

## “The Thousand and One Nights” Questions to Consider

Read the lecture that Borges gave on *The Thousand and One Nights* in 1977 (which he prepared, committed to memory, and then presented without notes since he was blind at this point in his life), and then use the following questions as starting points for notes in your Source Book.

1. What is the overarching plot of the book *The Thousand and One Nights*? Who is Scheherazade?
2. Who wrote the book, and how did it develop? What did some of the translators do that was unusual, an example being the Aladdin story?
3. Do you know any of the stories from *The Thousand and One Nights*? Which ones? How did you become familiar with them?
4. Cite *three reasons* that Borges gives as to why the book *The Thousand and One Nights* itself suggests the infinite.

*Finish the following two questions as the unit progresses*

5. Locate one quotation from one of the Borges short stories you have read where he references *1001 Nights*, and make a connection to its importance in the story based on this lecture.
6. Referring back to Barth's essay *The Literature of Exhaustion*, why does Barth argue that Borges has a fascination specifically with the 602<sup>nd</sup> night, and how does it relate to this lecture?

## “The Literature of Exhaustion,” by John Barth Guiding Questions

In 1967, John Barth published "The Literature of Exhaustion" in *The Atlantic* which amounts to a controversial manifesto of postmodernism. In it, he proposes that the conventional modes of literary representation have been "used up," their possibilities consumed through overuse.

The essay itself provided some postmodern writers with in effect a "Statement of Purpose" to follow in overturning the stale traditional order in literature. Some saw it as a denunciation of the modernist reliance on mythic archetypes (think T.S. Eliot's critical influence). And still some saw it as a reaction against people arguing that the "death of the novel" had occurred. Barth claims his intention was to discourage imitating modernism (and instead, borrowing *from* modernism, to "do something new").

Read Barth's "The Literature of Exhaustion" and then use the following questions as starting points for notes in your Source Book.

1. What is "Literature of Exhaustion" or the "literature of exhausted possibility"?
2. How does Barth use the term "ultimacy"? How does Borges do this, and why does Barth use Borges as a strong example of this literary tendency?
3. What does Barth compare Warhol's Soup adds to?
4. Why, in Barth's opinion, is "Mernard" successful and interesting? (87)
5. What example does Barth give of "Tlon's" "self-realization"?
6. What is the "contamination of reality by dream"?
7. How is *1001 Nights* a "story of a story turned back on itself"?
8. In what ways is Barth's essay a Postmodern Manifesto?