator that assures the listener that everything she is saying is fictitious. Shahrazad and the successive narrators are telling stories aloud, and the reader is aware of that. Thus the fundamental matter of this book is not in fact the content of the stories but the fact that these stories are fictional: the book is about fiction, not reality, and its goal is to explore and express the meaning of fiction in the context of our daily lives. When, at the end of the book, Shahrazad has been forgiven and the King has been cured, both Schahriyar and the subsequent kings have the ability to recognize the importance of the stories Shahrazad told. Schahriyar brings the copyists together to put in writing all the stories, and then he keeps them in the treasure room. A later king goes even further and orders that the work, which he considers to be wonderful, should be taken to all the corners of the world for everyone to know of it.

In The Legend of the Wandering King everything that happens is aimed at creating in Walid the ability to write a perfect qasida. First Walid is a talented and egotistical man who knows the technical aspects that would allow him to write a competent qasida, but lacks the experience and humility to make it extraordinary. The adventures he lives through, both on an internal level and in his trips through the desert, qualify him to infuse the qasidas with the life they lack. This way, the events of the book have just one purpose: to give Walid the tools to understand life, which is worthy of being understood in order to allow Walid to write a poem. The poem is the only purpose, the only thing that matters. And it is so important that at the end of the book this poem will be written in letters of gold in the Temple of Kaaba. Walid won’t append his name to the poem because he, as a person, will lose his importance over time: the only thing that matters is the poem, or the story, the only thing that matters is the work that has been written down, the work of art is the end goal.
In connection with Borges’ metaphor of the weft of a tapestry is the word *trama*, through which Borges links the act of storytelling and the act of weaving--also recalling the verbal link between text and textile. (233) In this vein, *The Legend of the Wandering King* employs a powerful image to drive the plot: the extraordinary carpet, which also serves as a narrative object since it is possible to read stories that are woven therein. Walid’s life is justified by his last *qasida*: everything he does is aimed to produce that masterpiece. Hammad, as Walid’s mirrored reflection, has a similar life, because in his case events make sense in light of the creation of the carpet: this carpet legitimizes what he has done and even legitimizes what monstrosities Walid has done to him.

A fundamental element that Borges finds in the book is coherence. When he speaks about variety and unity, he emphasizes the fact that, although the stories may seem unrelated to each other, in the end all of them are one, because one is the number of God. (233) Although the *Arabian Nights* includes pre-Islamic stories, Allah is constantly present, as Shahrazad frequently makes references that remind the reader that Allah is behind every event in the book. Thus, coherence in the book is linked to the fact that everything is one, but what truly gives the unity is the insistence in the fictitious nature of the book. Shahrazad’s voice reminds the reader regularly that what he is reading is a tale, and the multiple narrators contribute to the fictitious nature of the stories. The *Arabian Nights* tell us a story and at the same time reminds us that it is telling us a story, because it is saying that storytelling is necessary in the creation of our own personal narratives, that it is part of human nature, that is a way of authenticating an existence that otherwise would be fleeting. At the end of the *Arabian Nights*, Shahrazad dies, Schahriyar dies, and other kings inherit the books, but the words in those books have a longevity that human lives lack.
The Legend of the Wandering King is a story about a culture that sings and tells stories with the help of poetry. In Borges’ essay, “The Art of Storytelling,” regarding the singularity of epic poetry, Borges says that in ancient times to tell stories and to sing was the same thing (70). Gallego García’s tale reflects on the meaning of poetry. The subject matter of the qasidas is essential to the fabric of the story because it allows Walid to express his most intimate nature, and, with it, that of all human beings. Just as with words, the act of weaving is also primitive. In The Legend of the Wandering King, characters use poetry and weaving to say who they are, to say what they feel. Gallego García recovers the idea of words as tools as a resource for the definition and expression of one’s identity.

5.3 A Dream

In the Arabian Nights, the oneiric condition that often causes the reader to doubt if the characters are asleep or awake, is an essential resource to build the mise en abyme. Mise en abyme makes sense in this context because it helps in the development of the purpose of the book, which is to make the reader aware of the implausible nature of reality. The Arabian Nights makes explicit the fact that there is a narrator who is telling a fictional story, because the narrator is also fictitious, so the reader may even doubt his or her own existence. The Arabian Nights raises a question: in the context of time that runs at full speed and that disfigures the insignificant destinies of men, might it be possible that the reader is also part of a tale that someone is telling aloud?

In The Legend of the Wandering King, there are several moments in which dreams figure prominently in characters’ lives. Hammad sleeps for seven days and seven nights when he learns
that he has worked for nothing, when Walid orders him the impossible task of making a carpet that contains the entire history of mankind. When thieves steal the carpet from the chamber of treasures, Walid thinks that everything was a dream, but soon realizes that the dream has told him the truth. The little man in a red turban sometimes seems like a hallucination, and that happens also with the genies that appear at the end of the book before Walid to explain him the carpet’s nature. When Walid leaves his old life behind him and becomes a Bedouin, there comes a time when the only plausible reality for him is the desert and the tent where he lives, as if all his past had vanished. We could even think that the images woven in the carpet, hypnotic and exhaustive, are a dream of the possibilities that all men in the world have.

The most important dream in the book, however, is the one that works as the frame of Walid’s story: when the book begins, Walid dies at the hands of a bandit that the reader will later know to be one of Hammad’s sons. This episode creates confusion and makes the reader participate actively in Walid's hallucination: throughout the narrative, the reader believes that he or she is experiencing a retrospective journey that will explain the reason for the murder of the protagonist, but when the plot arrives at the moment when Walid dies pierced by a sword, the reader sees that later he wakes up and he is not injured. Walid suffered a hallucination, a dream, because he saw that fate in the carpet, and for an instant thought that he lived it, but in fact the bandit has forgiven him and considers him to be like a brother: he even thinks that Walid is worthy of Hammad’s legacy.

This element is essential in the interpretation of *The Legend of the Wandering King*, and in the comparison that may be established with the *Arabian Nights*. In the *Arabian Nights* the stories that are told at night have an oneiric component that is related to Shahrazad’s creative imagination. In *The Legend of the Wandering King*, the reader experiences an episode as if it
were true, but later this episode is revealed as a dream. The reader thinks that he or she is reading Walid’s story, but in fact he is reading about a hallucination experienced by Walid in a game of mirrors that makes us consider the structure of *mise en abyme* and its intent to establish a greater distance between the reader and the matter of fiction in order to point out that nothing is as it seems.

The origin of Walid’s hallucination is the carpet. When, at the end of the book, Walid confronts the seven genies in the desert, they ask him to look at the carpet and Walid does so, although he believes he will become insane. Walid sees the history of mankind, and the most important thing is that he sees the future, many futures. Walid understands that there are many paths and that men have the freedom to choose any of them. That is why he also sees the variety of possibilities in his own destiny, and in one of those destinies he foretells his own death. When the bandit approaches him in the middle of the desert, Walid remembers the destiny in which the bandit kills him, and faints.

Gallego García’s purpose is to tell the reader that every man and woman can choose, or even build, his or her own path. The paradox is that facts in the book around Walid’s life show an absolute consistency and in all of them the reader may intuit a designated fate. That is to say that, although the author speaks of freedom, there seems to be an inexplicable order that frames personal choices and gives them a meaningful context. This apparent contradiction is also common in the *Arabian Nights*’ stories, in which chance appears to determine the contingencies characters face, but at the end the reading that can be made of their lives makes sense, and all their steps seem to have had a direction. In the *Arabian Nights*, dreams could be considered narrative exercises created by the imagination that are linked to the immediate facts in the character’s lives. In *The Legend of the Wandering King*, it is possible to entertain the idea of
reality as a similar narrative exercise, the idea that reality is nothing more than a text, and that lives of real beings are written in advance, are predetermined.

Walid’s hallucination of his death by Hammad’s son’s hand, that possibility of a future that he, in fact, does not experience, is the context of the character’s story, who is always guided by his love for poetry. Poetry is the only impulse that drives Walid, his only purpose, his only driving force. In the latest qasida, and after having lived with intensity and having been inspired by genies, Walid is able to reveal himself fully and incorporate his experiences in a poem that justifies his existence and all of his acts. Hammad, on the other hand, sleeps seven days and seven nights and then is also inspired by the forces of the desert. His inner search ends when he creates the carpet, which is similar to Walid’s qasida, a reflection in the mirror that also legitimates his existence. The fact is that both characters have followed an intimate inclination that led them to creation, that both have sacrificed much, and that they have lived, not to write, but to put themselves in writing. The words written in the qasida, the images woven in the carpet, are products of intense lives and of the deep understanding of these two sensitive men, who have been exposed to experience. The context of these extraordinary creations is in the dreams and hallucinations experienced by the characters. These dreams and hallucinations are materialized in the form of genies of the desert that offer them inspiration, the matter that they will use to express their most profound truths. Dreams provide depth and perspective, and lead the creators beyond the superficiality of their own existences.

The name Walid chooses when he leaves his Kingdom and goes in search of the carpet, is the Wandering King. Until that moment the reader has seen him anchored in his house, with the desire to go to Ukaz to demonstrate that he is the best poet. The carpet forces him to travel, to abandon his past life forever, on a journey that is both external and internal. Later the reader will
see that Walid has the chance to fulfill a dream when he goes to Ukaz to recite his *qasida*. The fact is that the journey gives him the opportunity to understand life and his inner being through experience. The author chose the adjective *wandering* (errante, in Spanish) that refers to the one who goes adrift, from one side to another, seemingly without direction, and this is significant because, although from the reader’s point of view, Walid’s steps appear random, life takes him to three encounters with Hammad’s three sons, to the recovery of the carpet, to love, and to the understanding of the meaning of both his own life and that of Hammad, who has gradually become his master. Everything is coherent, although Walid is unable to read the meaning of his own steps on the way.

Dreams are, in this context, the opportunity to broaden the perspective in relation to the narrow panorama the character can see. For example, the old man in the red turban that could be considered a hallucination, seems to guide the character when he is lost, to direct his steps towards the fate that belongs to him, although it may seem that it is Walid who is making the decisions. Dreams are also the occasion the characters have to make important decisions, as happens with Hammad, when after a period of a long sleep, he awakes to execute an extreme act of will that leads him to create the extraordinary carpet.

5.4 Time

When Borges refers to the metaphor of a map of time (237) in relation to the *Arabian Nights*, he wants to show how the book has the ability to depict the steps of all men on Earth, of present, past, and multiple futures. The structure of the book allows this possibility because the stories within stories and the awareness of the fictional nature of the successive narrators, compel
the reader to read with suspicion and to consider the idea that nothing is real, that even the matter of his or her surroundings is likewise fictitious. The purpose of the narrative structure of *mise en abyme* in the *Arabian Nights* is to create the sensation of infinity, to place the reader next to an abyss, casting his or her gaze downward, to represent the most important feature of human nature, that is its temporality, in connection with the apparent enduring nature of the universe he or she inhabits.

Borges’ poem ends with the reader integrated as a character of the *Arabian Nights* in the last verse. (237) In this poem man matters less than the words that have been written about the fate of that man, and life has a meaning as long as it is told as a tale. If life is brief, the written word is nonetheless valuable and eternal.

The most important thematic element of *The Legend of the Wandering King* is time, because the most significant object in the story is the carpet, and this carpet offers an illustrated history of time. The paradox is that this object doesn’t present time as a succession, because all its images simultaneously reveal the present, past, and futures, in a snapshot that only one man is able to withstand (the phrase “history of time” could be considered an oxymoron since history implies succession while time exists as a concept out of time). Borges’ metaphor works in relation to this carpet because its figures constitute a map for Walid to navigate (and only Walid, because others are incapable of perceiving the coherence in the profusion of images, and that is what drives them insane), and what Walid understands is that destiny is not fixed, that men are free to choose their paths.

The *qasida* Walid writes at the end of the book is also a testimony to the passage of time and the inner journey of the protagonist, and that is why it is not ephemeral but eternal—evident in its being written in golden letters. The story of Walid, one that also seems to be successive, in
fact takes the form of a spiral when the preface anticipates a destiny that is not confirmed in the subsequent pages. The reader is introduced to a future event of Walid’s life, and then travels in time to his past to cover everything that has happened until that moment, but then the event changes: it is as if, by means of writing, Gallego García rejects the idea of time as a succession, to answer the question about fate and about the participation of human beings in that fate. Thus, the very structure of the work constitutes a statement of what Walid’s tale is trying to say about the notion of time.

The opposition between lasting and ephemeral makes sense, both in the Arabian Nights and in The Legend of the Wandering King, because of the implications these concepts have in the perception of language, and specifically of the written word. The construction Shahrazad creates with the fabric of life using words, the manual task of making a carpet that contains all the stories, the recreation of the desert and love in a qasida, the very story of Walid and his transformation into the Wandering King—all are evidence of the value that creators give to their narratives by means of which everyday events make sense. In Gallego García’s novel, during the contest when the minstrels are reciting the qasidas in public, the narrator says: “Everyone who was present that day could sense that words had a mysterious magical power, that they could reach the heart and make the oldest things new again, over and over, if only one used them with feeling or passion” (24). This fundamental power for words to renew is central in the interpretation of the Arabian Nights and The Legend of the Wandering King, and it forges a link between both literary works.

Another feature these books have in common is that they both stress the illusory nature of reality. Mise en abyme, in the Arabian Nights, helps to create the impression that reality is illusory, and in The Legend of the Wandering King the reader often thinks that possibly events
are not happening as the storyteller presents them. Hallucinations are abundant and they change the meaning of the story. Genies, the old man in a red turban, Walid’s intense dreams— everything seems to be there to confuse the reader, who at one point doesn’t know what is real and what is imaginary. However, being able to differentiate reality from hallucinations is not so important, because all the events in the story happen in the foreground, and dreams have an immediate impact on that reality, so their content is not untrustworthy anymore. The intention of the author seems to be to show the reader that characters are moving between mirages that are significant because we, the readers, move in a universe that is nothing more than an illusion. Language helps to counter the evanescence of reality.

The most important moment of Gallego García’s novel is when Walid speaks with the genies of the desert, finally looks at the carpet, and understands its meaning. The genies speak about the importance of the carpet and tell him that: “Hammad ibn al-Haddad is proof that humanity contains something of the divine: the same power of creation that made the great marvels of the universe” (190). The fundamental theme in Gallego García’s novel is creation, specifically literary creation, because it makes man similar to God, since a quality of divinity is to bring something out of nothing. Literary creation, in this context, would be exactly that because it manipulates a reality that does not exist, that is illusory (the deceptive reality of our own surroundings), to create works that give meaning to the lives of men.

We see this in the Arabian Nights because the labyrinth of words where Schahriyar wanders is populated by images that arise before the walker and that are nothing more than mirages. The stories he hears are not real, but they manage to create a territory that Schahriyar is able to inhabit for 1001 nights, one that changes him completely. In both The Legend of the Wandering King and the Arabian Nights, the reader sees an effort to express the dubious
materiality of the universe around us, in which humans, in our temporality, confront the infinite. *Mise en abyme* serves to show precisely that: there is a story within another story within another story in the *Arabian Nights* because infinity is an abyss. *The Legend of the Wandering King* also overrides the idea of linear time when the plot returns to the starting point in a circular misleading event of the future that then turns into something else. Both books manipulate the idea of time to point out the fleeting nature of human lives and the unreality of the context in which lives develop. In contrast to that transience is the impassive, eternal, and dizzying universe that seduces the characters so that they throw themselves into it by their own will. In both books, the reader sees the characters follow inexplicable paths, taking self-destructive and perplexing steps (just as Achib opens the door and Abdullah uses the ointment around his left eye, Walid leaves his kingdom behind and rushes into the terrible desert). Characters are seduced by the infinite: the abyss attracts them, an abyss where their existences are at stake and their identities could be dissolved. In these books, characters are often lost, and life itself is presented as an illusion in which human lives are meaningless, so the resource to avert meaninglessness is the written word, tales, literature.

Both the *Arabian Nights* and *The Legend of the Wandering King* emphasize the importance of creation, and specifically the importance of words, because they seem to have the power to stop time and to grant duration to fleeting human lives. Thanks to Shahrazad’s tales, Schahriyar understands that he has been cruel and that he has been wrong. Something similar happens to Walid when he sees the carpet and, in the carpet, all possible tales:

“I am a terrible king,” he said aloud. “I’ve brought ruin to my kingdom, I’ve been cruel, arrogant, and jealous, and many people suffered and died because of me.” (96-97)
Stories are related to the redemption of the characters, but also to the validation of human existence: in this context human life proves to be significant because it is able to leave a trail behind, a trail of words. In the *Arabian Nights* this idea is exemplified in Shahrazad’s telling of stories aloud to save herself and in the tale of the fisherman who, faced with the inexplicable, creates a lake from the inexplicable in which to fish. In *The Legend of the Wandering King*, what matters is that Walid’s life makes sense as, at the end, he creates a remarkable *qasida* that will remain anonymous, and his own life and Hammad’s are legitimized by the existence of the carpet that tells the stories of all men and women, in essence a map of human existence through time.
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Discussion

I used the metaphors Borges proposes in the poem “Metaphors of the 1001 Nights” to approach the Arabian Nights. I chose four stories that allowed me to reflect on each one of the metaphors (river, weft of a tapestry, dream, map of time), so I could reach conclusions related to the structure and purpose of the Arabian Nights. These findings allowed me to identify certain ideas that make accessible the rich universe of the Arabian Nights and made it possible for me to recreate this same critical lens in investigating a literary work written for children, Gallego García’s The Legend of the Wandering King, and uncover new layers of meaning in the story.

6.1 Findings

The conclusion that stands out as most significant is the one related to the power of the written word and of storytelling in the Arabian Nights and The Legend of the Wandering King. Both books show the disturbing behavior of characters performing extreme acts of will. Readers have the opportunity to reflect on human passions when they see that some of the characters, against all logic, make self-destructive decisions. In the Arabian Nights, we understand that certain characters’ actions are monstrous because they constitute an attack against themselves, and that is disconcerting: it appears that the important stories of the Arabian Nights are trying to say that there are powerful and chaotic impulses that drive action.

In many of the stories, the Arabian Nights shows that motivations for human actions are mysterious and are related to the awareness of our own mortality (even, one might say, in this context, an unconscious death wish). Borges guides a specific reading of the Arabian Nights that
he links with the idea of the river-like labyrinth, and in doing so, reveals something of the meaning of fate and of the nature of reality. The structure of the work itself, with its stories within stories, builds a maze with words to show the power of seduction these words have when the tale is spoken aloud. The final example is Schahriyar, who is seduced by Shahrazad’s words and gets lost in them, until his own identity vanishes and a new man emerges from the maze. The succession of stories in a current that seems to have no end and that arises from the chained narrative voices is a further expression of Borges’ metaphor of the river.

The impassive universe is coherent (in this sense Borges speaks about the metaphor of the weft of a tapestry), but that coherence is beyond the human capacity of understanding. In the Arabian Nights it seems that characters often know, by intuition, that the reality surrounding them is illusory (dreams contribute to this distrust of materiality) and that they live with the awareness of their own transience. Men themselves are mirages, as well as the elements of stories.

The map of time, Borges’ last metaphor, paradoxically refers to the non-existence of time, because the map that is outlined in both books through the anecdotes experienced by the characters points to the simultaneity of the events that happen in the past, present, and future, and to the fact that, on one hand, the Arabian Nights doesn’t really finish because it is--intrinsically—infinitesimally—infinitely, and, on the other, the many possible futures in Walid’s life in The Legend of the Wandering King reproduce infinitely the possibilities of being. The Arabian Nights is an infinite book because it does not ever end; The Legend of the Wandering King is infinite also because, due to its structure, time within the story is cyclical.

The hypotheses raised in this thesis focuses on the nature and structure of the Arabian Nights, and the way in which its traits are reflected in a contemporary work, which was written
emulating the motifs and the atmosphere of the ancient book. To reach conclusions that would simplify and assist in a better understanding of a literary work such as the *Arabian Nights*, it was necessary to choose a series of representative stories for analysis, according to the parameters offered by Borges in his poem.

The first story, “The Story of the Third Saluk,” openly shows the self-destructive inclinations that lead the character to say no to happiness. The second story, “The Story of Nur al-Din and His Son,” presents coherence and an idea of fate, so it completes the vision offered by “The Story of the Third Saluk” because it also speaks about the component of predestination, by which everything is fixed in advance. The third story, “The Story of the Hashish-Eater,” is likely the one that best expresses what we could consider the intention of the *Arabian Nights* as a whole, because when the fisherman creates the lake, he is mirroring Shahrazad in her work of storytelling. Dreams and hallucinations make sense in this context, because they enrich reality and impose a meaning on a universe that could be considered arbitrary and indifferent. Those dreams, those hallucinations, would constitute the origin of all creative work and, of course, of the creations fabricated by means of the written word. Dreams have real weight because reality is a dream. Illusions better express a material reality that is untrustworthy. Lastly, “The Story of King Schahriyar and His Brother Schahsemann” expresses the metaphor of time because Shahrazad is telling an endless story that will persist her beyond her personal salvation.

In the *Arabian Nights*, Schahriyar wanders in a labyrinth of stories. Tales are mirages that speak of human lives, and in those human lives Schahriyar sees a reflection of himself, because these men also choose paths of destruction which ultimately lead to self-destruction. In the mirror of Shahrazad’s stories, Schahriyar finds the way to recovery, because he manages to understand his own motivations, his own failings. The stories Shahrazad tells him constitute a
mirror in which Schahriyar is reflected, so thanks to those tales he gets to see himself clearly. To be able to see himself is in fact to get lost among the multitude of other men, and to recognize that he is no different than they are. In this sense we see that Walid is similar, because he is nameless at the end of the story, taking on an everyman quality. This dissolution of their own identities implies that Schahriyar, and perhaps Walid as well, are lost in the tumult, that they understand their own insignificance. Paradoxically, that understanding leads them to empathy and love toward others. They both stop destroying and, when they do this, they stop self-destroying, because the blow that is struck on others, in fact, constitutes a cry that demands a blow in return. In the context of many stories in the *Arabian Nights*, characters move in the universe as if they were in front of a mirror, and no act refers in fact to others but to the dialogue that every character sets with him or herself: the harm that is inflicted on others is ultimately nothing more than self-flagellation.

This interpretation is consistent with the idea of the fictional nature of the reality that surrounds all the characters. One doubts the materiality of that reality as it seems but another part of a dream. The character is just aware of him or herself and of his or her own existence, and that is why his or her actions have no other meaning than that of an inner search. Every physical journey is also, in this context, an inner journey, and perhaps they are *only* inner journeys. This reading of the *Arabian Nights* almost excludes the reality of an outside world and focuses on the inner world of the character, witnessing his or her own actions. The question that arises--one that the *Arabian Nights* and *The Legend of the Wandering King* answer successfully—is that the answer to all dilemmas is in the act of creation.

In this way, words, stories, creation in general, are revealed as the primary human purpose. Human beings are fleeting but they can produce works that endure. The voices of
generations recur in Shahrazad’s tales, human history is in Hammad’s carpet, and the most intense feelings are in the *qasida* of the Wandering King, who is no longer Walid because he is capable of writing only after his ego-identity has vanished, after he has lost everything. Human lives are worth the value of their works.

The *Arabian Nights* closes with the revelation of Shahrazad’s fertility, who has had three children while telling endless tales for 1001 nights. *The Legend of the Wandering King* ends with Walid’s cry of joy when he departs to the desert, at a gallop. Both books speak about happiness, and about the bond that happiness has with literary creation.

### 6.2 Limitations of Research

The most important limitation of this study is related to the difficulty of embracing the broad character of the *Arabian Nights* in order to look for its representation in modern books. There are multiple other possible approaches to the book that could lead to completely different findings.

It is also important to point out the fact that I worked with a novel originally written in Spanish that was translated into English. Due to that criterion, I excluded other authors and books that have connections to the *Arabian Nights* and that might be illuminating in different ways. Also, the fact that I chose to work with just one book may mean that the findings are limited and relative.

I worked with two different translations of Borges’ poem, “The Metaphors of the One Thousand and One Nights.” I could see the limitations of working with a translation that sometimes misses part of the author’s intention. In poetry, where every word carries so much
weight, it’s hard to find a fully satisfactory translation. This also means that, because I worked with the translation to Spanish of the *Arabian Nights* by Cansinos Assens, I may have lost important content that was in the original Arabic.

### 6.3 Implications for Further Research

The *Arabian Nights* is a literary object that will be endlessly examined as it is a work of such importance. The possibilities for analysis of the literary works that have been created under the influence of this book are vast and compelling. Further criticism could approach other themes and genres present in the *Arabian Nights*, such as fairy tales, picaresque fiction, epic and moral stories, and poetry, in order to see how they are presented in books for children and young adults, not only in Latin America and Spain, but also in other cultures.

This research focuses on the analysis of four stories from the *Arabian Nights* from a specific perspective offered by Borges. The identification of the elements that characterize the book allows the possibility to reflect on the way they are represented in *The Legend of the Wandering King*. The methodology I used helps in searching for clues in particular stories that could lead to a deep understanding of the motivations of the characters.

The lenses offered by Borges in his poem with his four metaphors refer to specific stories that could be investigated in further research, in order to enlarge the vision I presented in my work. It would be interesting, for example, to study in more depth “The Story of the Blind Man, Baba Abdullah,” in the context of the inexplicable acts of will that lead the characters to self-destruction. I commented on this story, but only briefly. Other stories that were not analyzed in my work, such as “The Fisherman and the Genie,” “The Tale of King Omar Bin al-Nu’uman and
His Sons Sharrkan and Zaul al-Makan,” and “The Angel of Death and the Rich King” could offer interesting insights into the subjects I have broached in my study.

The books written for children by María Teresa Andruetto, *The Enchanted Ring* and *Footprints on the Sand*, would be an appropriate matter for study using Borges’ metaphorical perspective, and specifically a story that is included in *The Enchanted Ring* called “Of Lights and Shadows.” In this story Andruetto builds a labyrinth with words, and at the same time the narrative presents an emotional labyrinth in which the characters get lost. It would be a worthwhile endeavor to follow this story using Borges’ metaphors as critical lenses. Other works, for children also, such as *Auliya* and *La noche de Scherezada [The Night of Shahrazad]* by Angélica Murguía, were written under the influence of the *Arabian Nights*, so it would be of value to look for the contributions they offer to the discussion. These are just some examples of the books that could be read following Borges’ metaphors, but there are multiple other options that might be considered.

### 6.4 Final Thoughts

The *Arabian Nights* offers young readers a marvelous environment to enhance their imagination, to reflect on human nature, to understand different cultures and points of view, and, specifically for the Spanish speakers, to enrich their vocabulary with words that speak about an extraordinary, complex, and fascinating world, words that belong to Spanish as they belong to Arabic. The possibility of following the traces of this book through modern literature offers children and young adults a compelling option for understanding how storytelling shapes a culture, and about the impact that tales have on audiences of all geographies. The *Arabian Nights*
is possibly the ultimate example in human literary achievement that demonstrates the importance of storytelling in human existence.
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Appendices

Appendix A


The first of all the metaphors is the river.
The waters in their depths. The living mirror
That watches over all those well-loved wonders
That once belonged to Islam and today
Are yours and mine. The great omnipotent
Talisman that is equally a slave;
The genie pent up in the copper vessel,
Held prisoner by the seal of Solomon;
The sworn oath of that king who delivers up
His queen of one night to the heartless justice
Of the sword; the moon,—the solitary moon;
The hands that have to wash themselves with ashes;
The voyages of Sinbad, that Odysseus
Driven onward by his thirst for the adventure,
Not castigated by a god; the lamp;
The intimations that forewarn Rodrigo
That Spain is to be conquered by the Arabs;
The false ape that reveals he is a man,
Playing a game of chess; the leprous king;
The lofty caravans; the magnetic mountain
Of stone that makes the ship fly into pieces;
The sheik and the gazelle; an aqueous globe
Of shapes that shift and vary like the clouds,
And like them subject to the whims of Chance
Or Destiny, which comes to the same thing;
The beggar who may really be an angel;
And the cave by the name of Sesame.
The second metaphor is the warp and weft
Of a tapestry which proffers to the glance
A wild chaos of unstable, mingled
Colors and lines, accident, vertigo, —
All of this governed by a hidden order.
Just like that other dream, the Universe,
The Book of the Thousand and One Nights is made
Of tutelary numbers and of custom:
The seven brothers and the seven journeys,
The three magistrates and the three desires
Of him who looked upon the Night of Nights,
The black tresses, the black and lovesick tresses,
In which the lover sees three nights together,
The three viziers and the three chastisements,  
And beyond all those numbers, the first  
And the last number of the Lord: the One.  
The third metaphor’s nothing but a dream.  
The Ishmaelites and Persians dreamed this dream  
On the cool porticos of the mantled East  
Or in the gardens which are now but dust,  
And men will go on dreaming it until  
The end of their long pilgrimage on earth.  
As in the Eleatic paradox,  
The dream dissolves into another dream  
And that into another and so on,  
All useless, weaving a useless labyrinth. 
In the book is the Book. Unwittingly,  
The queen tells to the king the now forgotten 
Tale of the two of them. Carried away  
By the upheaval of previous enchantments,  
They know not who they are. They keep on dreaming.  
The fourth metaphor is the metaphor  
Of a map of that indefinite region, Time,  
Everything measured by the gradual shadows,  
The perpetual erosion of the headstones,
The endless footsteps of the generations.

Everything. Voice and echo, what the two
Opposite faces of Janus gaze out at,
Worlds of silver, worlds of the ruddy gold,
And the long vigil of the constellations.
The Arabs claim that nobody can read
The Book of Nights all the way to the end.
The Nights are Time, the one who never sleeps.
Just go on reading while the daylight dies
And Scheherazade will tell you your story.
Appendix B

Amazon.com

From School Library Journal
Grade 7-10–The author of several books in her native Spain, Gallego García has set this quasi-historical fable in pre-Islamic Arabia. Crown Prince Walid ibn Hujr, a fine prince, attentive, generous, and brave, has everything except for recognition as a poet. When for three consecutive years his perfect poems lose to an unknown at a competition, he devises an atrocious (and pointless) revenge. Alas, he is too flat a character to accommodate such a contradiction. Gallego García tells readers that her hero is courtly, open-minded, and friendly, but shows him as petty, vain, heartless, and deceitful. His sudden remorse is as unfounded as his initial cruelty, and his inaction and turnaround are equally inexplicable. There are fairy-tale elements here—a fantastic carpet, a wicked sidekick, a beautiful woman, a predictable narrative structure—but the central character is at once too good and too evil to believe in, and too clueless to care about. The setting is a sixth-century Arabian court, but readers don't experience its sounds, odors, or tastes. Walid learns not from his own experience, but via magic. The rival's winning poems succeed because they are real and have heart: unfortunately, this fiction doesn't. Its weighty pronouncements about art, fate, and responsibility are undercut by its thinness of character, texture, and morality.–Patricia D. Lothrop, St. George's School, Newport, RI
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From Booklist
Gr. 6-9. "Before the days of Mohammed and Islam," Arabian prince Walid dreams of being a poet. He organizes an annual contest but loses each year to a humble carpet weaver, Hammad. Bitterly jealous, the prince punishes his rival with impossible tasks, which Hammad miraculously accomplishes, including weaving a carpet containing "the entire history of the human race." The enchanted rug drives its viewers to madness, though, and after it is stolen, an older, repentant prince, fearful of the damage it causes, sets out to find it. As he journeys through Bedouin lands and distant cities, the prince continuously reinvents himself, falls in love, and finds the soul and heart missing in his early poems. Spanish author García writes a captivating, magical tale—a combination of original legend, philosophical meditation, romance, and adventure—steeped in rich cultural specifics, defined in a note and a glossary. Readers will enjoy the thoughtful ruminations on fate and consequence as much as the thrilling, magical action, and they will recognize Walid's course of self-discovery: try many identities on for size. Gillian Engberg
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Amazing book written by a 24 year old, February 11, 2014

By M. H Shamp (Columbia Falls, MT United States)

This review is from: The Legend of the Wandering King (Hardcover)

This story shows such wisdom and understanding that it is beyond description, and to think that the author published it when she's only 24 years old! (According to Wikipedia) She is like a Jane Austen! This is one of the few books that makes you feel like your eyes are opened and you finally are seeing humanity in its flawed glory for the first time. The beauty of the Arabian kings and deserts and people -- it is like Arabian nights, but more modern, more in depth, and more amazing! I have read mountains of young adult books, and this one is one of those very few who knocks me off my seat! Wow!

I am learning Spanish right now, and I'm getting the Spanish version to study it!

Keep going through the first chapter—it’s worth it, August 31, 2008

By Hannah M. Sulski "Hmsulski" (Chicago, IL)

This review is from: The Legend of the Wandering King (Hardcover)

Although the first chapter took me a couple of times to get through, it was WELL worth it! Really excellent book: both exciting and thought provokingly moral.

A Wonderful Fable, June 10, 2006

By SeussFan (Littleton, CO USA)

This review is from: The Legend of the Wandering King (Hardcover)

I am a children's librarian who was enthralled with this book. It is a neatly-worked-out fable that explores jealousy and desire, inspiration, and how a man can redeem a life in which he destroyed others through arrogance and envy.

I believe some previous reviewers have been too harsh. The characters are flat because this is the working out of a folk tale, not meant to be a modern novel. The book is populated by characters which are "types" and includes some unbelievable coincidences precisely because the plot supersedes the characterization and setting. Great works such as "Everyman" and "Pilgrim's Progress" are similarly constructed.

I would encourage readers to give this one a try--I think they will be pleasantly surprised.
The Legend of the Wandering King is certainly a treat for the senses. The story amply describes the life of a very conceited and self-confident prince name Walid, who proceeds to hold a poetry contest at the command of his father when he wishes to go to Ukaz to express his love of poetry through these means. He is beaten by a man named Hammad, whose poetry greatly overcomes Walid and swaying the crowd and judges with his poetry. The prince holds the contest two more times before finally giving up and appoints Hammad master of the archives. His first task is to put the vast archives back into order. From there `King' Walid grows angry at the news that Hammad has completed his task in reorganizing the archives. In another way to make Hammad suffer, he orders the now older man to create a carpet containing the entire human race. From there Walid's world crumbles around him as he begins to regret the atrocious deeds against Hammad. The book is quite short but gives out [sic] plentiful description of Walid's life after the fall of his kingdom and his exploits through the desert as he strives to regain the carpet Hammad created.

The storyline is well thought out, as you try to figure out Walid's true purpose every time he meets Hammad's sons with every detour he makes. The characters, were at first hard to relate with seeing that; Walid was very vain and full of himself. But as the story progresses Walid begins to become more of a likable character, and you relate with his turmoil and regrets for his past deeds.

The description of each world Walid enters under his alias is beautiful, you can picture it clearly in your mind. All in all, I would recommend this book to anyone looking for a good fantasy that's earth bound. Sure there's little or no poetry but this shouldn't bother anyone looking for a story and not poetry. (February 3d 2006)
One of the best books Ever!!!!, September 18, 2005

By
blbooks "Becky"

This review is from: The Legend of the Wandering King (Hardcover)

THE LEGEND OF THE WANDERING KING by Laura Gallego García and translated into English by Dan Bellm is simply one of the best books that I've read this year. Set in pre-Islamic Arabia (5th to 6th century C.E.) it follows the adventure quest and life journey of a young Arabian prince, Walid ibn Hujr. Walid has always dreamed of being great-man, great poet, great ruler-yet when he lets human emotions (particularly jealousy, fear, and revenge) reign over him, embittering him, he realizes that he is anything but great. And then comes a remarkable chance to redeem himself: a magic carpet has been stolen...there begins Walid's lifelong quest to find and return the carpet to its rightful owner...no matter what it costs him.

THE LEGEND OF THE WANDERING KING reads like a fairy tale; it is a tale of mythological proportions.

Barnes and Noble
Anonymous
Posted August 22, 2008
Truly an Adventure!
This book was great. It got you to think about times now past and what's right and wrong, and the power of forgiveness. After you're done reading it you'll find yourself thinking about it long after.

Chapters

The most dangerous magical object in the history of the world waits quietly in the treasury of a decaying Arabian palace. It knows your name and home and history and fate: it knows the past and future of the entire human race. It is a carpet, an impossible, dazzling carpet, and though a glance at it can drive a man mad, many will risk their lives to look into its pattern and discover their destinies.