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Arabian Nights (The Framing of Sherazade)

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ARABIAN NIGHTS

(THE FRAMING OF SHERAZADE)



Written and Directed by Alison Daigle

In Collaboration With:
Sally Bell
Annie DiMaria
Katie Genualdi
Lisa Karlin
Elizabeth Olson
Rachel Sinead Price
Elizabeth Hope Williams

and Jen Houghton
(Production Designer)

Script, Rehearsal Journals, Still Photographs,
Final Response Paper, Annotated Bibliography,
And Video Recording (Separate)

April 2005

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This script is the result of a three-month devising process that took place between January and March of 2005, directed by Alison Daigle and advised by Sara Freeman. The original performances (with the actresses listed above) took place on April 2 and 3, 2005, at the Phoenix Theatre on the campus of Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, Illinois.

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1 - Exterior Frame

(Music. Women with fabric pieces. Fabric is unfurled, laid carefully on the floor. This is a ritual. The fabric is affixed to a center ring and raised to the ceiling. All move to center; Annie is lifted to affix the ring to the ceiling, then to attach the center lamp. The final light is lit. All relax into their positions; music fades and lights grow brighter. Stillness.)

(The following begins from rest.)

Katie: I am Sherazade.

(All women snap into motion.)

Annie: How can I finish the tale?

Lisa: I am Sherazade.

Liz: If you believe me, then I'm successful.

Rachel: I am Sherazade.

Elizabeth: You think you can be called Sherazade, just like that?

Liz: Did she call the system into question or merely propagate it?

(Elizabeth and Liz: SLIDE game number one)

Elizabeth: Don't ever call me a bird again or I'll do you in.

Sally: I'm not trying to escape responsibility. If you believe me, then I'm successful.

Lisa: I tell the tales I need to tell, I want to tell.

Annie: I am Sherazade.

Lisa: I choose the things I tell.

Rachel: I am Sherazade.

Sally: Lives are summarized and episodes left out to make it all go my way.

Katie: Did this woman's downfall lie in her inability to separate the body from the soul? The physical act of sex from love and affection? – or did she separate it *too* well, saying, *(women move at increased tempo)* “fine, I will show you what happens with only a body . . .”

Sally: Sherazade always disconcerted them.

(motion stops; SLIDE stops)

Annie: The indicator on the radio dial normally moved ceaselessly from one station to another, as she always thought the next would be better.

Rachel: I find that people tend to pay more attention to the content – perhaps out of a long-standing misguided notion that women, unlike men, are more concerned with form.

(All begin to move to standing outward-facing circle)

All: I am Sherazade.

(All: Snap to tightrope)

Liz: I am not words, compiled and confined.

Lisa: *(circling)* I am breathing, bleeding, eating, sweating, thinking, deciding, changing.

Liz: I hate that you cannot match me.

(Annie and Sally begin SLIDE game number two.)

Katie: My words ensnare you – my will and my sounds are stronger, yet you think I am needy.

Liz, Rachel, Elizabeth: I am.

Elizabeth: I am all of your female role models – rolled up in your sheets wearing a mask of Marilyn Monroe.

Rachel: I am my enemy. I befriend these women because they are strong, intelligent, creative, and mysterious, but also because it is important to keep those you fear by your side

Katie and Lisa: I am the mother, the lover, the virgin.

Liz: The power to love men and understand them even when they don't understand themselves.

Elizabeth: Does the strong, ideal woman strengthen women or weaken women? Is she one or all?

Rachel: "Feminine" can be read as the living, as something that continues to escape all boundaries, that cannot be pinned down, controlled, or even conceptualized.

Elizabeth: Cannot be arrested and which remains –

(All move into seated center circle. SLIDE stops.)

All: Elusive

(All: Face Wash)

Liz: What women want is sovereignty over their husbands.

Lisa: That is love.

(Liz and Lisa begin SLIDE)

Elizabeth: Where can I buy a burqua like the ones the women wear in Afghanistan – the blue one? I want one that goes from head to toe.

Rachel: I instinctively search for an exit for my head and hands and, finding none, thrash like a child.

(Elizabeth and Rachel begin SLIDE)

Sally: Almost everything is yet to be written by women about their infinite and complex sexuality, their eroticism.

Annie: Stupidity in a woman is unfeminine.

(Sally and Annie begin SLIDE)

Elizabeth: I shared with you my wisdom, and you gave me snakes for hair.

One always wonders if the story of a life is “it must be so” or “it could just as well be otherwise.”

But is not an event in fact more significant and noteworthy the greater the number of fortuities necessary to bring it about?

Where can I buy a burqua like the ones the women wear in Afghanistan?

What women want is sovereignty.

You think you can be called Sherazade, just like that?

All: I am Sherazade.

(SLIDE stops; all turn to look at Elizabeth)

Lisa: I hate that you cannot match me.

Liz: It must be so.

Annie: It could just as well be otherwise.

Katie: You came here so I could tell you a story.

Elizabeth: Don't ever call me a bird again or I'll do you in.

Sally: I came here to tell you a story.

Annie, Katie, Elizabeth: A story.

Sally: A story.

Rachel: A give-and-take relationship.

Lisa: I give you my story.

Lisa, Liz, Sally: Your story.

All: The story.

Rachel: You give me something back.

Sally: It could just as well be otherwise.

(End in standing circle, facing outward.)

All clap.

All turn and swiftly walk around outside circle. Music..

Women peel off one-by-one to take their places as others continue to circle:

Elizabeth

Sally

Annie

Lisa

Rachel

Katie

Liz

One at a time, as each is freed, she takes her place for the next scene.

When all are in place, all clap together. Elizabeth stomps; the rhythm of the stomps snaps women into set positions for start of next scene. Music snaps out.

2 - Sherazade Frame Tale

(Tableau: A/Elizabeth/Shahryar on block; B, C, D [Sally, Annie, Lisa] stand in horizontal line in front of block. Narrators [Liz, Katie, Rachel] sit in outward-facing circle.)

Liz: There once was a king named Shahryar who was regarded as great and wise. One day, however, his brother, Shahzaman, informed him that each time he left the palace on a hunting expedition, his wife was unfaithful to him.

(Shahryar ties on sash/scabbard belt)

(BCD hand slap)

A: When he saw this, the world turned dark before his eyes.

BCD: Betrayal

(hand slap; A foot stomp x2; BCD circle counter-clockwise)

Rachel: When Shahryar saw with his own eyes that what he had been told was true, he had his wife executed.

(hand slap)

A: How could she have done this to me? How could she have brought about her own death?

BCD: Wrath

(hand slap; foot stomp; circle)

Katie: Searching for solace, he and his brother, Shahzaman, journeyed to Shahzaman's kingdom, where they were surprised to discover that the situation was the same: this queen too was unfaithful to her husband.

(hand slap)

A: This only proves that all women will make cuckolds of their husbands when given a chance.

BCD: Self-victimization

(hand slap; foot stomp; circle)

Liz: King Shahryar and his brother were driven mad with grief. Searching for solace in their misery, they vowed to travel the land until they discovered someone whose woe was greater than theirs.

(hand slap)

A: No man in this world is safe from the malice of women.

BCD: The malice of women

(hand slap; stomp; circle)

Rachel: They soon came upon a terrifying jinnee sleeping beneath a tree. As they tried to sneak away unnoticed, however, they were hailed by the jinnee's wife, who commanded that they each lie with her.

(hand slap)

A: By Allah, life is nothing but one great wrong.

BCD: Justification

(hand slap, stomp, circle)

Katie: "In order to keep me for himself alone," the woman explained, "my husband keeps me locked in a glass box at the bottom of the sea. But when he sleeps, I free myself and lie with whomever I desire."

(hand slap)

A: Indeed, the malice of women is mighty.

BCD: The malice of women is mighty

(hand slap; stomp; circle)

Liz: After each brother had slept with the jinnee's wife, they decided to return home, as it seemed that in the jinee they had discovered a man whose lot in life was worse than their own.

(hand slap)

A: May Allah help us and save us from women's malice and cunning. It seems nothing can surpass their power.

BCD: Avoidance

(hand slap, stomp, circle)

(Shahryar begins binding breasts)

Rachel: When the king returned to his palace, he said to himself that all women must be malicious and conniving. And so he vowed from thereon to take a virgin bride each night and have her executed promptly the next morning.

(hand slap)

A: Rage and grief are quite understandable and excusable.

BCD: Rationalization

(hand slap; stomp; circle)

Elizabeth: Rage and grief are quite understandable and excusable.

(scenario breaks down)

Rage and grief are quite understandable and excusable.

Rage and grief are quite understandable and excusable.

Rage and grief are quite understandable and excusable.

All women climb monkey bars – a row of hanging women.

Elizabeth slaps.

And so the king vowed to take a bride each night and have her executed promptly the next morning.

All women drop to dead hang. Hold as long as possible, dropping when necessary to quick exit or remaining neutral on the floor.

When all are off the monkey bars, Sally and Annie begin offstage game of SLIDE. Liz, Lisa, Elizabeth, and Rachel set up box.

(Katie enters and turns on light. She is in shadow.)

Woman in Box (Katie): I am the women you remember. You wanted to categorize me so you could keep me. I introduced myself as a bastion of sovereign female wisdom, a demonstration of wholeness and balance, and you gave me snakes for hair. I always disconcerted you. I am not

words, compiled and confined. I am breathing, bleeding, eating, sweating, thinking, deciding, changing, and I hate that you cannot match me. But you dressed me head to toe in heavy fabrics, so that years later I clamored, Where can I buy a burqua like the ones the women wear in Afghanistan? The blue one. You put me in this box and tucked away the key, forgetting that I will always find a way from the inside to the out.

Katie snaps off light; box breaks down.

Sally and Annie slide books to women in center. All move to places in seated outward-facing circle. Sally to block. All reading, holding books in front of their faces.)

Sherazade (Sally): *(reading)* When the king returned to his palace, he vowed to take a virgin bride each night and have her executed promptly the next morning. This went on for three years, until the only virgins left in the kingdom were the daughters of Shahryar's chief vizier.

Annie: I want you to sit still, say nothing, and refrain from exposing yourself to danger.

Sherazade: The elder of the sisters was called Sherazade, and she had read so many books that she knew all the histories and tales of the land.

Rachel: You will die for not having used your brains.

Sherazade: Against her father's wishes, Sherazade went to the king and offered herself as her bride.

Liz: Are you going to continue to ask questions about things that don't concern you?

(All on the exterior lower books: down-2-3, then turn heads.)

Katie: You can put me in a box, but there will always be a way out.

(All snap back)

Sherazade: After King Shahryar had taken her maidenhead, he could not sleep. And so Sherazade offered to tell him a story to pass the time.

SNAP books shut. Drum music.

Toss books to Sally; slap and down. Sally push block off.

All circle to move to positions for next scene.

3 - The Merchant and the Jinnee

(Jinnee – Lisa and Liz - is asleep. Katie moves to center and begins narration. Music out.)

(In this scene, the sheikhs' stories are acted out as the words are spoken. This is an all-out performance for the benefit of the jinnee. Movement is as fluid as possible; scarves are used to represent all magic.)

(Sally enters and begins scene, circling the space.)

Katie: There once was a wealthy merchant who spent his days traveling from city to city, trading goods and collecting debts. He often ate his midday meal along the road, as he could not afford the time to return home. One day, as he sat beneath a tree quite peacefully eating his lunch, a huge jinnee suddenly appeared.

Jinnee: Stand up so I can slay you just as you've slain my son! As you were eating those dates just now and throwing away the pits, one of the stones struck my son and killed him right on the spot.

Merchant (Sally): By Allah, if I slew your son, I slew him by chance. Therefore, I beg your pardon!

Jinnee: There's nothing you can do. You must die!

Narrator: Terrified, the merchant began to plead with the jinnee, saying

Merchant: Listen to me. There is a great deal of money owed to me, and I have a wife and children at home. Permit me to return home and put my affairs in order, and I promise to return to you at the beginning of the new year. Allah is my witness that you can then do anything you want with me.

Narrator: The jinnee accepted the promise and let the merchant go unharmed. And so the merchant returned to his home and completed all his transactions and said his final farewells to his wife and children. At the first of the year, he did as he had promised and returned to the place where he had met the jinnee to await his fate.

(Sheikhs enter and tie Merchant to the pole.)

As he sat waiting, however, he was approached by three old sheikhs, who asked why he was in such an odd location, all alone. After he had told them the story of the jinnee and the date pit, the sheikhs were amazed:

Sheikh 1 (Rachel): My brother, we will not leave here until we have seen what happens between you and this jinnee.

Narrator: It was not long, then, before the jinnee appeared to take his revenge.

Jinnee: Stand up so I can slay you just as you slew my son, the soul of my life.

Sheikh 1: Oh mighty jinnee, crown of the kings of the jinnees, if I were to tell you a story and you were to consider it wondrous, would you give me a third of this merchant's blood in return?

Jinnee: Alright, deal. If you tell me your tale and it is indeed marvelous, I'll give you a third of this merchant's blood.

(Music; begin action.)

Sheikh 1: Do you see beside me this gazelle? I'll have you know, O Jinnee, that this gazelle is actually my wife of 30 years. You see, though I married my wife when she was very young, she never bore me a son. And so I took a concubine, who gave me a beautiful, strong boy who soon grew to be a beautiful, strong man. My wife, however, was very jealous and took it upon herself to learn the art of witchcraft – and one day while I was out of town on business, she turned the my son into a calf and his mother into a cow. When I returned home, my wife told me that my son and his mother were dead, and I grieved for an entire year. The following season, when the time came for the Great Festival of Allah, I sent my herdsman to bring me a fat cow. The one he brought to me, however, was that which had formerly been my concubine and, though I did not understand this at the time, I could not bring myself to kill her. Angry, my wife ordered the herdsman to kill the cow, but when he did, we discovered no flesh or blood, only hide and bone. Confused, I then sent the herdsman to bring me a calf. This time, the herdsman brought me the calf that had once been my son – and again, though I did not know the truth of things, I found myself unable to kill the calf. Again, my wife ordered the herdsman to perform the sacrifice. But this time the herdsman intervened, pulling me aside and taking me to his home, where his daughter, who also knew magic, told me what my wife had done and that the cow I had killed had been my concubine and the calf I was now ordered to murder was my son. She then offered to return my son to his former shape – on the condition that she also be allowed to transform my wife into a gazelle so as to avoid her revenge. I agreed to the terms – and so now I travel the land, leading this gazelle that is also my wife from this piece of string.

Music out. Jinnee applauding.

Jinnee: My, your story is indeed strange and wondrous, and so I shall grant you a third of this merchant's blood.

Rachel removes one of the pieces of fabric that binds Sally to the pole.

Sheikh 2 (Annie): Oh mighty jinnee, if I were to tell you a story and you were to consider it just as wondrous as the first, would you give me a third of this merchant's blood as well?

Jinnee: I give my word, but only if the adventures you tell are indeed more marvelous.

(Music.)

Sheikh 2: These two dogs that I have here beside me are actually my two brothers. You may not at first believe me, but I will tell you the tale of how this came to pass. When my father died, he left a great deal of money to myself and my two brothers. And so we divided the money amongst ourselves and began to travel, hoping to find a good business in trade. By the time we had spent only a month at sea, I discovered that I was having great success: for every piece of gold I had invested, I gained ten, while the trade my brothers were attempting brought them no profit in return. One day, as we were leaving a city, I was approached at the seashore by a beautiful young woman who begged to be taken along on the vessel. And so, being a man of great kindness, I agreed to take her along. Not many nights had passed before I became so attached to her that I lavished more attention on her than on my two brothers and decided to take her as my wife. My brothers then became jealous and plotted to murder me and steal my wealth. One night, then, as I was sleeping, they picked me up and threw me overboard. My wife, however, immediately changed into a jinniyah and pulled me from the water. She begged me to allow her to overturn the ship and drown my brothers, but I forbade her to do so. Yet one night after we had returned home, I found these two dogs tied up outside my house. "These are your two brothers," my wife said to me. And ever since I have taken them along with me as my companions.

(Music out. Jinnee clapping.)

Jinnee: Your tale is certainly more marvelous than the first! I grant you the second third of this merchant's blood.

Sheikh 3 (Elizabeth): Oh jinnee, if I am able to tell you a story that is even better than these first two, would you grant me the remainder of the merchant's blood?

Jinnee: You have my promise!

(Music.)

Sheikh 3: Here with me is a mule that was once my wife. I will tell you just how it happened: I returned home one day to find my wife sleeping with one of my servants. As soon as she saw me, she muttered some spells over a jug of water and threw it upon me, saying "change your shape!" As soon as she had done this, I became a dog – and ran from the house until I came to the home of a butcher, where I hoped to find some bones to chew. The butcher had a daughter, however, who immediately saw that I was an enchanted man – and she too whispered spells over a jug of water before throwing it on me and returning me to my own shape. She then gave me the jug of water and told me to sprinkle it on my own wife as she slept in order to change her into whatever I wanted. And so I changed her into this mule – the very one you see before you right now.

(Music out.)

Jinnee: (*shaking with laughter; clapping*) What a wonderful story! Thanks to you and your storytelling, you've now won all this man's blood – and so have gained his freedom.

Narrator: And so the merchant was allowed to return to his family and business. The sheikhs too departed, knowing that they had done a great deed in saving the life of the man and the welfare of his family. And the jinnee, for lack of anything else, lived happily ever after, with the wondrousness of the tales echoing in his mind forevermore.

Music.

All women slap. Music out.

Sally is at center, seated on block reading as before. Other six women stand around the outside of the circle, in pairs, playing Cat's Cradle. One by one, they speak.

Liz: I want you to sit still, say nothing, and refrain from exposing yourself to danger.

Katie: Are you going to continue to ask questions about things that don't concern you?

Rachel: Don't call me a bird again or I'll do you in.

Elizabeth: I choose the things I tell.

Lisa: If you believe me, then I'm successful.

Annie: I choose the things I tell.

Sherazade (Sally): And so that very night, as he drifted off to sleep, the wondrousness of the tale echoing in his mind, the King said to himself, "This tale surely is marvelous. By Allah, I won't slay her until I have heard more." And it was in just this manner that Sherazade earned herself the right to tell another story the next night.

Sally finishes narration (others circle and exit while she speaks); Sally exits with books, leaving block at center. Enter Elizabeth to begin new scene.

4 - The Fisherman and the Jinnee

Narrator (Elizabeth): This is the story of a penniless fisherman who once happened upon a lamp containing a genie and was, needless to say, overjoyed. (*Lisa enters to center block. Other women begin to enter, one at a time.*) This is also the story of how terrified he was to be offered not the coveted three wishes but rather his own free choice of death.

In short, this is the story of expectations that were dashed by reality – of a myth that failed to quite pan out in real life. This is the story about something outwardly beautiful that instead turned out to be nothing short of rotten.

This is the story of where the genie came from and how he got so pissed.

(Exterior women [Annie, Rachel, Liz, Katie] raise arms.)

Part one of the story is the part that belongs to the wisher, to the fisherman: it is a moment of absolute hope.

Fisherman: If you ever find a magic lamp, rub it with your hand and a genie will emerge. And not a lamp that runs off electricity, with a socket and a bulb and a long cord. To find a genie, what you really need is a thin, squat teapot made of brass. If you cannot find such a lamp, an ornate bottle may do the trick.

When you rub the lamp or pull the stopper from the bottle, a genie will come out.

(he-jinnee [Katie] breaks free)

He will have broad shoulders and muscular arms, but will trail off below the waist like a wispy mermaid with smoke in place of scales. He will wear a beaded and embroidered vest.

(she-jinnee [Annie] breaks free)

Or it will be a she, and she will wear jewel-toned pants cinched at the ankles and a gold-edged top that leaves her belly button exposed. He will stare sternly, laughing too loudly, and offer you three wishes, though ix-nay on the wishing for more wishes. She will cross her arms over her chest and nod her head with a jerk, flipping her smooth ponytail like a whip.

Your life will be happy then, and you will have wealth and travel and contentment, all from that little brass lamp.

(All slap. Scenario breaks down.)

Narrator: Phase two is also one of absolute hope – on the opposite end of the spectrum.

(Jinnee [Sally] on center block, surrounded by inward-facing circle of bottle women, arms linked over shoulders)

Jinnee: When you are a genie, you learn that you have such a power: you can make people happy. You can solve the world's problems in the blink of an eye. You look forward to the day when it will be your turn, when you will feel that tickle, feel that rush of air, and spring forth to be nothing short of magnanimous.

And so you go out into the world with these high hopes for yourself, and as you look for a place to lie in wait, the options begin to fall open before you:

(bottles break free)

Bottle 1 (Annie): Pick me. I can offer you a fast escape. Choose me, and you'll never feel dull or bored.

Bottle 2 (Rachel): Pick me. I can offer you excitement. Choose me, and you'll always have fast times and plenty of sex.

Bottle 3 (Liz): Pick me. I can keep you safe. I can complete you. Choose me, and you can have all the power you ever hoped for.

Jinnee: And you wait, excited for your chance.

(Jinnee chooses lamp 3 and enters the embrace. Exit of other lamps)

Jinnee: Whoever releases me I will provide with great riches.

All: And a hundred years pass.

(posture change)

Narrator: And it's starting to get a bit stuffy, and so you think,

Jinnee: If someone lets me out of here, I will give them three wishes.

All: And a hundred years pass.

(posture change)

Narrator: And suddenly you're feeling claustrophobic – what was supposed to be so right has turned out to be so wrong. That beautiful lamp has become a prison, your exotic clothing and jewelry are itchy and uncomfortable, and your knees are cramping, and so you think,

Jinnee: If anyone gets me out of here, I will kill them.

Narrator: When the fisherman released the genie from the jar, this is what the genie said:

Jinnee: *(Reclaiming block and binding breasts)* I lived in the jar for a hundred years, during which time I said in my heart, "I'll reward whoever releases me with great riches." But a full century went by, and when no one set me free, I began the second and said, "I'll open the hidden treasures of the earth for whoever releases me." But still no one set me free, and four hundred years went by. Then I said, "I'll grant three wishes to whoever releases me." Yet no one set me free. Thereupon I became extremely furious and said, "From this time on I promise to slay whoever releases me, and the only choice I'll give him is what kind of death he'll die."

(offstage slap, double stomp)

And now, since you've released me, I'll give you your choice of death.

Jinnee-Sally exits.

Enter Liz weaving a Jacob's ladder. She speaks as she walks through the space.

Liz: Slowly, Shahryar began to become transfixed.

Entangled.

Hypnotized.

Amused.

Entranced.

Sherazade always disconcerted them.

But if you believe me, then I am successful, for stupidity in a woman is unfeminine.

But what is feminine? "Feminine" can be read as the living, as something that continues to escape all boundaries, that cannot be pinned down, controlled, or even conceptualized.

Cannot be arrested and which remains elusive.

Above all, Sherazade realized that, for now, all the king wanted was to be told a story.

She displays the Jacob's Ladder and exits. Immediately begin Sinbad.

5 – Sinbad the Seaman

(The story of Sinbad is acted out at full tilt – ship, whale, washtub, bird, and all. Music)

Narrator (Rachel): There was once a man named Sinbad who had all his life lived in great comfort and with great wealth. After many years of spending money wherever and whenever he saw fit, however, he woke up one day to discover that all his money had been squandered and he was penniless. After pondering for a few days' time what to do with himself, Sinbad sold his house and all his possessions and bought a ship and goods for a lengthy voyage. For many days and nights, Sinbad and his crew of merchants traveled from country to country and island to island, buying, selling, and bartering everywhere they went.

One day, they happened upon an island that was as green as any they had seen. Assuming they had discovered a paradise of the sea, they disembarked from their boat and began eating, drinking, and relaxing. Suddenly, one of the sailors began to cry out,

Sailor (Lisa): "Run for your lives! Return to the ship as fast as you can! Leave your gear and save yourselves from destruction, and may Allah preserve you! This island that you're standing on is not a real island, but a huge whale in the middle of the sea. The sand has settled on it and trees have grown on it over time so that it seemed an island. But when you lit fires on it, the whale felt the heat and has moved. In a moment it will dive down into the sea, and you'll all be drowned. So leave your gear and seek safety before you die!"

(music stops; hard freeze)

Elizabeth: And Sherazade noticed that dawn was approaching and stopped telling her story.

(All exit. Hold on empty stage.)

Narrator: *(Re-entering)* In the morning, the King said to himself, “This tale surely is wondrous. By Allah, I won’t slay her until I have heard more.” And when the next night fell, he granted Sherazade permission to continue the story she had begun.

Slap. All re-enter. When everyone is in their places, begin music.

Narrator (Sally): Upon hearing the cry, many of the sailors fled for the ship in order to preserve their lives. Many of them succeeded – but Sinbad sank into the sea as the whale descended below the surface and swam away. By the grace of Allah, Sinbad was able to grab hold of a washtub which had been used on his ship in order to save himself from drowning and, after the passage of a full night, paddle to the shore of a strange island. On this island, Sinbad lived in the company of wealthy kings and spent a number of happy days.

He had not been on the island long, however, before he began to grow restless and desired to travel once again. And so he journeyed to the shore and engaged himself on a vessel headed out to sea. With this crew Sinbad visited many more islands and strange lands. One day, he fell asleep on the shore of one of the islands on which the ship had landed and, upon waking, discovered that the rest of the sailors had made their departure while he slept. Near the point of despair, Sinbad climbed a tree to gain a better view of the island – when suddenly, out of the clouds, came none other than an enormous bird of gigantic girth and wide wings, so large that it veiled the sun from the whole of the island.

(music stops; hard freeze)

Elizabeth: And Sherazade noticed that dawn was approaching and stopped telling her story.

(All exit and hold)

Narrator: *(Re-entering)* In the morning, the King said to himself, “This tale surely is wondrous. By Allah, I won’t slay her until I have heard more.” And when the next night fell, he granted Sherazade permission to continue the story she had begun.

Slap. All re-enter. When everyone is in their places, begin music.

Narrator (Katie): The great bird descended into the treetops to take a rest and Sinbad, taking a piece of rope from his pocket, fastened himself to the bird’s leg. It was not long before the bird awoke and soared into the sky, carrying Sinbad with him. It was not long into the flight that Sinbad began to fear for his life and, the moment the bird came near to a high mountaintop, he cut the rope that held him to the bird’s leg and thus set himself once again free. Upon landing on the mountaintop, however, Sinbad began to wonder about the logic of his plan: while on the island he had fruits and fresh water, the mountaintop offered nothing to sustain him. And so Sinbad began to worry about his health and safety and wonder just what it was he ought to do.

(music stops; all freeze)

Elizabeth: And Sherazade noticed that dawn was approaching and stopped telling her story. And by this point Sherazade's plan is perhaps obvious. Of course the luckless Sinbad will eventually return home to Baghdad – just not for many, many, many nights.

(Slap.)

All circle to places, Liz to center on block.

Katie: Eventually, Shahryar learned that there was some value in waiting just one more day.

Annie: One more day could bring a reward earned with relatively little output.

Lisa: And the king thought to himself, “my, these tales are indeed marvelous.”

Sally: And Sherazade saw the opportunity, the door or window or peephole that had opened, and began to tell the tale of the Wily Dalilah.

(All sit)

6 - The Wily Dalilah

(Dalilah [Liz], at center, tearing fabric from her skirt and knotting it together to form a rope ladder. She speaks as she works, absorbed in her task. It gets quite long.)

(All others in circle, facing inward. To start the scene, all women together inhale deeply, then slap the floor. They begin to speak.)

Rachel: There once was a woman who knew how to get what she wanted.

All women slap floor in unison (this continues after each line until otherwise noted)

Dalilah: I haven't any excuses to give.

Elizabeth: Warning: you may find her methods lacking in moral fortitude.

Dalilah: I'm not apologizing.

Sally: When Dalilah lacked money and power, she stole the clothes off the back of another woman who had trusted her.

Dalilah: If you really loved me, you'd tell me what makes you so strong.

Katie: When that wasn't enough, she kidnapped a child for use as a tradable commodity.

Dalilah: If you want to be with me, you have to do as I say.

Lisa: When the authorities came for her, she always escaped. They didn't know how to recognize her.

Dalilah: If you tell me what I want to hear, I will love you forever.

(Women slapping the floor break the pattern and begin building rhythm, increasing tempo: Sally leads)

Annie: And because no one can keep running eternally, she was once tackled into submission.

Dalilah: If you make me feel potent, I will tell you you are beautiful.

Elizabeth. But because some will manage to run until they are satisfied, she convinced a passing sucker to take her place of punishment.

Dalilah: If I have power, I will be good to you. If I am powerless, I demand that you match me.

Rachel: And because Dalilah so wanted money and power, she earned it or took it or bought it or stole it – because she could.

Dalilah: I haven't any excuses to give. And I'm not apologizing to you.

Floor-slapping has increased to a driving tempo and here ends with a slap of the hands. Liz gets up and walks to block near bench; all watch her go. She sits and begins assembling her rope ladder as Rachel stands.

Instructor (Rachel): *(as if teaching a class)* The Art of Dalilah: An instructional seminar on getting what you want. Or – Manipulation: From Ducks to Down.

(Katie, Annie, and Elizabeth move to the opposite end of the stage, where they enact each phrase in a freeze-frame tableau.)

Phase One: In a Sentimental Mood

(tableau: mwahaha)

Phase Two: Sitting ducks

(tableau: ducks in a row)

Phase Three: The barter system

(tableau: stealing)

Phase Four: Tax-free income

(tableau: stash & run)

Phase Five: Capture the flag

(tableau: Capture)

Phase Six: Sitting Duck Schmuck

(tableau: change places)

Phase Seven: Born free

(tableau: back to stealing)

Phase Eight: Herd of Sitting Ducks Distraught

(tableau: gun, slump, eh)

Phase Nine: Ducks Wise up and Lay an Egg

(tableau: ding-lightbulb)

Phase Ten: Practical Application

(tableau: rich and happy – handshake)

Dalilah: *(from block by bench)* I'm not apologizing, and I have no excuses to give. I deserve respect from every man, woman, and child.

Tableaux break down. Lisa, Sally, Katie to block, in line. Elizabeth and Rachel are bailiffs, carrying them off. Confessional.

Woman (Lisa): I wanted to conceive a child, and this woman appeared to be just what I needed: she seemed to have just the right magic. Just the right abilities. She promised she would take me to a sheikh who would solve my problems; she promised she had done this before. She told me my beautiful robes and jewelry would offend the sheikh – but promised to keep them safe for me while I consulted with the holy man in my plain shift. I let myself be used. But she seemed to have just the right magic.

(Collapse. She is carried offstage.)

Child (Sally): On the day my older sister was getting married, I was sent to play outside. This woman came, this beautiful woman, and she offered me an adventure. A trip into town. And so

I went, and she took me to the market, where she bartered me for a thousand dinars' worth of jewelry. A fair trade for her.

(Collapse. She is carried offstage.)

Man (Katie): She was tied at the banks of the river, the way they tie people overnight when they are to be crucified in the morning. Still, she looked so beautiful hanging there. She confessed to a minor crime, said she was to be sentenced to be punished in the morning, said she would be forced to give a public apology. I thought, "I would not much mind bearing her punishment for her." And so I untied her and took her place. I assumed she was telling the truth because she was so beautiful.

(Collapse. She is carried offstage.)

Narrator (Annie): Dalilah had a daughter to whom she taught her arts, because sometimes in the end one feels the need for hundreds of daughters. And the two caused so much mayhem that her pursuers saw no strategy but to give her the money and respect she so desired. And so it was in this manner that Dalilah (along with, of course, her perhaps hundreds of daughters) was given a job in the palace to last her throughout her days.

Dalilah: I'm not apologizing, and I haven't any excuses to give. I demand, I deserve respect from every man, woman, and child. *(Getting up to leave; coiling and referencing her rope ladder, slinging it over her shoulder)* I need this to escape from the ivory tower. Or to reach the ground when I've been put on a pedestal. Or maybe to daringly lasso a tree branch as I fall from a thousand-foot cliff of rock. I need this to watch out for myself. *(Shrug and exit)*

Annie enters to center.

Annie: After the story of the Wily Dalilah, Sherazade stopped to breathe.

Elizabeth: Lives are summarized and episodes left out to make it all go my way.

Rachel: I choose the tales I tell.

Annie: And the king on the following night realized he wanted more. "These tales surely are wondrous," he thought to himself. And so Sherazade considered the holes already plugged and the questions yet unanswered. And then she chose her next tale: the story of Prince Behram and Princess Al-Datma.

Drum music. Lisa enters to center to begin next scene.

7 - Prince Behram and Princess Al-Datma

Drum music. Princess Al-Datma (Lisa), is shadow boxing and wrestler-ready, taking down suitors/attackers left and right. Music swells for take-downs and continues more quietly for narration and dialogue.

Princess (Lisa): Marriage is just a game.

(Elizabeth slam)

If you make the rules the way you want them, there's no need to worry about breaking them.

(Rachel slam)

Or being betrayed by them.

(Katie slam)

The simpler the rules, the simpler the union.

(Liz slam)

I have one rule: be my equal and I will marry you.

Narrator (Sally): There once was a princess called Al-Datma who was renowned throughout the land for her beauty, grace, and intelligence. She attracted a large number of suitors, but never married them: she had made up her mind that she would not marry until she met a man who could defeat her in a duel.

Princess: I have one rule: prove to me you are my match and I will marry you.

(Elizabeth slam)

Narrator: Whenever a suitor tried to get around the princess's set of rules by asking her father for her hand in marriage, the king simply replied,

Liz: "I have no power over her, for she has sworn by her soul that she will not marry until she finds a man who proves himself to be her equal."

(Princess threatens her father, who takes no notice.)

Princess: I have one rule: be my equal, be my match, and I will marry you.

(Rachel slam and exit)

Narrator: One day, the princess was visited by Prince Behram of Persia [*Annie*]. At first, the scene seemed to be no different than any other day. But as the duel wore on, the princess began to worry about the strength of her competitor and considered the fact that she might indeed lose.

(fight has begun during narration – things are looking bad for the Princess)

Narrator: And so the Princess Al-Datma decided to take drastic action.

(The Princess snaps her fingers. From offstage comes a cry: “Boobies!” All echo, running around the space wildly. Return to previous positions, but it is revealed that Al-Datma has lifted Behram onto her shoulder.)

Narrator: She lifted her veil and revealed her face to Prince Behram, who became so bewildered and distracted that he was knocked to defeat as easily as if he were a sparrow.

Princess: If you’re going to fight, you’d might as well fight dirty. It’s in the rules.

(She slaps Behram’s behind and sets him down. Princess and her attendants move into a huddle.)

Narrator: The tactic should have been quite easy to see from where you’re sitting – but perhaps there was a moment when you weren’t paying attention?

(music out)

Narrator: With another defeat so handily accomplished, the princess retired to her corner – she began to spend her days picnicking on the palace grounds with her attendants. And so the prince disguised himself as an aged sheikh in order to re-enter the ring.

(Behram approaches, a poorly-tied turban wrapped around his head.)

Prince: Excuse me. I would like to buy a wife from your party. I promise, however, to always remember the rules of the game: I will give her only one kiss and many riches, then divorce her.

Princess: *(amused)* Alright. We’ll play.

(Red Rover. Behram wins a row of girls, each of whom receives a single kiss and a handful of riches. The girls all clap and cheer, goading one another on. With one girl left beside the princess:)

Princess: No, me first.

(Music begins again. The princess runs and at first all is the same, but as she leans in for her kiss, Prince Behram reaches out and throws her over his shoulder.)

Prince: I am Prince Behram of Persia and now, by your own promise and your own set of rules, you must be my bride.

(Behram sets Al-Datma down. They shake hands – but as they are doing so, the Princess hoists the Prince again onto her shoulder and exits.)

Narrator: And it was in this manner that the Princess Al-Datma, having finally met her match, allied herself with a husband with whom she happily lived out the rest of her days.

(Music fades out. All women enter and walk through the space. They speak -)

Liz: Sherazade's words range out loud and clear.

Rachel: What women want is sovereignty.

Katie: Over something.

Sally: Over themselves.

Annie: And from this need, Sherazade's stories grew and multiplied. 500, 600, 700 tales that all stood for something, one on top of another on top of another.

Elizabeth: Unwritten but sovereign.

Lisa: I came here to tell you a story so that you might understand.

(All are in place for the Ebony Horse, a straight line across the space. Those on the ends are seated; those in the middle pose, ready to listen.)

8 - The Ebony Horse

(Telephone. Long diagonal line; the first begins by announcing the story, and it is passed down the line to the last, who recites her version.)

First (Rachel): This is the tale of the Ebony Horse.

(words sent down the line. Etc. throughout.)

Last (Katie): *(Confidently)* This is the tale of the Ebony Horse.

First: There once was a king who loved anything that was new. And so he routinely offered up great rewards to men who brought astounding inventions to his court.

Last: There once was a young boy named Jack who lived with his mother and a cow in a small house with a garden.

First: One day, the king was presented with something particularly extraordinary: a man brought a carved wooden horse of exquisite workmanship.

Last: One day, Jack's mother told him to take the cow to market and sell it in order to bring home some money.

First: "This horse, o king, can carry a rider anywhere he wants through the air at a pace that will cover in a day a distance that would otherwise take an entire year," the man told the king.

Last: On his way into town, however, Jack met a man who offered to buy the cow for a handful of beans, which he told Jack were magical.

First: The king was so astounded that he offered as a reward anything the man desired. The man chose as his prize the king's beautiful daughter.

Last: Stunned and excited, Jack ran home with the beans to tell his mother. She, however, was not so thrilled with the outcome and threw the beans angrily out the window.

First: The princess, however, had been watching the proceedings from behind a curtain and immediately despaired, for the man was terribly old and ugly. She ran to her elder brother, begging that he convince their father not to give her to the man.

Last: The next morning, Jack awoke to see a giant beanstalk rising from the garden outside his window. It was so high that he could not see the top of it before it disappeared into the clouds.

First: The prince approached the king, pleading for his sister's case, but the king only told him that he too would give away the princess if he knew the greatness of the ebony horse.

Last: Intrigued, Jack went outside and began to climb the beanstalk. He climbed until he could no longer see his house on the ground below him, and there in the sky he found a beautiful castle.

First: Intrigued, the prince asked the old man to show him how to make the horse fly. The old man demonstrated the lever used to propel the horse into the air, and the prince immediately flew off to test the invention for himself.

Last: Through the castle gates, Jack could see a beautiful golden harp, which he knew would bring his family money if he could sell it at market. And so he snuck through the bars and made a run for the harp.

First: As the prince flew out of sight, however, the king began to worry about his welfare and asked the old man how his son would return to the ground.

Last: Suddenly, however, Jack felt the clouds beneath his feet begin to shake. He looked up to see a terrifying Giant running towards him, growling like a beast.

First: The man simply smiled sweetly. “My lord, he said, I am afraid you will not see your son before next year, for he was too proud to ask how to descend, and I simply forgot to tell him.”

Last: Terrified for his life, Jack turned and ran for the beanstalk as quickly as he could. As soon as he had reached the ground, he grabbed the axe from the woodpile and chopped the beanstalk down. The giant plummeted to his death.

First: And that is the tale of the Ebony Horse.

Last: And that is the story of Jack and the Beanstalk.

(Everyone turns to stare at the last person. Line begins and is passed again, slowly and more clearly.)

First: This is the tale of the Ebony Horse.

Last: This is the story of Hansel and Gretel.

(General disgust. Annie, in the center of the line, unfurls a tin-can telephone so that the two at the ends may converse directly.)

First: This is the tale of the Ebony Horse.

Last: This is the story of Cinderella?

(Disgusted, all leave. Last is left alone, trying to figure it out.)

Last: This is the story of Rumpelstiltskin?

This is the story of the shoemaker and his elves?

This is the story of Little Red Riding Hood?

Can someone say it again, please?

I think I missed it.

Just repeat it one more time?

I don't think I got it all.

Once more, really quickly?

Please?

(She stands alone. Liz enters and climbs the monkey bars. Katie watches her.)

(Liz hangs upside-down; an offstage slap denotes the drop into position and the beginning of the scene. Liz speaks like the Cheshire Cat, coolly confusing. Katie watches.)

Liz: Are you going to continue to ask questions about things that don't concern you?

(slap)

You will die for not having used your brains.

(slap)

I am afraid you will not see your son before next year, for he was too proud to ask how to descend, and I forgot to tell him.

(slap)

For he was too proud to ask how to descend, and I forgot to tell him.

(slap)

Are you even listening? Do you get it? Is it sinking in?

(Liz descends. Music in. All women enter and circle to places for the Tale of the Three Apples)

9 - The Tale of the Three Apples

(Music continues. As all women reach their spots in they turn and sit facing outwards in unison.)

Sally: There once was a king named Shahryar who was regarded as great and wise. One day, however, he learned to his dismay that his wife had been unfaithful to him.

Liz: When he saw this, the world turned dark before his eyes. He decided that all women must be malicious and conniving. And so he vowed from thereon to take a virgin bride each night and have her executed promptly the next morning.

Annie: After 3 years had passed in this manner, Shahryar took his last wife, though he didn't know it at the time. This last wife was a storyteller, a spinner of tales. This last wife was smarter and dearer and craftier and more understanding than any that had come before her.

Katie: This last wife knew that what he needed wasn't vengeance.

Elizabeth: This last wife knew this wasn't working.

Rachel: This last wife knew there had to be a way to get out of this alive.

Lisa: And so this wife started telling stories, wonderful stories, that captivated the king night after night.

Annie: And after 1000 nights had passed, this wife began to realize that the majority of the bad had been balanced out by good. That the scales were beginning to tip.

Sally: And so it occurred to her that after 1000 successful nights, perhaps there was just one more left to go. Just one more – the thousand-and-first – to put the whole thing in place.

Elizabeth: And on the Thousand-and-first night, this is the tale that Sherazade told:

(All rise: general motion around the space)

Lisa: One day, the king's vizier was brought a large wooden box which had been pulled from the bottom of the Tigris. After prying off the lock, he discovered that inside was the body of a woman, cut into seven pieces.

Katie: Dismayed and heartbroken at the terrible crime that had befallen this poor woman, he journeyed to the center of town to investigate the incident.

Vizier (Rachel): A box has been found with the body of a woman. A woman who has been murdered. Please, if anyone can tell me who did this terrible thing, I would be grateful. This cannot have happened; this must not be.

(Stillness. Liz stands atop the block; the other women group to one side or another. As each character is introduced, he/she steps forward, restrained in relationship to the two other women. There is an air of calm and seriousness.)

Man (Liz): *(coming forward)* It is I who killed the woman in the box. I was married to this woman for many years when she told me she had become sick with a terrible fever. I began to fear she would not recover, for she went many days and nights without seeming to know where she was. One day, from the terror of her sickness, she called to me and said,

Wife (Katie): Please, I beg of you, there is only one thing I want. I want an apple. I beg of you, please bring me an apple.

Man: I knew that finding an apple would be difficult. But I said to her, "Even if you had a thousand longings, I would give my life to satisfy them all." For I loved her with all my heart. And so I journeyed far and near until I was able to find an apple. I brought it home to my wife

and, as she was too sick to eat it, I set it at her bedside. The next day, while tending my shop, I met a man carrying an apple. I asked him where he had gotten it. He replied,

Slave (Elizabeth): I took this from the bedside of my mistress when I visited her just this morning. She is pretending to be ill and her nitwit of a husband traveled the land for weeks just to bring this to her.

Man: When I heard this, the world grew dark before my eyes. I ran home and saw that the apple was missing from my wife's bedside. I asked her, "where is the apple?" She replied,

Wife: I have no idea. I fell asleep, and when I woke, it was gone.

Man: Mad with rage and jealousy, I reached for a knife, carved her to pieces, and put her in this box, which I threw into the Tigris. But on the way home, I met my eldest son in the street, crying.

Son (Annie): Please don't be angry with me! I stole the apple from my mother's bedside when she was sleeping, but a man passing me in the street snatched it from my hand. I pleaded with him and told him it belonged to my sick mother, but he just laughed and walked away.

Man: When I heard this, I immediately began weeping and mourning, for I realized that her death was unjust. Please, I beseech you by the honor of your ancestors to righteously kill me.

(Liz kneels next to the box, head resting. Like someone who literally has a neck on the chopping block. All other women move slowly to their places for the next segment during these lines.)

Elizabeth: On the Thousand-and-first night, the man expressed regret.

Annie: The man expressed remorse.

Lisa: The man felt guilt.

Katie: The man no longer felt wronged.

Rachel: The story Sherazade told on that 1001st night could have been called the Tale of the Apple.

Annie: Or it might have been called anything.

Elizabeth: Like the Tale of the King and the Vizier's Daughter. It might have been called that. What is most important, perhaps, is that a thousand nights weren't enough to tip the scales: it took a thousand and one.

(At this, five women sit around the outside of the circle. Liz and Sally are left alone, standing back to back, near the center. Liz binds her breasts.)

10 – Closing the Frame

Sherazade (Sally) and Shahryar (Liz) stand at the center, backs toward one another. The outside circle sits calmly.

Liz: And so, after that thousand-and-first night, there stood a king named Shahryar.

Sally: *(turning)* And opposite him stood a woman named Sherazade.

Liz: Once, the world had gone dark before the king's eyes.

Sally: And once, the woman had been told to keep to herself, head bowed, and not ask questions about things that didn't concern her.

Liz: *(turning)* But the woman was a spinner of tales,

Sally: A weaver of stories, a mender of that which is broken and healer of that which is crippled.

(Sally unwraps the binding around Liz's breasts)

Liz: And so the king slowly learned to open his eyes. He didn't necessarily know when or how it happened, but one day, after that thousand-and-first night, he opened his eyes and for the first time in a long time it was not dark.

Sally: This king who had killed a thousand women in a thousand nights was amazed at the telling of a thousand and one tales in a thousand and one nights.

(the outer circle speaks)

Elizabeth: I came here to tell you a story.

Annie: My story.

Katie: Your story.

Lisa: The story.

Rachel: I came here to tell you a story.

Elizabeth: I give you my story.

(Music. All lights dim but the center as the women move to the outside of the space and slowly release the tent around Sherazade and Shahryar. They are enveloped. The tent glows red. Slowly, the final light goes out.)







Rehearsal Journals

1/11/05 Tuesday

Rehearsal #1

I was extremely nervous before starting today. And I suppose I'm extremely nervous after starting today, but what can you do . . . In short, I always feel like I am such a burden on people, dragging them along on my little pet projects. This project is in a sense not so bad (I really do feel like everyone is or soon will be quite enthusiastic about the subject matter, and the group by and large is not being pulled in the worst possible directions), but is also in a sense worse (if I screw this up in any way or fail to be amazing, I have wasted a lot of peoples' precious time).

So.

I need to prepare, prepare, prepare, and not be afraid to put things out there. These people will catch me and bulk me up; but I need to be ready to greet them each day with fully formed thoughts (not baby weirdo ones) and pretend to always be confident.

Right?

I still feel like I'm fishing in thin air.

I wish I had answers to all the questions.

I wish I automatically knew how to bridge the gap between ideas and storyline, between thoughts and images. And also knew how to translate those things.

One of the things I've decided is that I need to cling more closely to the text than I had perhaps originally thought. That should seem second nature: something to hold onto at the very least. But in my mind the world is so blown open – and I need to remember that it does not need to be that way.

We had some fabulous discussion today – some highlights, generally broken down into three main bullet points that have emerged:

- 1) The position of Sherazade
 - The power of sex: does a woman HAVE to be EITHER a victim or a villain? Why is there no middle ground?
 - If a woman is detained because of the fear she will run sexually rampant, does she only imprison herself further if she uses that sexual power and prowess to “escape?” What is gained by running wild?
 - How many permutations can we create of Sherazade? Where does she fit in the ancient Islamic society? In the translation to modern Islamic society (intense fear/protection of women's sexuality)? In contemporary American society?
- 2) The power/place of relationships
 - What are the relationships with the father? Sister? King Shahryar?
 - What are Sherazade's reasons for engaging in the undertaking of marrying Shahryar? How emotionally vulnerable does she effectively make herself?
- 3) Storytelling

- The power of speech (replacement of speech for sex in bawdlerised versions)
- Idea that there are only a certain number of stories in the world (man vs. nature, man vs. self, etc) – what is the value of telling and retelling them again?
- What makes a story meaningful to its audience? In our contemporary society, what role do conventionalized forms of storytelling play (news, tv commercials, sitcoms, etc.)? Why are they so effective? → There is something communal about the way they are created and received; people are able to assign a value to a story that is independent of the actual components of the story itself.

Anyway, we discussed these things at length – and had a good time doing so.

Participation was great; people are entirely forthcoming with ideas and have good ones.

Now the challenge: to get up on our feet and create something. Far harder than talking.

Working to make previous rehearsal plan a bit more structured – I will choose a specific bit of text to storytell with next time.

1/12/05 Wednesday

Rehearsal #2

Today was the scary day. Probably not the only scary day (okay, *definitely* not the only scary day), but scary in the sense that as the first day of motion (and therefore creation per se) it reminded me that all the things I'd been worried about were indeed true and well-founded. It's HARD to create something from nothing. It's HARD to create structure where there has been none. It's HARD to take new things in the middle of rehearsal whilst definitely still on one's feet and run with them in a manner that makes sense. It's HARD to try to make theatre; usually the playwright does a good chunk of work at the start that moves some of those other things out of the way (even if the text is bizarrely open-ended).

So this is what we did:

First, we discussed a warm-up: our goal will be to start every rehearsal with a massage circle, a vocal warm-up, and some sort of game, in that order. The plan right now is to keep the warm-up basically the same from day to day, but running through different games; I'm hoping that somewhere along the line we fall into a nice, comfortable pattern that feels good to everyone.

Plan: to institute the clap when switching directions and finishing shoulder rubs. Perhaps silly, I know, but I love it and miss it when it's not there.

After that we worked on a first improv/building exercise: we used the story of "The Fisherman and the Jinnee" as I had written it out (part synopsis, part quotation, without ending). We began by discussing a bit about the story (my sense that the important part lay in the speech given by the genie: it is [1] unexpected, at least in our eyes, for a genie to do anything but offer three wishes, and [2] the speech outlines a process of step-by-step embitterment that perhaps echoes that of King Shahryar).

The cast (including Jen) broke into two groups and created a staging of the tale, adding on an ending of their choice. One group created a tale about the fisherman encountering a 3-headed genie that offered a choice between wealth, knowledge, and death; the fisherman first chose wealth and then knowledge, only to find that both options led to bad outcomes (seeing and

understanding incredible suffering in the world around them); s/he then returned and announced a choice of death on the condition that all the wealth and riches earned would be used to help assuage the suffering in the world. The point of this version was the genie's state as an all-knowing being that stacked the cards and knew the ending far beforehand.

The second group created a tale about the genie and how s/he got into such a predicament in the first place. The sense was of a young genie diving into the ocean and being offered several choices for the future: a chance to escape, lots of sex, and then the bottle – offering power and fulfillment. The genie, of course, chooses the bottle, and the bottle then traps her for centuries. When she is pulled from the ocean by a fisherman, she fulfills her promise to kill him, only to be sucked back into the ocean by the bottle, where she is seen to remain from then on.

Important thought: the story is most interesting when it is about the genie, not about the fisherman.

What we latched onto (or at least what I latched onto) was the idea of “Where does the Genie come from and why is he so pissed?” We started to play around a bit with adding on an introduction: “When I was young, my mother told me that I would be able to bring wealth, power, and happiness to all those I encountered” that would lead into this sense of sort of diving into the world and then suddenly losing control. The idea is that the genie is looking for the thing that completes himself: what is it that can provide such contentment (if there is anything)? We also discussed the idea of the genie's tale as a cyclical, never-ending story – with any “young genie” narrators jumping in and following suit.

Thoughts from the textual ending to the story: in the stories as written, the fisherman then earns his own life by telling the genie that he first has one question: how did the genie fit himself into the bottle in the first place? The genie cannot resist the need to prove himself mighty and all-powerful and thus indeed CAN fit in the bottle – so watch him do it. Thus the demise of the genie. (Though there is of course more – pages and pages of stories within stories – I would say that this is the point that is more relevant as an ending).

This is something of what we had:

YOUNG GENIE 1 (Katie): When I was a girl, my mother used to tell me the story of Cinderella . . . I always loved it so much that she was able to find her shoe . . . It made me love shoes . . .

YOUNG GENIE 2 (Lisa): (something somewhat similar)

YOUNG GENIE 3 (Sally): (etc.)

Rachel jumps into water and swims along . . .

BOTTLE 1 (Annie): Pick me! I can provide you with a way to escape. I can get you out of here.

BOTTLE 2 (Elizabeth): Pick me! I can make you physically happy. I can give you lots of sex.

BOTTLE 3 (LizO): No, no, pick me! I can complete you, I can make you whole.

RACHEL: Okay.

Rachel jumps into LizO's arms and is embraced. Line: “A hundred years pass”

RACHEL: If anyone can get me out of here, I will give them all the riches in the world.

Line: “A hundred years pass” The physical position changes: Rachel is more entrapped by Liz.

RACHEL: If anyone lets me out of here, I will grant them three wishes!

Line: “A hundred years pass” The physical position changes again: Rachel has been completely tackled by Liz.

RACHEL: If anyone gets me out of here, I will kill them!

At this point, Rachel is fished out of the ocean by fisherman Annie, who sits on Elizabeth's outstretched back as she mimes the use of a fishing pole. She kills Annie. The bottle (Liz) bodily grabs her and manhandles her back into the sea.

RACHEL: Maybe I shouldn't have killed that poor fisherman.

Also had a meeting with Sara Wednesday afternoon – we discussed what had and had not been accomplished at rehearsals. Things to remember from that discussion:

- Have a group norming discussion: establish that not everything created will be used, that something one person created may be said or performed by another, and that things do not have to stay in the same order and form that they were originally created in.
- Before the end of each rehearsal, have each person write down everything she remembers (words, actions, impulses) to keep from losing things
- It looks like it will be important to use lines from the text (despite the fact that they as bastardized translations are of course heinously inaccurate): remembering always, “By Allah,” the king said to himself, ‘I won’t slay her until I hear the rest of the story, for it is truly wondrous.’” – repetition? I get an almost sing-song feel in my head just from thinking about it . . .

1/18/05 Tuesday

Rehearsal #3

Tuesday afternoon is officially a rough time to rehearse – especially when people are sort of conditioned to act tired, as if that is the best way to go about things. It annoys me. Yes, it's late in the day, yes, most everyone has been running since 9 a.m. and rehearsing takes a lot of mental energy, but for the love . . . pet peeve. One of many.

Also – I get annoyed when six people at six different moments all say, “Oh, Alison, I almost forgot, I have to leave . . . blah blah blah.” I am not your mother. Write down your schedule and figure it out.

Word.

This is why stage managers were created.

Anyway, we had a short rehearsal today, as Pro ate into the first half hour and the last half hour was given over to sending people to the now-starting-earlier *Farther West* rehearsals. Blahdiblah. Sometimes I wonder if people realize the pall they are casting.

Did a quickish warmup, then spent some time sharing “Sheherazade statements” that people had brought in. Lisa brought in song lyrics (“Silent all these years” – Tori Amos), Annie brought some other song lyrics about storytelling (one direct reference to Sherazade), Katie made a list of “role model” women in an “I am” statement, Rachel wrote a train-of-thought narrative on Marilyn Monroe standing over the grate, Elizabeth talked a bit about the idea of a mother, Liz talked about hating men, and Jen brought in a series of images based on a surface-level read on the name “Sherazade” (French Barbie-esque dolls, photos from dance pieces, paintings and artistic readings, other mythological references – focused on the idea of night vs. day – the importance of the stories taking place at night – perhaps a time of specific power for women?). I pulled in a brief collection of stuff regarding shopping for a burqa.

We did some read-aloud and sharing of thought processes, then traded texts so no one had their own anymore. Did one full read as in down-the-line, then had each choose two lines or bits from the section; we did these in a circle out of order (as flow); then walking around the room; then walking with required pauses/climbing on blocks for speaking; then walking but maintaining eye contact for speech. The goal was to work on seeing what would happen when bits and pieces were woven together. The effect was alright – something I’d imagine we’ll almost certainly use in some form in the final production. Perhaps multiple times. Themes that popped up audibly from what was being said and the way things aligned:

- Defiance
- Men
- Being unsure
- Exposure
- Wearing masks

Here are the lines that were chosen from larger things:

- “I am not words, compiled and confined. I am breathing, bleeding, eating, sweating, thinking, deciding, changing.”
- “I hate that my words ensnare you. I only allow myself to be affected.”
- “Your scream got lost in a paper cup. I think there’s a heaven where some screams have gone.”
- “I befriend these women because they are strong, intelligent, creative, and mysterious, but also because it is important to keep those you fear by your side.”
- “I am Sheherazade.”
- “How can I finish the tale?”
- “Where can I buy a burqua like the ones the women wear in Afganistan – the blue one? I want one that goes from head to toe. I don’t want one like they wear in the Middle East.”
- “The sky blue (the very popular color, seen often on Afghan sisters on t.v.) only comes in 5 foot long size, but that should be fine for any sister over 5’2”.”
- “My head immediately feels uncomfortably compressed.”
- “I am all of your female role models.”
- “Rolled up in your sheets wearing a mask of Marilyn Monroe.”
- “In the end however, what more did her savvy achieve but another brick of coal to the heater of standard gender roles?”
- “Fine, I will show you what happens with only a body.”

In discussions and among what materialized, I think we will continue on this “Sherazade statement” track – the assignment for next week is to create/find a piece that is about or based on a historical, mythical, or Biblical figure. Another round will have to be entertainers – after that, we’ll see.

The other assignment was to find a selection from the frame tale of King Shahryar to use as a focus – the goal then being to wrap that into/make sense of the relationship with the story of the jinnee and the fisherman.

Word.

1/19/05 Wednesday (a.m.)

Rehearsal #4

Morning is a way better time to get people. As much as people may complain that they are not morning people, the change from late afternoon (when the day has absolutely worn people out) is tremendous from the get-go.

We tried a new game today as a warm-up: "Knock-kneed Chase" from the Bicat book, though we renamed it Old-Lady Tag (or several variations on the theme). In the game, a circle is set up of chairs, one for each member of the group. One person is then designated as "it" and may only walk with her knees pressed together (we later required that person to hold a book between her knees, as it became quite easy to cheat and move a little more quickly than was helpful). The goal of "it" is to sit in the empty chair; the goal of the rest of the group as a whole is to block her from doing so by one-by-one moving to fill any empty spaces. So when "it" heads for chair #1, another person must get up from her chair and move to beat "it" to it; someone else must fill the now-empty chair before "it" has a chance to switch directions and sit there. The goal is to move and work fluidly as a team; in a well-played game, "it" would be "it" interminably and would never be allowed to sit as a result of the flawless interaction of the rest of the group (needless to say, we weren't that great).

We also had a brief "group norming" conversation as Sara had recommended, simply solidifying/noting some details about how the work is to progress: not everything created will be in the show; the fact that you created something doesn't mean you will actually get to say or do it, as it might be given away to someone else; things don't have to stay in the same order or relationship as that in which they were created; and so on. No one really seemed to be at all rattled or annoyed, which is good.

The next thing we did was discuss takes on the intro re. King Shahryar (it had been everyone's assignment to pick out the section or sections they like the most for whatever reason). The main bulk of quotes picked out were basically amusingly worded bits about the terrible luck and fortune that have befallen the kings:

- "When he saw this, the world turned dark before his eyes, and he said, 'If this is what happens while I am still within sight of the city, what will this damned whore do during my long absence at my brother's court?'" (4)
- "How could she have done this to me? How could she have brought about her own death?" (4)
- "This only proves that all women will make cuckolds of their husbands when given the chance." (6)
- "Indeed, the malice of woman is mighty! My brother, you've escaped many an evil deed by putting your wife to death, and your rage and grief are quite understandable and excusable, especially since you had never suffered anything as terrible as this before. By Allah, had this been me, I would not have been satisfied until I had slain a thousand women and had gone mad!" (7)
- "When I saw your misfortune, and your wife's betrayal, my own sorrow seemed slight in comparison, and I became sober and sound again." (8)
- "Only in utter solitude can man be safe from what goes on in this vile world!" (9)
- "There are other things more important than our kingdoms." (10)

The emphasis, then, is on blaming women; on being plunged into some sort of insane darkness; and on the fact that the kings' relationships with their wives are a norming factor that must be in place for their existences to be functional and normal: a life without faithful wives is basically a life that is over and/or worthless.

The sort of second emphasis was on the moderately allegorical episode of the woman kept in the box by the genie:

- “Oh lady of noblest line, whom I snatched away on your wedding night and whom none has loved or enjoyed except myself. Oh, my sweetheart . . .” (10)
- “He guarded me so that I would remain chaste and honest, and so that none but himself could have any contact with me. But I have lain under as many men as I’ve desired, and this wretched jinnee doesn’t realize that destiny cannot be averted or hindered by anything and that whatever a woman wants, she will get, no matter how much a man might try to prevent it.” (11)
- “Tell whoever has sorrow
Grief shall never last.
Just as joy has no tomorrow,
Woe is bound not to last.” (13 – quotation of poetry by Sherazade to her father)

With those two thoughts mainly in place, we divided into two groups to attack this section of text. The first group (Elizabeth, Annie, Lisa) took on the general King Shahryar story. They chose to focus on the somewhat arbitrariness of the killings by using a repetitive movement pattern/format that highlighted certain words. A block was set up by the pole on which one person would stand while the others circled around; the person on the block read lines from the text; one of the circling performers would stop and announce a “buzzer word” (words used included betrayal, rationalization, wrath, justification, guilt, jealousy, denial, self-victimization, the malice of women, and avoidance); the performer on the block would then physically shove her away, sending the circle moving again. The block performer would then step down and parts would change as the circle continued. The effect of people being thrown away one by one was very strong – the effect from the outside was somewhat of a whack-a-mole game: the idea from the inside was that on the cycle/path of King Shahryar’s mind, one thing leads to another in terms of rationalization only leading to the emergence of another problem. Another comment from the outside was that it somewhat resembled a game show where contestants would buzz in with correct answers of “betrayal!” and the like.

One thing of note is that the members of this group went through a fairly sizable amount of frustration and angst in the midst of it all; I didn’t listen to their process, but they took longer than the other group and seemed to be a bit battered by the experience. In the end, though, their product was a little bit fabulous.

The second group worked on the tale of the woman kept in the genie’s box. They went for a fairly goofy, farcical, cartoonish style (not what I think we’re going for in the long run), but a few things popped out. One was the obsession with the actions of the wife: in their tale, the two brothers were a bit hampered while wandering the land because everything they saw or encountered reminded them of their wives. A sort of side note to that was the fact that women were thus clearly delineated as objects: a gazelle, a rock, a tree – all things were akin to women. Another memorable bit was the sense of competition between the two brothers to one-up or one-down each other; a final bit to remember was the ultimate childishness of the genie and the kings from start to finish.

That finished out rehearsal for the morning – we took time to have everyone write things down (though for the moment they are keeping them for themselves) and then went on our merry ways.

A final note: sometimes I feel like I'm working on this project alone (ie . . . everyone has a schedule conflict. Constantly). Sometimes I feel like other people actually are excited about it and that I can't let them down – that somehow something wonderful must be birthed – and all it takes is one person saying, "hey, I really enjoyed rehearsal today," or "hey, that assignment really made me think and I discovered a lot of really cool things" to make me feel better. Far too fickle. Ick. Also, good to have a stage manager in real life to filter through the mumbo-jumbo crap like scheduling. Also, having an almost week-long gap in rehearsals followed by 2 days of fairly intense group work is not necessarily working out so hot – it's too hard to keep myself motivated and in the right mindset. I thought it would provide good stretches of days in which to do legwork, but that turned out to be a lie. Oops.

1/19/05 Wednesday (p.m.)

Rehearsal #5

After reconvening for the afternoon (the group decided against a warm-up), we began by taking a look at the Rimsky-Korsakov suite. I first played (in full) the first movement of the suite ("The Sea and Sinbad's Ship" – about 10 minutes or so) to allow everyone to get comfortable (or at least vaguely familiar) with the material.

In general, the response was positive and people liked what they heard in it. The general consensus fell upon the idea of the large, brassy theme as the King, with the light violin solo as Sherezade, which in the end manages to cut through and pacify the more hard-core theme. As the movement goes along, the Sherezade theme emerges, disappears, and re-emerges numerous times, moving towards an ultimate relaxation as the theme is able to take full control. Also prominent was the idea of the themes weaving together in a way that might be akin to the way the threads of a story bind into one another. Additionally, there was a sense that the scale of the piece was right: even though Russian romanticism doesn't really belong in 7th-century Arabia, the grandeur certainly has a recognizable place.

The group's responses lined up quite well with the liner notes – such as these:

- "A sinuous, caressing line for solo violin represents the lovely storyteller, while a gruff and powerful theme for brass and lower strings characterizes her murderous husband. These motives are present at the beginning of each of the movements except the third, and Scheherazade's theme is heard in the midst of that one" – signaling a constant return to the memory of Sherezade's situation . . .
- R-K's note that the goal was not to tell the stories in complete detail: "I meant these hints to direct but slightly the hearer's fancy on the path that my own fancy had traveled, and to leave more minute and particular conceptions to the will and mood of each"
- Overall: the idea that a movement might move from an introduction into a full-scale story and then back off rather gently –

We then divided into two groups to prepare a group interpretation (for what that terminology's worth) of the first 2 minutes of the piece (through a solid establishment of both

themes, but before the “story” part really begins). The first group worked off images of flowers and of smoke rippling; they also used an opening tableau of the King focusing on sorrow and shame. The second group started off with the idea of many deaths, beginning standing stiffly together and then branching out. They said they were searching for an embodiment of wanting something you can’t have – in practice, the visual image was one of intense intertwining.

All in all, the movement stuff, while not unsuccessful, is farther from what I think may be my ultimate goal than some of the other things we’ve created. I am worried about getting too “dancy.” I am, though, a bit fan of using at least the beginning of the Rimsky-Korsakov suite in some manner. A good note to remember from Liz is the need to let people discover their own movement responses individually before getting into a group situation that requires discussion and collaboration; this will help keep things from being so “heady” (perhaps).

At this point, we began working on the “scripted” bit of the Fisherman and the Jinnee; while we didn’t get concretely far, I think I did learn that after the initial exploration is done in separate groups, it really is time for me to play director to try to shape things.

Hopefully we will somehow and at some point create or discover a manner of staging that makes everything flow together and generally be easier.

1/25/05 Tuesday

Rehearsal #6

We started off rehearsal (after warm-up) with a discussion of what people had brought in (the assignment had been to find/create another Sherazade statement, this time based on a historical, mythological, or Biblical figure). The responses went a number of different directions and included Brigid (Celtic – no detail, just a suggestion), Amelia Earhart (a capable explorer and voyageur), Mother Jones (a powerful motherly figure and public speaker who had strong political involvement re. the poor etc.), Enheduanna (a priestess of Ananna; the first recorded author who managed to give her father his political power), Sarah Bernhardt (exhibiting a dedication to multiple things – character, author, public), The Wife of Bath (the ways in which women want to have control over their husbands), the Fates (their control over what happens in the lives of men), Persephone, Medusa (recognized as a goddess of knowledge before being adopted by the Greeks and turned into a picture of fatal ugliness), and Isadora Duncan (dancy things). Some of the responses seemed a bit wandering, so the next thing was to sort of pare back a bit.

So after we’d chatted for a while, we took a few minutes to write out specific statements (many people had just brought in research and thoughts rather than written statements). We then worked on remembering hand games from our childhoods (of which it turns out we know MANY). My favorite is the one that increases (“Slide” as Sally and Katie, the resident experts, called it) with each go-around. There are no chanted words, but the tempo and intensity pick up immensely as it goes until it tends to get out of control and crash and burn.

We then had Katie and Sally play Slide while Elizabeth, Annie, Rachel, and Lisa read their statements in rotation behind them (standing still to speak and then crossing the stage when through). We then cut each “statement” down to one sentence and did it again and worked to increase the pace in measured increments.

I'm a big fan of this bit for some reason; Liz was sitting out and watching and it made her cry. Granted – it's hard to pinpoint why one might cry – but what she pointed out is quite true: there's such a familiarity to the hand games that it puts this really stolid ring to other things that are happening while simultaneously pulling you back towards the idea of being innocent. Things that were important to me included the audible rhythm, the feeling of nostalgia held up against history, and the increasing pace and intensity.

My to-do and to-think-about list:

- Are there similar resonances in other childhood games? Should we be looking at these games as a starting point for mining a related field of understanding?
- It's turning out that the references to specific women don't have to be too indicative. They are turning out to be more of a means of securing and achieving suitable text, whether through quotation or reaction (free-writes or discussions) – bits of things together form a compendium that gains meaning through being piled.

At this point in rehearsal, we lost Sal, LizO, and Rachel to rehearsals and work – with the remaining people and time we took a first look at “The Ebony Horse” (the shortened bastardization I had typed out). The initial response was one of some frustration – I don't think the group knew where to go with it. Also, on another sort of level, everyone was very distracted by the word “button” in the story, which caused much conversation. In the end, the group staging was a game of telephone: a part of the story was read aloud by the person on the stage right side of the line, who then whispered it to the person next to her; the whispering went down the line until the person on the far end announced a wildly different version. This continued until the story had been told in full. We all agreed that the execution of the idea wasn't great – but that the idea of playing telephone (it being both a children's game and related to the practice of storytelling) was attractive to all of us. I've no idea if that is something that will be eventually usable, but we liked the thought of it.

1/26/05 Wednesday (a.m.)

Rehearsal #7

Again, we started rehearsal post-warmup with some discussion time. Liz had brought in some poems by Mary Oliver – the idea was that the writing had “a wildness and a depth to it that you don't see right away.” Also mentioned was the idea of women being blamed for wars and major conflicts because of their dealings with men (though I failed to write down the details of those observations).

We then spent some time working with music (back to the Rimsky-Korsakov). We started by playing the Sherazade theme (the solo violin) – the assignment was for each actress to create one movement or gesture that was influenced by or reflected the bit of music. After a few rounds of the music to develop the movements, we then shared them with one other. We repeated the exercise twice more with different sections of music: the King theme and the storytelling theme.

Once we had established a wide movement repertoire, we chose three movements (okay, I lie – I chose my three favorite movements): Sally's tip-toed tightrope walk, KTG's being pulled from the floor by her arm, and Lisa's face-washing – and taught them to everyone. The

actresses were then divided into two groups and assigned to find a way to fill two minutes of music (all three themes) using as tools only those three movements, plus standing/sitting still and neutral movement between gestures.

Again, the results were very dancy – more so than I think I'd like to use in the long run, but a few things stood out. In one group, they started with a snap into a line of women in an arms-outstretched tightrope pose. The surprising thing was that while the pose (and its attached gesture) is so unstable in its own right, the group together looked incredibly strong. We also discovered that a strength (or at least interesting bit) from the arm pull-up movement is the propensity it has for hiding the performer's face; depending on the angle, it is quite easy to only see an arm and shoulders, which seemed interesting. Another discovery was that the washing gesture when repeated at an increased tempo became a sort of OCD/turrets-like tic.

We then discussed a bit the idea of using a record player for its ability to physicalize recorded music and the possibilities it presents for distortion – we said nothing too specific, however.

1/26/05 Wednesday (p.m.)

Rehearsal #8

The afternoon turned very talk-y, and not necessarily about directly useful things, but who knows – perhaps this will prove useful later. So here's what we talked about:

The goal of the discussions was to look at the section of the frame tale in which Sherazade is introduced in order to pull out sections, quotations, and themes that might be usable or important.

Opening thoughts centered on the idea that Sherazade is powerful in part because she asks questions – a statement that we were able to tie back to the story of the Ebony Horse, where a failure to ask questions (and/or a failure to give information) was the downfall of the character(s).

. The thought then . . . is of course to find a way to tie that back in: as “The Fisherman and the Jinnee” can be about embitterment, so should perhaps the story of the Ebony Horse become about questioning your surroundings and the things that are presented to you.

We also talked some about the case of the two brothers and the fact that they glean pleasure from one another's pain and misfortune (linking into the German idea of *Schadenfreude* - obtaining enjoyment from the troubles of others).

Another topic of discussion was Sherazade's logic: she wanted to go to the king in order to represent the women who had been killed and to save other women. In a sense, it almost feels like Sherazade has placed herself in the position of a backwards martyr: instead of the traditional model of dying to save others, Sherazade must live in order to provide freedom for “her people.” All in all a more positive view of martyrdom, yes?

A strong bit that popped up again and again was the inevitability of the situation: over and over again the idea “it must be” weaves in and out of it all. In a way, this sense of fate and necessity, combined with the rather lofty poem she quotes to her father, put Sherazade on a

pedestal from early on. She is introduced on a higher plane than other characters – romanticized a bit and given extra power.

2/1/05 Tuesday

Rehearsal #9

At the start of rehearsal, I brought in some thoughts from the morning's Avant Garde class about Arabian Nights references in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. We read aloud the section about Marana, the fake translator, and his work for the Sultan and Sultana of Arabia, translating readings for the Sultana in order to placate her. The section:

"The Sultan sent for me to ask me how many pages I still have to translate in order to finish the book. I realized that in his suspicions of political-conjugal infidelity, the moment he most fears is the drop in tension that will follow the end of the novel, when, before beginning another, his wife will again be attached by impatience with her condition. He knows the conspirators are waiting for a sign from the Sultana to light the fuse, but she has given orders never to disturb her wife she is reading, not even if the palace were about to blow up . . . I have my own reasons for fearing that moment, which could mean the loss of my privileges at court . . .

"And so Marana proposes to the Sultan a stratagem prompted by the literary tradition of the Orient: he will break off this translation at the moment of greatest suspense and will start translating another novel, inserting it into the first through some rudimentary expedient; for example, a character in the first novel opens a book and starts reading. The second novel will also break off to yield to a third, which will not proceed very far before opening into a fourth, and so on [. . .]

"Ermes Marana appears to you as a serpent who injects his malice into the paradise of reading . . . In the place of the Indian seer who tells all the novels of the world, here is a trap-novel designed by the treacherous translator with beginnings of novels that remain suspended . . . just as the revolt remains suspended . . . just as the revolt remains suspended, while the conspirators wait in vain to begin it with their illustrious accomplice, and time weighs motionless on the flat shores of Arabia . . . Are you reading or daydreaming? Do the effusions of a graphomane have such power over you? Are you also dreaming of the petroliferous Sultana? Do you envy the lot of the man decanting novels in the seraglios of Arabia? Would you like to be in his place, to establish that exclusive bond, that communion of inner rhythm . . ." (125).

The bit of discussion thus necessarily included talk of the idea of feminine narrative strategy – the idea that narrative is essentially the handling of desire, and that feminine desire, as opposed to male desire, does not move in one fell swoop towards a climax, but rather returns to a running narrative thread and diffuses desire over time. Additionally, it became amusing that, in a way, the structure of *If on a Winter's Night* is ridiculously similar to the structure of the Arabian Nights (though no story is ever finished). In short the discussion opened the discourse about the necessity and place of stories within stories – something we definitely need to get to very very soon.

We then read and discussed a bit about "Wily Dalilah" (the first trick only). The general consensus was a resounding chorus of "what the crap" and a movement to rename the story based on her treatment of the barren woman. We also talked a bit about the Biblical Dalilah (Delilah) story, tossing around ideas of how they might or might not be related (the Biblical

Delilah having tricked Samson into telling her the secret of his strength by crying and accusing him of not trusting her, then robbing him of said strength-giving hair). Also threw out the bit from urbandictionary.com (a funny site) pronouncing a Dalilah to be “what every guy wants, or the perfect girlfriend.” The sample sentence, for the sake of amusement, is “yo home-boy ova there’s got himself a dalilah.” In general, we figured that the said “urban usage” of the name is more of a misinterpretation than anything else (why would a scheming, destructive female be desirable? – unless there’s something in the power therein that is attractive). Overall, the sense of the story going into group work was that of the ability of women to be cruel to other women (and the fact that for every woman who is deceitful, there is a woman who is naïve and easy to manipulate).

In terms of group work – the first group (KTG, Lisa, and Elizabeth) focused on female cruelty in terms of playground rules and clubs: Katie and Lisa were two friends who made Elizabeth perform elaborate stunts to be in their club (and their club, of course, included playing hand games). All in all, the basis of the skit might be useful – but definitely not a full-length segment in that vein. It served as a great way to really ground the hand games (assuming, of course, that we are able to defend the hand games to a point that is acceptable to a panel-like audience). When talking about the skit, Elizabeth brought up the image of things that look pretty but are dangerous – like a Venus fly trap – also something about dandelions that she promises to make clear next week (for her, there is something in the image of a dried dandelion being blown to the wind that is very attractive – it was something her character did at the start of the skit).

The other group (Sally, Rachel, Liz, and Annie) set up a TV talk show in which a Dalilah character offered terrible advice to women (first reinforcing the necessity of successful conception as a woman’s role and then stealing a suitcase from a woman on the street). Overall, it was fairly goofy, but had of course some useful thoughts. The choice of an infomercial/talk show format was because of the manipulative tactics often applied and associated therein; the indoctrination of the necessity of conception; the question of what/who the heck is Zaynab (here, she was a zombie-like mummified walk-about) – all were interesting thoughts.

So that was that – the day was a bit of a “Dalilah intro.”

2/2/05 Wednesday (a.m.)

Rehearsal #10

This morning was a “Dalilah continuation” day. I brought in a highly bastardized and shortened version of the remainder of the story (stealing the child, escaping crucifixion, and gaining employment at the palace). Overall, the feeling of shock about Dalilah’s dubious choice of activities was still the most prevalent reaction – there emerged a generalized sense of pity for the people she interacts with (and therefore steps on). The more we talked, however, the more the group was willing to look at the events in a slightly different light: it became feasible that Dalilah might be an example of what a woman will and/or must do in order to gain respect and independence in society (at least that society) – (though I believe all of us were and perhaps still are a bit flummoxed by the idea that Dalilah’s pursuers might suddenly think to themselves, “perhaps she only wants respect” and accept that as logical). In general, there was agreement in simultaneously feeling a strong disapproval for Dalilah’s actions/tactics and accepting them as valid and successful choices. What does it say about a society and the people in it if these sorts

of manipulations are the way to get what you want? (And this is still present in our contemporary society, yes?) And if this is a plausible way to get what you want, is it then automatically okay to do so – or is there still a line that should be drawn somewhere?

Then followed a brief discussion about how the story of Dalilah might or might not relate to the story of Sherazade. The reaction to that was that the story was a bit backwards: Dalilah puts other people on the line in order to achieve her goals, while Sheherazade puts herself out as the one as possible risk. And so rather than connecting the figure of Dalilah to Sherazade (though there is a bit of something there – both women rely upon their wits to get them through; both are strong, independent, feisty female characters), it began to make sense to connect her to the Kings' cheating wives. Perhaps the story of Dalilah, if it is at all about not all women being the same (though that seems perhaps a bit forced, as Dalilah, the "wily" character, is so definitely at the forefront), is a story about why Shahryar should not have been so hard on the women in his life? Or – do women have to carve out their own bit of freedom if they expect to survive as autonomous, functioning beings in their marriages?

Group work turned out two interesting scenes. The first was a freeze-frame commentary/retelling of the story called "From Ducks to Down" (based on the idea that Dalilah's victims were all simply sitting ducks – thus a statement at one point of "Sitting Duck Schmuck") that used one narrator (Rachel) reading out titles and the other three forming scenes that represented the story (I believe there were 10 scenes in all). The second was a collection of "I am" statements from the points of view of Dalilah's victims (based on the idea that Dalilah was able to deceive man, woman, and child in the course of her doings).

Discussions that followed . . . (1) the idea that Dalilah pits herself against her environment and the entire world, one against a million; (2) still, a generalized unwillingness to accept the story of Dalilah, despite the fact that we were willing to try to understand the king's story as he kills his wife. In a way, we try to see the King as a real person and Dalilah as a character: why are we okay with one but not the other? (3) the story as a demonstration on how to achieve social mobility; and (4) the idea of giving the duped people a background – especially if the story is drawn up to be about Shahryar's wives' unfaithfulness, meaning that Shahryar is the represented duped person.

While the groups were working, I worked on pulling out some quotes from the story that seemed to relate to the themes we had been discussing:

- "You realize, don't you, Mother, that this fellow Ahmad al-Danaf came here from Cairo a fugitive and played the double dealer in Baghdad until he wormed his way into the Caliph's company? Now he's become a captain of the watch, while that mangy chap Hasan Shuman has also become a captain! Each one can count on a full meal every day and a monthly salary of a thousand dinars, whereas we're unemployed and have been discarded without rank and honor." (430)
- "Let's get to work and make ourselves notorious with some clever scheme. Maybe that way we'll be able to regain Father's salary for ourselves. It's the least we deserve." (431)
- "It's the least I deserve."
- "Do you know how many old women there are in this city who fit her description?" (443)
- "May Allah torment her!" (447)
- "You've all been wronged." (451)
- "Truly we have been cheated!"
- "Tell me – who has cheated you?" (454)

Additionally, a line that popped out from the group discussion I was listening a bit to: “I have no excuses to give.” I decided to boil it all down to two statements: “I have no excuses to give” and “It’s the least I deserve.” All were assigned a short free-write on the two statements (from the point of view of Dalilah or a Dalilah figure). The responses were not quite what I expected – may collect them later and rethink them. Or redo them.

2/2/05 Wednesday (p.m.)

Rehearsal #11

We started the afternoon’s rehearsal with everyone writing her version of the frame tale. The instructions were to narrate the frame tale in whatever way seemed clearest and to make it as short as possible (making choices about what to include or not include if that was necessary). The versions were pretty similar – the main questions being (1) whether or not to include the brother, and (2) how to deal with the story of the genie and the woman kept in his box.

We then went back and talked about/worked on how to join together simple storytelling and a fairly abstract representation of that story. We started by reconstructing the walk-around-the-pole version of the story of the brothers, then restructuring it a bit and finding ways to weave in narration (it became leaving one person on the block as Shahryar with an outside narrator and three women doing the circling in a much more formalized manner). We then did a bit of the same thing with the story of Sherazade’s introduction – this time, though, instead of trying to interweave the narration into the story, we had Elizabeth (in the Sherazade position) read the story three times, growing each time, with an inverted set-up of the three circling women.

Basically, the results of the day were helpful – a rather comforting first look at how to really shape things in a recognizable fashion.

2/8/05 Thursday

Rehearsal #12

We started out looking at pictures people brought in: imagery was of course quite varied, but the bits that actually held together best turned out to be the natural imagery that arrived: Venus fly traps, praying mantis – all held together in a really coordinated color scheme and felt “right” together. We’ve started a book into which all such imagery can be chucked. Hopefully people will be good about bringing things in to pique imaginations (lots of stuff has been shown from books but not brought in as a keepable form – but as it’s already proving helpful to see things together, i.e. pasted on a communal page, I’ll have to push for that).

We then read through Sinbad and talked about the technique of cutting a story off at just the right moment, the way commercial breaks are done: the sense was a bit that Sinbad as a story is not much more than a collection of events (rather than a story that “means something” in the context of the frame tale). Split into two groups for a telling: one group took on the first episode, building a ship with two people and a chair and sending Sinbad off on voyages; the

second group used the second episode and “updated” it in terms of falling asleep on a bus and then being terrified in a movie theater.

The sense that arose, then is that it might work best to stick with a version of the story that is very strongly straight-forward in its telling (i.e. the first group) – small details seem to be what really make it all work: Sinbad with one hoop earring and a scarf; throwing real pocket change to the wind; a ship with a real human-female masthead. I do think I’d actually like to play with coming to a stop and sending the actors offstage for an uncomfortably long moment (I believe I used the phrase “uncomfortably long moment” a ridiculous number of times during the rehearsal). I suppose the goal is to find a performable equivalent to leaving things hanging.

Also, I think the little bits of frame tale text are necessary in some form (“and the tale was wondrous . . .” etc.) – though perhaps these have a home far more interspersed throughout an identifiable whole.

2/9/05 Wednesday (a.m.)

Rehearsal #13

We started the rehearsal with a discussion about the device of stories within stories: the visual image that kept popping up was of a spider spinning a web to catch its prey. The sense is that Sherazade’s stories have to function as an entrapment device: it is the stories themselves in their functions that draw the king in and refuse to let him go.

We then spent some time looking at the first and most straightforward example of this in the story set: the Tale of the Merchant and the Jinnee (merchant is to be killed by the jinnee; three passing men each tell the jinnee a tale for which they have bargained a third of the man’s blood if the tale is astounding; the man is eventually set free after all three thirds of his blood have been won from the jinnee).

It was important to us that the frame tale of “Merchant” was a direct parallel to the overall frame tale of Shahryar. The tale, for example, shows the ability of stories to change a situation (with as strong an action as literally saving someone’s life) and puts the stories in a very immediate context: because the men in the story tell tales about animals they have physically with them, the correlation and importance is immediately clear, as it is literally directly in front of the jinnee’s face.

The conversation then spun off to be about the ways in which little kids tell stories, with changing points of focus and strings of “and thens” – both skits then wound up being kiddish (Lisa, Elizabeth, and Liz were children telling stories of “worse” things that got them out of trouble; Rachel, Annie, and Katie played with the idea of stories that stick in your head and seem true, a la urban myths, that changed as they grew older), which seemed passably alright at the time but in close retrospect seems problematic. It seems that childishness is going to creep in no matter what happens – but allowing ourselves to focus on living in kiddieland is most likely not the answer. As Sara pointed out – we’re at a point right now where thinking back to childhood is very attractive to us and seems to have all the answers to our current lives. But in terms of the show? Childishness and innocence can’t rule all, no matter how much people enjoy spending time in “kid world.” So maybe what we’ve done can be chalked up to background explorations (that works, right?) – but I REALLY think we need to get past the kid thing, pronto. It’s a great big gaping trap.

Thus an offshoot of all this . . . we found no answer to stories-within-stories and so have to come back to it again . . . starting FRESH, not building upon something else. Maybe we can literally wrap something or someone? Weave a web? What else is woven? Dreamcatchers? Gods' eyes? Tapestries?

Also, people are starting to say things now like, "oh, it would be cool if" and then stating a very specific staging – which makes me uncomfortable (?) – I don't even know if that's right. I don't know if it's something I appreciate (people are really starting to look for the practical application of things) or despise (shooting things down takes energy) – so that's something . . .

Other thoughts . . . is there value in a depiction of the way storytelling changes as one gets older? I dunno . . . that's pushing it right back to where we started.

Somewhere along the line today, the image of blowing bubbles popped into my head. And there's something in that that I like: after thinking about it for a bit, it started equating itself to smoking, and the image inside my head of a reclining woman, relaxed as if she's having a post-coital cigarette, blowing bubbles with a killer-viper calm. And so maybe that's the way childhood things can make their appearance: little references that change the way a different activity is viewed.

And thus so far we have hand games, which are proving themselves to be quite ripe for abstraction, and maybe bubble-blowing a la smoking . . . what else?

2/9/05 Wednesday (p.m.)

Rehearsal #14

The goal for the afternoon was to deal with the end of the frame tale, where King Shahryar comes to his change of heart and the wedding takes place. We started with a walk-through of the main arguments and points of division about the ending. The first is the idea of the children: is Shahryar's main reason for granting Sherazade pardon the simple fact that he cannot kill the mother of his children OR that he has been psychologically cured and has reconciled himself with/to what is happening/has happened? The first version of the idea is frustratingly simplistic – the second is far more attractive (meaning, perhaps, that the children are of no consequence at all to the story and its outcome).

The second point of argument was about the elaborate parade of dresses: it seems possibly annoying that Sherazade is once again objectified and made something to be looked at. One point of interest from an outside reading was that each outfit that Sherazade and Dunyazade put on refers to a specific erotic image (which makes it a bit worse, yes?). The third conversation piece was the idea that the stories are in the end taken over and disseminated by Shahryar and his male successor. One reading of this is of annoyance: why should the stories fall into male ownership? The other reading was that it didn't particularly matter: Sherazade was above having to deal with the stories in a paper format, as she carried them within herself. Ownership is/was not an issue.

After that, the rehearsal quite honestly fell a bit apart; the actors worked together for a bit but hit a point of frustration. I then walked them through trying to assemble an ending based on the beginning telling of the frame tale opening, which was a miserable failure and thus will not be recorded.

We'll do better next time.

2/15/05 Tuesday

Rehearsal #15

The goal of today was to revisit the tale-within-a-tale demonstrations as shown by the Tale of the Merchant and the Jinnee, as the previous go-around's results were so overwhelmingly childish (though we had a good time exploring them). Because the group was decidedly low-energy and a bit underconnected with one another, we walked through things a bit step-by-step: this was a time when I tried to guide the groundwork creation, which I didn't particularly love (that affords no opportunity to understand much besides my own mundane reactions, and we do so much better when I can let those ground readings be pumped up and reinvented by other people's thoughts) – but given the direction things were going, I think it was necessary.

The first goal was to simply list the chain of events of the story: (1) man kills baby genie; genie threatens death; (2) man bargains with genie and, on his word, returns at the start of the next year; (3) man is approached by 3 passing sheikhs (gazelle, dogs, mule); (4) genie arrives and the first sheikh strikes a bargain; (5) first sheikh successfully tells story; (6) second sheikh successfully tells story; (7) third sheikh successfully tells story; (8) the merchant is set free. Again, we have a genie present in a story as, basically, the king: genies in these stories have emerged as powerful beings that yet can be made impotent at the drop of a hat.

Sally, Elizabeth, and Katie were then assigned to write narration bits for the sheikhs' tales (one each), while Annie, Liz, and Lisa spent some time playing around physically with the genie and the encounter therein. We played around a bit with adding narrations and interior stories, but came up with nothing much but a fun physicality for a genie.

This did, however, start to call out for a structure that inverts what I had previously somewhat thought: here, it would almost be okay to tell a story straight-forwardly and *then* back away from it in the form of commentary (here – a cat's cradle game, a Jacob's ladder, a dream catcher, weaving . . . lighting starts to be important . . .)

2/16/05 Wednesday (a.m.)

Rehearsal #16

As it is seeming (as we come to the end of the "creation" segment of the game) that what we need is access to more stories, that is the goal of today – to tackle a couple more tales to see what they do or don't bring. We started today (after a few quick visuals from Annie) with the Tale of Prince Behram and Princess Al-Datma. The initial reading and discussion was obvious – the tale has been described as an early *Taming of the Shrew* (about which everyone of course has preconceived notions and understandings).

Important points we liked: (1) the princess is revered for both her physical beauty *and* her intelligence; (2) the father's unwillingness to intervene in his daughter's decision; (3) the princess' demand that she must/will find her match by competing with suitors on an even ground ("no one but him who defeats her in the listed field"), as what she actually wants is an even competitor; (4) her beauty is simply her backup plan; (5) while the princess uses a low blow to

defeat the prince, she accepts the fact that he in return downed her with a trick: she respects the fact that she has been challenged and rivaled; (6) marriage is portrayed as a bit of a parlor game or entertainment, something that can be flirted with for the sake of fun (though in the end she is willing to go it for real when the price is right).

In another moment of the conversation, Annie started to riff a little bit about the idea of pulling a trick on the audience, like distracting them from an important part of a story by flashing them. And while it's a bit ridiculous . . . that is a bit amusing, isn't it? The idea of saying, oops, now you've gone and missed something big, because you chose instead to watch someone strip a bit. If there are 2 areas of the stage otherwise given equal focus and one has a naked body on it . . . what are you going to pay attention to?

The scene cobbled together was quite literally an American Gladiator-style duke-out with a series of suitors in which the princess figure won over the prince by flashing her breasts, then was taken down in the locker room when he reappeared in disguise hawking reality TV contracts. Overall over-the-top, but . . .

The exaggerated stage violence was not out of place. I started wondering . . . what happens if there is cheering . . . and the bell of a boxing match . . . and a narrator functions doubly as a referee-cum-ringleader, holding a dueling prince and princess apart by the foreheads. If everything was quite abstracted, perhaps with running in place or something . . . I dunno. It stuck in my brain as a thought.

We then struck up a bit of a conversation about the relationship between us and our audience when we are telling the story of the Arabian Nights: we as a company (and they as performing actors) are part of a larger narrative frame, Sherazade-ing to their content. I wonder what our set-up ought to be . . . and whether there is room for even a direct appeal to the audience. A strong frame-to-a-frame. Hmmmmmm

2/16/05 Wednesday (p.m.)

Rehearsal #17

This afternoon was again a bit scattered people-wise and turned out to be a bit abbreviated therein – but overall I think we did fine, for whatever that's worth. We spent time talking about/working on *The Tale of the Three Apples*. After reading through the tale together, one of the quandaries became about what could be new and different about this tale from other things we have covered. While I picked this story for its dead-on similarities to Sherazade's frame tale, it became clear(ish) while talking that most of the issues in the frame tale (at least that we've discovered thus far) have been touched upon with work done on another internal story. So part of the battle with "Three Apples" was/is/has been finding what makes it different and worth the time and energy.

One element we talked about was the slave figure – but he quickly became unimportant, as it seems that the "black slave" figure is simply used throughout the tales as the worst possible cuckolding device – and so he in this tale (despite the fact that he is one of the elements that drives the feeling of parallel-ness) is not as important as one might like or think. We then focused instead on two other elements: (1) the feelings of guilt and remorse felt by the young man when he discovers he has wrongly accused and killed his wife (his coming forward echoes the sense of high honor in keeping one's word that is present elsewhere in the stories), and (2)

the immense coincidence present in the story (one thing relates back to another which relates back to another – the feeling of chance, luck, and fortune is strong).

The group then took some time to work with the story – a sort of closed-room questioning session that latched onto the ideas of confession, coincidence (but a coincidence in which everybody played a role), and a police line-up. The most memorable aspect of the scene was the strong theatricality of it: characters were high-stakes caricatures but still managed to be adult, lights and sound were implemented in a mechanically visible way, the movement was quick and included people and furniture . . . and so on. Furthermore, the details were part of what made it work (as noted before in the Sinbad work): a funny visual of a woman's body parts piled on a table was clever beyond a doubt. In short, I didn't always even know quite what was going on – but I liked it anyway. I was genuinely captivated and joyful when watching it. It gives me a thought – this is the type of scenario where this mildly ridiculous scene could be presented first – and then an explanation given after.

We then took a bit of time at the end of the rehearsal to riff about our attraction to kiddishness and child-like impulses. The understanding therein seems split: everyone acknowledges that in one way diving towards juvenility is simply easy (especially in an otherwise frustrating situation) – yet also says lovingly that storytelling is simply something that is connected with childhood whether we like it or not (and we do like it). No matter what the morbidly adult overall theme is, there is (or has to be) a sense of wonder that accompanies the tales, pure and simple. And that is rooted in essentially childlike (hopefully not childish) things.

We also talked some about the setup of the space: I would really like to do it in a round formation – a four corners audience or some such thing. And we all know we need fabric (as we said – fabric has never particularly been mentioned, but all of us in our heads are assuming that fabric will logically be involved) – we started talking about this tent-like feel (I began to wonder if we could drop a tent from the ceiling in the center of the space – red – like crawling under a parachute – lit from within – like a hand shadow puppet theatre), couches, pillows – you name it. Perhaps it's all getting too complex?

Shadow screens for acting out stories . . . if the audience is in the round, how can that be constructed? Physical impossibility . . . ?

2/22/05 Tuesday

Rehearsal #18

Sherazade Frame Tale

Today marks the first day of staging that should be usable (“should” in the sense that if it is not truly functional, scheduling from here on out gets officially rough). All in all, an exciting thing: we moved fast and called things functional and kept running the best we could, which in the end is all you can ask. I think people are starting already to get excited; things today at least flowed into place pretty naturally, which is nice for a first day – a way to start.

Here is the gameplan recorded in typeface:

Three narrators (Rachel, KTG, Liz) sit in a circle, facing outwards towards audience. They are telling stories to the children surrounding them. Elizabeth is at center on block – she is Shahryar. In front of her are Lisa, Sally, and Annie, standing in a neutral line. The format for

the first section of the scene is narration, SLOW hand slap, Shahryar line, FAST hand slap, and stomp. The narrators pivot on the final beat of each hand slap (in before Shahryar speaks; out after). The three standing women circle the block at each segment. Shahryar performs a quarter turn at each stomp.

Shahryar has also been given a piece of fabric: he begins by tying on a fabric belt (treating it like a sword and scabbard), which he later transforms into a strip used to bind his breasts. In rehearsal, we played with this fairly early on in the scene; after thinking about it later, it may well be best to do it later. My thought was “After each brother had slept with the jinnee’s wife.”

The thoughts on the binding of the breasts: there is something about the emasculation of Shahryar that we really must see physically embodied. What does it actually mean to see a female actress portraying a male bind her breasts midway through a scene? Here, I think Elizabeth is demonstrating Shahryar’s descent into a male-only view of events: he is completely suppressing the female side of himself (assuming, of course, that every person is naturally a male-female duality.) He makes a conscious effort to turn himself into a solely male entity, despite the obvious manifestation of the fact that he is not quite all male. If this truly works, this would be a motif to repeat.

The next section of the scene is the woman in a box. During rehearsal, we did figure out how to build the box: Rachel, Lisa, LizO, and Elizabeth lay on their backs with their legs in the air; Jen will provide a fabric box (four walls and a lid) of a fabric that will show light from the inside. Katie is the woman in the box, and she speaks to the audience from inside. My original thought is that she blows bubbles; in a box and in obscured viewing, this seems less likely, but perhaps Annie and Sally will provide? Dunno. At least that’s easy enough to add.

As we did not create a transition during rehearsal: here is the transition I sketched out later. After the final line (“rationalization”), there is a hand slap in the fast rhythm, a stomp, a circle. The three narrators then pick up and repeat the line “Rage and grief are quite understandable and excusable” while moving slowly to standing and Sal, Annie, and Lisa continue to circle the block. The circlers come to a stop, while the chanting continues. Slow clap, slow clap, slow clap. On the final beat of the slow clap, the three narrators snap to the tightrope pose and Shahryar drops into a shoulder twist. This moment is held.

Sally, Lisa, and Annie drop to neutral and exit. We hear from offstage a game of SLIDE (Sal and Annie) while all others travel in neutral to box setup. Snapping on the light inside the box puts all else to an end. The box monologue is delivered.

The next section is of Sherazade: again, a section we blocked but did not transition into. Here is the outline for the phantom transition: we need a sound (thought what it might be I have no idea), and Katie pulls the box down from the center until it disappears. All move to book positions; this should perhaps be worked out with one or two people delivering the stack of books to the stage and distributing them via a rhythmic slapping and sliding.

Once in position (six women in circle, facing outward, reading, straight-backed with books to their noses; Sally on a block by a pole, reading comfortably), the scene is read as written. After Liz’s line (questions about things that don’t concern you), all lower their books on a slow 3-count (starting at the hairline, 1 = eyebrows, 2 = nose, and 3 = chin), turn on a 3-count, then snap back to the start. We finish with Sherazade’s line and then transition into the Merchant and the Jinnee.

One thing that seemed likely is that this segment will need some sort of underlayment: when we were first working out the beats, we used a constant snapping. This worked quite well

– and though by the end we were capable of doing the bit without the guidance, we missed it aurally. Something about that metronome (though the idea of using a metronome makes me worry about repeating oneself) worked – so we’ll need to figure out for sure what made that click (literally, perhaps).

The tone of the rehearsal was quite good – we were all positive about the way things went. We did also begin work on the Merchant and the Jinnee, but more on that later, as we finished it Wednesday.

2/23/05 Wednesday (a.m.)

Rehearsal #19

The Tale of the Merchant and the Jinnee

The name of the game during this rehearsal was to stage the story of the merchant and the jinnee. In truth, some of this was actually begun Tuesday afternoon and finished Wednesday afternoon – but for the purposes of simplicity, it will all be recorded here.

The milieu of this scene is to be the feeling of a circus: the idea is that telling a story to save one’s life has to be a major, high-stakes production. We likened it to the idea of “Spectacular Spectacular” or “Razzle Dazzle,” things that make storytelling a major hey-look-at-me-aren’t-I-awesome sort of endeavor. The goal is for the three sheikhs to approach storytelling in that way: that if it isn’t large and amazing and magnificent and impressive, it’s not worthwhile and it’s not effective.

At the start, Katie is in the center of the space as ringmaster-narrator, addressing the audience in a “ladies and gentlemen!” sort of feeling. Lisa and Liz are in front of the bench, formed into the sleeping jinnee. Here, we need to already be able to start adding sound effects: drumrolls, crowd roars, etc. As Katie speaks, the merchant (Sally) begins to circle the space. The Jinnee awakens as the relevant line is spoken – here, we still need to experiment with having one or both parts of the jinnee actually speaking. For today, we used 2: I think we need to choose certain lines to double and to leave single.

The merchant’s position needs to be by the pole; Sally can then be bound to the pole (ankles, arms, and gagged through the mouth) by the 3 sheikhs during the narration as the jinnee sleeps for the second time. The sheikhs then circle the space until their entrance.

The structure of the sheikhs’ stories is that each speaks his story while simultaneously acting it out with the assistance of the other 2 sheikhs and the narrator.

The first sheikh is Rachel. She begins by pulling a gazelle (Elizabeth in a one-legged gazelle pose) into the scene. (The feeling should be that this sheikh is desperately searching for an exciting and invigorating way to tell the story, something to speak about, and so grabs whatever is at hand and instantly creates a creature around which to center a tale. Use what is near to you and available.) As Rachel’s story progresses, here are the physical events which occur: Rachel twirls wife-Elizabeth and Eliz bows; Rachel then gives her a solid arm-twist in punishment for not bearing a son. Annie represents the concubine and twirls into the scene, wrapping her leg around Annie. KTG is the son and is born from between Annie’s legs. Rachel bumps Annie out of the way and lifts Katie to her feet (at “grew into a beautiful strong man”). Rachel and Katie pose in a circus strong-man tableau. Elizabeth’s witchcraft is represented by

scarf juggling, and a dramatic sweep of the arms is the spell that turns Annie and Katie into cows (posture change). Katie and Annie somersault off (in general, action should be on a diagonal; marked by a strip of mat/carpets that allow for floor rolls without bruising). Annie reenters with a back somersault, then cow-spins and embraces Rachel. Rachel tries to choke Annie, but instead drops the concubine-cow. Elizabeth (wife) kills the cow by raising her arms and legs straight up from the ground, then forcibly dropping them to spread-eagle. Elizabeth and Rachel carry Annie offstage by her arms and legs. KTG somersaults back on and cow-loves Rachel; Rachel lifts her to her feet as before and takes her around the middle to kill her, but again cannot. Annie appears as the magical daughter, juggling scarves, and turns Elizabeth into a gazelle, who hops along on one foot, led by Rachel.

At the end of the story, all are exhausted by the effort and collapse/present in front of the jinnee, begging favor. The jinnee has all along been watching with the head-on-hands pose. When favor has been granted, Rachel unties Sally's feet from the pole.

The second sheikh is Annie. The format is the same; here are the relevant actions: Rachel and Elizabeth are her dogs, grasped by their ears on either side of her. The three brothers huddle together face-to-face to count their money; once they have divided it, they turn outward and scuttle in an awkward, tight circle. Katie, a trader, enters juggling scarves moving outside the circle in the opposite direction, but only Annie is able to catch the scarves (a symbol of her success and wealth). When the brothers leave the city, they form a left-hand star (yes, as in square dancing), and Katie slinks in as the beautiful young woman, joining the circle. As she grows in favor with the sheikh, Katie is chair-lifted by Elizabeth and Rachel, then set down as Annie is pulled into a back walkover against their arms into the sea. Katie then goes overboard in the same walkover fashion. She spins Annie by the arm and lifts her to safety. Katie then is seen juggling scarves (magic) as the two dogs (Elizabeth and Rachel) cling near the pole, framing Sally.

At the end of the story, we finish as before, and Annie is able to untie Sally's hands from the pole.

The third sheikh is Elizabeth. (As a reminder . . . we blocked this on Wednesday afternoon with the wrong people, and it must be taught to the right people. Word.) Rachel is her mule/wife, and she sleeps with Katie against the pole. When discovered, Rachel does magic with scarves (of course), and Elizabeth drops to a dog. She goes directly to Annie, the butcher's daughter standing on a block off to the side. Annie juggles scarves, dropping them one by one into the waiting hands of Elizabeth, who then does the magic gesture to turn Rachel into a mule.

Again, the story finishes as before. Elizabeth unties the final gag, and the sheikhs and merchant circle the space during the ending narration, dropping off one by one into their audience spots. As the jinnee disassembles and disappears, someone (who?) moves to the center of the space, as Sherazade, with a book. The two lines come from the cast members in the audience before she speaks.

Again a good solid rehearsal, though it is clear that this tale will require a good amount of work before it runs smoothly. The best moments are the ones when there is very nearly too much movement for the given dialogue; it must flow smoothly from one to the other and very nearly have a frantic pace.

2/23/05 Wednesday (p.m.)

Rehearsal #20

Sinbad the Seaman

This rehearsal, though again great fun, was conducted in true Wednesday-afternoon style, which means that we only had a few people (Lisa, Elizabeth, and Annie, as well as Rachel for half the time). So while things went quite well – this story needs to almost completely be taught to everyone else (as it soon surfaced that we needed more people than we had for what we wanted to do). The goal here is an amusing physical telling of the story (verging perhaps on cute) – using as much of the space as possible and using the human body in unexpected ways. This will be interspersed with literally stopping the action dead and walking offstage and out of the room. Here is the thought: I am tempted to put this story later in the sequence so as to spread it away from the blatant and sizable physicality of the Merchant tale, but also feel that it might well need to go earlier as it so straightforwardly depicts a storytelling method: a means to survival through cliffhangers. I don't know. It's currently placed fairly late (number seven), but I think it might need to be moved earlier (perhaps number five, after the fisherman and the jinnee). Hmmmmmmmm

At the start, as a narrator tells us what is happening, Elizabeth as Sinbad takes her place in a chair, which is her house (built by two people forming a roof over her head). Here, she squanders her money by flicking coins away into the wind. The sailing ship consists of two people belly-down on the floor, linked together hand-to-hand with fabric. One is a masthead. Their feet touch beneath a chair, on which Sinbad stands. When Sinbad exits the ship to barter, Elizabeth steps down and visits the three other actresses, who are spread in different corners of the space. Bartering consists of a set of hand-slaps with these people from foreign lands. Here is a place where we need some happy-dippy sailor nautical music – part of the current to-do list. The whale island is built of a line of 4 women on the ground, knees tucked with heads over top. Sinbad stretches out on top of them, enjoying the island. The other sailor (Lisa) reclines at the side of the island and jumps up to deliver her monologue.

After Lisa's "hey it's a whale" speech (during which there is some sort of semi-hard freeze to halt the action in its tracks), all drop to neutral and exit out both doors (after Elizabeth delivers the line, "stopped telling her story"). After an expanse of onstage silence and emptiness, the original narrator slips back in for "in the morning," paving the way for a general re-entry.

Everyone takes up the exact poses in which they left off; we might even pick up the music as well at the cut point. As we continue with narration (switch to a different narrator), the whale island slides to the floor on their stomachs and Sinbad escapes by rolling off the back (their feet). For "grab hold of a washtub," Sinbad grasps the pole with two hands and is lifted by the others to a horizontal "float" on the water. Meanwhile, a block is placed beneath him by the pole, so that Elizabeth can be set down on it: Sinbad's new island. He is fanned with fabric and fed grapes by the local kings. We then repeat the sailing vessel until Sinbad arrives at his new locale. Sinbad then checks out the island, joining the rest of the cast in an audience corner to relax and eat grapes. Sinbad falls asleep and the others leave – meaning that he wakes up and has been left alone. Elizabeth then climbs the pole (tree-monkey style) and a great bird (one person sitting on the shoulders of two, manipulating fabric wings attached to her back) appears.

At this point, we repeat the process of freezing, exiting, and re-entering as before.

When we return, we begin again at the pose we left off at (the arrival of the giant bird). The bird then swoops in and, when it reaches Sinbad, turns around. The top person grabs the monkey bars and swings across, while the other two bird-members manipulate the wings. Sinbad follows on the monkey bars and finishes by alighting on the bench by the wall. At this point, we reach our final freeze and exit before the final re-entry to tie up the tale.

2/28/05 Monday

Rehearsal #21

The Fisherman and the Jinnee AND The Wily Dalilah

Today's first project was the Tale of the Fisherman and the Jinnee – one we had worked with in several different incarnations in the past. The main goal with this tale is to get the natural progression: to us, the jinnee figure is very clearly Shahryar. So thus for our purposes, it is very important that the jinnee figure be somehow connected with the frame tale: hopefully, running from the frame tale through a jinnee story to an explanation of “where the jinnee came from and how he got so pissed” will construct some sort of through-line therein. Hopefully. A natural progression built off Shahryar and the Merchant. Also, for what it's worth, this is turning out to be our first abstracted interior tale (I knew they were coming . . .): everything we've staged so far has been very narration-driven. Hopefully this will be a good move.

We start with a bare stage, then the narrator (Elizabeth) enters and takes the space. Lisa (the fisherman) enters as she is introduced and stands on a block placed at center. Beginning on “This is also the story,” four other women enter (Rachel, Liz, Annie, Katie – in that order) and form a tight inward-facing circle around the block. When all are there, they together raise their arms to link together at the shoulder to move a bit closer. Elizabeth then relaxes back into the audience at “Part one of the story.”

Katie is the he-jinnee; she is released from the circle around Lisa at “a genie will come out.” She crosses her arms and does a pelvis thrust . . . all in all there is some blank space here and the challenge will be to fill it. Annie is the she-jinnee and is released into an I Dream of Jeannie pose and hair flick. Again, here are moments that can be filled somehow with other things (what exactly to do with Rachel and Liz, for example?), but what they are I don't necessarily know right now.

After the line “all from that little brass lamp,” there is a general slow slap, then we lead into a circle from Sally (who steps in from her audience position). All walk in a circle until arrival at the next spot (which may be on- or off-stage). Sally becomes the jinnee and climbs the block, while Rachel, Liz, and Annie surround her in the manner of before. At the correct cue, the bottles break out into an open circle and assume their three poses. After the line “and you wait . . .” there is a slap performed by those offstage, and Sally and Liz intertwine as needed. They move through three poses/stages set off by rounds of “and a hundred years pass” until Sally is completely trapped and smothered. In the end, Sally the Jinnee is left alone standing on the block, binding her breasts (an echo of the frame tale). We then hear/see the hand slap and foot stomp near the end of the scene.

Overall, this tale works alright but contains a good amount of dead space that will likely need to be filled – so that will be the most immediate challenge.

The other thing I noticed today that is not so directly scene-related is that the “will the audience get this?” moments are starting to pop out from people. On one hand, I’m glad that they are concerned: that everyone is thinking about the big picture. On the other hand, I need to be sure that everyone is clear and comfortable with the fact that I will try not to let anything happen that is terrible. Try. Hopefully. So it’s the moment of trust – that moment of decision where the actors sort of decide if they’re going to stay with me or fight me all the way. Hopefully they can be convinced to trust me . . .

* * *

The next project of the day was to begin work on the Wily Dalilah.

We begin with Dalilah (Liz) seated at center on a block. She is wearing a long muslin skirt, which she tears into strips, making it shorter and shorter, for the purpose of constructing a rope ladder (Jen’s idea). She works industriously as she speaks. The others sit in a circle (facing inward) around her; the order of lines is Rachel, Elizabeth, Sally, Katie, Lisa, Annie, Elizabeth, Rachel. Between each line at the start, there is a communal hand slap on the floor (one beat). After “If you tell me what I want to hear, I’ll love you forever,” all start slapping together rhythmically, gradually increasing in tempo (Sally is the leader). After the line “I’m not apologizing to you,” all bring it together for a strong two-hand clap. From here we can move into the rest of the scene.

The outer circle then stands together (rhythmically, dance-team style: Rachel leads) and moves to places for the next section. Rachel moves to stand against the back wall, clicker in hand, and becomes the instructor for this segment. A possibility is to have the reel-to-reel projector going for the sound effect. Annie, Elizabeth, and Katie are at the opposite wall: they are to form the tableaux. They go as follows (in vaguely descriptive terms): (1) three thinking/plotting/scheming gestures – chin, hands, fingers; (2) ducks in a row on a string; (3) stealing from pockets – Katie in the middle, hands in two pockets, with Lisa bending down to tie a shoe and Elizabeth reaching for or waving to something; (4) Katie puts the money in her boobs and runs; (5) the capture of Dalilah; (6) Dalilah changes places with her captor – pull through the legs and push to switch; (7) Dalilah is back to stealing again; (8) all the pursuers are distraught; (9) all the pursuers get a nice “ding”-lightbulb; and (10) a handshake, over which Elizabeth presides.

After the ducks section, Dalilah delivers her line and then moves to the bench to watch the ensuing action. All again circle as needed to move to their new places. Lisa begins on the block (she is the woman). Sally stands behind her (the child) and Katie (the man) behind Sally – they look like they are standing in line for something. Elizabeth and Rachel stand off to the sides as bodyguards or bailiffs. As Lisa finishes speaking, Elizabeth and Rachel enter to stand close at the sides of the block. As soon as she finishes her last line, Lisa raises her arms above her head, then slumps limply over the joined shoulders in a sort of forward double-fireman carry. They carry her offstage, then return to their positions. This is repeated for Sally and Katie.

With all three thus removed, Annie rises and moves to the center to speak the narrator’s lines. Dalilah enters again to the center of the space and speaks from there before finishing the scene and exiting to the far side. Elizabeth and Rachel trail after her as if they were her own protective bodyguard puppydogs.

3/1/05 Tuesday

Rehearsal #22

The Prince Behram and Princess Al-Datma

This scene is quite straightforwardly centered around the idea of a boxing match: on the to-do list are sound effects such as a bell and a cheering crowd.

We start with the princess (Lisa) at center, showing her strength and posing for the audience. After the line “marriage is just a game,” Elizabeth enters as the first suitor/contender: she takes two swings (Lisa ducks), then is taken down by an eye poke. After “breaking them,” Rachel makes the second suitor entrance. Lisa flip-rolls her (another reason for our diagonal line of mats. Also on the to-do list). After “betrayed by them,” Katie enters. Lisa stops her with a hand on her head; Katie swings wildly and ineffectively. Lisa pushes her backwards to upright, then flicks her in the face. Katie runs away. After “the simpler the union,” Liz enters and is spun on her way (this one got a bit confused by the end . . . it could be something entirely different by now).

The narrator (Sally) then speaks from the wall bench: sort of narrator-a-la-referee. Lisa remains in the center of the space and mugs. (This is another of those empty spaces . . . this may need to be filled with more little fights. I suppose we’ll see as we go.) After “I will marry you,” Elizabeth enters again; this time she gets kicked in the crotch. As the narrator speaks, Liz enters from a corner and cuts in with the king’s lines (as king) “I have no power over her.” After “I will marry you,” we get our last suitor entrance: Rachel enters and is too terrified by Lisa’s pre-punch wind-up to take it and runs away whining.

The next event is the arrival of Prince Behram. During the narration, Annie (the prince) enters down the hallway doing cartwheels. The outline of the fight (perhaps) is one punch from Lisa that Annie blocks. One eye poke that Annie blocks. One punch from Lisa that Annie dodges by doing a back walk-over. The two then circle one another as the narration comes to a close. After the narrator’s line “take drastic action,” all others run wildly around the space yelling “Boobies!”

This might well be ridiculous – perhaps bordering on foolish. But I did want to know what would happen if we just sort of did the same thing to the audience that the princess does to the prince – a ridiculous little jig-of-a-distraction. So it might flop miserably – but for the moment it is making everyone really, really happy.

When the boobies section is over, Lisa is revealed to be fireman-carrying Annie. She holds this pose until after “it’s in the rules.” She then puts Annie down. There is a triple-slap from offstage and the princess and her posse move into a huddle. Prince Behram wraps a turban around his head and picks up his moneybags, then approaches the group. A game of Red Rover ensues, beginning with Annie using the pole as a partner. Each girl is summarily kissed, given riches, and set free. Last to go (though she pushes one other girl aside) is the princess: but instead of being kissed she is hoisted to Annie’s shoulder. As soon as Annie sets her down, however, Lisa hoists her right back up and walks offstage.

Thus the end of the scene. Break and move into the next.

The other partial activity of the day was to begin teaching “Sinbad” to those who missed to original go at it – we got through the first section in the few minutes that we had.

3/2/05 Wednesday

Rehearsal #23

The Ebony Horse and The Tale of the Three Apples

Today was marked by the loss of many folk to SETC's – we worked this morning with Liz, Elizabeth, Katie, and Rachel to stage what hopefully are the last two of the internal tales.

We started with the Ebony Horse. First off, this was one I was terribly terribly worried about: we had worked with the tale very little in rehearsal, only really touching on it and chatting about it some. I definitely considered not even trying to use it – but it just kept calling out to be used at least somewhat. So I went back to our original workday on the tale, when we got stuck on the idea of a game of telephone. The script we used today took forever to pound out and went through probably a dozen incarnations that never even got printed. That's what a pain it was. Luckily, the reaction from the actors was good: they really liked the way the script sat and found reasons to make sense of a Jack-and-the-Beanstalk choice. So there.

The set-up and staging of this scene is quite simple: there is a diagonal line of people set up across the space, with Rachel ("first") at one end and Katie ("last") at the other. Everyone else stands or sits between, alternating facings and poses. The format/rhythm of the thing is this: Rachel says a line to the audience, and it is then passed down the line via exaggerated, stylized "whispering" gestures/poses while she speaks. (This takes five "clicks," for what it's worth.) When it reaches Katie, she states her lines confidently to the audience. This continues unhindered through "And that is the story of Jack and the Beanstalk," at which point everyone turns to look at her. Rachel whispers for the whisper-line to return, and the message is sent again in a much more deliberate fashion. At "Hansel and Gretel," Rachel and Katie are handed a tin-can telephone, into which they shout-speak the "Ebony" and "Cinderella" sequence.

At this point, all but Katie exit. She is left onstage to speak her final lines alone. Eventually she too exits, and the stage is left blank for a moment.

Liz enters (in the script, "Another") and climbs the monkey bars. She hangs upside-down from her knees. We hear the slap from offstage, and Liz delivers her lines (with slaps in between).

This scene still needs to be taught to all the others – fortunately the staging is simple and should not take long.

* * * * *

We also today marked out (and will need to teach to the others – but again it is fairly simple) The Tale of the Three Apples (which has, I suppose, become the tale of the single apple somewhere along the way. Oh, well . . .).

The bulk of the beginning lines are to be spoken from the story circle format, though these do yet need to be assigned (it seemed senseless to assign them with half the force missing). At "One day, the king's vizier," one actress steps into the space as a central narrator; this happens again with a second actress when the vizier is introduced. S/he circulates around the audience to accuse and ask what is going on. The man (Liz) then enters and stands on a box at center. When the wife speaks, she is placed, kneeling, hands together, in front of Liz to plead to her. Two others, who have placed her in this position, stand to the side as jailers. When the

slave is introduced, he appears opposite the wife, restrained with two arms held back. The child appears then to the side, again posed by two bailiffs-of-a-sort into a twisted pose of hands-wringing. Throughout, each grouping appears from the relevant side (share bodies as needed) and moves always gently from position to position. After the line “righteously kill me,” Liz steps down and kneels, with her head on the box. All the others deliver their final lines from their places in the audience.

Again, this scene is quite simple. The nice thing is that as soon as we read through it, the tone of the rehearsal changed. Everything got quiet and everyone got serious. I hope I’m not falling into some sort of trap – big boisterous laughy stuff that suddenly and unpreparedly ends glumly. But I think the moment can indeed be right: as long as the movement is always towards this sort of enlightenment through captivation. The king relaxes into this revelation rather than stumbling on it. As we discussed in rehearsal, the feeling is that the king doesn’t necessarily even know what hit him. Doesn’t necessarily even know why his mind is changed. He can’t necessarily pinpoint the moments at which things clicked or the specific ways in which methods affected his understanding. The king just sort of slides into this new understanding, as is.

Also up for discussion is the choice of a final story. The story that is last in the Burton is unexciting and every pick-and-choose adaptation seems to pick a different story to end on. The Sallis book mentions a final tale called “The Two Kings and the Viziers Daughters” – which doesn’t quite seem to pop up in any such straightforward form. Borges in *Labyrinths* (and this may or may not be simply invented – hard to say, though highly likely invented) writes, “I remembered too that night which is at the middle of the Thousand and One Nights, when Scheherazade (through a magical oversight of the copyist) begins to relate word for word the story of the Thousand and One Nights, establishing the risk of coming once again to the night when she must repeat it, and thus on to infinity,” (25) which is perhaps something else entirely. So what I decided is that I get to choose whatever I gosh darn please to be the last tale in the set. Everyone else seems to have already done so.

3/7/05 Monday, 9-11 p.m.

Rehearsal #24

We walked into this rehearsal after a loooooong day of Plasticene – and I think that the overwhelming feeling was that we were all obscenely glad to be back in a group that worked well together and listened and responded when people talked. It’s true: collaboration works a thousand times better when you like and respect and understand all the people you are working with (ahhhhhhhhhhhh . . . breath of fresh air). We had all been worried that the rehearsal would be worthless because of the general level of exhaustion, but it actually turned out to be relaxing – a nice surprise and one that I hope says something about the mood and vibe of the project in general.

At the start of rehearsal, we talked about our general vision/direction for the opening moments. The framework is a building of the tent, starting with simple swaths of fabric. This is actually drawn from some of the things that happened at Plasticene: in watching some of the actors’ object work, I became quite entranced with the things happening to and with a curtain panel. One strong image was simply that of a woman spreading the fabric on the ground, taking exquisite pains to lay it out just so. Kneeling on top of it. Taking care of each corner. Another

image that worked quite nicely was that of a woman with a swath of fabric draped over her body, head-to-toe – sort of ghostly and interesting, but also wonderfully reminiscent of a burqua without actually being one. So the goal for the start of the show would be to bring in these pieces of fabric and to introduce them to the audience (as the actors introduce them to themselves). We would end with a ritualized laying out of the fabric in relation to a central ring, to which it could be attached. The entire contraption could then be raised to the ceiling at the edges by pulling some rigged strings; the center proper would then be raised to the ceiling and affixed. The goal would be to visually build the performance space in front of the audience – to put up our storytelling tent. Enclose people. The final button on the segment could be placing a final lamp in the center of the ring – a lamp-lighting ceremony to put everything in motion.

This action would have to be accompanied by music – so the big question is of course what music. I'm still attracted to the Rimsky-Korsakov for a lot of reasons, but also know that it's sort of wrong for probably just as many reasons. So there's a question to ponder and play with.

We spent the remainder of the evening working out the opening text of the show, just going through it over and over, trying to find hit points and ideas that worked and were worth keeping. The format was to simply run with a popcorn reading and to let it evolve. We started by just walking the space and speaking the lines, then began to layer on rules for each consecutive walk-through. A list of things that seemed to be functional: a single person standing still while everyone else is moving (especially if that still person is leaning against the pole); someone watching other people talk; sliding down the pole (especially if there's someone on either side of the pole); back-to-back intertwining arms; a fast break; sitting in a line; echoing the three gestures; mirroring, especially when back-to-back; pulling up someone else's arm; physical relationships between no more than two people at any one moment. We were able to settle on two definite hit spots: a seated back-to-back circle followed by a face-wash at "elusive" and a standing back-to-back circle followed by a unison tightrope at "I am Sherazade." Though we're lacking much more structure than that, it is clear that seeing those unison hits after a bunch of chaos is nice.

All in all a nice rehearsal – though we didn't set much of anything in stone, we all felt good about being there (which is, I think, something worthwhile in and of itself).

3/8/05 Tuesday, 9:30-11:30 p.m.

Rehearsal #25

This rehearsal wound up only lasting about an hour out of pure necessity: the energy level after the completion of *Plasticene* was not exactly the highest it's ever been. Still, we did meet and accomplish at least a little, which is at times I feel all we can ask of ourselves.

Mainly, we spent some time discussing the ending of the show: what it might entail, what it might echo back to, what it might be visually, what it might be textually, etc. We went back over the final (?) scene of the *Tale of the Apples* to try to figure where it might be leading to, and talked about the ambiguity of the current final lines. We really came to no conclusions – I feel that coming to any sort of concrete sense of the ending might take us a good long while.

3/9/05 Wednesday, 11 a.m.- 1 p.m.

Rehearsal #26

This morning's rehearsal was mainly a nuts-and-bolts affair: most pieces of the show have been created, but we spent this morning bringing everyone up to speed on moments they missed in preparation for trying to do a hobble-through with depleted forces this afternoon. This consisted mainly of noting bits of scenes we'd worked on Wednesday afternoons and teaching things to the MIA people. We also spent a decent deal of time reviewing and re-working Sinbad and the Merchant and the Jinnee, as those are the two pieces of the show that require the most coordination in terms of people moving here and there.

3/9/05 Wednesday, 2-4 p.m.

Rehearsal #27

This afternoon marked our first stumble-through of sorts. We marched our way through the script-as-it exists (that was another big landmark of the day: I handed out our first "full" script in whatever version it currently exists in – it's definitely not perfect, but we now all have a nice, thick packet, which is satisfying in and of itself).

All in all, it seems that most of the large pieces are there (which is good, because if they weren't, we would be in terrible shape . . .), but all the connecting bits are completely MIA. Also, another major discovery of the afternoon was that a number of things definitely felt starkly different in new light and in new surroundings. There were things we had created and dealt with in that sort of mid-working-haze (like the opening segment) that didn't feel right at all this afternoon. Still, though, I'm thinking we need to stick with what we've got right now, as we can't very well chuck it ALL at this point. I'm beginning to realize that this will not be the most polished, neatly written thing. In a show that someone else has written, I'm only grappling with the performance of what exists . . . in a show that we're sort of cobbling together, it's highly likely that there will be structural problems I don't understand (or perhaps do understand but don't have time to fix) that get in the way of the final performance – completely apart from any staging or performance issues. Anyway, so I'm starting to realize that and accept that as part of the way this project has rolled out: there is a definite reason that devised shows often are created over the course of a year – not 3 months.

The big next project is to write and deal with all the transitions – while a few are written in right now, the majority need to be created, and the whole thing needs to be strung together like beads on a string (rather than beads tossed around haphazardly). The other big project is shopping – Jen and I are headed out tonight for fabric, though other things (monkey bars, lights . . .) will sadly have to wait until after break.

Overall, I'm feeling good about the project and timing things out – it will just be a question of actually doing it after break.

3/21/05 Monday, 10:30 p.m. - midnight

Rehearsal #28

In a way, tonight we got nothing done. In another way, I suppose we got everything done. With Elizabeth stuck in Washington, Rachel MIA (turns out she was obviously sleeping), and Sally working late, we were a bit crippled for numbers. Pretty much to the point of dysfunctionality. What we did instead, then, was nuts and bolts. We fit costume pieces, talked schedule, learned how to play Cat's Cradle and Jacob's Ladder, talked about getting a board operator (which we have since succeeded in doing), and played with the fabric box Jen made for us. That was it (an hour and a half worth of organization). I'm hoping it doesn't put us too much behind this week . . .

3/22/05 Tuesday, 4-6 p.m.

Rehearsal #29

A bit chunk of today's rehearsal became monkey bar playtime (which is good, as everyone needs to get comfortable on them). In general, slippage is a problem (we will try a combination of gloves and tape to make it easier), as is hand fatigue (nothing with monkey bars can be rehearsed much on any given day, as they are quite painful). Still, though, everyone is quite excited about them, which is nice. Hopefully the audience will be equally as amused.

After spending some time on the monkey bars, we worked through the beginning section of the show, from the transition out of the opening (which we skipped in and of itself because we were still missing Elizabeth, and figuring out that segment is nearly impossible without everyone, I think) through the transition out of the Fisherman and the Jinnee (into Sinbad).

The goal of the first transition is to define the outside circle of the space (which we then use so much thereafter) and to demonstrate the extent to which we are using a semi-unison rhythmic motion. So we included a final beat on the transition that snaps everyone into the "go" position at the same moment – which is I think good. The start of the frame tale moves along pretty well – though we didn't have Elizabeth, so I may well be making that up. Figuring out the "dead woman hanging moment" and how we get into the box from there took some time – simply juggling people there and speaking of Elizabeth in the theoretical sense was not easy. Hopefully, when we have everyone together it will go more smoothly (right now it feels like we're artificially pasting together a long string of awkward moments, from the moment the "buzzer word" circles break down to the point where everyone has their books and is sitting calmly onstage). I am currently crossing my fingers and hoping it will magically become wonderful.

Tossing the books to Sally in the center is proving to be a nice transition out of the frame and into the tales proper – so that is good. That is a moment that went together more easily than I expected (we need more of those!). Within the scene of the Merchant and the Jinnee, the outline is solid: it's the nuts and bolts that I worry we're skipping over too much. First off, memorization in this section is a pain in the neck and fairly problematic. Merging that with the onstage actions (which would not really be classified as "smooth") may also be a problem. Additionally, we do not have the fabric to tie Sally to the pole or the scarves to juggle with, and

so we are just deciding in our heads that all is fine in that world (which might, of course, be wrong). And we're missing a theoretical sound cue that I just keep announcing exists.

We built the next transition around Cat's Cradle, which I think will work nicely (though as Annie pointed out – miming the game also looks really cool. I don't think, however, we should mime it until we've at least done it once – and so perhaps we need to be thinking about adding in a game of mimed Cat's Cradle later on?).

The body of the Fisherman and the Jinnee moves very smoothly – the one thing I worry is that it might be too simplistic and therefore boring. So there's an unknown – though I don't think I really have a solution if it just turns out to be terrible.

The final thing we did was transition out of Fisherman and into the start of Sinbad – again quite simple. Hoping that the string-weaving motif will feel alright in truth. Otherwise we're a bit up a creek without any time left, I suppose.

3/23/05 Wednesday, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Rehearsal #30

We again spent a large amount of time today playing on the monkey bars, getting a sense of them and how they work for us (everyone still loves them dearly). The game of the day today was hanging upside-down, which proved to actually be easier and perhaps safer than we had at first perhaps thought. I can't help but worry about safety (one of those million things I'd much rather someone else be in charge of), but everything seems to be okay. We just need to make it a group priority to keep abreast of those things all the time.

We then spent the rest of the rehearsal working through the show from Sinbad through the start of Prince Behram. Sinbad, though great fun, is certainly one of the most cumbersome moments we've got going right now. We spent a lot of time working with Jen's big piece of fabric (as a boat, as the whale, as the bird), marking through things first and then trying to integrate it into the scene. Overall, the scene is fine: the challenges are wrangling that fabric (getting it in the right place at the right time), getting people moving at the right moments and trying to keep it vaguely smooth, and timing the pauses to a comfortable, functional place. Also, I really really really need to get out and get us some music so that we know what's going on in that realm more concretely than announcing, "music music music," which is less than entirely effective.

We then transition into Dalilah. Elizabeth breaks everyone out of the final freeze by slapping her hands, and all then circle to their new positions. Again, the framework of this scene is all fine and dandy. The biggest foreseeable problem is that we don't yet have a skirt to work with – and I don't know when it will be that we have one (no sooner than Tuesday, I am sure – and that would still be a pretty darn quick turnaround). So that's one logistical concern (especially as I know that Liz in particular really likes to be familiar and comfortable with her props and costume pieces). The other concern is just transitioning smoothly from one segment to the next, as this scene is sort of piece-mealy. Right now, it feels quite choppy. I'm hoping, however, that once I stop talking and let everyone pace it out for themselves as we move through it in real time (rather than me dictating), it will flow together at least somewhat smoothly.

The transition into Prince Behram consists of new material and should be alright – it's entirely simple. And the start of Behram moves quickly enough that everything should be

smooth (again, though – finding the right sound cue ought to be happening sooner rather than later. I wish there were ten of me).

All in all, the morning's rehearsal was good – some of the things we were dealing with (Sinbad in general . . . internal transitions in Dalilah) are more time-consuming to rehearse than other bits of the show, but the general pace of rehearsal was good and we did get a good chunk done.

3/23/05 Wednesday, 2-4 p.m.

Rehearsal #31

We began this afternoon by working through transitions from Prince Behram through to the ending. Or at least that was the idea. We were able to work through the scene a bit (it pretty much runs itself, which is nice), but unfortunately my grand plan was foiled by the fact that I have not yet actually written the transition out of this scene and into the Ebony Horse. So we began, of course, by skipping a chunk – which is less than wonderful but could of course have been worse.

The Ebony Horse again pretty much runs itself (thankfully – I actually feel that the hard stuff is very heavily weighted towards the front of the show. Go figure), and Liz's transition works well. We've all now become used to the monkey bars – but I'm still hoping that they will be surprising enough to audiences to elicit a moment of disbelief (an unexpected visual, hopefully – though word gets around). Getting into and telling the Tale of the Three Apples is similarly simple (again, nicely so). I'm hoping that the move towards simplicity later in the show is not a sign of failed creativity and/or generalized boredom but rather some sort of dramatic arch. Hoping. Eek. It could of course just be awful.

We then spent some time with the ending, but I decided that I needed to re-write it before we decided anything for sure. We do know that we will leave Liz in the center as the Shahryar figure and that Sally will join her as the Sherazade figure. Sally will then unbind Liz's breasts (though this can't be done in the Shakespeare-in-Love-spinning way, as that would be horrid. It needs to be simple). Another definite is that there must be a movement from facing away from one another into facing towards one another – that's for sure. Also for sure is that the five women on the outside of the circle will move to untie the tent apparatus, enclosing Liz and Sally inside. The question (or at least one of them) is whether Liz and Sally should speak or if the women on the outside of the circle should do the speaking a la narration for them.

With Rachel then departing to go to class, we were down enough people so as to be fairly crippled (we're definitely well beyond the point when missing one person is like losing a limb – we feel pretty well paralyzed). We took some time to walk through the start of the show and teach Elizabeth things she missed on Monday and Tuesday – then quit early. We are right on schedule, which makes me happy: I feel like we will complete the show and be ready for performance without that terrible last few days of idiotic scramble. It's nice to feel like we have a finger on things and are in control of them.

3/24/05 Thursday, 10:30 p.m. – midnight

Rehearsal #32

We spent tonight (another shortish rehearsal – Security does indeed kick us out of the Carriage House sooner than we might otherwise like) working on the opening, trying to get things set and lines assigned. Working late again gave us the giggles – everything was just far too amusing – but the nice thing was that as giddy as we were, we were still quite productive and got a good amount done. My sense was that we were moving slowly – but that we would be moving slowly whether we were stone faced or not. So at least we were amusing to ourselves. (Again, I do just sort of feel that we’ve managed to find as a group a pretty relaxed but functional rehearsal style – something we’ve fallen into. This is nice – while this project is not as long-term as many things [three months is I’m sure not the same as a year or two], getting beyond a five-week rehearsal process was a big change. Part of me feels like we really did hit a mental stopping point at five weeks in – a spot where we all just sort of were no longer interested and irritated one another – perhaps because we’re all mindlessly acclimated to a certain pace of working. But once we got beyond that point everything felt better: like a runner pushing past that point of no return – after you get beyond the fatigue, it all gets much easier and even perhaps feels natural. It’s sort of nice – I approve of it greatly.)

We start with the women spread around the space, at rest. Katie speaks the first line, and then everyone snaps into action in their own private worlds. Elizabeth joins Liz center stage, and they sit back-to-back doing the face-washing motion, then turn to face one another and play a game of slide. Meanwhile, the general movement of the other women is to vertical (of a sort, anyway), and at Katie’s line “fine,” all move through the space quickly. Sally’s line “Sherazade always disconcerted them” stops all motion, including the hand game. Everyone then walks heads-down to their circle-tightrope positions. Lisa sets the circle free by circling at “breathing, bleeding, eating,” and Annie and Sally take over playing slide. We then created quite a physical break-down (lots of people running into one another) trying to spiral Lisa and Katie in towards the center and Liz and Rachel away from it (with Sally and Annie inside it) – a problem which of course caused a fit of giggles but then left us without enough time to really fix it.

This beginning is the hardest – the most slow-moving bit we’ve encountered yet. The irony is that we always enjoy working on it – but we go so darn slow. Bah. I had hoped to finish this tonight, as well as add in the remaining transition and block/assign the ending, but we didn’t make it. It’s annoying to feel behind schedule, but I trust we will make it all come together sooner rather than later.

3/26/05 Saturday, 9-11 a.m.

Rehearsal #33

This ended up being a rehearsal that was abbreviated from the start: we killed a good but enjoyable bit of time first thing in the morning with birthday cake, putting everyone on a sort of alternating sugar-buzz-slash-upset-stomach throughout the rehearsal. Fun.

When we finally got going, we quickly staged the remaining missing transition (between seven and eight) – which was pretty simple. Everyone just moves through the space to their new

spots (Katie and Rachel pick up their blocks as they move). When everyone arrives, we start the scene as is. Lines are assigned (Liz, Rachel, Katie, Sally, Annie, Elizabeth, Lisa – in that order).

We then took a few minutes to block out the ending of the show. From the final sit-down and the end of the Tale of the Apple, Sally goes to the center, moves the block to the pole and out of the way, and stands with her back facing Liz (Liz gets up and turns her back when Sally takes the block). They speak the beginning lines of the ending, with both turning in at Sally's "and opposite him stood a woman named Sherazade." Sally then unbinds Liz's breasts as they continue speaking. The final lines of the ending are assigned as follows: Elizabeth, Annie, Katie, Lisa, Rachel, Elizabeth – and will be delivered as they move to the outside of the circle and release the tent.

With those things in place, we backed up to the beginning and worked on the opening section once more, cleaning it a bit. We're still sort of stuck on the spot where we ended Thursday – it doesn't work (too many colliding people, empty space, dead time, awkward motions – and all such wonderful things). We didn't, however, take the time to fix that or move on in the segment, as time was getting short and I wanted to start running/reviewing other sections of the show. We NEED to finish working out the beginning on Sunday night and deal a bit with the fabric. Stat.

We then jumped to the transition between one and two and tried to move forward as much as possible. Basically, we stop-and-start-ran through the start of the Fisherman and the Jinnee (number four), figuring out things that still needed to work out and trying to smooth them a bit. We spent a particularly long time working out the dead woman hanging moment (which is a pain because it can't be run over and over or at a decreased tempo, as people's hands die and they fall down. Which is frustrating. Also, things like climbing on monkey bars are particularly good for making us all collapse in giggles (which, of course, is enjoyable but time-consuming). Getting into the box was less of a trauma than I think we all expected, which was nice. The worry in the Merchant and the Jinnee is memorization (mainly of Rachel – she has a long stretch of narration that I don't think she knows any of yet – I think I spoiled people by reading for them: the text is entirely unfamiliar) and scarf-juggling: Jen brought in scarves that have far more weight to them than I had imagined they would – and they fall quickly. The idea was that the juggling would in truth involve no skill. That is not, sadly, the case.

All in all, we're a bit behind schedule – but not terribly. I had hoped to have run the whole show this morning, but we are about a rehearsal and a half behind that. Still, I don't think we're in a terrible place. I'm more worried about getting all the "stuff" done and getting people comfortable working with it.

3/27/05 Sunday, 10:30 p.m. – 12:30 a.m.

Rehearsal #34

We began rehearsal today with some more nuts and bolts: dealing with costume issues (silly WalMart running out of size small pants for us . . .) which took a bit of time.

We then ran/worked the show from "Fisherman" onwards through the end of the script. Overall, it still feels like all the pieces are most likely there – but that we're at a point where mental errors and general confusion do just sort of kill us in the water. It felt a lot like we simply weren't moving forward: like the dropped lines, disorientation (though I will admit that we

missed a crucial element that would have made things much simpler by not creating all our circles with everyone in the same relative positions. Having made that rule early on would have saved up mass confusion now – though I do feel that I like it better to have people in different spots . . .), and “what’s next” were slowly killing us. It gets very frustrating when I feel like everything needs to be said twice – like nothing can be remembered beyond the bounds of a single rehearsal.

A big part of this, I know, is the general mental state at late-night rehearsals. No matter how hard we try, everyone is somewhat fried to a crisp. Things that would be completely clear in daylight make no sense at all after midnight (again, one of the expected problems that stemmed one of the earliest set ideas from this project . . .) The other major thing, of course, is simply the pace and method at which we’ve been working: things have been fairly piecemeal and out of order (no one can remember what to do for the third circle because we don’t have it properly placed in our minds between the second and fourth circles).

Still, though, nothing feels disastrous (which is good – I don’t know what we’d do if it really felt disastrous). We still feel like we have a lot of work to do – but that success is really not that far away. An okay feeling, for the most part. Things are accessible. Though not easy.

3/28/05 Monday THROUGH 4/1/05 Friday

Rehearsals #35 – 42

Runs, Techs, and Dresses (the final push)

If there is one thing I did not manage to do effectively during the final week of work on the show, it was keep good rehearsal journals from one run to the next. I do, however, have a few notes about the progression which I will restate here – and a general sense that we went steadily uphill throughout the week. I don’t think we went a single rehearsal between Monday and Friday in which we did not add something new (and days when there were two rehearsals were particularly challenging: the turnaround between discovering we needed something and having to get it was absolutely terrifying at times. Often we technically had a rehearsal that ended at 6, then reconvened for another run at 10:30 – but I felt like I never left, as I either parked myself in front of a computer, in the music stacks, or in the Phoenix, taping things to the ceiling. This became a full-time job.

On Monday night, we worked with the red fabric for the first time and devised a method for carrying it on, unfurling it, and laying it on the floor. We worked with the pacing of the entries, ways to arrange it, methods for kneeling peacefully, and ways to rise together and to lift Annie to the ceiling to affix the lamp. We then tried underlaying music – beginning with the Rimsky-Korsakov. Not much to my surprise, it was horrid (though I’d felt the need to try it anyway). Which I suppose is a good thing: somewhere along the line, we became enfolded enough in the Tales that Western music became absurd. We outgrew it – outgrew the intensely programmatic nature of it. We then tried some music that Liz had brought in (Bulgarian, nonetheless, but, regardless of accuracy, it worked). I think we learned to achieve what we were going for: a sense of great anticipation, wonderment at what was going to happen. The feeling that something was *starting* was immense – I fell in love immediately. The question remained as to how we might connect this with the text of part one.

We then worked for a while on Part 1 (the opening) – and became terribly frustrated. As the only unstaged segment, this is what is eating at us most – and it is the hardest thing we've got going. In a way, it felt like a letdown after the beautiful start we had created – and we wound up arguing and wallowing in our communal frustration. Things to try include multiple games of slide (a general cacophony – perhaps leaving someone on the outside?), moving back into circles, and cutting lines (though I like them all and would prefer to avoid that if possible).

Tuesday afternoon we did our first run – which was incredibly satisfying. We ended with a bevy of notes and a to-do list a mile long, as well as some suggestions from Sara about missing moments, thoughts, or lines. All in all, the run felt way better than I had expected it to – though I worry that the show may just look trite and childish. Stupid. That is a terrible fear. The goal before the Tuesday night rehearsal is to write additional transition material and find more suitable music.

From here onwards, we moved into tech: we did another run Tuesday night with some additional material, then cued the show Wednesday morning (running through and rejecting whole stacks of CD's before finding what we wanted). Wednesday night was a first tech and a first chance to play with the rigging of the tent fabrics; Thursday afternoon and night were for more full runs, adding things each time: a new prop, a new music cue, a new set of lines. By the time we hit our final rehearsal Friday night, we felt solid – that we'd achieved a performable rhythm and were ready to have an audience.

Throughout the week we remained calm: we never hit that terribly stressful omigod-this-is-never-going-to-happen point (though my having the flu for three days slowed at least me down quite a bit). As Elizabeth noted, in a way we never had to worry: we all knew and felt that the show had come from us, from a very natural and intimate place – and so could not then be far off. The show was there for us to take – we just had to find it.

Final Response Paper

I'd like to start off by saying that I was (and am) extremely pleased with the outcome of this project. While the process was never easy, neither did it ever manage to be tortuous – and the response I got (and I believe many of the actresses got) after the performances was tremendous to a point that surpassed what we had considered to be rational expectations. The adjectives I most often heard applied were “delightful,” “creative,” and “thought-provoking” – bits of information that I think demonstrate that we did in fact succeed in reaching many of the goals we had set for ourselves. Of course not everything was perfect (how can it possibly be?) – but I would like to make it extremely clear from the start that I am exceedingly proud of and happy with the performance we created, the process we used to get there, and the response we received.

Process

The process on this show lasted about three months, not including the time spent researching and reading during the fall semester. The first six weeks (during January and February) were devoted to what might honestly be called playing around – simply discussing and becoming comfortable with the material and associated ideas. I counted on this time to generate the bulk of newly created material that we would need.

During this period, we had three rehearsals a week, for a total of six hours per week all told. Two of the hours were on Tuesdays; four were on Wednesdays (two in the morning and two in the afternoon). The main reason for this odd rehearsal schedule was to try to achieve

what has, over the years, become a bit of an obsession for me to puzzle out: I wanted desperately to find a way to work on a Phoenix show and be able to access the parts of peoples' brains that are still usable before 11 p.m. (at some point last year, I decided that the late-night-fourth-rehearsal-of-the-day format was often hurting us, not helping us). And so scheduling was our first and constant battle – we were able to almost completely avoid late-night rehearsals until the week before the show. In many ways, this worked quite well. Having regularly scheduled daytime rehearsals was great – though it turns out that the 4:00-on-a-Tuesday-after-four-classes brain is often akin to the midnight brain (for what that is worth).

The main trouble was having a solid third rehearsal time each week: while we were able to have a full complement at our first two rehearsals of each week, Wednesday afternoons (though they were the only even remote possibility for this third slot) took Katie Genualdi out of the picture always, Rachel Price out for half the rehearsal throughout the semester, and Liz Olson out whenever the box office was selling tickets for a show. At times, having a smaller group for rehearsal was fine – even to the point of being helpful – but the farther in we got, the more one missing person turned into a missing limb. We did have to devote a good deal of time to catching people up to speed on things we'd created without them and sometimes found ourselves at a point where a partially-attended rehearsal was pointless.

My original intention had been to choose people to work on the show partially on the basis of schedule and availability. While this would have been extraordinarily convenient and perhaps successful in its own right, the more I leaned towards a larger cast (which, I think, turned out to be a good decision), the more it became apparent that my starry-eyed hopes were completely out of the question. Still, though, we always did the best we could – and I would overall call the scheduling process more successful than unsuccessful. I also feel that I did a

good job of keeping track of our overall schedule – where we needed to be and when in order to finish in a timely and sane manner. I was able to map out major hit points early on, and thus kept us on track well enough that we were never far off base.

Our early rehearsals (the first six weeks) generally consisted of a warm-up, distribution of a story (I prepared simplified versions – one page or less – to be used in rehearsals), discussion of that story and the themes and problems it presented, and then some time allowing the actors to create a scene (of any sort – literal or otherwise) based on the material. One possible problem with this method of working was that I therefore directed each story in a sort of direction before the actors had even worked with it: as I simplified the stories for rehearsal purposes, I effectively chose what moments, episodes, and even lines were most important. I never gave stories to the cast that I had not already processed (with the exception of the frame tale and the Tale of the Fisherman and the Jinnee, which were included in the cast's pre-rehearsal reading packet). My reactions to the stories (manifested then in the ways in which I had cut and re-written them) were on the playing field even before we had an initial discussion of the tale at hand. In some ways, I am sure this was limiting (might not we have discovered more if I had never placed any limitations, no matter how slight?) – but in others I feel it was necessary and even effective.

A main concern in this realm was the constraint of time: in a two-hour rehearsal, it is impossible to read aloud and then discuss a 75-page story as it wanders and weaves. And given that many of the cast were not working on the show for academic credit but nonetheless were willing to give me a full semester's commitment, I was very wary of giving large amounts of outside reading. So I felt that processing the stories down to simpler elements (i.e. choosing only one strain or event of a story – as was the case, for example, in the Tale of the Ebony Horse) was

necessary from a practical angle. Perhaps if we had been working over the course of a year or more (as so many devising processes seem to run), our course of action would have been broader and the time spent with each story in full as a group would have been longer – but in our six-week creation time span, I think this was necessary and useful.

Furthermore, I really don't think my limiting of the stories put any crippling creative constraints on us. Yes, it did create a defined field from which to draw – but that, I feel, is somewhat necessary. We started with such a broad topic that I don't think we would have survived if I had not been vigilant about limiting what I brought in to rehearsal. Furthermore, many of the stories I brought in had no endings attached (this is the way, for example, I brought in both *The Tale of the Ebony Horse* and *the Tale of the Fisherman and the Jinnee*) – and those were the ones most open for wide-ranging discussion. The way we actually initially approached *Fisherman* was as an exercise in adding on an ending.

Furthermore, the simple format of rehearsal after our discussions made it impossible for anything to be limited to my own ideas. Generally, the cast divided into two groups, and each group then created a scene, moment, improvisation – whatever – based on the tale. This ranged from very straight-forward stagings/tellings of tales all the way up to bizarre, abstracted riffs on an idea or theme. We then came together again as a large group to show both pieces and then discuss what worked or did not work within each one. There were definitely some days during this period when I felt that this procedure was simply a cop-out: who was I to turn rehearsal over to the actors for 20 or 30 minutes at a time and simply walk away? And I know that on some days, this was extremely frustrating for the actresses. What remained true, however, was that there was no way I could discover all I needed to discover or invent all I needed to invent without the input (completely undirected by me) of other people. Through these scenes (though

the general agreement that in every two-scene set, at least one was almost completely ridiculous), I learned to see the stories filtered through someone else's brain. Their ideas gave me ideas – and the vast majority of the tale stagings that wound up in the actual performance started as seeds generated during these rehearsals. The beginnings of *The Fisherman and the Jinnee*, for example, came from a group scene on day two of rehearsal. The framework for the telling of the frame tale came on day three. I counted on this rehearsal method to provide me with the things I needed that I could not get from books or by staring at my computer screen – and later on, when scripting the show, I depended heavily on memories and notes from these small scenes.

We also had some rehearsals during this early stage that were not focused around specific stories. Some of our very first rehearsals, for example, consisted of long discussions about themes and ideas. Other rehearsals were devoted to things surrounding what we began calling “Sherazade statements” – research or free-writes that we used to help define the figure of Sherazade for ourselves. It was in this manner that we discovered a good number of the ideas and thoughts that were eventually included in our opening section (which was always intended to be, in some format, a series of “I am” statements that would help us to define a framework within which to set the Sherazade/Shahryar framing tale).

By the end of this six-week creation period, I will state very openly that we had reached a point where something needed to change. The actors were tired of creating scenes, I was tired of searching for new material, we were all tired of working theoretically rather than concretely, and, most importantly, we were all rather tired of each other. I would say that the sixth week of rehearsal was the hardest: if ever there was a feeling that we might never get anywhere, this was it. Overall, I would attribute this to fatigue: for five-and-a-bit-more weeks, we had pretty much been doing the same thing, day in and day out. We were getting bored. In a fairly substantial

way, I would attribute this to the fact that we are all extremely accustomed to a five-week (or so) rehearsal process from read-through to production. I had never really before thought about the way in which we are so firmly weaned on a set-length rehearsal period – but I do think it’s true that most of us have been working on that schedule since the beginning of high school, and so are all conditioned to some degree to expect results and a drastic change of pace after five(ish) weeks. And so for us, in our process (whether or not our “conditioning” was a major part of this), we needed a change – probably after the end of five weeks. That sixth week was a bit of a stretch – in terms of creativity, emotional stability, and general fortitude. In practice, we did get our change, as after that sixth week we moved on to something else. Had our process been much longer, however, I feel that it absolutely would have been necessary to find a way to change things up after that first five weeks (not that the time limit is necessarily perfectly important, but based on our collective energy and focus levels, that was the important timing for us) – options that cross my mind might be taking a week off altogether before reconvening or moving into a period of scripting based on what we had already done (knowing that we would later return to open creation, assuming that this was a much longer-form piece). In any case, that five-week point in our process marked a time where change was inevitable: without it, we would have reached a bit of a crisis point and perhaps definitively crashed and burned.

After our initial six-week period, we began a three-week segment (the three weeks directly preceding spring break) during which my main activity was scripting the show and our main rehearsal goals became staging scenes or segments that were “keepable” – things that, for the first time, we actually intended to create for the purpose of actually using them. It was during this time that, for me, this project became nearly a full-time job. When beginning the process, I wasn’t sure if I was actually going to be “writing” the show. In my perfect pre-

rehearsal world, I think I had somehow envisioned a final project organically emerging from the muck of exploratory rehearsals. While I still think that idea is nice in theory, it became quite clear to me as I looked at the products of our earlier rehearsals and our timetable that it would be very necessary for me to enter rehearsals with very distinct plans. What this became, then, was me sitting down in front of my computer, choosing a story, reading over all my rehearsal notes from the day (or days) we had encountered that material, and then actually writing a scene. At first, this idea was daunting. Before my first week of writing, I made a to-do list – and realizing that in order to keep on track I would have to “write” four scenes in four days absolutely terrified me.

Once I got going, however, things didn’t seem as awful. I learned that everything I needed was in my notes: as senseless as some of our rehearsals and early creations might have seemed, everything we needed to create a functional scene was at my fingertips, stored in computer files or jotted down in my notebook. It may seem like a little thing, but realizing how much the scenes and bits we had created in early rehearsals could be transferred into functional pieces of a larger puzzle was astounding – and also a huge weight off my shoulders. While I did ultimately end up “writing” the show, it would have been absolutely impossible without the material generated by the actresses in rehearsal. All the raw materials I used in scripting the performance were indeed generated by the group, which felt very satisfying.

Also helpful was the time we then spent in rehearsal during those three weeks staging the scenes I had written (this included everything from the Sherazade/Shahryar frame tale through the Tale of the Three Apples – we left the beginning and ending to be dealt with once the middle had a form). A major factor was getting support from the cast. The general outline of the way things worked was that I walked into each rehearsal with a stack of typed scripts – and that was

what we would stage that day. In most cases, I had the staging partially worked out ahead of time (in the sense that the things that happened onstage – like Dalilah tearing fabric to make a rope ladder or the group playing telephone during the *Ebony Horse*). These scripts – including staging ideas – were distributed to the cast at the start of rehearsal – meaning they had only a few minutes at the start of the session to process and get a feel for it. My big fear, of course, was that I would walk in with a script, hand it out, and get immediate rejection. Happily, however, this never occurred: every time I brought in a new script, the response was overwhelmingly positive. People were quick to say, “oh, I love this,” or “oh, this is perfect” – which I took to mean that I had managed, when scripting things, to adhere to general group visions and thoughts. Never did it seem that people were surprised, weirded out, or alienated by the things I brought in for rehearsal. And so, despite the fact that two hours worth of rehearsal on a scene inevitably brought to light a collection of changes that needed to be made, it seemed that I was successful in scripting scenes that were on the same wavelength as everyone else.

The final period of rehearsal, then, was the two weeks after break. The first week was devoted mainly to discovering a beginning and ending to the show, as well as internal transitions between scenes, and the second week was used for teching the show and rewriting/adding any necessary segments. I would say that the opening segment (“I am Sherazade”) was by far the hardest to stage: we probably devoted more time to this one scene than to anything else and went through more incarnations than anything else. The ending also was not created until quite late in the process: while I had “completed” and handed out a script for the ending before spring break, we’d never touched it – and I wound up rewriting it before we staged it so that we never actually worked with the “original” text at all.

Teching the show, then was quite simple (lighting thankfully was not an issue because of our fairly early choice to use general area light through paper lanterns): the biggest hurdle was that though we had worked with some music in rehearsal, we all sort of knew it was not usable in the show. In a perfect world, I definitely would have chosen music for the show much much earlier in the process. In practice, I was reminded of why sound designers exist: I simply did not have the time (nor was my brain in the right place until the final week) to add music into the mix. And so we were adding music cues (from people's personal collections – everyone helped – and after checking out every CD the library owns at all related to world music) up until our final rehearsal.

Overall, I would say that the rehearsal process was quite functional and successful: we stayed well on-schedule and managed to never kill (or, I think, even really hate) each other. I think we achieved success by stumbling through (some things of course always felt like lucky happenstance) a process that turned out to be productive on all fronts: the period meant for creation successfully created, the period for scripting ended with a script, and the period of finalizing a staging ended with a finalized stage. For every rehearsal that we all left a bit frustrated (and never, I think, did we leave *completely* frustrated), we had five jubilant, openly productive rehearsals. All in all, I think it was a good process.

Performance

As I have said, I wound up absolutely loving the final performance that we created. With that in mind (and that, of course, always at the fore – I am happy with and proud of what we created), I would like to take a walk through the final production and make note of my thoughts about each section as it worked in its final (for now, at least) incarnation.

I feel that the (pre)opening (the section with the red fabric) was entirely necessary to the show. The function of the moment was based on several thoughts: the idea of the audience seeming the performers actually build the performance space before their eyes; the idea of a ritual that starts the energy of a performance (including the lighting of a lamp to begin a story); and a structural piece that could and would work into a tent (like one a child might build to play in or tell shadow-puppet stories from) later on. In practice, I felt that the main purpose of the opening tent sequence became about defining the space and setting up an incredible sense of anticipation about what was going to happen next. This sense of anticipation is what struck me most early on in the staging (though this segment was not staged until the Monday before our performance weekend) – especially once we underscored (or overlaid, perhaps) with the music we used. While I later looked on the segment mainly as a structural element, my overwhelming memory of the first time I watched it in a put-together form (which I can't help but feel must be in a way the most valid from an emotional standpoint – my memory of actually *seeing* it for the first time) was of this great anticipation. And that is what I hope the audience took from it.

My sense is that it did generally work in that manner – but the effect decreased dramatically for people who saw the show more than once (myself included). It seems to have been a brilliant one-time effect – and something that I view as necessary to introduce the rest of the play – but not something anyone necessarily would get more from by watching over and over. My only real qualms with this section were practical – whether it would go smoothly, whether the red fabric would unfurl in a pretty way (as opposed to a terribly awkward one), whether any of the strings would snag on the ceiling (which, luckily, they never did after we trouble-shot early on in the week), whether Annie would be able to affix the ring properly (the

hooks never seemed to be in the right places on the ceiling, despite the fact that they never changed), whether the lamp would hang crookedly.

From here we moved into what we called variously the “exterior frame tale” or the “I am statements.” This is a section of dualities: while it is the part some audience members expressed discomfort with (too abstract), it is the part others loved for opening so many interesting issues. While it was the section most difficult to stage, it is the segment of text the performers all pronounced they loved the best. While it was the hardest to get memorized, it was the section most directly drawn from things like free-writes and research that had been in our vocabulary from the beginning. While it was the segment that perhaps did not fit in as well stylistically with the rest of the piece, it was also the segment from which all the other sections were in a sense drawn. While it was the piece with the least amount of storyline, it was the segment that the largest number of audience members remembered and quoted specific lines from.

I viewed this segment as our bit of truth: from the very start of the process, we had wanted the show to be at least somewhat about the universality of Sherazade and the ways in which we can find her in, as we said, “all your female role models.” Structurally, I wanted to frame the Sherazade/Shahryar frame tale with a frame tale from our perspective: a frame that put Sherazade in the context of us and now. I think this segment served us well in some of these respects. In terms of setting up our performance, I think it did fairly effectively define the actresses as at times one and at times separate: we knew that all the women represented Sherazade, and that they were more powerful when they functioned as one (thus the hit-points that we used to bring all the women together for one moment in a pose or to have them speak all at the same time) – but also that they remained essentially separate and independent (that is one reason we were so necessarily attracted to making so many of our circles back-to-back rather

than facing inwards – I didn't want the women to be too connected. I liked the idea of the audience at times only being able to focus on one – and yet knowing that all the others were mirroring the one they could see). In some other respects, however, this scene never was able to have quite all the influence we had envisioned it to have. I'd intended, for example for this frame to introduce physical themes that would be echoed throughout (the tightrope, the face-washing, pulling oneself up from the floor, the hand games). Somewhere along the line, however, the tightrope and the arm-pulling and the face-washing never reappeared in the rest of the show – I can only assume based on negligence on my part. The hand games did reappear again and again in the slapping we used in so many ways – but I don't think I managed to set up the connection between those two things effectively. Nor am I convinced that the hand games used in the opening effectively paved the way for the other child-like things we included (monkey bars, Cat's Cradle, Jacob's Ladder, Red Rover) – though I did hear from some audience members that they found that through-line (that of displaced children's games) to have been quite clear.

So in some ways this section did not live up to all my lofty expectations. But the fact remains that when I heard from people their thoughts about the show, things from this section were always among the first to be noted as having stuck in the minds of audience members (even right down to very specific lines. People remembered – even when I talked to them days later) – meaning that something about it was drastically right. Overall, I think this segment was still evolving when we performed the show – it had a lot of great elements and was headed in a great direction (and certainly developed tenfold over the final week of rehearsal) but has not yet reached its peak or best self.

Next up was the Tale of the Merchant and the Jinnee. I chose to place this tale first (of the internal tales) for several reasons: firstly, because it demonstrated the practice of inserting internal tales into a larger, longer tale (a frame tale encapsulated within the larger frame – originally, this was intended to be used to demonstrate Sherazade’s method of prolonging a tale by filling it with other tales – though I do not think we did that in this scene. There were too many other things we needed to accomplish at this point and with this tale: had we had more time, this issue would have likely been addressed in another scene entirely), secondly because it introduced the jinnee figure (more on that later), and lastly – and most importantly – it gave an early, clear depiction of stories being used for good and to change someone (and, perhaps more bluntly, to save someone’s life). The original conception was that this scene should play like a circus act – a demonstration of pulling out all the stops to grab Shahryar’s attention from the get-go. In a perfect world, this would have involved tumbling, special effects – the whole deal, immediately and unexpectedly (a mix of “Spectacular Spectacular” and “Razzle Dazzle”). In the real world, we had low ceilings and no circus training. What we tried to do, then, was to make the sheikhs’ stories as boldly entertaining as possible. Overall, I felt this was successful. This was the scene that effectively loosened the audience during every performance (at just the right moment – nothing before this was intended to draw laughs, but this scene was), getting them amused and involved. Several audience members told me after the show that this scene was their favorite; others professed to wanting to applaud after each short story (a reaction that could not have been more perfect). In truth, the physical action could have been cleaner, the relationship between the sheikh’s narration and the movement smoother and more reliable, some of the physicalities more exaggerated or more tricks pulled. The inclusion of those things, however, would have required more time (and sometimes more means and, again, a higher ceiling – we

were full of ideas we could not do because of our eight-foot limitation) – and I feel that we were able to capture the desired effect of the scene within the bounds of our logical abilities.

The transition after this scene included the women in pairs, playing Cat's Cradle. The rationale behind this was as a child's-play reenactment and embodiment of web-weaving – an image of Sherazade spinning a web to capture Shahryar. In practice, this idea was not extended to the point it needed to be in order to be fully resonant (it was never repeated or explained). I do not, however, think it was distracting: audience members seemed to accept it as an extension on the theme of inserted children's games, at the very least – which I think is alright given the timing in the process at which many of these transitions came into being.

The second internal story was that of the Fisherman and the Jinnee. The main purpose of this was to introduce and explain the jinnee in the context in which the figure appears in the Arabian Nights. This had initially been a big surprise to us: the American conception of the genie is related entirely to the idea of being granted three wishes – and encountering angry jinnee after angry jinnee in the Tales (like the one that appeared in “Merchant”) was at first off-putting. What “Fisherman” offered, then, was a glimpse of what embittered the jinnee (or, as we said, “where the jinnee came from and how he got so pissed”). I hoped to introduce the jinnee in the Arabian Nights sense (which is why I included references to our American genie conceptions – Disney's *Aladdin* and the blond-haired bottle-dweller from *I Dream of Jeannie*) and to tie the figure of the jinnee to the figure of Shahryar – a connection we had decided was worthwhile. The main mechanism we used to try to relate the jinnee to Shahryar was the binding of the breasts (which was first introduced with Shahryar in the telling of the frame tale) – which never worked as well as I'd hoped. The idea came from the question of what happens when a female actress is portraying a man who is effectively stamping out the possibility of any femininity

within himself – and breast binding, then, logically made some sense to us. In practice, however, I don't think this was ever clear to the audience (though again – I'm not sure anyone was terribly distracted by it either) – and of the actresses who did it onstage, I think only Sally was ever able to master the action and endow it with enough bitterness to make it plausible. The gesture did improve throughout the final days of rehearsal – enough that I still held out hope and did not toss it completely. Still, however, it was never perfect – and, given another chance, that action is something that I would rethink, rework, or replace (as I think there is room for *something* of that nature in that slot – we might just not have found the right thing).

The transition out of this scene (Liz weaving a Jacob's Ladder) was intended to strengthen the idea of web-spinning introduced with Cat's Cradle. Again, I don't think this was ever strong enough – nor was Liz ever able to make the physical actions automatic enough to pull the transition quite off. As noted before, this small motif is something that, if approached again, would need to be looked at and worked with (though I still like the idea in concept). I do, however, feel that the text of this transition (and the others in general) works quite well – if anything, I think I erred on the side of caution and not wanting to be overwhelming or overpowering when adding small memories of the beginning as transitional tie-together material – but I think it all in all was quite functional.

Sinbad the Seaman was one of the hardest scenes to work out logistically – but one that we all loved. The goal with this story was to demonstrate the tactic of cutting off a story at just the right moment to ensure that the listener will want to hear more – like the modern-day commercial break. I chose Sinbad for this purpose because of its episodic nature and the somewhat fantastical, over-the-top elements it employed. The goal was to make the story as exciting as possible – with as many big events and new and different stage pictures as we could.

In a lot of ways, staging Sinbad was mostly about trying to be as clever as possible in our stagings of events. Thus came the whale, the bird, the tree, the washtub, the sailing ship – a host of things that were individually amusing but hard to puzzle out and thread together logistically.

Dealing with the walking offstage was also troublesome. It was something I very much wanted to do: leave the audience waiting for the rest of the story. I wanted them to wonder what was going on. For some people, I think it worked incredibly well – audience members like Charles Haugland and Jac Jemc were quick to laugh the moment everyone broke their poses to go offstage – they knew immediately what was going on and were amused by it in the same way I was. Other people looked merely uncomfortable (which I think is perhaps okay as well). Everyone, however, laughed when the narrator(s) re-entered, saying “In the morning . . .” – which to me means that the device was effective for most people on some level. I still think, however, that these moments could have been heightened more with further rehearsals and re-workings. As it was, changes in the final week (cutting an exit, adding music, playing with exactly where the music cut out and then back in, and solidifying final and beginning poses) made drastic improvements – but I am sure there must be ways in which we could have gone farther. As it was, a major determining factor was being able to hit a huge, ridiculous tableau just before calling “freeze” – Sinbad on a moving whale with a sailor quaking theatrically in fear, Sinbad up a tree while a huge bird flapped its wings, and Sinbad stuck on a mountaintop with who-knows-what dangers beneath him.

The close of Sinbad (and the transition out of the scene), approximately the middle of the script, for me marked the end of our biggest, most fun, most brazen storytelling. The first few stories had to be large enough to envelop the audience – to draw them in, to become involved, to buy into the story-by-story structure. To let them know that they were supposed to laugh,

supposed to be openly entertained. From this point forward, however, the production in my view needed to start getting more focused (thus the transitional line, “And Sherazade saw the opportunity, the door or window or peephole that had opened, and began to tell the tale . . .”) – after having hit the midpoint, we needed to begin to draw people in more closely and to narrow our focus a bit.

Thus the Wily Dalilah. I feel that this is the story we left in the most obtuse form – the one we outlined three times according to different rules but never outright “told.” I’m still not sure how I feel about this scene in comparison with the others. In some ways, I love that we introduced all the ideas we had thought to be important – but never laid anything completely out in the open. I liked that Dalilah herself was set apart at the beginning and left alone through the second two sections, even as her story was being told without her. With the exception of the first section (Dalilah’s story is told by a circle of external narrators while she comments from the center – “I haven’t any excuses to give. And I’m not apologizing to you.”), I was never quite as enamored of these moments (the Sitting Ducks and Man/Woman/Child segments as I was of other moments in the production. I think the feel was right – that we needed to enter a time where we got a little more reflective, a little quieter. A time where things were not so explicitly told but rather were examined in and out of context. What I’m not sure of, however, is that we necessarily found the absolute best ways to do those things. Given more time, this is probably a scene I would target for reworking and rethinking – though I do feel that the movement out of this and into the next tale (“After the story of the Wily Dalilah, Sherazade stopped to breathe”) felt right – the question lies in linking the scene’s end to the scene’s start.

The Tale of Prince Behram and Princess Al-Datma was interesting to encounter at first because of its unavoidable similarities to the more familiar *Taming of the Shrew* (even academic

mentions of the story never failed to mention the *Shrew* tie-in). From that standpoint, our discussion was limited from the start: it became quite obvious that it is easy to have your hands tied in terms of viewing a new story by previous encounters and ideas – and also that no idea is original. What became clear to us, however, was that the Arabian Nights version (much more so than the Shakespearean one) relies very heavily on the fact that the Princess was not merely cantankerous of her own accord: she simply wanted to be presented with an equal rather than a poor substitute (a theme that had already come up earlier in the process during “I am” statement free-writes: thus the line, “I hate that you cannot match me”). This provided a nice framework for the scene – and gave us the central theme and purpose around which the story could be organized.

Physicalizing the fights (which, again was helped by the Sherazade version – the Princess did indeed duel with her suitors) was, I think, successful in terms of once again lightening the mood and energy of the piece as a whole after the more ruminative Dalilah (and as a part of the downhill movement into the show’s closing). The big question, of course, was whether we could really get away with running around the space and yelling “BOOBIES!” – I really wasn’t sure of that until we had an audience. Overall and for most people, I think it did work (luckily, people can sometimes be bought for cheap). Brian DeCaluwe later told me that when he heard that we intended to run around yelling “boobies” he thought the show was doomed – that we’d all been brainwashed by our own rehearsal process into thinking it would work. But, he said, in context it did indeed work – and he never, ever, could have been coaxed into saying he thought it would. Generally, the response was one of surprise, shock, and laughter – just what I think we were going for. This was a moment when we were directing our choice of action specifically at the

audience (like the Sinbad moment when everyone left the stage) – and these moments, though risky and perhaps imperfect, were a great deal of fun to think up, chat about, and, ultimately, do.

The most questionable moment as far as I'm concerned was actually the switch when Prince Behram has set down Princess Al-Datma and she, much to his surprise, picks him up again and carts him off. I did not manage to frame that moment quite well enough: it functioned, but could have been better. On another track, I was very happy with the transition out of this scene and into the Tale of the Ebony Horse – I think it hit all the right notes and did an effective job of moving us closer to the production's ultimate end.

The Ebony Horse was by far the hardest segment to write. We had discussed it in a small group only, and never came up with a really definitive, exciting group staging. While we liked the idea of playing telephone, we'd not been able to make it work in our early experiments. When I started structuring the show, then, I very nearly tossed Ebony out the window: while the essential ideas of miscommunication and failing to ask pertinent questions were very attractive to us, I didn't feel we had played with the story enough to have formed anything truly usable. I could not, however, quite bring myself to toss it. There was still something in it that drew me in and made it seem somewhat important. And the idea of telephone, however unformed, was an attractive one. And so this small piece of script went through half a dozen complete incarnations in the space of one evening in front of a computer – the story being repeated back nonsensically, the story being repeated back approximately correctly but with vague details missing, etc. What I finally settled on, then, was having the entire tale mistaken for an entirely separate tale, in full.

When I brought it into rehearsal, the response was thankfully positive. We all felt that there was something interesting in not getting the message and therefore defaulting to something familiar: here, for us and for our audience, a story from the canon of Grimm's Fairy Tales. We

also felt that the choice of Jack in particular was appropriate: both tales can be related (to use an entirely third story set – one that is by no means a standard to compare all to but one that will at least here serve as a comparative measure) to the Icarus myth – of pride and flying too high becoming a cause for downfall.

In practice, the beginning of the scene always worked very well (from setting up the game of telephone to Katie's initial repeating of the wrong line – the first line of Jack and the Beanstalk). The ending (from Katie's assertion that she had rightly told the story of Jack and the Beanstalk) also was well-received. What I am left unsure about, however, is the middle – the segment where both Rachel and Katie told their stories in their entirety. While I don't think this page or so of text was fatal – I don't think it did us any harm – I am sure that there must be a better solution out there to be tried. Once the scenario of Rachel stating one line from a tale and Katie repeating with a line from another story entirely had been set up, I'm not sure there was any reason for the audience to stay tuned in through the middle section.

The final moment (with Liz hanging upside-down and Katie standing somewhat beside her) was one of my favorite visuals in the piece. The juxtaposition of the two people (the Cheshire-Cat-like upside-down Liz versus the confused Katie) opened the field of play for a number of interpretations – Sherazade's doubt versus her assurance, the King's confusion versus Sherazade's obtuseness, the failure to listen tied to the failure to hear. All told, I think this section worked very well – and also did a good job of dropping us into our final bout of relative seriousness that outlined the end of the play.

I think that the Tale of the Three Apples worked very well to lead into the ending of the production. Though I didn't always think I knew much about the shape of the whole show at the point when we were staging and creating these stories, on this one I guessed right: the drop from

play into seriousness, first as the music entered in the transition (as Liz descended from the monkey bars), and then more drastically as Liz claimed the blame for slaughtering the woman in the box, was, for me, perfect. Leaving the staging of this final tale so simple, then, allowed that feeling to sink in, to permeate the space.

Moving from here into the final images of the performance to me felt very natural in its final form. I adored the final pieces of text (the penultimate depiction of the healing, story-telling woman and the final message of “I give you my story”), as well as the closing image of the lit tent closing slowly around Sherazade and Shahryar. For me, using that red tent at the start and finish of the piece put on just the bookends we needed – and having Sherazade and Shahryar finally face one another (where we had worked to keep much of the show “back-to-back”) was a beautiful kicker.

The ending as it did exist, however, did not come into existence before the week of the show. I had actually written several versions at several points, and each of those times we tried rather half-heartedly to stage the ending. There were two main problems with these early attempts: (1) the text wasn’t right, and everything we tried only seemed ridiculous, as we were working with texts that actually begged *not* to be staged; and (2) we weren’t ready (in terms of being sure of the show up until that point) to stage an ending. When we finally did manage to stage the end, it was entirely natural and took perhaps five or ten minutes to work through.

What never completely worked was the unbinding of the breasts – while I can find nothing wrong with this gesture in this moment or the way it was performed, the initial binding of the breasts at other points in the show (as noted above) never quite clicked 100% - meaning that the final unbinding could never click 100%. Still, however, the gesture did seem to be in the right place and, in my eyes, was in no way a distraction – just not necessarily helpful.

The choice of using paper lanterns for lighting was deliberate and, I think, successful. The feel was definitely a plus: we tried to transform the space as much as possible (fabric, pillows, carpeting), and lighting had to be a part of that. I viewed the room, from wall to wall (audience included), as one cohesive space – and didn’t feel the need to differentiate area from area with traditional directional light. My only qualm was about lighting the audience – but, in the end, I was not at all bothered by this. I actually enjoyed watching the audience members receive the show – if the listener is as much a part of the story as the teller, then including the audience in the feel of the performance space was just as important for us as putting actors onstage in the first place.

I was very happy with the effectiveness of the music we used in performance. While I would have been happier had we been able to use “authentic” music (the Algerian and Iranian music I was able to place my hands on quickly was of the sociological-sound-recording variety, which, while lovely in and of itself, would not have served the production well; if, for example, we had discovered a magnificent sound recording by a current Algerian female artist creating atmospheric, rhythmic soundscapes – which, in case you have not guessed, we did not – life would have been perfect), the music we did use (Bulgarian, Egyptian, and Pakistani) I believe worked in context. I did feel a bit ashamed when I realized during my search for music that my criteria for consideration had become “anything vaguely ethnic” – I knew with certainty what ridiculous blindness that entailed. In a way, however, I also don’t think that was necessarily a terrible problem: we were looking for music that created a certain effect, that could lend very distinct energies to very distinct moments – and as long as the music chosen fulfilled those criteria, we were thus valid. Again, had we access to many more weeks (or had we a sound designer or composer along for the duration), a long search for more “legitimate” but functional

music would have been warranted – but that element was necessarily shelved in deference to more terribly pressing things. I do not think our choices of music hurt us in performance.

Overall, the performances hit an interesting note somewhere on the border between lighthearted fun and a sense of weight: I believe that we were able to meld for the audience a concoction that included both the playfulness and the seriousness – the awe and the mystery – of Sherazade’s storytelling.

Product

One of the perhaps oddest things about this project was the way I began to feel about it at the end of the creation process – specifically the final week as we were teching and polishing the show. In the cases of past directing projects I have worked on, I would probably characterize my feelings during this final stage as low-grade panic: I would be worried about each and every detail, and, more specifically, doubting myself at every turn. I would question every choice we made and worry about audience reception – and not, I think, in a positive, constructive way but rather in a fairly fearful way. I could count on being hit by a last minute wave of o-my-god-what-have-I-done-this-is-NOT-under-my-control – a feeling that is not, perhaps, pleasant. At the end of the *Arabian Nights* rehearsal period, however, I didn’t have this feeling. Though there was certainly a lot to do, I never doubted that it would get done. I talked about this feeling on several occasions with the actresses, and they all felt the same: that the final week did not carry a sense that the ultimate success or failure of the whole process rested on the outcome of a few days. Elizabeth Williams explained it as well as I’ve yet heard, crediting the creation process: because everything in the show had come from a really natural, organic place, because we’d watched every little piece of movement or text grow from its conception to its final form, there

was an indestructible safety net. We could not fall because we had made the show and we knew it would protect us.

Another major surprise that final week was that I simply did not care what the audience was going to think. (Again, this is something that I think was fairly common among all involved based on our conversations – which for me helps to validate it). In the past, that has been a major fear. The emotion I most associate with opening a show to an audience is extreme embarrassment: like I’ve forced people to sit through a reading of my diary and then am expected to shake hands with them and ask them what they thought of it. In truth, I was worried about that feeling *more* leading up to the *Arabian Nights* performances than I have been in the past: this, if anything, is the piece I have done that bears the strongest mark of me. Though I worked with indispensable collaborators, the conception, writing, and staging of the piece rested mainly on my shoulders. I couldn’t blame the script (I wrote it and made all the final decisions); I couldn’t blame the process (I chose it and led it) – it was just going to be me, hanging out to dry in front of a firing squad (yes, both of those things together).

In practice, however, my fear could not have been farther from what truly happened. As I said above, somewhere along the line I realized I did not care what the audience was going to think. Yes, I wanted to make the show good. Yes, I wanted to tell the stories clearly. Yes, I wanted to be entertained (and entertaining). Yes, I wanted to discover resonance. Yes, I wanted to score the thing effectively. But I realized that I wanted to do those things for *me* – and for the cast – *NOT* for an audience (which is perhaps odd when considering that a major series of thought processes throughout the creation of the show centered around communicating effectively with the audience). In our minds, the show was already validated: we knew the logic and the struggle behind every line, every action, every symbol or allusion – and what became

important was making the internal and practical logic of those things work for us and us alone.

Again, this is something we discussed as a group, and we seemed to all agree: yes, we of course wanted people to love the show in the way that we loved it, but our opinion of what we had done and were doing was certainly not going to be swayed by anyone else's opinion.

In the end, I think this feeling managed to work to our advantage: we wanted to make it good for ourselves, and that somehow in turn managed to make it good for the audience – in a way that was more selfless than I would have guessed. The offshoot of this was that I wasn't embarrassed. For the first time, I didn't feel self-conscious or panicked standing behind the audience watching performances. Because the audience was lit, I spent a lot of time looking at people's faces – and if I caught someone's eye, I just sort of grinned. It made me happy. Even when I saw the occasional dead face, someone who wasn't entranced, I was unfazed – I simply didn't mind. When a performance finished, I wanted to run out and hug people (rather than slink away into the corner, which again is the urge that I'm used to). I was happy and eager to talk about the show, to answer questions and ask what people thought about specific moments. No embarrassment. I am now convinced that achieving that set of feelings at the end of a rehearsal process and during performances is what I want to work for all the time. It is far more positive than anything I've encountered yet.

Another major bit of understanding I feel I took from this process is the fact that I am very much who I am: a young female American. I think that in previous projects I tried to skew my viewpoint to match the script – or maybe to deceive myself a bit about what I was seeing and thinking and why I might process things in such a manner (not to a terrible extent, but to a point I think I believed it was necessary – that I was not enough but needed to always learn to be something else). In this process, however, I realized very strongly, perhaps for the first time, that

there are unchangeable elements of myself that can and will manifest themselves in my work. And that is okay. It's okay to be 22 and view a concept or idea from that standpoint – rather than that of a 40-year-old (which I think I have tried at times to do). It's not embarrassing to be solidly American: while coming at the pre-Islamic middle-Eastern society seemed at first daunting, realizing that it was okay to approach the ideas therein from my viewpoint – that it was not at all invalid – was liberating. Perhaps more importantly, however, working on this process kept me keenly aware that what we were creating was distinctly feminine (I say “feminine” rather than “feminist” because I don't feel I've yet grappled enough with the latter word to use it appropriately and comfortably). If you'd asked me last fall, I would have disagreed with my current stage of mind – but I am now beginning to view theatre as distinctly gendered. There are masculine productions and feminine productions – and I am far more capable of the latter than of the former. This may sound like perhaps an odd and inconsequential thought – but for me it's been a bit of a watershed: whatever I do I will always do as a woman – whatever I interpret I will always interpret as a woman. And that makes a difference.

All in all, I will very clearly state that I was very happy with the process and product of this project. I had to drop some expectations and realign some assumptions, but all my goals were met – and I learned a good deal along the way. One of the most encouraging things is how often we said to one another, “let's take it on the road!” Of course we were half joking – but only half. I enjoyed this project immensely and would like to return to this type of work again (if not to this show – a number of people did tell me they would be interested in seeing it staged elsewhere, which is heartening). Though we of course had our moments that were less eloquent and functional than others, I leave this project feeling empowered, accomplished, and, ultimately, ready to do more.

Works Consulted

Aston, Elaine. *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook.* London: Routledge, 1999.

This text, which walks through theatre practice (in both rehearsal and performance) from a feminist standpoint, was very helpful in validating the process and product in a squarely feminine realm. While a large portion of the book was devoted to “how-to” segments giving suggestions for feminizing the rehearsal and creation process, what was most important to and for me was the strong explanation of and support for the need to look at a production from a standpoint that is distinctly feminine – rather than traditionally masculine. While I had decided early on that I wanted to stage the show with only women, the choice was based mainly on a gut feeling – and this book helped to validate and provide reasons (that, thankfully, were positive rather than angrily militant) for that need. Some observations that I found enlightening: utilizing women only means that never could the female be defined by the male – the male could instead be defined by the female (a bit away from the standard); it is acceptable – and perhaps more right – to seek a structure that discovers bits and pieces of the whole along the way, rather than building towards one single climax; that work in a female-only environment is useful for setting up a workspace that can be completely “collaborative and democratic”; and that coming together first as a group of women and relating to one another in that way would be enough to inform quite a bit of the process.

Bicat, Tina and Chris Baldwin, ed. *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide.* Wiltshire: The Crowood Press, 2002.

This book, an overall run-down of some of the things one might expect to encounter and deal with when working on devised theatre, was one of the first that I looked at in order to get a sense of just what direction I might be headed. Overall, I found it to be a nice, gentle introduction with useful suggestions for organizing principles – but decided that the information was presented in such a simplistic way that I was not necessarily challenged to think too hard. What was most helpful about this book was that it divided the work of devising into categories by jobs: directors, scenic designers, actors, producers, stage managers, writers, costume designers, etc. One particularly helpful segment told a brief story that might be the subject of a project and then gave lists of questions that might be asked by each of these people to jumpstart the devising process. This allowed me to think about what we were doing from many angles before we even began. This book also included some games and exercises, one of which we did use in rehearsal.

Bogart, Anne. *A Director Prepares*. London: Routledge, 2001.

This is a book that I read through early on in the process, simply for some general ideas and thoughts. It seemed important for me to read a theory book by a female director and author – I think the viewpoint is different from that of the more standard male viewpoint. Overall, I would not say this text was extraordinarily influential: I found the writing to be somewhat on the smarmy side – a bit too touchy-feely for my tastes. I was and still am intrigued by her idea and sense that doing theatre is giving a gift (to the audience or elsewhere) – I think that is something definitely worthwhile that found its way into the final show. My interest was also piqued by her section on making decisions: she pegs the phrase “keep it” as one of the most limiting things that can be said in rehearsal – where I have found that the phrase if anything opens doors: it narrows the vision and focus enough to stimulate creativity twofold. And if it turns out to be the entirely wrong road, you can always trash it. One segment of the book I did really enjoy, however, was the description of things that really stop you in your tracks (those moments that say, “wow, this is perfect”) as erotic tension: I find that description in particular to be apt – and it says, I think, quite an odd bit about the relationship between the actors and the audience.

Burton, Richard F. *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night: A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments Made and Annotated*. New York: The Heritage Press, 1934.

This is a six-volume version of the Burton translation and was used solely to refer back to a larger compilation and see the ways in which this collection (which often seems to be treated as somewhat definitive in the English language but is in truth terribly dry and rather affected) dealt with the Tales in order to compare with texts we were actively using in rehearsals.

Calvino, Italo. *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Trans. William Weaver. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.

This novel, something I (as well as two of the cast) was reading for another class entirely, found its way into our rehearsal discussions as an example of the way Sherazade and the Tales of the Arabian Nights pop up in another context entirely. The text, which contains the beginnings of ten distinct stories embedded in a framing narrative, itself bears a resemblance to the situation of the Arabian Nights – a subject of discussion in and of itself (providing another look at how the narrative strategies of Sherazade can be used in other contexts) – and, more specifically, contains a section of almost humorous usefulness: a character in the framing tale, a phony translator, finds himself in a situation where he has been called to move to Arabia in order to translate nightly sections of text for the restless Sultana, as the Sultan is terrified of what might happen if she ever runs out of reading material. The translator himself worries of the gap that will occur when he has translated a novel in its entirety: together, the Sultana, Sultan, and translator make up an

odd Arabian Nights triangle which, though not necessarily directly used in the production, provided a good amount of discussion and exploration.

Hussein, Taha. *The Dreams of Scheherazade*. Trans. Magdi Wahba. General Egyptian Book Organization, 1974.

This short narrative begins with Shahryar waking up in the middle of the 1009th night because he finds himself unable to sleep. He then wanders to the chambers of his queen, Sherazade, where he listens to her tell stories in her sleep. This continues on throughout the text: the King, still unhealed and unresolved after 1001 nights, sits every night in the presences of Sherazade, who, without waking, narrates her dreams to the king. After hearing these stories, the king can then sleep peacefully. While there were some interesting ideas present in this text (the king, for example, is depicted as battling constantly against a sense that while he desperately loved Sherazade, he also despises her because he cannot understand her; the reduction of the king to a dependant child who needs his bedtime story was also a bit attractive), overall it did not suit our purposes wholeheartedly: firstly because the idea of complete healing and salvation was important to us, and secondly because the focus was so strongly on what might have happened *after* the telling of the tales – while we were focused completely on what might have happened *during* the telling of the tales.

Kritzeck, James, ed. *Modern Islamic Literature*. New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

While I did browse through this book to get a sense of the collection as a whole (no surprise – the title “Modern Islamic Literature” leads to as many different types of writing as any other grouping of “modern literature”), my focus was on an excerpt from a play called *Shahrazad* by Tewfik Al-Hakim. The scene that is reprinted in the anthology is between Shahrazad and Shahryar. The two are in an odd argument, and Shahrazad is managing to completely torture the king with her wit. She can never get enough of questioning Shahryar to the point where he becomes uncomfortable – and he can in no way keep up with her as they discuss beauty, clear vision, and deceit. She is shown to be brilliantly manipulative and seems to almost laugh circles around the King. Shahrazad is also represented here as holding onto both a great number of mysteries and a great number of truths – she has a very natural sort of power that is never quite defined or explained. At the close of the scene, she sings him to sleep with his head on her lap. I included this scene in the packet of readings I distributed to the actresses before winter break for some pre-rehearsal reading as an example of a reinterpretation of the figure of Sherazade. We also referred to this scene in some of our earliest discussions about what we intended the figure of Sherazade to represent to us and for us.

Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Trans. Michael Henry Heim. New York: Harper and Row, 1984.

I was reading this novel for another class during the rehearsal process and, while I cannot say that it necessarily had a huge impact on the themes of the production, I did pull a bit from this novel for the script and thus mention it here: the lines “One always wonders if the story of a life is ‘it must be so’ or ‘it could just as well be otherwise’” and “But is not an event in fact more significant and noteworthy the greater the number of fortuities necessary to bring it about?” are pulled from the text. The connection came about on a day we were talking about to what extent Sherazade’s situation was brought about by fate (a line from the translation we used reads to the effect of, “Must it be this way? Indeed it must”) or by choice (a more attractive option). In seeking a way to rectify these two impulses, it was Kundera’s prose that ultimately provided a functional middle ground.

Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

My reading in this book was limited to the first chapter (“Narration and Desire: Shahrazad”), as I had been advised that this would cover the main issues of the text as a whole without being too overwhelming. The goal for reading this text was to learn a bit about the idea of feminine narrative strategy – the sense that a “feminine” narration (as opposed to a “male” narration) is linked to the idea of the fulfillment of desire (sexual and otherwise) in the sense that the feminine version is to spread things out over time rather than work solely towards one main, all-encompassing climax. This chapter was very clear in delineating the link between narrative desire and sexual desire – and the necessarily connected fact that Sherazade was able to use a new pattern of narrative to change Shahryar’s pattern of sexual desire and function (in a very sophisticated way). Another important point from this reading was the idea that Sherazade always had a choice in the matter – never was she the victim of any all-encompassing fate. This article did affect a good day’s discussion in rehearsal and did influence us overall: the depiction of Sherazade as a multi-faceted and multi-abled woman who successfully substituted the power of stories for the power of sex was attractive and important to us in our process.

Maso, Carole. *Ava*. Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive, 1993.

Somewhere in the middle of our rehearsal period, I was reading this text for another class altogether. I had in no way expected to find it to be related, but discovered as I read that the text, a poetic rendering of the thoughts that cross the mind of a terminally ill woman on the last day of her life, that certain things stuck with me. The first and most immediate discovery was that I reacted to the text very strongly as being distinctly feminine; I don’t think I’ve ever before read a text and felt so strongly the importance of the author’s femininity. The second discovery was becoming attached to certain lines: “One feels the need in the end for hundreds of daughters;” “Almost everything is yet to be written by women about their infinite and complex sexuality, their eroticism;” “I find that people tend to pay more attention to the content – perhaps out of a longstanding

misguided notion that women, unlike men, are more concerned with form;” and “Feminine can be read as the living, as something that continues to escape all boundaries, that cannot be pinned down, controlled or even conceptualized./ Cannot be arrested and which remains - / Elusive” are all from Maso’s novel.

Oddey, Alison. *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*. London: Routledge, 1994.

This book, a general overview of the workings of a number of British companies who generally work through devised rather than script-based processes and a collection of associated suggestions therein, served as a very helpful introduction to many of the ideas and theories of and about devising. Most thoughts were relatively simple but, importantly, were not things I might have thought of independently. I relied on this book at the start of the process when I began to plan how we might run and structure rehearsals. Following are some of the ideas I found most influential in terms of our process: the idea of feeling free to utilize a visual concept or a text fragment to jumpstart the process (be it overall or simply for one day), letting that general sense and feeling do the crucial early work of setting the mood and the tone; constantly asking “what is the form” and always focusing on *how* the material is to be presented in terms of discovering the structural architecture of the piece and deciding what the audience needs to know, how they need to be told it, and when they need to find out; the less structure there is in the process, the more weight is placed on each individual participant – meaning that I had to put a lot of thought into how much I expected to direct this project versus how much I let the project be directed by the group (something I tried to hit a happy medium on); the idea that the goal is to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts; a rehearsal method that is always explicitly intended to explore or create the embryo for the start of an “actual” scene; the sense that there can be a place for a director not at the top of a strictly hierarchical structure but rather at the center of a creative fulcrum (something I think we swapped back and forth between as we went); and the need to create and set a functional group dynamic and manner of working early on in the process.

Orlando, Valerie. *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999.

The subject matter of this book, which looks at (as the subtitle says) feminine identity as depicted in contemporary literature of the Maghreb, was very helpful in setting out some issues for discussion and consideration in rehearsals and in conceiving the show. Because I was not familiar with much of the literature referred to directly in the text, I limited my reading to the opening overview chapters and the section related to Leila Sebbar’s *Sherazade*. While I was far less interested in post(-)colonial discussions than in material related to the idea of a cultural feminine identity in general, there were a number of ideas which were of particular interest: the idea of feminine identity as something that needs to be actively defined because it is always changing; the sense that one is searching for a definable feminine identity in and amongst a society and culture that does not necessarily condone such an idea; the conflict always between public and private spheres

(which I feel was reflected in the final production through the use of sections that were both forwardly narrative and more self-reflexive); the idea of three separate stages of defining a feminine identity – awakening the female self, writing narrative that includes never-before-told female memories, and entrance into womanhood and true feminine self (in a way, an outline of the process we walked through encountering Sherazade); always embracing the elements that are specifically feminine in order to discover just what it is to be female; and the sense that one is walking a thin line between traditional Algerian values and Western “decadence” (the idea that Sherazade walked and does walk a thin line was always of importance to us – thus the use of a tightrope walker as one of the poses we used to define her).

Sallis, Eva. *Sheherazade Through the Lookingglass: the Metamorphosis of the Thousand and One Nights*. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999.

This book was very useful as an introduction to common contemporary readings and understandings of the Arabian Nights. The two chapters I focused on (and reproduced for the cast to read before the first rehearsal) were “Introduction to the *Nights*” and “Sheherazade/Shahrazad: a Commentary on the frame Tale.” This text provided us with information we discussed concerning the use of the Tales in English translation as a foreign escape, often artificially dated or enhanced to provide entertainment; the idea of looking at the stories in a way that accepts them from both Eastern and Western vantage points; the open-endedness and adaptability of the Tales in general; the idea that central themes are infidelity and betrayal, so that the action of the framing tale as a whole is to heal Shahryar (including the observation that the length of the 1001 Nights can be related to the length of Shahryar’s killing regimen); the explication through the tales that women are not all alike; the power of speech as being akin to the power of sex; the importance of the constant return to Sherazade and Shahryar throughout and between the individual Tales; the use of an Eastern method of producing complex character, meaning that this is achieved not through the Western notion of the “developed” character but rather through repetition, shadows, duplication, collage, and indirect referral; the Tales as a blend of child-like entertainment and very sophisticated views on human emotions and traumas (simple and complex at the same time); whether or not Sherazade’s children should be included as a mitigating factor in the end that helps to save her life; and the separation between Sherazade’s physical self and intellectual self. Many of these points became major issues of discussion and inspiration for us during the process, and a good number of these issues are, I believe, represented rather directly in the final performance.

Schechner, Richard. *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.

This book looks at the various junctures between anthropology and theater – and takes the stance that the two are inextricably and importantly linked. Ritual is not without theatre and theatre is not without ritual: the two depend intimately on one another. That said, while the general idea of this book interested me and, I think, in some ways influenced at least one direction from which we hoped to approach the material of the

Arabian Nights, the depth of information given (many detailed examples of various cultures, for example) was not too useful to our process. A general overview of this book's ideas would have been far more practical and approachable – as it was this text was not a major factor in our rehearsal and creation process.

Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

This book takes examples from American theatre, African society, and other sources to make sociological distinctions between drama (what is written by the writer), script (the way a production is actually realized and internally organized), theater (the specific and actual actions made and words spoken by actors during an event), and performance (which is comprised of the event in its entirety – including the relationship between the audience and performers). For Schechner, these distinctions can be defined separately but build upon one another in concentric rings of involvement. As he writes, “To what degree ought the drama determine the script, theater, and performance?” (77). He also makes a point to delineate the differences between public and private spaces and connects things such as hunting and ritual to theatre and play. While this book did not have a direct effect on the devising of our version of the Arabian Nights, most interesting was the idea that “ritual” becomes ritual by privileging performance over script, drama, and theater – something that I think we were trying to achieve in our final production.

Sebbar, Leila. *Sherazade*. Trans. Dorothy S. Blair. London: Quartet Books, 1999.

This text served as one of my very first looks at a recent take on Sherazade – the name here given to the central figure of a young Algerian woman living in Paris. The strength and mystery of this character (and her surroundings, really) were influential, and I did bring this text to rehearsal (specifically the very first chapter, entitled “Sherazade,” which we read out loud at the start of one of the days we were set to discuss what we began to refer to as “Sherazade statements.” This was our first one – our example. Lines from this text were also included in the final script. These included, “You think you can be called Sherazade, just like that?”; “Don’t ever call me a bird again or I’ll do you in”; “Sherazade always disconcerted them”; and “The indicator on the radio dial normally moved ceaselessly from one station to another, as she always thought the next would be better.”

Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.

Overall, I found this book to concentrate on ways to use theatre and dramatic theory in general to inform methods of presenting ethnographic studies. In this light, the book was not as helpful as I might have liked (I wanted it to be the other way around: to concentrate on what ethnographic research might add to theatre, as I was thinking about our production of Arabian Nights much more about theatre that could be a bit informed by cultural necessity than the other way around) – but despite the fact that it was not

directly usable in the project, I found it interesting and very readable. I very much appreciated Turner's assertions about performance in general (he assigns to it a great deal of weight and legitimacy as a form) and the idea that our "social dramas" are what define and inform our art – that defined cultural experience can be and often is an explication of life itself. I would like to include a short passage that I feel defines what I was able to take from this book: "'Experimental' theatre is nothing less than 'performed,' in other words, 'restored' experience, that moment in the experiential process – that often prolonged and internally segmented 'moment' – in which meaning emerges through 'reliving' the actual experience (often a social drama subjectively perceived), and is given an appropriate aesthetic form" (18).

Vanden Heuvel, Michael. *Performing Drama/Dramatizing Performance: Alternative Theater and the Dramatic Text.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991.

I delved into this book expecting to find some useful thoughts about the ways in which text might function in our performance – especially in relation to physical work – but was overall disappointed. The book was fairly dry and technical (especially for something pursuing artistic descriptions) – and was far too theoretical to be of much practical use. I read the introduction fully and skimmed the other chapters (each specific to an author) for a general feel. There were several ideas that I liked – particularly the idea that there is (or can be) a difference between "drama" and "performance" and that a stagnant relationship with text has successfully caused stagnation in American theatre in general – but overall did not find this book to be a huge influence in our work.

Williams, David, ed. *Collaborative Theatre: The Theatre du Soleil Sourcebook.* Trans. Eric Prenowitz and David Williams. London: Routledge, 1999.

The format of this book (organized in major sections around productions and in smaller sections therein by internal topics) was, for me, of questionable functionality: while it lent itself fairly well to disordered perusal, it still seemed to demand recognition as a history of the Theatre du Soleil, rather than the overview and discussion of methods that I would have preferred – meaning that I did not find myself relying directly on this text during our process. What I did do, however, was to plumb each segment of the company's history for interesting thoughts as they revealed themselves: the idea of abandoning a project on the basis of not having been able to find a form for it (interesting in the long conversations I had with myself about what in the world the form of our performance might be before it existed); the ultimate idea that the form is imposed by the story itself; and that all involved in the process are equally authorial, whether or not they ever exactly hold a pen, were all ideas that eventually found resonance.

Zipes, Jack, ed. *Arabian Nights: The Marvels and Wonders of the Thousand and One Nights*. New York: Penguin Press, 1991.

This was the main text I used of the Tales. A toned-down version of the Burton translation, it was far easier to read (much more conversational in nature) and I believe served us well. While I did consult other versions from time to time, this was my day-to-day reference that has not left my desk (except to enter my bag) since the fall. Some pieces of the script, including many of Shahryar's lines in the telling of the frame tale and the speech of the Jinnee in the Tale of the Fisherman and the Jinnee, are quotations from this text.

NOTE: *This bibliography effectively lists the main texts I consulted when preparing for and working on this project – but it is by no means exhaustive of all the things I only vaguely or – here is where the field gets exponentially larger – might have looked at. My list of things-I-would-have-liked-to-have-looked-at-but-ran-out-of-time-for is perhaps as long as this list – but alas there is a time constraint and a mental constraint on everything. I for the most part stopped reading new material near the midpoint of the rehearsal process: I reached a moment where I quite clearly thought to myself, “For the moment, I know enough.” To read more threatened to be both overwhelming and overkill. So these were the books that took me to a point from which I was able to feel confident in my ability to complete the process on my own terms – which, in my view, means that they served their purposes extremely well.*