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IN PRAISE OF DOUBLE SEXUALITY
IN THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS:
THE GESTE OF BOUDOUR
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

“The mares who bear me took me
as far as my desire
and their gallop led me
on the famous path of the goddess
who everywhere guides the wise man.”
Parmenides, *Proemium*

Among the many story groups of *The Thousand and One Nights*, few demonstrate with such clarity, precision and even some audacity the vicissitudes, privileges, fortunes and joys of sexual polymorphism. The geste of Boudour belongs to such a cycle.

Sett-Boudour and Quamar az Zaman form the poles of this marvelous narrative, sometimes troubling because of its ambivalences, its connotations—indeed its telescoping—between the

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universe of myth and that of everyday humanity, the profane universe.

By her audacious initiatives, her resolute actions, the power and sovereignty which she acquires by her courage and her spirit, Boudour reverses institutional roles and sexuality itself. Sovereignly woman, she participates in some respects in the life of hermaphrodite gods. Denying the order of the title of the tale, she steals a lead partly over man.

The appearance of marvelous elements—in the form of the Efrits or Djinns—and unheard-of episodes, the epic thread which by its unexpected twists gives movement, without doubt make of this tale, like many others in the *Nights*, a geste. It unfolds, moreover, in a cycle. After this first narrative (*op. cit.*) there follows another which is both reciprocal and reversed: *The Story of the Princes Amgiad and Assad* (Galland translation).¹ A mirror-reversal, as if a break had come between the two (knowledge of incest?). Does the figure of Boudour go back to legendary Indo-Persian material, or even further? N. Eliseef finds a trace of it in *Hezar Efsane*, a manuscript which preceded the *Nights*.

Of love

The geste of Boudour is above all an ardent love story, perhaps the most beautiful of those told in the *Nights*. Boudour certainly stands out from other lovers—the beautiful Schamsennahar, smitten by Ali Ben-Bekar, the seductive Sett El-Hosn, lover of Bâdr-Ed-Dîn. Not that their beauty is any less real. But in the very adventure of the narrative there is an element of freedom, of happiness, of power which the double ambivalence of Boudour—as twin and androgynous (on a mythic plane)—increases. In one sense she multiplies happiness; in another, perversions (according to the analytic grid, for example, to whose data we shall return)—perversions for others, not for herself, for she roars with laughter at them.²

The methodological approach

There are two choices. Either we can say that there was a prototype for the tale (legendary, mythical) of Boudour which has been buried and lost for ever; research can only advance by bits and

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pieces, like a puzzle with pieces missing. Or we can see the tale (legendary, mythical) functioning as a celebration. “Celebrations”, writes Cl. Lévi-Strauss, “are social life *played backwards*: not because it was once so, but because it can never be any other way”.³ We know that myth frequently reverses social life; it was even necessary to make of this a methodological rule, for those cases where the prototypical model does not exist.

Another possibility is the thematic approach, articulating and structuring the data, even forming a classification and catalogue for them. This is the method followed by N. Eliseeff who has created a first-rate research tool.

A third possibility consists in extracting the narrative schema which generates the tale by eliminating the “psychological” dimension of the characters and emphasising, inversely, the roles and functions proper to the internal logic of the tale. This in no way inhibits an extra-literary and logical double reading. These principal methodological options have each one given proof of their fecundity.⁴

Anthropological enlightenment

Along with the planned types of approach, it will be useful to include other investigations to illuminate the Boudour cycle. Research into several structures of relationship, both on the mythical and social levels; investigation into cosmic twinning (the major directions: east/west; right/left; sun/moon) and its relation with human quasi-twinning; which leads to mythical incest and its relation to human symbolic incest; these two themes being connoted by that of androgyny of the gods and its relation to human bisexuality (and here we can note the complexity of the themes of transvestitism (of clothing, sexuality, of power, of words, or images), the themes of confusion and parody, comedy of errors³²—error as path to the truth in myth—and all these systems of attitudes associated with the *joke relationship*² which anthropology has perfected for more than a half-century; and finally, a striking fact in the Boudour cycle: the heroes (who seem to be true cultural heroes) create or restore sovereignty over cities (Boudour in the city of the Isle of Ebene; Amgiad in the city of the Magi). We are in the presence of a grandiose cycle which takes the shape of a myth.

From mythic figure to profane character

And so each character is first of all a figure (as is said of a figure on a tarot card⁵), a mythic figure given a functional role. But as if by twinning, within the same person is also a character in the psychological sense. In fact, just as happens in other tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the legendary role figure is given very concrete and sometimes particularly vivid psychological traits. And, true enough, it is this brutal immersion of the myth into reality which gives the *Nights* its desynchronisation, disorientation, daring and even the vulgarity in which the pagan* gods engage (in the sense that for the most part, these are sexual and even bisexual gods, whereas in the biblical universe, the divine person and sex are antinomic⁶), the double telescoping of the real into myth and of myth into the real exercises on the reader of the *Nights* that fascination mixed with Freudian *Unheimlichkeit*, “disturbing strangeness”. Divine and human ambivalence form quite certainly one of the keys to the Boudour geste (although the poem enchants the reader) and its delicate unraveling.

Multidimensional approach

The structure of this myth is, however, multi-dimensional, its reading plural, exoteric (epic) and esoteric (the play of the real and the imaginary consciousness, of the symbol and its inversions). Even more, of one esoterism which refers partially to others, fitting one into another like Russian dolls (*matriochka*), but offering in other areas oppositions, in some cases reversals of symbol systems, completely unexpected — or on the most evident level of signs, the reversal of entire descriptives, when we move, for example, from the level of myth to the level of the profane.

Beyond the theme of quasi-twinning and of princely (symbolic) incest, we have seen that there is also androgyny, already noted, series of symbols with a multitude of parts running through the text: thanksgiving objects (sign, rings, hair, nourishment [olives], precious gold, cornelian, etc.) ritual initiations (sacrifice of the horse in the forest), transvestitism both internal and external, sexual and/or political, masculine and feminine, of madness and normality, of husband-wife reversals, queen-king, etc.

* By “pagan” we mean non-biblical religious facts; conventionally.

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In fact the narrative develops like a nodal network in that the symbolic grid loses at a certain point in the narrative its own coherence in favor of another which is substituted for it, and others as well, particularly the code of the myths of incest (regular and prescribed) compared to that of the real social game (prohibited incest).

As if it were a matter of superimposed and interwoven registries, partially basing their oppositions and contradictions on recourse to *joke relationships* (in the ethnological sense) or to parody. The theft of the cornelian (we should say the double theft, by Quamar the Prince and then by the rapacious bird) and the flight of the thieving and mocking bird refer to different levels for decoding the narrative—including the symbols known to alchemy* during *sublimatio*. These symbols are superimposed at the risk of confusing the trace. As Cl. Lévi-Strauss observes, “When a mythic schema passes from one population to another, the myth begins to become confused”.⁷

To crown it all, and in addition to the others, the use of a Freudian interpretation grid risks bringing the structure down, portraying as perversion (the relation between Boudour and Haïat Alnefous or inverted relations between Boudour and Quamar [without his knowledge]) what is experienced as happiness by the protagonists or even shown to be a *custom between groups of related persons* (consanguineous/uterine) under the form of “*joke relationships*”. An assuredly demoniacal text, filled with *charms*. The second part⁸ acts as a revealer of the first: the incest declared by the two queen-mothers to their respective children (to each of the sons of the *alternate* spouse of King Quamar az Zaman) brings on the crisis which makes this second version the negative of the preceding one, reversing the poles of power which change from feminine to masculine.

From the Nights to Nourritures

“Her lips, when she smiles, are like cornelians; her saliva like melted honey; her teeth a string of pearls...” “When you sleep on

* There is nothing which prohibits extracting from each of the sequences its alchemy counterpart: *coniunctio* / *separatio* / *olutio* / *putrefactio* / *sublimatio* / *fermetatio* / *exaltatio*. But alchemy does not explain, it merely illustrates. We will return to this point (sequence of the miraculous garden).

purple”, says Quamar az Zaman to Boudour, fallen asleep in the tent, which reminds him of the first miraculous night, “your clear face is like the dawn and your eyes skies of blue. / When your body is clothed with narcissus and with roses, standing or lying stretched out, there is no palm tree growing in Arabia which is like it. / When your fine hair in which diamonds sparkle falls in a mass or blows lightly, no silk could equal its weave. Ah, sleeper! It is the magnificent hour when the scattered palm trees drink in the light.” Such poetic heights can hardly be surpassed.

André Gide, who was bound as we know by a profound friendship to Mardrus, cites in his correspondence¹⁰ one of these verses which he had so magnificently translated, or rather reinvented, in order to praise the beauty of his friend: “*For beauty belongs only to him who seeks it with love.*” When reading it, a pleasure stolen from the gods, this text from the *Thousand and One Nights*, imbued with unequalled fervor, is a hymn to beauty as mystical knowledge, poetic frenzy, amorous frenzy such as Plato describes in *Phaedra* and *The Banquet*, and as the Pre-Socratics exalted it.

Moreover, it is not impossible that the poetics of Mardrus (poetics meant not only as a theory of the production of writing, but likewise as all the first choices which specify, among all the various possibilities, its shape, its outline, its path)—that this latent poetics then has alerted, fascinated, engaged the fervent interest of the author of *Nourritures terrestres*.¹¹ “There is an entire study to be made of the friendship between Gide and Mardrus and of the influence which the latter exercised at one time on Gide’s imagination.”¹² *Nourritures* refers back to the *Nights*:

“And the delicate bodies entwined under the branches,
I touched his pearly skin with a delicate finger
I saw his delicate feet
Which marched noiselessly in the sand...”¹³

Nathaniel seems to echo Boudour and Quamar az Zaman.

Of the modernity of a myth

Between the succulence of fruits and their scientific analysis are interposed “the dismal pleasures of the mind” (Descartes). In truth the pleasure is not so much dismal as the task is delicate if

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one hopes to untangle this complex skein of mirrors, of doubling and twinning, of androgyny and sexual polymorphism, of the uterine quasi relation, of the incest favored by the Efrits (Djinn) but condemned by the sons, the father-kings who assume the roles of mothers (practically incestuous) and of queen-mothers who assumed the latent roles of aunts by marriage subjected to “joke relationships”, of (lunar) princesses who assume solar roles and of princes in the opposite situation, of a matriarchal hegemony disguised by and under the signs of masculinity, which is transformed into masculine power, of the right (right side) which becomes the left and the left which turns into the right, of the east which becomes west and *vice-versa*, of the top which goes to the bottom, and the bottom to the top. Upon careful reflection, the geste of Boudour connotes not only the *situation of the modern woman*, but even more: everything else being equal and on a different level, is it not the situation in which modern society is debating while seeking unsuccessfully to define the mechanisms for the transgression of values (sexual, political, religious, aesthetic, etc.)? We did not know that within this marvelous text can be found the imaginary, phantoms, and the transformations of attitudinal systems which refer, in bits and pieces, to the curious mutations of our times.

Schematic approach

Better than the summary of an unsummarisable poetic prose, a diagram will guide us through this labyrinthine passageway.

1. *Two essential figures at two ends of the world*: Sett-Boudour, princess, daughter of the king of Extreme China, Ghaïour, who “loves her with a fervent love” and builds her seven palaces (of gold, of silver, of crystal, etc.). Quamar az Zaman, prince, son of the king Shah-Zaman of the Isle of Khaledan (Isle of Children). “He loved his son so much that he could not be separated from him for an instant”. They are of nubile age, but refuse, in a symmetrical fashion, all marriages. The angry fathers lock them up, him in a tower, her in a palace. “Three things kept her from giving humans a glance which said yes—fear of the unknown, the honor of the known and her beauty”. Both are stunning in beauty but afflicted, with “a heavy rump”. She has “sumptuous buttocks”.

2. *Supernatural reunion of the two adolescents: Boudour takes the sexual initiative*: as a result of a bet by the Efrits (Djinn) who want to compare the respective beauty of the adolescents, the sleeping Boudour is carried through the air to Khaledan and placed alongside the sleeping Quamar. Awakened by a Djinn-flea and astounded by the (twin) beauty of his partner, he desires her and wants to unite with her, but finally *restrains himself*, fearing a trick by his father. He exchanges his ring for that of Boudour and goes back to sleep. Awakened in turn under the same conditions, she admires Quamar, urges him to declare his love. While he is asleep, she takes the initiative, becomes woman. “The two youths were so perfectly alike that they could be taken for twins”. Following this sexual initiation, Boudour became masculine (aggression and daring initiative) and Quamar feminine (aggressive then lunar-distraught).

3. *Reclusion*: carried through the air back to her palace during her sleep, Boudour wakes up far from her lover. The same thing happens to Quamar az Zaman. They both become wild and aggressive with mad love. They are locked up—he with his father in a palace built on an island where this maternal father wraps him in his arms while he sleeps; she in one of the seven palaces with her mother-nurse. They languish. The alarmed fathers seek healers. The emperor of China proclaims that he will give the crown and his daughter in marriage to the most efficacious doctor; but, in case of failure, he will be decapitated. Boudour receives a visit from her foster-brother Marzaouan, disguised as a woman, who, after a long absence, has become an astrologist-healer. He offers to go seek Boudour’s unknown lover.

4. *Marzaouan’s initiatory pilgrimage**: step by step he discovers the story of the loves of Quamar az Zaman and discovers the unknown itinerary; his bark capsizes, and he swims to the isle of the palace, sees the Shah and offers to heal Quamar. When Quamar is informed of the story of Boudour, he recognises her in the tale; they both decide to flee from the protective eye of the father,

* Marzaouan is called Aladin in the Khawam version, and the cornelian does not appear, replaced by a “sewn package”. We are dealing with different sources.

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simulate a hunting party, trick the watching horsemen in their entourage, sacrifice a horse at the crossing of the forest paths and leave bloody clothing behind to attempt to show the death of the prince, and arrive at the palace in China.

5. *Meeting between Quamar and Sett-Boudour*: Quamar pretends to be the astrologist-healer with clothing like that of the foster-brother, and offers to heal the princess despite the forty cut-off heads hanging at the palace gates following the failures of his predecessors. Just before meeting Boudour, he prefers to leave her a message (poem) and his ring (sign of recognition): precursory signs of the passionate meeting. Visit with the king of China. Marriage of Boudour to Quamar az Zaman (matrilocal marriage in China, an eastern country).

6. *Departure for the west*: appeal of the father of Quamar. Happiness troubled by the nightmares of Quamar az Zaman; in his dreams, his father calls him. Decision to depart. Entourage, caravan. Initiatory journey in opposite direction, from east to west. Arrival at the prairie at high noon. Tents are set up. Boudour falls asleep, Quamar draws near. "This tent reminds him of that first miraculous night spent in the tower". He falls in love with the sleeping Boudour* and "in the shadow of her thighs" he discovers a precious stone, a cornelian marked with talismanic signs; comes out of the tent to look at it, a rapacious bird plunges from the sky and steals it from him.

7. *Quamar doubly "lost"*: he follows the thieving bird who teases him by alighting here and there and then flying away. Chase, in vain. Quamar has lost the trail. Weakened and wild, he loses his sense of direction. He wanders. He comes across a hostile city called the city of the Magi, intolerant of Islam. He is finally received by an old man, a Muslim gardener; Quamar enters his service.

* Is not the rest of the narrative simply the "continuation" of Boudour's dream? (Boudour would then be like Lewis Carroll's Alice). But this hypothesis cannot be retained, for the anonymous author(s) of this geste would have recounted the awakening of the princess.

8. *Sequence of the stolen cornelian (sex?) and the taking of power by Boudour*: Sett-Boudour discovers the theft of the cornelian, awaits the return of the prince in vain. To avoid confusion in his entourage, she decides to wear Quamar's clothes, to use his mount, to pass herself off as him, to take the prince's whip and lead the cohort to its destination (particularly since she resembles the prince like a twin). The city of Ebene is in sight. The king Armanos comes out to meet the princess whom he takes to be Quamar az Zaman. Festivities, banquet. He offers her his nubile daughter Haïat Alnefous in marriage. Anxiety of the prince (princess) who accepts in order not to betray the trust of Armanos and for fear of reprisals. Marriage, festivities, marriage night. The false prince, now sovereign of the city, governs with wisdom by day and lives his sexuality by night: nothing happens. Pressure from the royal family to see the marriage sheet displayed (stained sheet ritual). The third night Boudour decides to reveal the truth to Haïat Alnefous who adores her husband. "And if I were your mother, would you love me as much?... And if I were your sister?" Faced with the intensity of the passion of the young bride, Boudour reveals herself and initiates her. Haïat Alnefous will keep the secret "and you will also be his wife".

9. *On the Isle of the Magi (garden), Quamar discovers the cornelian and a treasure*. In the garden a bird falls, belly open (with the stolen cornelian). The same day, Quamar discovers a buried treasure. The old man wills it to him and reserves him a place on a sailing ship leaving for the Isle of Ebene. The old man dies. Quamar fills the jars, hides the gold in the bottom and places stuffed olives on top. But Quamar misses the boat; the jars leave without him.

10. *Reunion—simulated homosexuality*: Boudour visits the ship, purchases the jars, discovers the gold and in one of the jars the cornelian and Quamar's name. She has Quamar brought back by force, under accusation of the rape of a young cook, she says. Return of the prince-gardener who does not understand the situation. He is led to hammam, sumptuously clothed and then named grand vizir. The following night he is invited by the "king" (queen) to come to the royal apartments. Boudour simulates a homosexual

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scene with him (the meaning of which we will discuss later). When Quamar can find no masculine traits in her, she breaks out laughing, rises before him, naked, her hair untied. Reunion. Reciprocal stories; he says, "What you did to me last night was tremendous". Boudour answers, "By Allah, it was only as a joke". The king Armanos is informed, grants his daughter as second wife to Quamar az Zaman (first wife in the Galland version). Festivities. He commands that the marvelous story be written *in golden letters*. Happiness *à trois*. Quamar governs by day and each night receives alternately each of his wives. They, however, "belong to each other during the daytime hours". Then, almost at the same time, they each give birth to a boy (Amgiad and Assad), half-twins (twins by the same father). The story recommences with the male twins, doubles of the cosmic twins. End of the first tale: sexual sharing *à trois* (figure of sovereignty in Chinese symbolism).

Anthropology and hermeneutics

In our two figures, the mothers are unknown (Galland, however, cites the young and beautiful concubine Fatima as mother of Quamar), but the fathers have maternal attitudes toward their respective children, particularly Shah Zaman. They mother them. It is as if they were both father and mother, as if they were self-impregnated. The mother is only a means. There is a kind of denial of physiological maternity. Ghaïour "loves Boudour with an ardent love"; the shah lives on the Isle of Children (Khaledan), surrounded by water impregnated with feminine sexuality connoted by the lunar suitability of the name of Quamar az Zaman (*moon of the century* or *moon of time*). This isle is to the left, to the west of the tip of China, which is located to the east, at the right. However, Sett-Boudour lives in the east, in seven palaces—of gold, silver, crystal, opaline; sometimes lunar/silver, sometimes solar/gold. Ambivalent, she will overcome, stage by stage, a solar dimension, masculine, noble, sovereign* and will become king-queen of a

* Conventionally it is posited that Boudour, immediately after the first marriage, adopts the code, the orientations and the cosmogony of the royal Spouse (dextral cosmogony, right-handed orientation) used in most Middle-eastern Islamic cultures, as in the West.

city in the continuation of the tale. Symbolism which is both a durable symbol (right/left; solar/lunar; east/west; feminine/masculine), but likewise a symbol of *position* which is defined by a term-for-term series of oppositions, as in commutative analysis in linguistics.

Today we know better; the symbols have no value in themselves (neither in all places nor in all times). The signified of a sign varies from one civilisation area to another. Since this is so, it would make little sense to reject a more durable symbolism which has been formed and stratified over the centuries in the areas of civilisation evolved since the prehistoric diasporas from China to Europe. Alongside durable symbols which endure precisely in relation to the narratives which they animate and actualise from one period to another (in this sense we can say, with Mauss, that there are no survivals), there exists a more precarious symbolism which eliminates itself. Finally both participate in a *symbolism of position* (and opposition). Claude Lévi-Strauss emphasises this: "Symbols have no intrinsic and invariable meaning. They are not autonomous in relation to the context. Their meaning is first of all one of position."¹⁴ In a famous article, Robert Hertz sensed this strongly and cast an illuminating light on the structures of the make-believe. So, in Maori cultures, the symbolic terms¹⁵ are divided up as follows:

light/darkness	<i>consecration of Marae</i> (temple)
day/night	heaven/earth
east/west	male/female
south/north	life/death
high/low	health/sickness
heaven/earth	force/weakness
divine/profane	

The human body is divided by this bipolarity :

Right side	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{noble} \\ \text{male} \\ \text{strong} \\ \text{active} \end{array} \right.$	Left side	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{profane} \\ \text{feminine} \\ \text{weak} \\ \text{passive} \end{array} \right.$
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We find, of course, this double polarity in the West. Hertz notes, "All these terms are *interchangeable*. They designate under multiple aspects the same category of things". This new property was discovered later by linguists (Circle of Prague, 1929). It is a matter no less than of the proof of the commutation of signs, an operation consisting in varifying a term in a finite series and observing if this property makes sense only by the position which affects the term in its relation to an opposite term (as are pairs of opposites—left/right; light/darkness; masculine/feminine; solar/lunar, etc.).

The inverse of the preceding is the Zuni system (an American *pueblo* group) which favors the left side:

Class	God "left side" ¹⁷	"right side"
Reference	{ eldest agriculture shield*	youngest war lance*
Connotation	wise, defensive	impetuous, offensive

(Pueblo variation: two goddesses)

Apparently these symbols have no invariable Zuni-Maori meaning. They signify by their position within the whole.

Boudour and the cosmogonic directions

The geste of Boudour is, in this respect, essential. Sett-Boudour represents primarily and institutionally a system of the left type (profane/feminine/weak/passive) associated by its geographic symbolism to a system of the right type (east side/right/solar/golden palace). She is ambivalent, but in the course of her various initiations (sexual initiation, initiatory journey toward the city of Ebene, etc.), she overcomes domination, sovereignty, the right side. This position allows explaining somewhat the various trans-

* Roger Caillois (*La Dissymétrie*, Gallimard, 1973, p. 41) observes, "In ancient Greece, the *right* is often called the *spear* side and the left the *shield* side (Greeks were right-handed)". We can note the same symbolism but inverted. Although Caillois contests a completely left-handed culture, he allows for cultures "where the right enjoys no appreciable privilege".

vestitisms—of clothing (masculine), sexual (male), of sovereignty (king's crown).

Inversely Quamar az Zaman represents signs of the left side (birth in the west/lunar name/isle surrounded by water/over-mothering by the father [mother]) associated with a masculine/future sovereign/strength and expected activities type.

The various initiations take place with a consort* (such as the Efrits of the foster-brother). Quamar refuses sexual initiation, only Boudour takes full part of her own initiative. The initiatory path toward China takes place with Marzaouan (foster-brother, twin likeness of Boudour, but also the likeness of Quamar az Zaman); the prince will exchange his royal garments for those of the healer-astrologist, i.e. for those of a lower state. The ritual of sacrificing the horse, propitiatory (solar) ritual preparing the novice for positions of sovereignty by his marriage to the princess Boudour. However, Quamar cannot retain this high position (right side/solar). His father calls to him in his dreams. Another inverse initiatory journey, that of the caravan; he will travel only half the way, up to the *prairie* (connotation alluding to paradise).

Three facts are essential for understanding the text:

1. The tent and the sleeping Boudour evoke for Quamar the first "miraculous night": what really happens in *what is left unsaid*?
2. The double theft of the cornelian (intervention of a *bird-Hermes*: who guides it?)
3. The wandering of Quamar: he loses the *sense of direction* (madness) then finds refuge in the garden, is taken in by the old man. Transformational role of the death of the Senex.

Boudour takes full advantage of the power of royalty by becoming, through marriage with Haïat Alnefous, sovereign of the city of Ebene. For Quamar, the reversal of this negative position, from the left to the right and sovereignty, will occur only through the meeting with the old man-consort (double positive and father substitute). The old man is the figure of the liberating Senex.

* In Greek myths, the consort is the animal or the divine counterpart which accompanies the divinity (Minerva and the owl "who gets up only at night", Hegel).

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From the death of the Senex (or shortly before) there are three important resulting consequences for the Puer: 1. Quamar discovers, under a hollow uprooted tree (carob), an underground passage filled with precious metals, i.e. signs of his royalty; 2. he discovers the cornelian, i.e., in a certain sense, the sign of his rediscovered sexuality (three moments: desexed, asexual, resexed) anticipated by the propitiatory ritual and the sending of the jars (gold and olives); 3. he passes from an invisible and obscure mode to a visible and stunning mode.

Sequence of the miraculous garden

These three events are not without reference to an alchemic symbolism. This is not at all explicative, but illustrative of the order of the sequences. Corbin stresses, in fact, how much Iranian philosophical and literary texts are steeped in alchemic esoterism.¹⁶ According to the analysis used in our research, these symbols function as *shifters*; modes of passage and articulation from one code to another;¹⁷ shadow/light; low/high; humility/sovereignty. Cf. the research of linguists¹⁸ and semiologists.¹⁹

Gemini, twins and mythic incest

These two figures, Boudour and Quamar, are so strikingly similar that the narrative repeatedly mentions it: “The mold which formed (Quamar az Zaman)”, says an Efrit, “was not broken until after it had made a female model—the princess Boudour”. First point: this breaking refers to sexuality itself, and is “lived in a bisexual manner”.²⁰ Second point: we are dealing with twins of an enigmatic origin; the mothers are unknown, the fathers live at opposite ends of the world; but the “formative mold” of our two figures is the same. Their twinning, at this point of the analysis, is indisputably cosmic, so much so that one of the fathers seems eminently solar (Ghaïour) (to the right, eastern, the seven palaces) and the other no less eminently lunar: Shah Zaman. Each cosmic figure is passionately seeking *his double* in the sense that one is for the other, and reciprocally, the sign of his immortality,²¹ up to the moment when the roles are settled, for a time, so much so that one becomes the mortal part (invisible) of the other, immortal (visible).²²

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fantasises the other? Boudour's lack and simulated madness? There is the question.

The mythic twin couple has the privilege of incest. The real twins not at all. However, that which constitutes the strength and spirit of *The Thousand and One Nights* is, as we have said, the constant reversion from myth to the real and from the real to myth. As mythical figures, the heroes have access to what is forbidden to humans, and the narrative brings in marvelous elements. To carry out the order of the narrative, the Efrits will bear the sleeping Boudour through the air to Quamar az Zaman, her cosmic twin. Conversely when he wants to unite with her in the tent, he sets in motion his own castration with the theft of the cornelian. The narrative makes Marzaouan the consort who mediates between Quamar and Boudour.

Relations between Boudour and Haïat Alnefous constitute one of the most unusual and at the same time essential aspects of the narrative. She is informed of the triple misrepresentation of Boudour. First in *dress* (including the hair, the symbolically imperishable part of sexuality as distinct from the flesh, perishable;¹⁵ hair which Boudour will let fall on two occasions: 1. as revelation of her femininity to Haïat Alnefous; 2. as revelation of herself to Quamar az Zaman); then the sexual misrepresentation: she plays a man to Haïat Alnefous (she is her institutional spouse and, for Quamar az Zaman, she is his institutional sovereign) in this final scene which refers not only to a misrepresentation of a misrepresentation, but to the perversion of perversion. And third, the misrepresentation of sovereignty makes clear the development.

The enigmatic sequence

—unless we see in this unusual sequence a group of attitudes which anthropology designates with the term of “*joke relationships*” leading to veritable inversions of roles, of attitudes and vocabulary (foul language, sometimes extremely filthy, becoming the “obligatory” language). We shall return to this problem.

Whatever may be the case, as a mythical figure Boudour behaves like the androgynous gods and goddesses, and in her relations with Haïat Alnefous it is a question of nothing less than attesting to a mythic function with her mirrored double. Boudour then appears as a sort of feminine Narcissus. Her relations with Haïat

recall that of *Salmacis and Hermaphrodite* recounted by Ovid.²³ As Mircea Eliade points out, ritual androgyny forms a model “because it implies not the sum of anatomical organs, but symbolically the totality of magico-religious powers associated with both sexes”. And so, by uniting with Haïat Alnefous, Boudour fulfills a ritual of the “totality of the world”. As “sovereign” nothing inhibits thinking that this androgynous ritual is in accord with the *restoration* of the City. Mythical twins create cities or restore them: Romulus and Remus.²⁵ However, by a return to the real (to which the *Nights* have by now accustomed us) the text (Mardrus variant) leaves no doubt of the joys and pleasures of the sexual initiation which, through the mediation of the divine Boudour, Haïat undergoes with fervor.

The passage from the androgyny of the gods to the hermaphroditism or the bisexuality of humans, according to M. Eliade, can be expressed in a multitude of erotic possibilities. The famous sculptures, *The Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, called the Borghese Hermaphrodite, and the *Hermaphrodite with the Swollen Breasts*, are seen with a double sex.²⁶ So Boudour’s sexual polymorphism with Haïat Alnefous seems to be one of the determining elements of the narrative. We have already pointed out that the stolen cornelian denotes symbolic castration for Quamar az Zaman; (the proof *a contrario* is the fact that the hero is re-sexualised by the miraculous rediscovery of the cornelian). But that the stone represents for Boudour an “erotic superabundance” before Haïat would seem to refer, beyond the fact that the absence of the cornelian (femininity) reinforces Boudour’s masculine polarity, to a process of narcissisation by and in the *mirror* which she personifies as the “double”. (Can we think of this at this level as a structuring by each of them of the hysterical desire brought on by Quamar’s absence and the waiting for his eagerly sought return?) “You *too* will be his wife.” For he, perhaps, will bring the answer to *their questioning*.

The figure three

Because they are androgynous, mythical figures can only function as triads. Our diagram shows quite clearly that the three palatial cities are:

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LEFT

Khaledan: Shah Zaman
Quamar az Zaman

RIGHT

China: Ghaïour
Boudour

CENTER

City of Ebene: Armanos
Boudour
Haïat

In short the three cities form a cosmogonic triangle, with Quamar's garden being in the shaded part of the map until the discovery of the gold. When Quamar az Zaman returns, he does not kill his rivals like Ulysses; he does not expel Haïat Alnefous. To the contrary. He forms a sexual triad with Haïat who becomes his second wife. The king Armanos accepts this trilogity and, dazzled by the tale revealed by Boudour and then by Quamar, he gives the order, as we have seen, to have it inscribed in "golden letters".

The figure three is the expression of totality and of fullness for an androgynous figure.* In Chinese numerology it is the axis of the world and the figure of sovereignty. Haïat Alnefous is the body of one and the body of the other at the same time: desire made real by the mirror which she represents. The immortal poet of the *Nights* says of Boudour: "When her hair is braided into *three* braids which fall to her feet, I seem to see *three nights at once*". (Mardrus, 554). Three emerges from the androgynous dyad in the narrative.

From joke relation to the problem of incest

"What you did to me last night was tremendous."

"It was only a joke", Boudour responds to Quamar az Zaman, still dumbfounded at having been obliged to perform homosexual acts with the king (his wife) in disguise, only to see the king

* The figure three, although widely mentioned, is here considered only in relation to Irano-Indian and Chinese cultures. Methodologically it functions in the analysis as shifter.

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set aside for sacrifice. As a result of various circumstances, the visible/sovereign/solar brother encounters the second/invisible/underground/lunar brother and each founds a city or a kingdom. These twins are creators of cities, just as Boudour was.

* * *

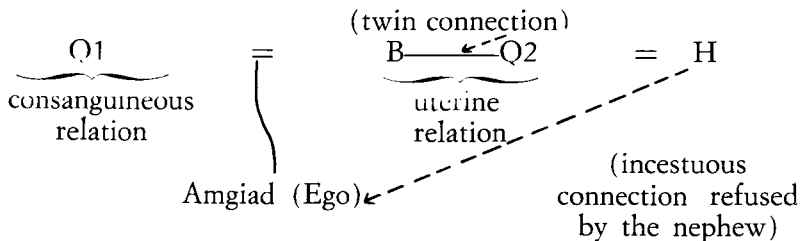
In both narratives, I and II, relationships are entirely reversed. The incest permitted in I (but, as we have seen, in a secret fashion since Boudour, Quamar az Zaman and Haïat come from three different kingdoms and their twinship is unknown) is forbidden in II).

In narrative II, the mothers exist (they are missing in I). In actual fact the diagram of relationships is *multiplied* in this way: Quamar plays the role of *two fathers*, Q1 and Q2. In one case he is the father of Amgiad, Q1; in the other the father of Assad, Q2.



Q1: Quamar father of Amgiad (twin) — Q2: Quamar father of Assad (twin) — B: Boudour — H: Haïat.

Upon analysis, the twins are “alternate” relative to their mothers but “internal” relative to the father. However, Boudour and Quamar are *mythically* “twins” (hidden brother and sister): similarly Boudour and Haïat are (hidden) twin sisters, Haïat being the (cosmic) substitute for Quamar (feminine, narrative I; masculine, narrative II).



The dissociation of Q1 by Q2 seems methodologically necessary. Mythical relation and empirical relation are superimposed.

The first serves as latent symbolic reference to the second. Thus the aunt-nephew relations refer to an incestuous mythical situation.²⁷

The father of Amgiad (i.e. Quamar) is both his father (Q1) and his uterine relative, that is his uncle, brother (Q2) of the mother. Haïat then becomes his aunt by marriage. However, in the structures of patrilinear filiation where marriage is with a crossed (uterine) cousin, the son (Ego) has the right and even the obligation of “joking” with his uterine siblings.²⁷ This is the case of Amgiad and Assad. It occurs preferably with the aunt by marriage in the sense that she is considered as thief and usurper of the “brother” of the mother (her husband) and usurper as well of the goods of the brother of the genetrix.²⁷ The nephew engages in oratorical jousting with her, occasionally vulgar, on the theme of a *supposed union*; moreover the nephew disposes of the right of plundering the goods of the aunt and every *theft* is the symbolic equivalent of a *rape*. Here the relationship *is reversed*. The aunts by marriage take the initiative in the sense that the sovereignty which they enjoyed fully before the second marriage with Q was taken from them by the “usurping” twins.

In the light of the relationship diagram positing the doubling of Quamar (as husband (Q1) and brother (Q2) and given the analysis of relations (within certain oral tradition societies)* we are better equipped to grasp the connections which escape us on the purely literary analysis level. In fact in the institutional context of the *Nights*, (middle-eastern Islam), filiation is also patrilinear. Because of the difficulty of establishing the *sure sources* (cfr. N. Eliseeff) of the place of origin for the elaboration of the Tales, the use of certain anthropological models allows a “loosening” of the analysis. These models here explain the exorbitant privilege of the “joke relationship”.³³

This is not all. In the case of the model used, it is the uterine nephew who takes the initiative. In the case of narrative II, the step-mothers take the initiative, for they have a theoretical status

* This model of relationship is not the only one; another can be used. Thus the three figures B, Q, H dissolve analytically into four for the dissociation Q1/Q2. This gives the paradigm $Q1 = B - H = Q2$ where the cousins A1 and A2 are parallel. The reciprocal “aunts” have an even greater *joking right*.

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of “aunt by marriage” or, in the second model, of “paternal aunts.” Is it because they are “half-fathers”?²⁷ Perhaps. It is also because their *feminine sovereignty* was taken from them by the enthronement of Quamar as king.

This reversal of position is far from being without use. Boudour and Haïat Alnefous, mythically incestuous sisters, are not afraid of saying it. During Boudour and Haïat’s third wedding night, no doubt is permitted to remain (return from myth to reality).

B. Would you have been happy if I were your brother?

H. Ah! I would die of happiness.

B. And if I were your sister, would you have loved me as much?

H. Even more. I would have always been with you, slept with you, in the same bed with you.

The sexual relations which they propose to their respective step-sons (theoretical nephews) are therefore not unreasonable; they refer to the same framework of *mythical* relationships in which the aunts had incestuous relations with the nephews. But instead of being hidden, incest is here openly declared. Which leads to the condemnation of the sons (princes) by error, and the real repudiation of the wives (queens) by “mythical” error. In fact, as we have seen, from the point of view of myth, they have the right to make this “outrageous” request, the exorbitant right of (profane) relationship.

* * *

This excursus into narrative II has permitted revealing the incestuous situation and the joke relationship within the uterine family (mother’s family) by consanguineous relations (father’s family), and particularly the *manner of operation required by the joke relationship* which leads, moreover, to the *ritual of the laugh*²⁷ as cathartic operation for an “unfulfilled” sexuality. The laugh in fact is a substitute for a missed or impossible coitus.²⁸

In the case of Quamar az Zaman, his father (Shah Zaman), as we have seen, is “overmaternal” and lunar. But mythically the group of uterine relatives represents maternity and femininity (uterine uncles have a double status, feminine/masculine). Consanguineous relatives exercise the privilege of the joke relationship

with regard to uterine relatives, i.e. disrespectful relations (vulgar language and theft seen as symbolic rape). On the other hand the position of Boudour is the opposite to that of Quamar. She is solar/east/right/sovereign/visible. In a word, she possesses masculine attributes.

As for Quamar, he is lunar/west/left/underground/invisible: feminine attributes. The “maternal” relationship which he has with his father is symptomatic in this respect. *He is symbolically uterine* (although there is no mention of either wife or sister for Shah Zaman, we are faced with lacunae in the text and vagueness in the sources). Whatever might be, the father plays the double role of father and uterine uncle (mother’s brother); he is consequently half mother²⁷ (and this is the reason that it is not necessary for mothers to appear in the text). But the father (uterine) is caught through the action of the son (Quamar) in the traps and the ruses of the “joke”, of Boudour (high/solar/consanguineous) before Quamar (low/lunar/uterine), which initiates the *reversal*.

Finally, and above all, Boudour sets up a scenario which unfolds—like a carefully planned script—to show the various moments of the joke relationship during which Quamar must engage unequivocally in homosexual relations. This scene is followed by Boudour’s almost uncontrollable laughter²⁸ whose hidden meaning(s) we have noted. The enigmatic sequence of the geste of Boudour is, it seems to us, partly explained at this stage of the analysis. It is not excluded that the various disguises and parodies which occur so frequently in this geste connote structures or networks of joke relationship hidden within our own society but whose secret manifestations (Proust: *Sodome et Gomorrhe*) or more visible appearances (blatant transvestitism) are only a desperate effort at seeking in *illusion* (*in lusio*, the beginning of the game) and in *seduction*³⁶ the inverted world of myth, by making surreptitious use of *disguises* and *jokes for transgression*. These aspects go beyond private life and enter the area of the political game (cf. M. Kundera⁴⁰). By using “double” or “contrary” operations, inversions of clothing or sexual changes,¹⁹ inversions of language or social customs, they attempt—perhaps—and frequently in a clownish fashion, to communicate with that universe of myths (and of the truth of myth) and, by their me-

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diation, with the universe of the gods. We have reached the *half-way point*, apparently, in this *enigmatic scenario*. Now we must cover the remaining distance.

* * *

From the ruses of history to the tricks of Boudour: the role of Metis

The various passages, except for the last one, seem woven by fate in the form of the Efrits, or the bird-Hermes (messengers) or the foster-brother, etc. However, the final passage alerts the mind and does not stop questioning it. "I have come up with a wonderful plan," Boudour says. Do the ruses of history come from blind destiny or do they emanate from the ruses and tricks of her who has imposed herself on us not only as an admirable lover, but also as diviner, magician and transvestite?

One does not grow tired of noting Boudour's polymorphism—sexual, verbal, of her clothing and her sovereignty. The shrewd intelligence which she uses here and there makes her for us a distant companion or asymptotic consort of Metis, the Greek goddess whose role, attributes and functions have recently been definitively established by M. Detienne and J. P. Vernant.²⁹

In fact, what characterises Metis, like Boudour, is her aptitude for change, for making her adversaries' tricks backfire by using ruses, deception, shifts and magic; in short by disguise and fraudulent actions as means of dominating others. At the same time she shifts the consequences off on the society which surrounds her, society still spellbound by her deeds.* Endowed with a generous dose of Metis-like qualities, Boudour "weaves, braids and knots the threads" of a net meant to capture those who give way to her desire. This hypothesis of Boudour as Metis is not to be excluded. To the contrary, the Efrits and the Birds (supernatural) would then be at her service.

At the cosmo-mythical level (which we have seen intervenes at the profane level by the use of disguises), Boudour is, like her counterpart, androgynous and associated with the ocean since

* Armonos the king says, "The princess Boudour, whom I have thought of up until now as my son-in-law by a trickery which I cannot fault", Galland, p. 214.

she is born “in deepest China where she can see the last islands of this hemisphere” (Galland).

Boudour, an aquatic, fluid and polymorphic entity, is at the same time associated (like Metis as well) with solar brightness. (Metis-Phanes, dazzling, illuminating.*) Like Metis, her fundamental ambivalence divides her between water and cosmic light in the trajectory of the star. Moreover, Metis, of orphic tradition, appears as the great primordial goddess (connoting the great Asiatic goddess). In this respect she represents a side of marked feminine sovereignty. Boudour likewise represents this side in her disguise. Finally, in the fifth generation Metis gives up her scepter to the gods who then impose masculine sovereignty (Uranos, Kronos, Zeus). The latter, especially, will establish it in a durable manner. In the poem by Parmenides, the great goddess bears Eros.³⁰ So many common attributes make of Boudour that passionate lover who engrosses the reader from beginning to end.

The cosmic metamorphosis of Metis, like the extensive and varied polymorphism of Boudour, comes from what they accomplish, the one and the other, the cycle of cosmic transformations, forced, in turn, by dispersal and by unity.

* * *

By disguises and ruse, Boudour inverts the uninvertible difference of sexuality (the breaking of the original mold for the twins). And so, from the prairie and in the city of Ebene (city of Night), Boudour *infringes the law constantly*. She tampers with the means, but follows her path carefully, the path of her determination.

The disguise³⁹—beyond the fact that it is authorised by the joke relationship (as we have seen)—appears as a supreme means for Boudour to realise her ends: on the cosmic-mythic level to pursue her trajectory; on the profane level to ensure her sovereignty using hierogamy. The marriage with Haïat Alnefous (corresponding to Boudour’s third marriage**) is inevitable because

* Orphic tradition version (*op. cit.*).

** After the first *mystic* marriage (through the intervention of the Efrits), and the second official marriage in China.

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in hierogamy, sovereignty is abolished. That on the profane level Boudour gives herself over to accomplishing erotic desires with her partner corresponds to her ambivalence and her bisexuality. The “variable combination of homosexuality and heterosexuality”²⁰ attests (morality excepted) to the libidinal plasticity of this surprising character. Her relations with Haïat leave no doubt.

There remains the more complex problem of relations with Quamar az Zaman. On the hierogamic level, Boudour is to the east and the right, symbolically masculine. Quamar is the opposite, to the west, the left and symbolically feminine.

At the level of the narrative we note that:

1. He refrains from all relations during the first mystic wedding (in his tower of residence); he simply exchanges rings with his lover.
2. During the official marriage in China, the two spouses “enjoy the pleasures of the hymen” (Galland, 188) but on hearing the appeal of his father in the dream, Quamar “reveals a great dissatisfaction.”³⁰
3. During the third encounter (prairie) he takes advantage of the sleeping Boudour to steal the cornelian, and by doing this he reverses the course of destiny (which we suspect in some way has also been woven by Boudour, magician and diviner).

In the three episodes Quamar shirks his hierogamic obligation. He seems quite marked, from the beginning, by symbolic castration, attested additionally by the over-maternal relation which his father-mother lavishes on him.

Faced with this terrible peril, Boudour, the cosmic lover and spouse of this world, works out a strategy which staggers the imagination and which allows research. “I have come up with an admirable plan” (so that Quamar will recognise her), she says, “and this plan will serve as a lesson” (Mardrus, 598).

The investigation

What then is “this admirable plan” whose hidden means Boudour allows Haïat Alnefous to sense. Investigation in fact is located at three levels of the analysis: the first speech, to Haïat; the second speech, to the Captain; the third, the private con-

versation with Quamar az Zaman. It is through and across the mingling of these three levels that the enigma is glimpsed in a certain manner.

1st speech, to Häiat: the sign of Quamar's presence is attested to by the talismanic cornelian in the jar (of olives and gold) on which the name of Quamar had been inscribed.*

2nd speech, to the "Captain" of the ship: she says, "I have discovered that the person who prepared these stuffed olives could only be my former cook" (who fled) (Mardrus, 596) "for having destroyed his kitchen boy by embraces which were too severe and too little restrained."*** "He is responsible for the destruction of his delicate assistant." On the boat bringing Quamar back, the Captain says to him, "So you are the one who loves little boys and who destroyed the King's kitchen boy."

3rd speech, conversation with Quamar who first asks himself why he, a poor gardener, should be the object of so much concern on the part of a "young king" who made him a great vizir. He concludes, "This young king must love boys." Intrigued, he asks the sovereign once they arrive in his private quarters the reason for such actions. And Boudour (in disguise) answers, "O my beautiful vizir, there is a reason for all this. It is the friendship which your beauty has enkindled in my liver"**** (in me). Quamar replies that he is "mourning his wife whom he has not been able to find again." But Boudour, the king, insists, "Only one time," she says. "O my beautiful vizir, sit down near him who is... *willing to have you reign on the throne with him if you will share his passion.*" (Mardrus, 596). And to sing an exalting poem, one of whose verses is significant:

"What should we do when our taste changes its desire?"

Quamar, protesting—like a young girl, gives in to this ardent

* The Galland version only develops the theme of this first speech; similarly for the Khawam version. The second and third speeches are in Mardrus and partially in Guerne.

** She plays on a suppressed attribute of the other, the supposed cause of his castration. "The kitchen boy and his *delicate assistant*". The allusion is clear. Also on the level of alchemy (cf. H. Corbin, *op. cit.*) this situation refers to the Alchemist (cook) before *Athanor*.

*** The liver is thought to be the center of the person in Southeast Asia and in Melanesia (cf. M. Leenhardt, *Do Kamo*, Gallimard, 1970).

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passion whose comic side only becomes apparent at the moment when he begins looking, in vain, for his partner's masculine attributes. Boudour then reveals herself in her divine laugh, in her nudity, her hair undone. The "admirable plan" consisted, evidently, in capturing and trapping Quamar, bringing him out of his symbolic castration (which he received from his father-mother), and leading him forth by following her shadow* to the fullness of sexuality whose voluptuous secrets Boudour possesses. And by this cathartic scenario,³¹ using perversion within perversion and disguise within disguise, to free him and to lead him to the *fullness of hierogamy*. This is what Boudour has been awaiting from him since the beginning of the story and since her sexual initiation which she performed herself without the assistance of the reciprocity of her lover.

This fantastic subterfuge is, it would seem, unique in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Its minutely planned unfolding recalls a well worked-out stage production: theater within theater as Shakespeare could hardly have imagined in this sense,³² and provoking by a mirror symmetry the image, in turn direct and reversed, of the phantoms of the Other. A stage script also at the heart of which the play of symbols, entirely telescoped, leads to the *death of the death of the shadow*, opening, by the re-created play of opposites, access to the ecstatic love of life. This magnificent invitation to hierogamic heterosexuality through the mediation of an intense and lyric simulated homosexuality can only spring certainly from Boudour's sorcery. "United, they both wept for joy." Boudour recites these verses, "See, my beloved, the harmonious dancer." "See my beloved..." (anticipating in a certain respect Nietzsche's poetics).

The spouse-lovers are reunited, it seems, as if it were the first time (for everything indicates that the scene of the second marriage in China was neither "inhabited" nor penetrated by poetry). The conclusion implies anew a reversal of power, masculine this time; Quamar az Zaman reinstalled on the throne acquires sovereignty, not in the city of his origin (to the west), not in the city of Boudour's origin (to the east), but in that central city

* For the theme of the shadow associated to twinship and to the double see O. Rank, *op. cit.*

which, because of its axial position, unites so well with the figure 3 in Chinese numerology (three/axis/sovereign).³³

A final trick by Boudour

Nothing prohibits thinking that Boudour, Chinese princess, retained (against all convention, see note page 22) the codes which defined her in China. The Chinese cosmogonic code and the directions which express it have a predominately “left” aspect. The left side, the honorable side, is in traditional China the side of sovereignty (Granet, *op. cit.*). But the compass is reversed: *the south is at the top*, the north at the bottom. The sovereign looks to the south, the *top*, the *yang* side. *The east is then his left*, and that of traditional Chinese territory. The vassals, to the contrary, are bent to the earth, turned to the north, the bottom, the *yin* side. The south and the east are similar. The north and the west are also. The position of Boudour relative to her sovereign Quamar is that he sets himself to the right (which for him is *east*), looks toward the north, according to his code (dextral cosmogony). She sits at his left (which for her is *east*), but she is at the opposite side. Side by side and/or back to back position. Quamar is the manifest sovereign and since he looks north, *yin* side, Boudour, *yang* side, wields an indisputable supremacy over him. Boudour remains the latent sovereign. Boudour-Metis has not laid down her arms. To the contrary, her “admirable plan” continues. She rules according to her own code (left side). Haïat, indispensable, reunites the royal couple, as mediatrix of their desire.

Symmetries and dissymmetries: the systems of transformation

The different phenomena of parity or duplication encountered during the analysis refers us certainly to more general problems, and to their conjunction. That of symmetry (including all figures from translation to inversion), that of dissymmetry, more heuristic still since it is through it that the *shifters* function providing passage from one code to another.

Dissymmetry, perhaps the origin of the living cell, is, and there is no doubt about this, that which gives life, force and freedom to the narrative. The adventure, one might even say the phenomenology of Boudour, on the two levels, sometimes

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disjointed, sometimes superimposed and united, of a cosmomythic order and a temporal order, confronts the analysis with cases of figures marching past in review, in geste and by a totally unexpected coincidence, *the various schemas of symmetry and dissymmetry*, which Roger Caillois, in an excellent work, left to us.³⁴ The attention of scientists has not been sufficiently directed to that research which forms, in our eyes, an essential pivot for work in the human sciences (and will permit, in some way, to find a way out of the complex crisis which it presently faces). An object hidden in part, but which experts in the exact sciences do not neglect, to the contrary.³⁶ A logic too strongly dominated by symmetry risks becoming “a brake, an iron collar.” Or even more: “The hypnosis of symmetry,” observed R. Caillois, “has even slowed down the progress of scientific research.”

Few have listened to this warning. The fascination which symmetry exercises over thought and the mind which works it out extends to the imaginary as well. Dissymmetries mark the pace of its movement.

We note it with care in the geste of Boudour. Dissymmetries emerge, provide bounce and freedom to the narrative space which analysis then discovers in the object which it forms. This point should hardly astonish those who knew how to learn from Caillois' lesson.

And what is this lesson? Simply, that symmetry, abundantly present in the mineral kingdom, can be found, even partially, in the world of viruses. That dissymmetry develops with life, similar in some respects to *reverse entropy*, but without in any way eliminating symmetry.

A symmetry of the almost

All figures of symmetry are present in the geste of Boudour. But their realisation retains a minuscule deviation, a clinamen, an “almost.” A retrospective survey allows us to consider these cases of figures.

Symmetry by translation: Boudour and Quamar during their first mystic marriage, translation by the Efrits; their resemblance is *almost* perfect (breaking the mold); likewise by *translation*, Boudour and Haïat, but referring in some manner to a “mirror”.

Symmetry by rotation: a figure turns around a fixed point, occupying several points successively; itinerary of Marzaouan/return of Quamar/Marzaouan. Overlaps here with a symmetry by inversion (disguise, exchange of clothing by Quamar-Marzaouan). Nevertheless this latter symmetry introduces a *dissymmetry* by the attribution of a new “property” to each figure: the status of healer. The *dissymmetry* in turn functions as *shifter*, i.e. “transformer” of the code.

Code 1 (Shifter) Code 2

Third kind of symmetry: Translation subjected to a rhythm combined with rotation: particularly the figure of Boudour who moves from east to west, from west to center from top-center (sovereign) to bottom-center (spouse). Reciprocal and reverse case for Quamar; he moves from west to east, from east to center, from bottom-center (gardener) to top-center (sovereign). The model is complicated also on both sides by a symmetry through inversion.

Fourth kind of symmetry: mirror symmetry, by reflecting surface of a mirror; this is one of the primary symmetries. The figure and its reflection are identical but not superimposable, unless it is an already symmetrical figure. In this case the other types integrate themselves with it. This so-called *paradoxical* symmetry illuminates in turn the paradoxes of the narrative. “What a resemblance there is between our two hands,” said R. Hertz, “and yet what even greater inequality.” On the same level, the left hand cannot be slid over and superimposed on the right. By mirror duplication the images of the figures seem to double, as well as places, either in a similar fashion or an opposite one.

Palace	Boudour	/	Garden	~	Quamar
Center 1		/		Center 2	
High		/		Low	

*The double reverse mirror symmetry** introduces by the new “properties” of the “figures,” a process of dissymmetry, codes

* The disguise plays the *role* of a mirror and/or a lens (*camera obscura*) and the travesty of the disguise refers to a simultaneous use of a mirror and a focal point (lens).

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invert, the top is transposed and becomes the bottom, the right becomes the left and the left, right. The heavens (sovereignty) become earth (garden) and the earth the heavens. East becomes west, and west east. In short, the reversed world in turn reverses the status of things. Symmetry by reversal is a “combination of rotation with reflection; it permits obtaining a figure reversed like the image formed after the passage through the lens at the back of a *camera obscura*, with what was at the right now at the left and what was at the top now at the bottom” (Caillois, p. 28).

After the *stop in the prairie* (theft of the cornelian), the codes reverse from top to bottom, from day to night. Then they double as a positive code: city of Ebene, Boudour = Haïat, sovereignty; and negative code: hostile city, Quamar \rightleftharpoons Senex. And so each “space” of the narrative forms a code and relates to the coded space opposite or contiguous in symmetrical relations corresponding to one of the figures of the typology set forth, these codes being articulated between them by the *shifters* of various forms: aerial (Efrit: bird-Hermes), terrestrial (Marzaouan), marine (ships). These refer to (or produce commutative elements in) the series: dead tree as source of life: cave filled with gold: bird ~ cornelian, for example.

Consequently, if, as we have explained, Boudour retains her original code of Chinese space (prevalence to the left and left superimposed on the east) she introduces through dissymmetries new properties which reshape the data and the meaning of the code, the symbolism being a symbolism of position.

The use of symmetry and dissymmetry diagrams illuminates not only the narrative, but gives it indispensable unity. We know better today, thanks to this research, how much importance dissymmetry has for explaining mineral and living structures on the one hand, and, on the other, the symbolic activity of the mind and the evolution of the imaginary. Dissymmetry emerges in the construction of the narrative as a shifter, making possible an articulation between them of apparently disparate codes but which are seen to converge upon study. Like the formation of crystals, which develop various forms of symmetry because of pressure or some other phenomenon, symmetries reverse and

bring on dissymmetries* which are indispensable for life. Research into dissymmetry by Caillois forms in this respect, as in many others, a fundamental turning point in the analysis of myths and tales.

* * *

The geste of Boudour offers us a great lesson in wisdom and the experience of censured aspects of the symbolic activity of the mind and social life, and shows how the mechanisms of transgression are created which surround them and, by the laugh and disguise, attempt to resolve them. The fantastic thing is that the laugh refers back to myth. With no doubt a great lesson of liberty and of happiness. The geste of Boudour, perhaps the most beautiful love story, is a story which ends well. It does not postulate that death (as happens in numerous European legends), is an *obligatory mode of resolution* for a passionate relationship. To the contrary, it is totally open to the exalted passion of life. In this respect, this geste redefines, by reshaping it, the image of woman by reason of her essential polymorphism. And paradoxically, of the modern woman in the mirror of her modernity.

But there is more. Boudour, by a fantastic subterfuge, plots with an Oedipus complex and uses the polymorphic Metis to change its course, to disarm it, to manipulate it.

The enigma which she creates and unfurls like some invisible net²⁹ over whoever casts an analytic glance at her does not come solely from an interrogation which remains without answer. It also proceeds from a response into the search for her origins: those of a double mirror reflection which are reversed in relation to one another, twinning of an unknown origin, attested by the fascinating resemblance which the figures of Quamar and Haïat reflect back to her.

Boudour anti-Oedipal

As the axis of the triad, Boudour, and not Quamar, is fulfilled only through androgyny and, in turn, from one end to the other

* Imagine a crystal with a single axis and no symmetrical center. If it is heated or if pressure is applied, it acquires a positive electrical charge at one end and a negative electrical charge at the other so that it becomes oriented. The two directions of the segment have ceased being equivalent; a dissymmetry has just been formed (R. Caillois, *op. cit.*, p. 36).

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of the narrative, is the focus of a “desire realised desire” (R. Char), of a desire which is self-produced like the “desiring machines” of *Antioedipe*.³⁷ She is the opposite of Quamar who is marked by the stigmas of the law, of the significant and of castration (the law of the father and symbolic castration), in a word by an Oedipus complex. Boudour is fulfilled only through and in the transgression of the law (transvestitism, “joke”) not by the significant (her desire is not articulated to a lack); (“What is that, Marzaouan, do you believe in my madness? Be reassured.”) nor by a castration which the fullness of her desire rejects. Boudour anti-Oedipal has not finished intriguing. She does not let go of those who read her and follow her.

The Boudour effect:

Today we know that woman is in some degree androgynous thanks to significant research (biology, psychiatry, analysis) which have attested to its bases. What is new in modern societies is the phenomenon of acceleration of social rhythms. Since the post-war years and especially since the Sixties, *institutional frameworks* combined with a kind of reversal of categories (left/right sides) accelerate the process of the androgynisation of woman, the Boudour effect, not only on a symbolic level (clothing, etc.) but at a level of positions, roles and social status.

The *Boudour effect* is sweeping the world like a wave.

Michel Matarasso
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NOTES

¹ This title only appears in the Mardrus translation. Is it part of the enigmatic and now lost fourth volume which Galland mentions? On this point see N. Eliseeff, *Thèses et motifs des Mille et une nuits*, Inst. franç., Beirut, 1949, p. 56-72. Moreover narrative 2 seems of a different source and much later than narrative 1. Additionally, the character of masculine sovereignty is much more pronounced.

² A certain number of these attitudes come from joke relations as we shall

see. Cf. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, Ed. de Minuit. On the laugh and sexuality, cf. Freud, "Fragments posthumes" in *L'Arc* (issue on Freud). L. Gernet, *Anthropologie de la Grèce ancienne*, Maspero, 1968, p. 82 ff. H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos, Histoire du culte de Bacchus*, Payot, 1951, p. 316, on *mania*. Cl. Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le cuit, Les Mythologiques*, Plon, 1964, p. 117. M. 28. Warrau, origin of the stars, in the narrative of the laugh as prelude to sexuality with the eldest daughter. Cf. also G. Condominas (note 38, below).

³ *Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, P.U.F., 1949.

⁴ There is an excellent discussion of these types of approach to the tale in A. Miquel, *Sept contes des Mille et une nuits, Sinbad*, 1981, p. 251 ff. by the author of the work, Cl. Brémond, J. Bencheikh and others.

⁵ In *The Ship of Fools* (1480) S. Brandt uses tarot figures to support his narrative. See also O. Wirth, *Le Tarot*, preface by R. Caillois, Tchou, 1966.

⁶ For certain exceptions, cf. J. Bril, *Lilith ou la mère obscure*, Payot, 1981.

⁷ C. Lévi-Strauss, "La geste d'Asdiwal" in *Annales, Ecole pratique des hautes études* (sc. rel.), Paris, 1958, p. 3-43 *Les Mythologiques*, Plon.

⁸ *Histoire d'Amgiad et d'Assad*, *op. cit.*

⁹ "Poème à Boudour endormie" (Mardrus, 580), *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Unpublished letter of A. Gide, reproduced in the preface-notice by Marc Fumaroli of the new Mardrus edition, *op. cit.* Cf. the notice itself.

¹¹ Mardrus arrived in France a little before 1895 and frequented the salon of Mallarmé and that of Heredia.

¹² *Les Nourritures* were published in 1897, and the first volume of the *Thousand and one nights* in 1899.

¹³ *Les Nourritures terrestres*, Ed. Gallimard, 1935, p. 57.

¹⁴ C. Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le cuit. Les Mythologiques*, Plon, 1964, p. 64.

¹⁵ R. Hertz, *La Prééminence de la main droite*, 1909, reprinted in *Mélanges de sociologie religieuse et folklore*, Alcan, 1928, Re-published P.U.F., 1970.

¹⁶ H. Corbin, *La Philosophie iranienne islamique aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Buchet-Chastel; and *Cahiers de l'Herne* dedicated to Henry Corbin, No. 39, 1981. On Alchemy see J. van Lennep, *Art alchimique*, Brussels, 1966.

¹⁷ M. Matarasso, "Robert Hertz notre prochain", *Année sociologique*, 1973, vol. 24 p. 119-147.

¹⁸ R. Jakobson, *Essais de linguistique générale*, Ed. de Minuit, 1963.

¹⁹ R. Barthes, *Le Système de la mode*, Seuil, 1967.

²⁰ Chr. David, "Les belles différences", *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse*, 7; 1973, p. 231 ff.

²¹ O. Rank, *Don Juan. Une étude sur le double*, Denoël, 1932, p. 135 ff.

²² O. Rank, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

²³ Reprinted in *La Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse*, 7, 1973, Gallimard, p. 5-8.

²⁴ M. Eliade, *Mephistopheles et L'Androgyne*, Paris, Gallimard, 1962, p. 123; cf. also Marie Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite*, 1958.

²⁵ O. Rank, *op. cit.*; cf. also Marie Delcourt, *Hermaphroditéa*, 1966.

²⁶ F. Cachin, "Monsieur Vénus et l'ange de Sodome", *Nouv. rev. psy., op. cit.*, p. 63-69.

²⁷ M. Griaule, "Remarque sur l'oncle utérin au Soudan", *Cah. Int. Socio.*, 26, 1954, p. 35-49. G. Tillion, *Le Harem et les cousins*, 1966.

²⁸ Freud, *op. cit.*, on the laugh.

²⁹ M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *Les Ruses de l'intelligence, La Mètis des grecs*, "coll. Braudel", Paris, Flammarion, 1974. (Metis, already pregnant by her husband Zeus, is swallowed by him. Zeus then gave birth to Athena. Metis appears in two important versions: *Theogony* by Hesiod and *Theogony* attributed to the orphics. Her fate endured for ten centuries in literature).

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³⁰ *Id. Ibid.*, p. 142.

³¹ On the inversion of poles in Chinese hierogamy, cf. L. Granet, *Pensée chinoise*, Albin Michel, 1980, p. 132—Inverted tree with the roots in the sky.

³² Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*.

³³ L. Granet, *op. cit.*

³⁴ R. Caillois, *La Dissymétrie*, Gallimard, 1973.

³⁵ Is it necessary to recall that the Nobel Prize in physics for 1968 was awarded to Lee and Yang for their work on antiparity?

³⁶ J. Baudrillard, *La Séduction*, Gonthier, Paris. Along with this excellent analysis should be read Jean Chalon, *Portrait d'une séductrice*, Stock, 1976.

³⁷ G. Deleuze and G. Guattari, Ed. du Seuil, 1972.

³⁸ G. Condominas, *L'Espace social* with regard to South-east Asia, Flammarion, 1978.

³⁹ P. Radin, G. Jung, Ch. Kerényi, *Le Fripon divin*, Paris, 1968.

⁴⁰ M. Kundera, *La Plaisanterie*, Gallimard, 1968.