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The Interconnection of Historical Text and the Illusion of Fictional Discourse: Raml al-Maya by Waciny Laredj as a Case Study

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Abstract

This article investigates how historical and fictional discourses intersect and mutually reshape one another in Waciny Laredj's novel Raml al-Maya: The Tragedy of the One Thousand and Seventh Night. It argues that the novel constructs a complex "textual interconnection" between history and fiction through its paratexts, its dense intertextual relations with One Thousand and One Nights, and its sustained reworking of classical and historical sources. The study adopts a narratological and semiotic approach to Gérard Genette's notion of the paratext, combined with close reading of key narrative episodes that fictionalize well-known historical figures such as Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, al-Hallaj, and Ibn Rushd. It shows how the novel blurs the boundary between historical fact and narrative invention, and how it employs what is here termed a "textual paradox"—a double positioning between an antecedent text and a later re-writing—to question both official historiography and inherited literary forms. By foregrounding the roles of the warraqūn (court chroniclers) and by reframing the narrative contract of One Thousand and One Nights through the voice of Dunyazad and the figure of al-Bashir the Morisco, Raml al-Maya turns history into a contested narrative field. The article concludes that reading these novel amounts to rereading Arab–Islamic history itself, and that this rereading lay bare the continuities between past catastrophes and present forms of political oppression.

Keywords: textual interconnection; paratext; intertextuality; historical novel; Waciny Laredj.

Introduction

The title of Waciny Laredj's Raml al-Maya immediately invites repeated reading. It resonates with the imaginative universe of One Thousand and One Nights and simultaneously addresses, in the words of Abdelrahman Munif, "the climate of the era in which we live; for Scheherazade, who told Shahryar what he needed to hear, returns to us to say in a new language what we must hear, no matter how harsh or difficult" (Munif in Laredj 1998, first page after title). In seeking a conceptual framework that structures the paratextual environment of his novel—an environment that involves both publisher and reader—Laredj broadens the function of the title. He loads it with suggestive connotations and uses it to articulate a deliberate relationship between historical narrative and fictional discourse, thereby enriching the novel's semantic and aesthetic fabric.

This article approaches Raml al-Maya as a paradigmatic example of contemporary Arabic historical fiction that does not merely "use" history as material but interrogates the very writing of history. It focuses on three main axes:

1. The role of external and internal paratexts in signalling the novel's historical and intertextual stakes.
2. The intertextual structure that binds Raml al-Maya to One Thousand and One Nights and to classical Arabic and Andalusian sources.
3. The "textual paradox" through which the novel juxtaposes historical chronicles and fictional re-writings in order to expose the ideological nature of both.

The central research questions guiding this study are:

- How does Raml al-Maya construct its relationship to historical discourse at the level of paratext and narrative structure?
- In what ways does the novel refunction One Thousand and One Nights and other antecedent texts to critique both historical and contemporary forms of oppression?
- How does the interplay between documented history and narrative invention reshape our understanding of Arab history and its representation?

To answer these questions, the article combines a theoretical framework drawn from paratextual and intertextual theory with close textual analysis of selected episodes from the novel.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The analysis is grounded in Gérard Genette's theory of the paratext, as elaborated in Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation (Genette 1997). Genette's distinction between peritext (titles, subtitles, prefaces, chapter headings and other elements materially attached to the text) and epitext (interviews, letters, and other external commentary) provides a useful lens for understanding how Raml al-Maya prepares and directs its readers' horizon of expectation. As Abdelhaq Belaabed notes in his study of Genette, the main title remains indispensable in modern titling systems, but it rarely appears alone; it is usually accompanied by a subtitle that participates in meaning-making (Belaabed 2008, 68). Laredj's double title—Raml al-Maya and The Tragedy of the One Thousand and Seventh Night—is read here as a peritext that both anchors and destabilizes the interpretive process.

The article also draws on intertextual theory as introduced by Julia Kristeva and systematized by critics such as Graham Allen (2000). Intertextuality is understood not as a decorative game of allusion but as a structural principle through which texts rewrite, reframe, and contest prior discourses. In Raml al-Maya, intertextuality operates at multiple levels: explicit citation (al-Maqqarī, al-Tabari, Ibn Rushd), narrative patterning (the transformation of the One Thousand and One Nights frame), and thematic recurrence (repeated persecutions, inquisitions, exiles).

Finally, the article engages, in a limited way, with debates around the historical novel and what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon 1988), while remaining attentive to the specificities of the Arabic context. The methodological approach is essentially that of close

reading, with attention to the semiotics of paratexts and the narratological organization of the text. Key passages are examined in detail to show how linguistic, symbolic, and structural choices underpin a sustained questioning of official history and its narrative forms.

Critical Context and Previous Scholarship

The Arabic historical novel has become a prominent site for exploring questions of memory, identity, and political legitimacy. Contemporary Arab novelists frequently revisit turāth (heritage) and rework foundational narratives to address present concerns. Within this trend, Waciny Laredj occupies a central place: many of his works return to the histories of al-Andalus, Ottoman rule, and modern Algeria, combining archival research with narrative experimentation.

Critics have noted that such novels tend to move away from straightforward illustration of historical episodes toward complex, self-reflexive narratives that foreground the act of writing itself. The intertextual engagement with One Thousand and One Nights has been particularly significant, as authors appropriate and subvert this canonical collection, exploiting its openness and narrative plasticity. Muhsin Mahdi's studies of the textual history of the Nights (Mahdi 1984) underscore this fluidity, which contemporary novelists like Laredj re-activate in a new historical and political context.

Most critical work on Laredj, especially in Arabic and French, has addressed his reimagining of Andalusian history, his critique of authoritarianism, and his sophisticated play with intertextual references. Yet less attention has been devoted specifically to the paratextual dimension of Raml al-Maya and to the systematic juxtaposition of historical chronicles and fictional rewriting in this novel. This article seeks to contribute to filling this gap by proposing a focused reading of how Raml al-Maya organizes its historical references through paratext, intertext, and what is here termed "textual paradox."

I. Paratexts in Raml al-Maya

1. The External Paratext: The Double Title

The external paratext of Raml al-Maya is central to the novel's strategy of meaning production. The title appears in a dual structure: a principal title, Raml al-Maya, set in large type, and a subtitle, The Tragedy of the One Thousand and Seventh Night, printed beneath it in a smaller font (Laredj 1993, title page). This double title immediately enters into dialogue with One Thousand and One Nights. In line with Genette's observations, the main title functions as the essential identifier, while the subtitle introduces a specific, interpretively charged modulation (Genette 1997, 55–60; Belaabed 2008, 68).

This paratextual strategy is not merely ornamental. It underpins the novel's reworking of history. Laredj does not turn to historical material in order to revive old narrative forms; instead, he engages with the inherited textual architecture to reactivate its latent narrativity. The subtitle, The Tragedy of the One Thousand and Seventh Night, deliberately overturns the familiar framework of One Thousand and One Nights. The world of wondrous tales, music, and pleasure associated with Scheherazade's nightly narratives is inverted into a space of catastrophe. This

inversion announces a shift from entertainment to critique and from mythic time to historical time saturated with violence and suppression.

The external paratext thus fulfils a designating function that governs both descriptive and connotative dimensions. In fictional texts, this function does not always coincide neatly with the author's inner intention; rather, it mediates the dynamic between title and reader. The reader, in turn, actively seeks out the intentional horizon of the title as it is realized in the fictional discourse.

In Raml al-Maya, the main title is deliberately opaque. Its interpretive resonance emerges only gradually, as the reader advances through the text. The expression "Raml al-Maya" recurs at crucial moments. Early in the novel, in the chapter dealing with the ordeal of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, the narrator declares:

> "And my heart fills with screaming: Ibn Abi Junada, before the boats of a thousand magical colors enter your heart, you will live and die alone, the wind throwing you to the wind, the sand to the sand, and the eye to the eye" (Laredj 1993, 20).

The motif resurfaces in relation to Ramla bint Rafi'a al-Ghifariya:

> "I can swear, it is the face of Ramla bint al-Rafi'a al-Ghifariya, which began to melt and melt until it merged with the face of my father: Junada ibn Qays" (Laredj 1993, 21).

The "sand" (raml) also marks the topography of the cave in which al-Bashir the Morisco sleeps for three centuries, buried beneath dunes that erase historical time (Laredj 1993, 8–14). At the close of the novel, Raml al-Maya appears again as the name of one of the Andalusian nūbas (musical suites), repeated several times, thereby connecting historical memory, geography, and musical heritage (Laredj 1993, 272).

The subtitle, The Tragedy of the One Thousand and Seventh Night, recurs throughout the chapters in varying formulations. It suggests that the time of catastrophe extends beyond the canonical "one thousand and one nights" into an unbounded, excessive temporality. Laredj stresses that even "the scholars of geomancy and sand divination, nor those who knew the secrets of the stars and the seas when they overflow and fill the abandoned shores and shells" could not determine its end, and that "they did not believe when they were told that the One Thousand and Seventh Night lasted longer than earthly time, because the reader will discover that we are living it" (Laredj 1993, 10–12). What One Thousand and One Nights closes off, The Tragedy of the One Thousand and Seventh Night reopens. Story-time is prolonged into historical time; the narrative refuses closure and splinters into a continuous present.

Within this framework, the number seven becomes a structural and symbolic motif. The narrator describes "seven doors," "seven keys," "seven locks," "seven slaves," "seven swords"—a baroque multiplication that underlines the density and inescapability of historical oppression (Laredj 1993, 11). The trials of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, al-Hallaj, and Ibn Rushd are implicitly framed within this numerological pattern, suggesting that their fates echo one another and prefigure contemporary Arab experiences of repression and uncertainty. In the same vein, the number seven recurs in relation to al-Bashir the Morisco: led to the seventh cave, saved by seven

masked men, captivated by seven stars, confronted with the seventh hell and the sevenfold catastrophe of al-Andalus (Laredj 1993, 7–8, 41). In each case, the number encodes a state of extremity and crisis.

Thus, the compound title Raml al-Maya: The Tragedy of the One Thousand and Seventh Night functions as a complex sign. It gestures toward unknown narrative terrains and latent intertextual relations between historical chronicle and fictional invention. It orients the reader toward overlapping temporalities and events—particularly those of Arab–Islamic history—and invites attention to the tragedies experienced by philosophers, scholars, and the people of al-Andalus, all refracted through the lens of the novelist's present.

II. The Intertextual Structure in Raml al-Maya

1. Internal Paratext and Narrative Voice

At the level of narrative discourse, Raml al-Maya stages historical events in such a way that the boundary between fact and fiction becomes blurred. Actual historical episodes are reimagined and redistributed across a fictional landscape, to the point that readers may find it difficult to disentangle what "really happened" from what has been creatively reworked. This deliberate blending distances the novel from conventional realist forms and from classical, linear storytelling.

One of the most striking features of the novel is its reiterated return to specific historical crises—above all, a succession of Arab defeats. Laredj revisits these episodes not as fixed outcomes but as open texts that can be rewritten with new emphases and details. The narrative moves fluidly from the fall and loss of al-Andalus, to the persecution of philosophers and thinkers, to scenes of exile and burning. Ibn Rushd's exile is narrated in searing terms:

> "al-Mansur Abu Yusuf Ya'qub was a beast that heard nothing but its own voice and its echo. He banished him to the outskirts of Cordoba, burned his books and all the books of philosophy, and prohibited engagement with the sciences. But that son of a… opened the way for charlatanry, summoned all the fornicators of the quarter, and placed the judiciary in their hands" (Laredj 1993, 92).

The suffering of al-Hallaj, Ibn Rushd, and Abu Dharr al-Ghifari thus provides a historical substrate for the fictional journey of al-Bashir the Morisco across time in the "One Thousand and Seventh Night." Through this palimpsestic structure, Laredj probes large intellectual and ideological questions: the roots of conflict in Arab–Islamic history, the mechanisms of political repression, and the echoes of these dynamics in modern Algerian history.

A central part of the novel, the sequence entitled Masālik Abwāb al-Hadīd ("Paths of the Iron Gates"), explicitly addresses prior texts, particularly the classical narrative universe of One Thousand and One Nights. Laredj sets up a relation of interdependence between this reference text and his "One Thousand and Seventh Night." He imitates and displaces the archetypal roles of narrator (Scheherazade) and listener (Shahryar). Scheherazade withdraws, and Dunyazad

assumes the role of storyteller, now recounting not tales of wonder but a history of defeats directly connected to contemporary events.

The story of the Morisco, we are told, "was told by Dunyazad, and before her many people had narrated it. The storytellers in the markets painted it in the likeness of Doomsday. The shepherds loved it and told it tinged with sadness and longing. The women rejoiced to hear it, inside the palace and outside. Time came to a halt at the end of the tale, for another time to begin—one whose contours were difficult to trace and discern. Yet what the subjects of the jumlukiyya (the 'republic-monarchy') did not disagree on was that something new, like a thread of fire in al-Rifā'a and al-Naqā', was rising in the waves that were breaking successively against the ancient wall" (Laredj 1993, 29).

On the basis of Scheherazade's earlier tales, Dunyazad's narration moves from explicit storytelling to modes based on allusion, concealment, and fictionalization. The aim is no longer to entertain or placate a tyrant king, but to expose what Scheherazade did not—and perhaps could not—say. We are told that "forgotten secrets and reports were reaching her from the citadel, the fenced-in fields, the open country, the city walls, and the ancient ramparts that pushed back the waves from the Roman shores" (Laredj 1993, 31). In this way, Laredj mimics the style of the old text while bending it toward a new purpose: a critical re-reading of Arab history through the lens of narrative. This is a self-conscious, metatextual use of One Thousand and One Nights; he activates the earlier text to create a new work with its own interpretive weight.

2. Interweaving and Juxtaposition of Historical and Fictional Narratives

In Raml al-Maya, the interplay between historical and fictional texts is built on both interweaving and juxtaposition. The historical text is given room to exist within the novel as an autonomous narrative stratum. At the same time, it is repositioned within a new discursive context, where it is subjected to critique and resignification. Laredj uses this strategy to explore how meaning is reconfigured when historical accounts are reframed inside fiction.

The explicit intertextual reference to One Thousand and One Nights provides the guiding framework. While the historical material retains its internal narrative logic, the insertion of the Nights' architecture gives it a new horizon of meaning. The result is a kind of textual counterpoint: the new narrative both echoes and contests the earlier one.

Within this scheme, the narrator recounts the events of the One Thousand and Seventh Night in a pattern reminiscent of the original Nights, producing a sense of authenticity for the historical episodes that appear in his voice. These episodes can be read as documentation, but also as rhetorical devices that reinforce the novel's engagement with present political and cultural realities.

A key example is al-Bashir the Morisco's recollection of what he read in al-Maqqarī's Nafḥ al-ṭīb concerning the fate of expelled Moriscos in the Maghreb:

> "The first and last city I entered after the tragedy of the cave was burning like a great toy made of straw. The Bedouin Arabs and those who did not fear God set upon them in the roads and

plundered their wealth. This was in the lands of Tlemcen and Fez, and only a few escaped that disgrace. As for those who went out to the outskirts of Tunis, most of them were saved, and to this day they have populated its empty villages and lands, as well as Tetouan, Salé, and the Mitidja of Algiers… In the end it became clear to me that what I saw in the cave, concerning the fourth ruler, was nothing but a small part of the tragedy of the thin thread of blood that issues forth from the darkness of the One Thousand and Seventh Night" (Laredj 1993, 262, drawing on al-Maqqarī).

Here the historical reference maintains its distinct identity—it is clearly marked as a citation from al-Maqqarī—yet it is integrated into al-Bashir's subjective experience. The historical cruelty that the Moriscos endure upon arrival in North Africa mirrors the fictional cruelty of his journey from al-Andalus to the Maghreb, "laden with terror and fear of the Italian pirates" who carry them to the southern shores (Laredj 1993, 272). Fiction thus amplifies history rather than erasing it.

The novel also recalls Tomás de Torquemada, the notorious Grand Inquisitor, whose cruelty was directed at Muslims and Marranos. In a bitter monologue, he is invoked as a type:

> "You are just like Torquemada, you son of a dog. All of you reject the Marranos. It was bitterly cold, at the end of February 1481… when he ordered the killing of six of us. And you, what did you do, you contemptible Moriscos? You stood in the markets of Seville applauding the burning?!" (Laredj 1993, 116).

This invective underscores al-Bashir's realization of the full horror of that moment and his confrontation with the complicity of his own community. His reply is equally ferocious:

> "You son of a whore… Death is the most precious thing that can be granted to you. Isabella was a Catholic, and her hatred struck us down to the point of death. The whore wanted a kingdom intoxicated with joy and pride, with gold upon our ashes—a forgotten kingdom on the edges of the Mediterranean. When the world fell into crisis, they lifted their protection and left us to face the ruin alone, to face the red-hot iron of the Inquisition. They expelled us from Castile and from the other cities. Where were you, you son of a whore? Are you not the rulers of the land?" (Laredj 1993, 117).

Through such passages, the novel unfolds a continuum of persecution stretching from Boabdil's Granada, through the Ottoman period, to the present. Different epochs are treated as variations on a single pattern of repression and betrayal. This sense of repetition is made explicit when the historical tale narrated by al-Bashir to Shahryar ibn al-Muqtadir moves the latter from a passive listener—like the original Shahryar—to an active participant in the unfolding events. His regime, founded on bloodshed and the beheading of his own father al-Muqtadir, reflects in a distorted mirror the behaviour of Muhammad al-Saghir in handing Granada over to the Castilians (Laredj 1993, 135, 147). Dunyazad's narrative thus breaks the frame of myth and forces the "king" character to recognize his complicity in a repeated historical catastrophe.

III. The Textual Paradox between Historical and Fictional Narrative

The formal and thematic innovations of Raml al-Maya are rooted in a deliberate reconfiguration of narrative technique. Laredj's fictional writing arises from the sustained interconnection between historical and fictional discourses. His narrative therefore operates through what may be called a "textual paradox": it positions itself between an earlier text and a later one, and between documented history and imaginative reconstruction.

This paradox is managed through a metatextual strategy. Laredj constructs explicit relations between his novel and a range of prior texts—chronicles, philosophical treatises, and classical narratives—and then transforms those relations through imitation, inversion, or critique. Historical texts are not simply quoted; they are repositioned, rewritten, and interrogated.

The structure of The Tragedy of the One Thousand and Seventh Night exemplifies this approach. The title alone announces a direct engagement with One Thousand and One Nights. Yet the new "night" is not a continuation of the old series so much as a re-framing of it. Scheherazade's voice falls silent; Dunyazad, speaking through al-Bashir the Morisco, narrates a different kind of story. The familiar narrative contract—in which storytelling postpones death and soothes a tyrant—gives way to a confrontational narrative aimed at exposing uncomfortable truths about history.

As a result, the novel is suffused with historical allusions that resist easy identification. Laredj weaves together episodes and figures from different periods to create what Mohamed Lotfi al-Yousfi has described, in another context, as "a writing that confronts order with chaos, established on deconstruction and scattering. It announces itself in the form of a relentless and unceasing interrogation; therefore, it attaches itself to history not to follow it, but to grapple with it, commencing the destabilization of values that have become—delusionally—part of that history" (al-Yousfi 1994, 4). This formulation captures well the spirit of Raml al-Maya.

In this light, the historical novel becomes a means of recovering what remains of a suppressed or falsified past. Laredj foregrounds the role of the warraqūn (scribes/chroniclers) who wrote "official" history on behalf of rulers—often "a history boiled between the legs of slave girls," that is, fashioned in the intimacy of palaces and harems (Laredj 1993, 58–59). Dunyazad, "the lioness of fierce cities," stands in radical opposition to these scribes, as does al-Bashir the Morisco. Both characters pursue truth without compromise and question the legitimacy of palace-produced history. Al-Bashir's cry—"Which history, you poor people? The history you tell in the squares, or the history forged by the scribes in the palaces?" (Laredj 1993, 32)—cuts to the core of this critique.

A further dimension of the textual paradox emerges in the novel's engagement with Ibn Rushd. Laredj calls upon Fasl al-maqāl (The Decisive Treatise) to give voice to a "lost history" of critical thought in the Islamic tradition. The philosophical text and the fictional narrative converge in al-Bashir's meditation on the loss of al-Andalus:

> "Ah, philosopher of the lost paradise, they stole Cordoba. They stole your dream which the minions of death rejected. You said religion is religion, and philosophy is philosophy; you said it at the top of your voice... You said separate and do not combine what cannot be combined. Do

not combine the divergent: the world of nature and the world of metaphysics. The world of the Unseen and the world of the witnessed. Inference is only valid where the transfer is reasonable in itself. That is when the witnessed and the absent are equal. Make the decisive statement regarding the connection between Sharia and Wisdom" (Laredj 1993, 272; cf. Ibn Rushd, Fasl al-maqāl).

Here, the novel does not merely allude to Ibn Rushd; it recontextualizes his arguments about the relationship between religion and philosophy as a commentary on the ideological failures that contributed to the loss of al-Andalus. The philosophical text thus acquires renewed relevance within the fictional narrative.

The same technique is applied to figures like Abu Dharr al-Ghifari and al-Hallaj. The Caliph's letter ordering Abu Dharr's harsh transport and exile—"Carry Abu Dharr on the roughest and harshest mount, then send him with someone who will goad him violently until he reaches me"—and the subsequent accusation of inciting the poor and banishment to the desert of al-Rabadha (Laredj 1993, 12, 14) are re-narrated in a way that underscores patterns of silencing and violence against dissenting voices. Al-Hallaj is accused of zandaqa (heresy), crucified, dismembered, and burned in front of the public (Laredj 1993, 135; cf. al-Tabari, Tārīkh). Ibn Rushd is exiled outside Cordoba with the words:

> "Today we have exiled Abu al-Walid outside the walls of Cordoba so that I do not proceed to kill him. He challenged his limits, the limits of God, and the limits of governance. First, I am a Caliph, not his brother. Second, the world is two: one we live, and one that will live us; anything else is disbelief and heresy..." (Laredj 1993, 147).

The Caliph's declaration exposes a rigid binary logic that closes off alternative visions of community and justice.

In this way, the historical materials that Laredj incorporates are not neutral backdrops but active components in a developing critique. They are absorbed into the fictional structure, generating a dense layering that heightens the narrative's complexity and interpretive richness.

The spatial motif of the cave reinforces this pattern. When al-Bashir the Morisco takes refuge in the cave—a place heavy with Qur'anic and spiritual associations of trial, patience, and revelation, as suggested in the story of al-Khidr and Moses (Qur'an 18:65–66)—he becomes a privileged witness to history. From there, he narrates the decline and fall of Granada, the intrigues and betrayals of its rulers, and the spread of sedition. He insists: "You must believe me within the limits of the dream that never dies. I saw the dream just as I tell it to you now; it is not a dream but a retribution from the hell of the Seventh Night" (Laredj 1993, 31). The "dream" here is both vision and judgment, a way of seeing that cuts through historical falsifications.

The novel also juxtaposes official, idealized portraits of rulers with counter-histories. The scribes' portrayal of Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Saghir as a just and self-sacrificing ruler—one who feeds orphans from his own flesh, leads resistance in the Alpujarras, and is miraculously transported by Gabriel (Laredj 1993, 58–59)—stands in stark contrast to the narrator's assertion that he was, in fact, complicit in the ruin of al-Andalus. "This is our history," the narrator

declares, "and the scribes are the doom; they betrayed the salt of the poor and the tear of the stranger in distant lands" (Laredj 1993, 32).

By revealing the gap between glorifying narrative and historical reality, the novel strips the historical text of its supposed neutrality and exposes its ideological function. The figure of Muhammad al-Saghir, who shifts from "servant of his people" to "servant of the northern kings," encapsulates this reversal.

Laredj's use of al-Tabari's account of al-Hallaj operates in a similar fashion. The narrator cites a scene in which a man "known as al-Hallaj, surnamed Abu Muhammad... a charlatan accompanied by a companion of his" is brought before the vizier, with crowds claiming that he "claims divinity" (Laredj 1993, 116; cf. al-Tabari, Tārīkh). The reader is left to wonder whether this is the "real" al-Tabari or a fictionalized "Tabari of our age." The historical reference is thus destabilized and used to comment on the recurring role of court historians who side with power and profit.

Finally, al-Bashir's long sojourn in the cave and his later testimony before Shahryar ibn al-Muqtadir connect the massacres of the Abbasid era with the present-day abuses of "the jumlukiyya of Numidia." The people tell him: "O Bashir, you are what remains of the truth of the past time, and in this time we wanted to see the truth through your eyes... regarding what is happening in the ruin of the jumlukiyya" (Laredj 1993, 135). Historical cycles of oppression repeat; the novel suggests that little has changed in the underlying mentality—from Isabella and Ferdinand's Inquisition to contemporary forms of authoritarianism. As al-Bashir notes after hearing the story of al-Khidr: "What has changed from the old time until now? What is the difference between it and the Inquisition in the function of death practiced by everyone? ... What has changed? The same tales, the same riddles, and the same failed mentality between Granada and Numidia—Amdoukal: a thread of blood drawn by Muhammad al-Saghir (Abu Abdullah)" (Laredj 1993, 262).

Conclusion

This study has argued that the interconnection between historical and fictional discourses in Raml al-Maya is first signalled and structured at the level of the paratext. The external thresholds—title, subtitle, and related framing devices—encode relationships to earlier texts and direct the reader toward particular interpretive pathways, especially the dense interplay with One Thousand and One Nights and with Andalusian and Islamic history. The internal paratext, in turn, operates between antecedent and subsequent texts, transforming pre-existing historical and literary materials through strategies of imitation, distortion, and opposition.

By tracing the novel's intertextual dialogues with chronicles, philosophical treatises, and classical narratives, the article has shown how Raml al-Maya turns history into a contested narrative space. The figure of al-Bashir the Morisco, the voices of Dunyazad and Scheherazade, and the recurring appearances of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, al-Hallaj, and Ibn Rushd all serve to

highlight continuities between past and present forms of oppression, as well as the complicity of "official" historians in legitimizing power.

The main contribution of this article lies in demonstrating that Raml al-Maya does not merely recount historical events in fictional form. Rather, it uses paratextual and intertextual strategies to expose the narrative constructions of history itself and to question the values embedded in those constructions. In reading this novel, we are invited to reread Arab–Islamic history as a palimpsest of competing narratives, and, in doing so, to recognize how many of the tragedies of the past continue to be replayed in the present.

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