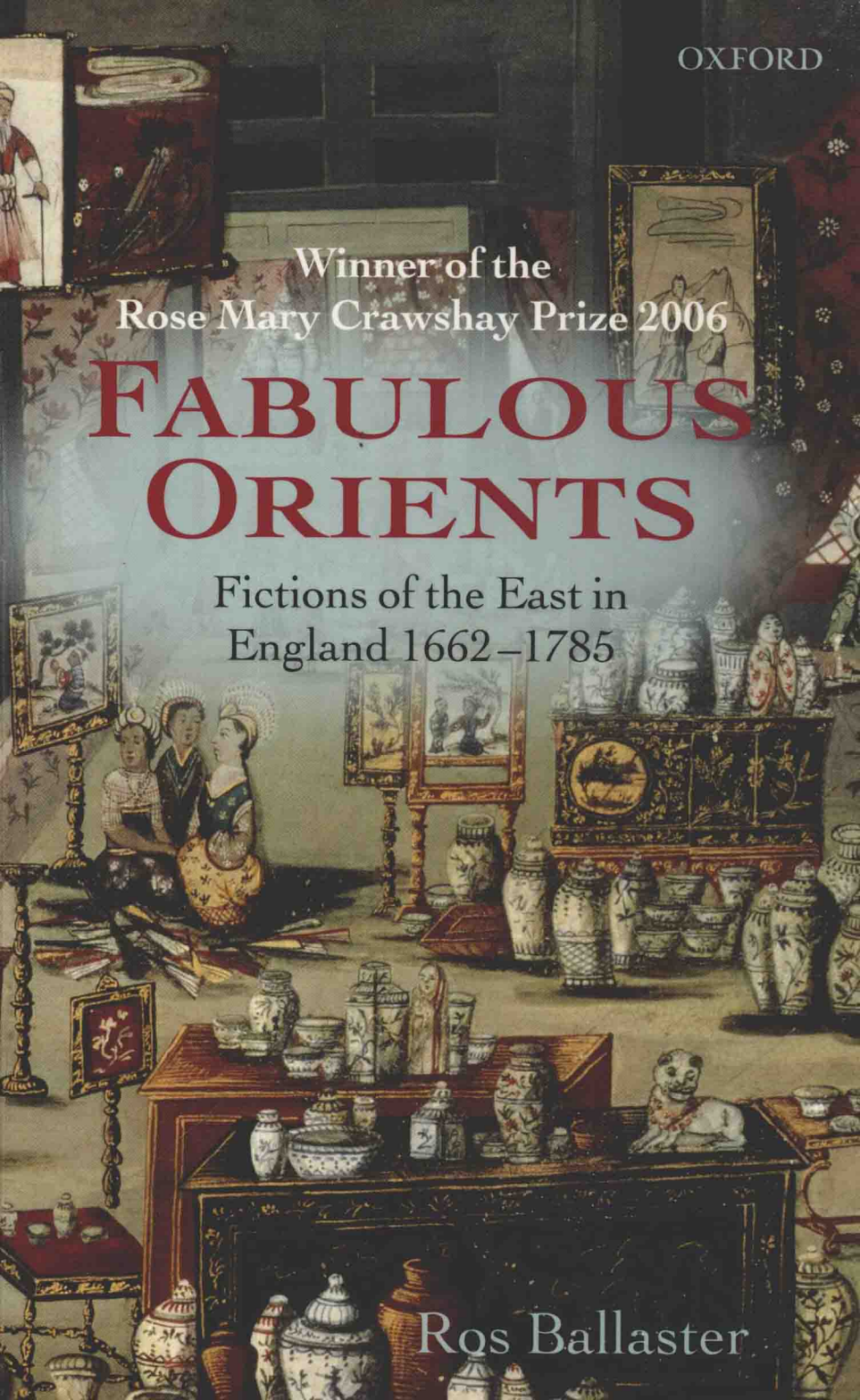
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Fictions of the East in
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Fabulous Orients

'Sir, answered Scheherazade, I have a sister, who loves me tenderly, as I do her, and I could wish that she might be allowed to be all night in this chamber, that I might see her, and bid her adieu: Will you be pleased to allow me the comfort of giving her this last testimony of my friendship?'

For Cathy

Sister and fellow traveller

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My children, Frances and Stuart, and my partner, Phil Harriss, have spent their own nights regaled by oriental tales. My own private djinns, their magic endures beyond the confines of any page.

Abbreviations

ANE	The 'Grub Street' translation of Antoine Galland's *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, ed. Robert L. Mack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
CLMWM	*The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–7)
PT	François Pétis de la Croix, *The Thousand and One Days: Persian Tales*, trans. by Ambrose Philips, 3 vols (1714–15)

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Narrative Moves

Dinarzade, the second string

The unsung second daughter of the vizier must wake every morning before dawn in her makeshift bed at the foot of the magnificent raised alcove on which her newly married sister and the sultan sleep. Without fail, she must prompt her sister to continue a story. In so doing, she preserves Scheherazade's lovely neck for another day. And presumably hers too, since she, as the second daughter, might fall victim to the bow-string (the traditional weapon of execution in the 'eastern' court) if her sister were to fail in her dangerous narrative enterprise. Each successive morning, the sultan becomes so engrossed in his wife's fable that he puts off the threatened execution for another day.

The younger daughter is, we are told, 'a lady of very great merit, but the elder had courage, wit and penetration infinitely above her sex'.[1] Dinarzade is always 'behind' her older sister, always in her shadow, her accomplice, her supplement. A second daughter and a middle child, I worried there was nothing special about me. My mother reassured me with two stories. First, I was the only child that was

[1] *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, ed. Robert L. Mack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19.

planned and, true to form, the only one to arrive on time. Second, I was born in the, to me, magical territory of India. My father's job in pharmaceutical sales took him to Bombay in the early 1960s and my mother embarked on a long sea voyage with one infant daughter to join him. From not very well-off middle-class backgrounds in Britain, they found themselves both more affluent and more leisured in India and decided to have a second child, delivered at Breach Candy Hospital on the expected date of arrival. These twin consolations, my timeliness and my purely accidental Indianness, gave me significance in my own eyes. Being 'on time' is, of course, the most significant element in the Indian vizier's second daughter's role in the Arabian Nights.[2]

But there are other consolations for the second girl. Even if there is no photograph that pictures you alone (baby, school, or family), even if every item of clothing you owned had first been worn by your sister, or was a miniature version of her 'larger' and first-purchased selection, you can take comfort in the fact that you will never have to do anything first. School, puberty, all other rites of passage, will never be as traumatic or shocking as they are for the oldest girl. You know about them through your older sister's stories before you live them yourself. Indeed, like Marianne, the second daughter of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)—a novel itself written by a second daughter, Jane Austen—you enjoy the freedom of nonconformity precisely because you have been able to watch and learn from your older sibling's experience. And, like Marianne, you can fantasize your own primacy and primariness, rejecting the model of your sister's acquiescent and responsible behaviour.[3] Thus, Anthony Hamilton (1646–1720) presents his Dinarzade in a comic rewriting of the tales which he circulated in the first decades of the eighteenth century among the aristocratic French lady readers so eagerly consuming Antoine Galland's newly published volumes. Hamilton's Dinarzade speaks up directly against the

[2] Throughout, I use the unitalicized phrase 'Arabian Nights' to refer to the composite 'text' translated by numerous different scholars into European languages from Arabic sources since the early 18th c. to the present day. When the title appears in italics, I refer to specific translations or editions.

[3] Ros Ballaster, 'Introduction', in *Jane Austen: Sense and Sensibility*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2003).

despotic, paranoid, and self-obsessed Sultan Schahriar, using her tale to undermine the myth of his potency, which her sister's deferential stories seek to enhance.[4]

The story of Dinarzade is a familiar one to the feminist literary critic as well as the second daughter. In Britain, from the eighteenth century onwards, women turned to publishing fiction in increasing numbers.[5] Even larger numbers of works were written in the voices of women.[6] Today, women are the major purchasers and consumers of fictional texts. Yet, as we read as women, we are aware that the story only passes through us or around us, whistling past our ears in its passage to its 'true' addressee. We are not, despite appearances, its target. We 'listen in' to the story whose intended recipient is the powerful male, his presence eclipsing our own, his 'reading' completing a textual meaning otherwise left indeterminate and unresolved.

To be reminded of Dinarzade's position is to be reminded that the route taken by narrative meaning(s) is neither simple nor direct, no single flight path from the mouth of a speaker to the ear of a listener. The encounter between self and other, between feminine and masculine, between one culture and another, is, like the narrative transaction, often 'mediated' by a third term. The third term can deflect, redirect, even block, such passage. The collection of tales known to Britain in the early eighteenth century as *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* (1704–17) came to these islands from the 'East' via

[4] Anthony Hamilton was an Irish cavalier, now best known for his satirical writings in French about the court of Charles II. For further discussion of his pseudo-oriental tales, see Ch. 3.

[5] Cheryl Turner's statistical research into the publication of fiction by women reveals that this was 'not a simple, continuous growth' through the century, but rather there were two phases of development, one between 1696 and 1725 and another after 1740, with a severe decline between those two dates and an 'abrupt upward surge' during the 1790s (Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), 38).

[6] James Raven's statistical bibliographical work concludes that only 14 per cent of new novel titles published between 1750 and 1769 can be identified as by women writers (James Raven, *British Fiction 1750–1770: A Chronological Check-List of Prose Fiction Printed in Britain and Ireland* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press; Associated University Presses, 1987), 18). He notes a steady increase in the percentage of new novels by women from the 1780s onward and that in the last two years of that decade 'female authorship was being deliberately promoted' with women outstripping men (thirty-three to eight) and an 'unprecedented number' of title-pages bearing the attribution to 'a Lady' (James Raven et al., *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 48).

France; indeed, the French 'translator' and distinguished Orientalist Antoine Galland was one of the leading forgers of western European constructions of the 'East'. Stories are not simple freight; in their passage from East to West they are often radically altered to become hybrid commodities and the bearers of multiple new meanings. Thus, through their ostensible depiction of life in the eastern harem, the *Arabian Nights Entertainments* could, amongst other things, provide a window for English readers into the 'précieuse' culture of the eighteenth-century French salon.

The role of Dinarzade can be consciously reprised by heroines of the eighteenth-century novel. Emma Courtney, the passionate heroine of a 1796 novel by Mary Hays, describes the experience of being transported by the narratives of the Arabian Nights. Having been an enraptured listener and reader in her youth, this Dinarzade, like Hamilton's, usurps the place of the storyteller traditionally occupied by the older sister, to produce her own *Memoirs*. Emma is adopted as a child by her aunt to replace an infant girl who died at the age of four months; she is then a 'second' daughter, whose fate will, hopefully, differ from that of the first child for whom she now substitutes. She confides in her reader that at the age of 4 or 5:

> When myself and my little cousins had wearied ourselves with play, their mother, to keep us quiet in an evening, while her husband wrote letters in an adjoining apartment, was accustomed to relate (for our entertainment) stories from the Arabian Nights, Turkish Tales, and other works of like marvellous import. She recited them circumstantially, and these I listened to with ever new delight: the more they excited vivid emotions, the more wonderful they were, the greater was my transport: they became my favourite amusement, and produced, in my young mind, a strong desire of learning to read the books which contained such enchanting stores of entertainment.[7]

Emma Courtney's account of her reading experience reproduces—as she does the lost child—a primary lost experience: the scenario of the oral tale told by a woman to household dependents while a powerful male may or may not be listening nearby (her uncle writes letters in an adjoining room). This experience was one nostalgically evoked in

[7] Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, ed. Eleanor Ty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 14.

many eighteenth-century novels acknowledging the radical shift in the circumstances of producing and consuming fiction—from the shared public spaces of the marketplace, coffee-house, or living-room, to the private and solitary space of the boudoir. There is both a connection and a gulf between the figures of Dinarzade and Emma as consumers of fiction: both are voracious consumers of an 'entertainment' that enables multiple identifications with a variety of subject positions, yet Dinarzade is a representative of an oral tradition of politically charged storytelling, while Emma's narrative development is towards the introspective, self-critical, and apparently private 'memoir'. It is a long journey from the eastern magical tale to the formal realism of the English eighteenth-century novel, yet practitioners of the latter frequently conjure up the trace of the former in the act of narrating their own histories of becoming storytellers.

Like the childhoods of Dinarzade and Emma, mine was filled with stories and the Arabian Nights held a special kind of magic. Especially the magic of being able to imagine oneself into the role of multiple others: Aladdin, the idle son whose dearest wishes are fulfilled through a combination of luck and resourcefulness; the courageous princess Badoura who comes to command a kingdom by disguising herself as her husband; innocent Ali Baba saved from falling victim to the forty thieves by his clever serving-woman. Not only can the reader project into many roles, but the interpretation of the tales remains an exercise in openness and heterogeneity. If Scheherazade tells her fables with a purpose—many of them slowly shift her husband from his inflexible condemnation of all women by warning against the over-hasty performance of threats and the need to look twice at appearances—her sister is free to make of them what she will. We, Dinarzade's readers, are given no inkling as to *her* 'reading' of the fables.

This book looks at what western readers who imagined themselves into the role of Dinarzade—an observer from the sidelines of the dynamics of an eastern despotism—read into oriental tales, a form of narration that flourished from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century. It does so recognizing the expediency of such acts of imaginative identification. They enable a fruitful pose, especially for the British on the threshold of western empire in India, as dispassionate judge of fixed, indeed stagnating, power relations,

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