The Arabian Nights in Translation: How the World of Scheherazade was Epitomized by the West

by

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# Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... 1

Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 2

Chapter 1: “Antoine Galland: The Storyteller” .......................................................................... 16

Chapter 2: “Edward Lane, The Ethnographer” .......................................................................... 38

Chapter 3: “Richard Burton, The Rebel” ................................................................................... 54

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 69

Bibliography ................................................................................................................................ 73
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K – see you tomorrow @ 4:00. #wemadeit
Introduction:

Throughout this entire process that began nearly one year ago, I’ve found myself continually at a loss for how to introduce the Nights to family and friends who were curious about my thesis. For starters, to this day (March 31st), I have yet to settle on what to call the collection when I first begin to explain it, whether to use The Thousand and One Nights, the literal translation of the Arabic title Alf Layla wa-Layla, or The Arabian Nights, what it’s most commonly referred to as in English. Each time I think I finally have it down, I’ll start describing the collection only to be met with a perplexed gaze that magically relaxes upon my switching to the other title. If they still have no clue what the heck I’m talking about, then I’ll usually follow up with, “it’s the collection of stories with ‘Aladdin.’” Easy enough, right? Except that Aladdin actually isn’t a part of the Nights, at least not by everyone’s definition (it depends on whom you ask). So, first I confuse them, and then I lie. Off to a great start. Unfortunately for my family and friends, the very essence of the Nights eludes straightforwardness.

While reading the Nights (hopefully) proves to be a more entertaining and fruitful experience than what I’ve just made sound so excruciating, any effort to better understand the origins of the text and its evolution into the “complete” (i.e. totaling 1,001 night) version produced by European translators in the 18th and 19th centuries may prove just as complicated. What we do know is that there existed a Persian collection of stories titled Hazar Afsan (the One Thousand Stories) that contained fragments of the opening frame tale that we’ve now come
to associate with the *Nights* (Irwin 49). Probably sometime around the 8th–9th centuries, *Hazar Afsan* was translated into Arabic, first under the title *Alf Khurafa* and then *Alf Layla* (*A Thousand Nights*). Aside from the frame tale, however, we are unable to link *Hazar Afsan* to these later Arabic translations, since there are no surviving MSS of *Hazar Afsan* to compare them with (we only know that the frame tale belongs to *Hazar Afsan* through the accounts of 10th century Arabic historians). Therefore, it’s impossible to prove that *Hazar Afsan* was anything more than a distant cousin to the *Nights* that followed (51).

Mentions of *Alf Layla* by Al Mas‘udi, Ibn al-Nadim and others suggest that the collection was relatively well known by the 10th century, and an Egyptian MS with the title *Kitab Hadith Alf Layla*, or *The Book of the Tale of the Thousand Nights*, that dates back to the 9th century confirms that the collection was circulating by this time (51). However, there is no mention of the *Nights* by its final title, *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, or *The One Thousand Nights and a Night*, until the 12th century, when a record belonging to a notary in Cairo indicates that a book with that title had been out on loan (50). The earliest surviving *Nights* MS that we have today is coincidentally the same MS that the first European translator of the *Nights*, a Frenchman named Antoine Galland, used for his early 18th-century translation. Although there’s been much scholarly debate over this MS, no one has been able to date it more precisely than to the 13th–16th centuries (46).

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1 Except where citations specify otherwise, the background information given in this introduction is taken from Robert Irwin’s *Arabian Nights: A Companion*, which for the most part strives to represent scholarly consensus.
Unfortunately, this is not really a summary of what we know about the *Nights*: this pretty much *is* all that we know. Important questions—one of the more obvious being how the collection evolved from the 8th-16th centuries—have yet to be answered. *Nights* scholars more or less agree that the oldest stories came from India and Persia, which were then added to during the time of Caliph Harun-al Rashid in Iraq (763-809), followed by a third layer of stories from Syria and Egypt. The Arabist behind the critical edition of the *Nights* (1984), Mushin Mahdi, aptly refers to the collection as a “bottomless pit” (8), by which he means that the collection, aside from an original core of 30 or so tales that are common to all MSS and share certain literary and thematic elements, became a receptacle for stories that represented a wide variety of genres, cultures, and eras.

Fortunately, the MSS of the *Nights* shed some light on this complicated history. There are 22 surviving manuscripts of *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, most of which were written in Syria or Egypt (Irwin 45). Our oldest MS is the aforementioned Syrian MS that Antoine Galland used for his 18th-century *Nights* translation, which dates back to the 13th-16th centuries. The most well-known 19th-century translations made use of a combination of four different Arabic versions, all printed in Egypt in the first half of the 19th century. These four versions are: Calcutta I, printed in two volumes in 1814 and 1818; Breslau, printed in eight volumes from 1824-1842; Bulaq, printed in 1835; and Calcutta II, printed in four volumes from 1839-1842 (Haddawy xvii).

The MS collection may seem meager, but the fact that we have any surviving *Nights* MSS at all is nothing short of a miracle. Irwin describes the
preservation of the *Nights* as an “accident,” and believes that without Galland the
collection would have been condemned to “obscurity and possible oblivion”
(81). Given the fact that the *Nights* was (and in large part continues to be)
dismissed as “low culture” by the Arab intelligentsia, little care was taken to
preserve the text until the 19th century when European interest sparked a new
market for the tales. Unfortunately, one consequence of this neglect was the
disappearance of many manuscripts, including the Egyptian ones that are
believed to have been the source of the Arabic printed editions and possibly a
second Syrian MS used by Galland.

The main difference between the two major MS strains, Syrian and
Egyptian, is their number of stories. Galland’s Syrian MS contains approximately
30 stories, while the Egyptian printed versions number well into the hundreds.
While it’s believed that many of the stories in the Egyptian strain were written in
the 19th century to satisfy European demand for a full collection, who’s to say
that some stories, if not many, were based off of those found in Egyptian MSS
(now lost) that were more complete than the Syrian? For example, most existing
Egyptian MSS contain all three old men’s tales in “The Story of the Merchant and
the Demon” while every Syrian MS only contains two of the three (60). Wouldn’t
this seem to suggest that the Egyptian MS strain may be based off of a fuller
source? Mahdi, for one, favors the Syrian MS tradition over the Egyptian and
tends to relegate any stories not belonging to the original core to the category of
*Nights* Apocrypha.
In 1984, Mahdi constructed a critical edition, or base text, of the Galland MS. The textual critic works from variant copies of an original MS source (in this case, the original Syrian MS that all other copies, including Galland's, would have derived from) and seeks to reconstruct this original. The critic starts by first establishing a stemma, a MS family tree of sorts, that shows how different MSS are descended from one another. This stemma is created by analyzing variations in the MSS, the most common variations being those caused by scribal errors. In assuming that scribal errors that are common to several MSS are not coincidental but are rather indicative of them all being derived from a MS source that also contained these errors, the textual critic can piece together a MS lineage by tracing these errors back to their original source. With this stemma, the textual critic seeks to a) determine which MS is the oldest (oldest is not synonymous with best or most complete) and b) date both the critical edition and the archetype, the MS from which the first split originated.

Mahdi concluded that the Syrian “mother source,” the source from which the archetype derived, was produced in the late 13th-early 14th centuries and was probably based off of earlier versions of the *Nights* that were composed in Iraq (Irwin 55). Furthermore, he believes that the archetype followed closely behind the mother source, and the Galland MS not too long after that, ultimately dating it back to the 14th century (55). However, Mahdi’s conclusions are not airtight. Certain details in the Galland MS, like the mention of a Damascus mayor who lived in the 15th century and a reference to the Ashrafi dinar, a coin that wasn’t in circulation until 1425, would suggest that the MS is much younger than
the 14th century (61). Furthermore, many find fault with Mahdi’s methods altogether, since constructing critical editions is a process typically reserved for single texts with single authors, and the very form of the *Nights* would seem to require a different method altogether (59).

The primary focus of this thesis, however, is not to tell the story of the *Nights*’ history and its MS sources, but rather of what happened after the *Nights* reached Europe. Published in 1704-1716, Antoine Galland’s *Les Milles et Une Nuits: contes arabes traduits en Français* [The One Thousand and One Nights: Arab Tales Translated in French] was nothing short of an international phenomenon. Galland’s volumes sold out instantly and even appeared in English grub street editions well before he was finished translating them in French. Furthermore, Galland’s translation served as the source for most other European translations (as opposed to an Arabic MS) so that of the 40 or so European editions of the *Nights* that appeared by the early 19th century, many were wholly indebted to Galland’s work (Rida 151). As Irwin writes, the *Nights* became an essential part of any educated man’s library (2). From the multitude of 18th and 19th-century translations of the *Nights*, I will be focusing specifically on three: the aforementioned *Les Milles et Une Nuits: contes arabes traduits en Français* by Antoine Galland, and the translations of two Englishmen, Edward Lane’s *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, published in 1838-1840 and Sir Richard Francis Burton’s *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*
Galland, Lane, and Burton were the three obvious choices for this thesis. Firstly, it would be impossible to enter into any discussion of the European translators of the *Nights* without paying homage to Antoine Galland, a man so integral to the *Nights* that, “some observers feel he is not simply the doyen of western *Arabian Nights* translators, but in some important ways, the work’s true author” (Nurse 53). As for choosing Lane and Burton, they were the two most prominent Orientalists of their time to have taken up the task of translating the *Nights*, and as such their translations were by far the most well known in the 19th century. One notable absence is John Payne, a friend and collaborator of Burton’s who had published a translation in 1882-1884. As a result of this collaboration, the two translations were extremely similar (Burton often quotes entire paragraphs from Payne, although he’s always sure to cite him), the main difference being that Burton’s included a 200+ page long “terminal essay” that makes for a much more interesting study. Furthermore, Payne did not even come close to rivaling Galland, Lane, or Burton in their astounding commitment to the Orient: all three spent the better part of their lives living in, writing extensively on, and studying the East.

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2 I will occasionally refer to a fourth translation published in 2008 by Hussain Haddawy, who translated Mahdi’s critical edition. Since I do not speak Arabic, I’ve used this more self-reflective and methodical translation mostly as an interpretive baseline of what a reliable 18th-century translation would look like if it were to conform to late 20th-century standards of precision and accuracy. This will be particularly useful when discussing Galland, since Haddawy is translating the critical edition of Galland’s MS.
Like every work in translation, all three of these texts were a product of each translator’s aptitudes, methodologies, and understanding of the Arabic language, as well as their respective historical moments. What all three translations had in common, however, was that they were each used to present a concise vision of the Orient to the West. Galland for one praised, nay, glorified, the Nights for what he believed were its superior literary qualities, namely how the Nights “qui font voir de combien les Arabes surpassent les autres Nations en cette sorte de composition [proves just how much the Arabs surpass all other nations of the world in this sort of composition]” (Galland Avertissement). By “this sort of composition,” he’s specifically referring to “les Contes de cette espèce sont agréables et divertissants par le merveilleux qui y règne d’ordinaire... [qu’]ils sont remplis d’événements qui surprennent et attachent l’esprit [The tales of this nature that are so agreeable and entertaining because of the marvelousness that permeates everyday life... they are full of events which surprise and take hold of the spirit]” (Galland Avertissement). Galland appreciated, much more so than Lane or Burton ever did, the Nights’ potential to both entertain and inspire, to suffuse European imagination with marvelous tales of far-away lands. The exotic, miraculous, almost supernatural elements of the Nights were precisely what Galland attempted to showcase as the spirit of the Oriental world, and what allowed him to do so was his natural aptitude for storytelling and his ability to see the Nights as a work of literature, as opposed to an ethnographic source like Lane or a politically subversive tool like Burton.
However, Galland also understood that dramatizing the Orient had it’s limitations. His intended audience were upper class, salon-frequenting, high society ladies, and as a result he both systematically censored the tales and adapted his translation to salon-approved literary forms, like the *contes de fees* that were in vogue at precisely this moment in French literary history, in order to produce a highly accessible translation. Thus, Galland dramatized the world of the *Nights*–to an extent.

Lane, on the other hand, did not approach the *Nights* as a storyteller in any capacity, but rather as an ethnographer. He wrote in his preface to *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836), his chef-d’œuvre, that,

> There is one work... which presents most admirable pictures of the manners and customs of the Arabs, and particularly of those of the Egyptians; it is *The Thousand and One Nights*; or *Arabian Nights Entertainments*; if the English reader had possessed a close translation of it with sufficient illustrative notes, I might almost have spared myself the labour of the present undertaking. (xviii)

You read that right: Lane believed that the *Nights*, a text that traces its origins back to the 12\(^{th}\) century at the very latest, provided such an accurate description of 19\(^{th}\)-century Egyptians that he might not have even bothered writing about their manners and customs had an English translation of the *Nights* with adequate notes existed\(^3\). Lane’s notes are crucial, as the entire transformation from beloved story collection to Oriental manual hinges upon them. One

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\(^3\) The irony here being that, in fact, many of the stories that Lane was translating were written in the 19\(^{th}\) century and perhaps did to some extent reflect the world of the contemporary Orient: however, Lane chose to believe that he was translating a medieval source
example will prove illustrative enough of Lane’s method. The tale of “The First Old Man and the Deer” begins,

Then said the sheykh, Know, O 'Efreet, that this gazelle is the daughter of my paternal uncle, and she is of my flesh and my blood. I took her as my wife when she was young, and lived with her about thirty years; but I was not blessed with a child by her; so I took to me a concubine slave, and by her I was blessed with a male child...” (19)

In reference to the line “so I took to me a concubine slave,” Lane appended a note titled “On Slavery,” where he proceeded to describe, in excruciating detail (2,059 words to be precise), the entire history of slavery in Islam as it related to religious, social, and civic customs. In prioritizing the notes over the tales themselves, Lane provided his readers with an informative, rather than entertaining, experience and dispelled any sense of marvel that Galland had so carefully cultivated by presenting the Orient as knowable through meticulous observation and study.

Burton is by far the hardest of the three to pin down. The defining characteristic of his translation was his treatment of sexually explicit passages, which, unlike Galland, Lane, and every other Nights translator that preceded him with the exception of Payne, he left uncensored. Now this decision can be interpreted in one of two ways, and I think that a strong case can be made for both. From one perspective, Burton used the Nights to undermine the rigid morality of Victorian England by exposing readers to sexuality in such a way as to violently disrupt any and all conventions that existed for the purpose of regulating how sex was discussed in the public sphere. Burton saw right through the cracks of Victorianism and believed that his native England, imperialist
colonizer of the East, stood to learn a thing or two from the very people that they were subjugating—and he wasn’t afraid to say so.

And yet, on the other hand, one could also argue that Burton was only able to use the Nights as a means of subversion insofar as he was able to emphasize its perversion. Was Burton not just widening the chasm between the civilized, dignified western man and the impulsive, lascivious Oriental? Rana Kabbani writes that Burton was responsible for cultivating the “myth of the erotic and exploitable east” (Irwin 35); Whether this was his intention or not is certainly up for discussion, but his Nights was undoubtedly read in this light by many.

Thus, Burton’s Nights represented the Orient as erotic, whether for the purpose of critiquing prudish sexual attitudes in his own society or highlighting the contrast between the morally respectable West and the deviant East. Regardless of his intentions, this cultivation of the erotic East that Kabbani describes was a central feature of Orientalism, and as such Burton’s translation reinforced this dominant paradigm. Lane, meanwhile, used the Nights as a pretext to publish notes that more or less reinforced the prevailing, highly systematized Orientalist discourse of his time, which painted the Orient as a world not so much of individuals, but of codes and customs that could be subjected to objective study. Galland, on the other hand, cast the Orient as an extra-ordinary, mystifying land while simultaneously situating the Nights within an established French literary tradition.
The ways in which these three translators conceived of the Orient and used their translations as a means of reinforcing these conceptions had far-reaching implications for Orientalism. Edward Said, in his pioneering 1978 book *Orientalism*, defined the practice as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (Said 3), and the translations of Galland, Lane, and Burton all contributed to the propagation of this discourse in a number of ways.

One clear example of how the *Nights* translations reinforced Orientalism was Lane’s vindication of the atemporality of the East, or his ability to act as a “European in command, almost at will, of Oriental history, time” (86). As has previously been mentioned, Lane believed that the *Nights* painted such a faithful picture of modern Egyptians that a decent English translation (i.e. one that included notes) would have eliminated the need for his *Manners and Customs* altogether. One distinctive feature of Orientalism was a predisposition to categorize the Orient as a land impervious to the passage of time, as “always the same, unchanging, uniform” (98) where, for example, “an observation about a tenth-century Arab poet multiplied itself into a policy towards (and about) the Oriental mentality in Egypt, Iraq, or Arabia” (96).

This brings us to a second fundamental characteristic of Orientalism, the tendency to “make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature” (86). By

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4 Although Galland technically predates “Orientalism,” which, by Said’s definition, began in 1798 with Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt, he nonetheless reinforced these paradigms
appending their translations with tedious notes—and, in Burton’s case, a 200+ page “terminal essay,”—both Burton and Lane were able to extrapolate broad, unsubstantiated generalizations from very particular details in the text and pass them off as facts about the contemporary Orient. In this way, the medieval Orient signified the contemporary Orient, and details signified generalizations that could be drawn from the text. More generally, Galland, Lane, and Burton all made a clear distinction between the Orient and the Occident, and in doing so, they exercised their European prerogative to speak for the Orient while the peoples, lands, and customs that they were objectifying lent themselves to passive representation, almost always “despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a ‘real’ Orient” (5). It should be noted however, as Said makes clear early on, that Orientalism was rarely ever the product of ill will. In a similar vein, it would be incorrect to conclude that approaching the Nights with an Orientalist mind was the result of any sort of disparagement of the text. On the contrary, Galland, Lane, and Burton revered the Nights and hoped to share this collection with the world.

I will now tell the stories of these three remarkable men (who tell their own stories via Scheherazade’s stories-within-a-story—remember that eluding straightforwardness thing I mentioned earlier?) and the ways in which they approached translating one of the most beloved texts of the 19th century. As I’ve hopefully demonstrated, in translating the Nights Galland, Lane, and Burton were less concerned with representing the text faithfully and more concerned
with their self-appointed task of communicating some notion, specifically *their* notion, of the Orient to a western audience.
Chapter 1: Antoine Galland, The Storyteller

Antoine Galland was born on April 4, 1646 in Rollot, France, a small town in Picardy. He was the son of poor artisan workers with so few prospects that he wouldn't have received more than an elementary-level education had it not been for his uncle, who was the president of a local college. However, after the passing of his uncle Galland was forced to leave school and work as an apprentice in order to support his family, but he soon quit his apprenticeship and left for Paris to make a name for himself at the young age of 15. In Paris, he enrolled in the Collège du Plessis, where he not only started learning Turkish, Persian, and Arabic, but also began teaching ancient Greek.

After Galland completed school, he was appointed the attaché-secrétaire to the Marquis de Nointel, the French Ambassador to the Sublime Porte of the Turkish Sultan Mehmet IV. After his first travel stint as attaché-secrétaire, Galland made two more trips to the Middle East, one to Syria lasting less than a year where he was charged with collecting artifacts for Louis XIV; and a second to Turkey, where he spent nine years as an official Antiquary to the King of France. Galland returned to France permanently at the age of 42, where he worked as a librarian in Paris and Caen. In 1701, he earned admittance into the prestigious Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres.

Galland undertook various literary and scholarly projects over the course of his illustrious career: he published a memoir of his tours in the Levant,

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1 All of the following biographical information and information pertaining to the publication of the Nights is taken from Paul Nurse’s Eastern Dreams: How the Arabian Nights Came to the World (2010) pages 55-98 unless cited otherwise
translated a book of Eastern maxims and proverbs, and worked as an assistant collaborator on Barthélemy d’Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque orientale* before assuming total responsibility for the work after d’Herbelot’s death. The project that would most come to define his career, however, was undoubtedly his translation of the *Nights*. In 1698, one of Galland’s Syrian friends showed him a manuscript that Galland would soon translate as “*Sindbad le Marin*”. Shortly after “Sindbad” had come into Galland’s possession, another friend (mis)informed him that the tale was in fact part of a larger collection of stories known as *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, which Galland promptly employed a Syrian buying agent to track down. A manuscript of *Alf Layla* reached Galland by 1701, and he began translating it while simultaneously using more buying agents to search for a complete version that contained all 1001 nights, since his MS had fewer than 300. Needless to say, this futile endeavor was unsuccessful.

To reiterate, the manuscripts that Galland used for his *Nuits* translation were a Sindbad MS (which has subsequently been lost) and a Syrian MS of *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, believed to be from the 13th–16th centuries, which is coincidentally the oldest surviving *Nights* manuscript we have to this day. Three volumes of this manuscript are currently housed in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris, but there is good reason to believe that Galland had access to either a fourth volume and/or another MS altogether, possibly belonging to the Egyptian strain. The first four volumes of Galland’s *Les Mille et Une Nuits* were published in 1704 by Claude Barbin: this was the first printed version of the text to ever exist in any language. Volumes five and six were printed in 1705, volume seven
was printed in 1706, volume eight in 1709, volumes nine and 10 in 1712, and the last two volumes were printed in 1717, two years after Galland’s death.

By the seventh volume, Galland had exhausted all of the Arabic MS sources in his possession (Mahdi 30). At this point, then, he was faced with the choice of either acquiring more sources or writing new material himself. Both required much more time than Galland had taken to complete his previous volumes, so his publisher, growing impatient with his slow progress, published an eighth volume including two stories (neither of which bore any connection to the Nights whatsoever) translated by another Orientalist named François Pétis de la Croix, all without Galland’s knowledge (Nurse 86). Galland was outraged and prefaced his ninth version with a defamation of his publisher, claiming that only his translation was the authentic Nuits: ironically enough, Galland himself had stopped translating his MS two volumes ago.

Galland’s savior appeared in the form of a Maronite Christian monk named Hanna Diab in 1709. Diab orally recited 14 tales to Galland, seven of which made it into the Nuits (notably, two became the Nights’ most famous stories: Aladdin and Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves). Since no MSS of these stories appear before Galland’s translation, it’s impossible to know whether Galland was acting more as an “anthropologist recording oral narratives, transcribing works of popular literature,” or a “creative storyteller retelling in his own fashion stories he had heard from Hanna” (Mahdi 33).

Galland’s Nuits was an instant success. English translations of his translation were published by 1706, just two years after Galland’s first volumes
were published. By 1720, retranslations of the *Nuits* were already circulating in England, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Italy, Poland, and Russia. In France, it flew off the proverbial shelves faster than an Adele album: the first volume sold out, was reprinted, and then sold out again (Nurse 85). It’s even said that the French public loved Galland’s stories so much that admirers would often stand outside of his apartment in Paris at night and throw rocks at his window, waking him up and refusing to leave until he told them a story (93). Despite its popularity, Galland’s *Nuits* received lukewarm reviews at best, was utterly ignored at worst, and on the whole was “not considered of any literary value by critics” (Mahdi 36). Furthermore, high society men in particular found the *Nuits* to be unrefined and too feminine. In fact, Galland himself came to deeply resent this work in spite of the fame it brought him, since he believed that the project distracted him from more scholarly pursuits much more worthy of his talents. That, and he probably wasn’t getting very much sleep.

Be that as it may, Galland’s *Nuits* had a tremendous impact, and every *Nights* scholar would unanimously cast his or her vote for Galland as a first ballot *Nights* Hall of Fame inductee if there were ever such a thing (god forbid). However, there is less of a consensus on just how much credit Galland deserves for his translation: was Galland an extraordinarily skilled writer, or was he merely capturing the essence and charm of the original Arabic? Most scholars would argue the former: for example, Rida Hawari writes, “the enthusiastic reception accorded to the *Nights*... is, in my view, due more to Galland as a translator and to the special nature and qualities of his copy than... to the
original Arabic version that he had used and translated” (151). He also writes that, “the original sounds, more often than not, almost like a faint echo when compared with what it becomes in Galland’s immeasurably artistic and highly cultivated narrative” (155). Paul Nurse similarly claims that the Nights “became a beloved literary classic only because of Galland’s efforts” (53). Although other translations may have a better claim to linguistic accuracy or historically legitimacy, Galland’s “personal stamp” (Irwin 53) is thought to be so instrumental in producing what we have come to know as the Nights that he may be hailed “the work’s true author.”

Mahdi, on the other hand, argues that, “much of what is praiseworthy in [Galland’s] translation is present in his Arabic original” (41). He agrees that Galland “exaggerates, elaborates, embellishes, or glamorizes the stories in his manuscript” (44), but argues that he mostly does so out of necessity because he’s working from a single MS source.² When Galland came across gaps, defects, or inconsistencies in his MS, he wasn’t able to check them against another source; rather, he was forced to improvise. Mahdi even goes so far as to say that Galland’s personal touch was inspired by the Nights itself, that “from [the Nights] he learned the art he applied in adapting stories for which he did not have an equally good Arabic source” (41) and that the “charm of the Arabic Nights inspires elaboration” (45). While Mahdi concedes that the Nuits, when taken as a whole (i.e. all 12 volumes) is “literary fiction” (23), and that Galland at times

² While I stated that Galland may or may not have had access to other MSS, they must have contained only a few stories: nearly everything that appears in volumes 1-7 of his translation can be found in his three-volume Syrian MS
departs from the original “in order to create a more prudish, sentimental, moralistic, romantic, or glamorous atmosphere” (Mahdi 45), he is firm in his conviction that “One cannot... rightfully call the Nuits ‘Galland’s tales‘ in the same way that one speaks of Perrault’s tales or the Grimm Brothers’ tales” (40).

To be clear, I am in no position, nor is the purpose of this thesis, to debate the merits or accuracy of Galland’s translation. In presenting these contrasting points of view, I hope to emphasize the fact that while I will subsequently argue that Galland did in fact take some liberties with his translation as a storyteller influenced by early modern French literary conventions, it would be unfair and disingenuous, in my opinion, to disparage the Arabic original as being dull, unimaginative, and a work somehow in need of rescuing by Galland, as Hawari and, to a lesser extent Nurse, seem to suggest.

While there may be some debate over the extent to which Galland produced a faithful translation, what’s incontestable was his “duplicity about what he was doing” (Mahdi 24), specifically how he deliberately failed to inform his readership that, from volume seven on, he was no longer translating from his Nights MS at all. Coupling this misinformation with his condemnation of François Pétis de la Croix’s methods –the very same that he himself had adopted –Galland appears almost comically dishonest. Thus, even if he did reasonably translate the text up until volume seven (which, as I will now demonstrate, in many instances he did not), the complete, 12-volume work that he presented to his readership under the title of Les Mille et Une Nuits was misrepresented.
Galland strays from the original Arabic in various ways throughout his *Nuits*: in some tales, his translation corresponds very closely to Haddawy’s programmatically literal version with the exception of minor illustrative dramatizations that make the story more expressive. In others, Galland uses the Arabic as something of a suggestion that can be unabashedly embellished. The storyteller in Galland rearranges plot points to make the narrative more fluid and inserts his own moralizing, didactic interludes, while the prude in him censors sexually explicit passages so that it could be circulated in the French literary salons.

Galland’s dramatizations can be seen in the story “The Merchant and the Genie.” In a close reading of this tale, the plainness of Haddawy’s version highlights just how verbose and descriptive Galland’s translation is. Here’s a few examples: where Haddawy translates “Old” (20), Galland translates “tout blanc de vieillesse [white with old age]” (60), “la hideuse figure du monster [the hideous figure of the monster]” (60) is emphasized in Galland where is it not in Haddawy, “please forgive me” (22) is treated as “je vous supplie de me pardonner et de me laisser la vie [I beg you to pardon me and spare my life]” (60) in Galland, and “wail” (26) appears in French as “remplir l’air de cris [fill the air with cries]” (65). These are obviously minor differences, and yet this heightening of certain dramatic aspects (e.g. the grotesque appearance of the demon and the merchant’s desperation) lends Galland’s translation a more entertaining effect.

Galland similarly makes the tales more enjoyable by reordering plot points for the sake of cohesion and fluidity. One example of this is in the tale
“King Yunan and the Sage Duban.” In this tale, the sage Duban visits King Yunan because he believes he knows the secret to curing the king’s leprosy. In Haddawy’s translation, the sage Duban goes to the king’s palace the morning after he gives him the treatment and is lavished with gifts and treated to a sumptuous meal. The reason for this hospitable reception is unclear, at which point Haddawy is awkwardly forced to backtrack,

For when the king had looked at himself in the morning... he found that his body was clear of leprosy... he therefore felt exceedingly happy and in a very generous mood. Thus when he went in the morning to the reception hall and sat on his throne... and the Sage Duban presented himself, as we have mentioned, the king stood up, embraced him, and seated him beside him. He treated him attentively and drank and ate with him (47, emphasis added)

Galland, on the other hand, describes the king waking up and finding himself cured before the sage Duban enters the court, so that when the sage Duban is so graciously received, we already understand that it’s because his treatment was successful. Whereas Haddawy’s translation is somewhat awkward and cumbersome in this regard, Galland’s more readable version flows with much less effort.

While Galland’s translation resembles Haddawy’s quite closely in these two cases, there are many instances in which Galland’s version would more aptly be described as an adaptation of the MS. One such instance is “The Tale of the Second Brother.” In this story, an old woman approaches a man named Baqbaq and promises that she will lead him to a beautiful and rich young lady and that this woman will be his on one condition: Baqbaq must agree never to argue with her. He gleefully consents. Baqbaq is then brought to the home of the young lady,
who is just as beautiful and rich as the old woman described, and begins to eat and drink with her. Suddenly, the young woman and her slaves start slapping Baqbaq, throwing things at him, and cutting off all of his hair for their own amusement. Baqbaq, remembering his agreement with the old woman, submits to this torture.

When comparing Galland’s translation with Haddawy’s, a few things become readily apparent: for one, Galland’s version of the story is significantly longer, since he’s included both more description and more dialogue. Secondly, Baqbaq’s character development follows an entirely different trajectory. While Galland’s Baqbaq is good-humored at the beginning when he’s simply enduring blows to the head, he grows much more disconcerted when the slaves begin shaving his beard and mustache. In Haddawy, his temperament is exactly the opposite: he’s furious at the beginning when the young lady unsuspectingly hits him, but he soon becomes dulled to the abuse. Another key difference is the conclusion of the story: in the Haddawy translation, the young lady demands that Baqbaq strip naked and chase her throughout the house until he gets an erection (the fact that he’s called “Baqbaq the paraplegic” at the beginning of the story, and thus presumably is physically unable to run, is entirely overlooked; this could be why Galland’s Baqbaq is “gap-toothed” instead). Galland censors this episode by having Baqbaq instead chase the lady around in a woman’s nightgown and foregoing the erection bit altogether. Finally, the narrator in Haddawy (Baqbaq’s brother) goes out looking for Baqbaq after he’s been exiled
and brings him back to Baghdad, while the narrator in Galland mentions nothing of the sort.

While both stories follow more or less the same general plot line, these differences are significant enough to mark Galland’s clear departure from his source. Perhaps the most striking dissimilarity is Galland’s censorship of the erection scene. For reasons that will become evident later on, Galland believed it both his duty and moral prerogative to censor the sexually explicit scenes in the *Nuits*, so streaking through the house with an erection didn’t quite make the cut. However, it’s in this exact moment that Galland’s true mastery of the art of storytelling shines through. When the slaves shave Baqbaq’s beard and mustache, Galland inserts that it’s the young lady’s desire that he look and dress like a woman. Then, he has Baqbaq dress up in a woman’s nightgown as opposed to just being naked, so that when he winds up in the crowded bazaar, he appears to be a transvestite. While Galland could have just censored this one particular passage and left it at that, he turned lemons into lemonade by seizing the opportunity to lend his story an additional comedic element. This detail of Galland’s own invention, seamlessly woven into the narrative, is a testament both to Galland’s keen literary sensibilities and the premium he placed on entertaining his readership.

In these three examples, Galland’s changes were motivated by a desire to enhance the reading experience: the dramatization in “The Merchant and the Genie,” the comedic embellishment in “The Tale of the Second Brother,” and, in the case of “The King Yunan and the Sage Duban” and “The Tale of the Second
Brother,” the rewriting of specific details, like the sequence in which king Yunan finds himself cured of leprosy, or the reference to Baqbaq as gap-toothed instead of as a paraplegic, in order to save the reader the trouble of getting bogged down by inconsistent or confusing details. As these three tales demonstrate, Galland’s appreciation for the more literary aspects of the *Nuits* dictated the ways in which he adapted his own translation.

However, the purpose of Galland’s *Nuits* was not merely to entertain. The foreword to the *Nights* states, “I should like to inform the honorable gentlemen and the noble readers that the purpose of writing this agreeable and entertaining book is the instruction of those who peruse it, for it abounds with highly edifying histories and excellent lessons” (Haddawy 3), and Galland evidently took these words to heart—he used the very same principles to guide his own translation: to entertain, to please, and to instruct. This is entirely consistent with Mahdi’s argument that, in reality, Galland didn’t reinvent the *Nights*, but rather derived inspiration from it. As I’ve hopefully demonstrated, Galland truly valued entertaining his audience and was quite successful.

Although striving to please and to instruct were clearly not exceptional objectives, they were significant in the sense that in order to please and to instruct, Galland was required to *domesticate* his translation.

The theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher first outlined the distinction between what would come to be known as foreignizing and domesticating translation in his lecture “On the Different Methods of Translating,” where he writes, “The translator either (1) disturbs the writer as little as possible and
moves the reader in his direction or, (2) disturbs the reader as little as possible and moves the writer in his direction...” (Venuti 15). The latter would be an example of a domesticating translation, the former, an example of foreignizing. The translation theorist Lawrence Venuti, who further developed these two methods, describes domesticating translation as the process by which the translator presents a source culture that has been recreated as something familiar and recognizable, thus making the source text more accessible to the reader. In this way, the writer is being “brought” to the target culture: the reader is not required to make interpretive cultural leaps, but rather the source text is translated with the reader’s cultural identity in mind and with the aim of leaving it as undisturbed as possible.

To give some examples, in his translation of the story “Noureddin and the Fair Persian,” Galland describes Baghdad as a city with long, well paved roads (Hawari 153). Galland assigns titles like “Monseigneur,” which carry hierarchical and societal connotations specific to France, and characters address each other as “madame” or “monsieur” where such cues are missing in the Arabic. Galland’s domestication led 18th-century Scottish poet James Beattie to question “whether the tales be really Arabick, or invented by Mons. Galland... for... the Caliph of Bagdat, and the Emperor of China, are addressed in the same terms of ceremony which are usual at the court of France” (Irwin 17).

A more meaningful example, however, is Galland’s decision to censor sexually explicit passages, thus conforming to late 17th-century/early 18th-century French attitudes towards sexuality in literature. One particularly
revealing instance of Galland's censorship is his treatment of the sexual encounter between the sultana and a male slave in the frame tale. King Shahzaman has just come to visit his brother, King Shahrayer, for some serious R&R after having murdered his adulterous wife. He’s feeling particularly moody one day, so he decides to stay home while his brother goes out hunting. While King Shahrayer is away from the palace, King Shahzaman witnesses his brother’s wife, the sultana, having extramarital affairs with a black slave. He watches the following scene unfold: “the lady called, ‘Mas’ud, Mas’ud!’ and a black slave jumped from the tree to the ground, rushed to her, and, raising her legs, went between her thighs and made love to her” (Haddawy 7). Galland, on the other hand, describes the encounter as follows: “La sultane, de son côté, ne demeura pas longtemps sans amant ; elle frappa des mains en criant : Masoud, Masoud ! et aussitôt un autre noir descendit du haut d’un arbre, et courut à elle avec beaucoup d’empressement [The sultana didn’t wait very long for her lover: she clapped her hands and yelled, “Masoud, Masoud!” and at that moment another black man climbed down from a tree, and ran towards her hastily]” (40). He continues,

La pudeur ne me permet pas de raconter tout ce qui se passa entre ces femmes et ces noirs, et c’est un détail qu’il n’est pas besoin de faire. Il suffit de dire que Schahzenan en vit assez pour juger que son frère n’était pas moins à plaindre que lui [Modesty does not permit me to recount everything that happened between these women and these black slaves, and it’s not necessary to do so. It suffices to say that Schahzenan saw enough to know that his brother suffered just as much as he did]. (40)

This last part, obviously, is not a translation, but rather an insertion made by Galland in the name of preserving his decorum. Instead of just following up the
description of Masoud running towards the sultana with “Schahzenan saw enough to know that his brother suffered just as much as he did,” Galland felt it necessary to distance himself from this illicit scene by invoking his refined sense of decency and prudishness. Irwin writes, “Galland’s decorous aim in translating the Nights was not so much to transcribe accurately the real texture of medieval Arab prose, as to rescue from it items which he judged would please the salons of eighteenth-century France” (19). Galland’s self-censorship was therefore an attempt at producing a translation that would be well received by his intended audience, specifically high-society women that frequented the French salons.

Galland was writing at the tail-end of a watershed moment in French literary history. As Joan DeJean writes, “in the space of a century, obscenity was transformed from a minor literary phenomenon available only within a restricted, elite audience into a veritable societal problem,” eventually becoming “the object of official, state-sponsored repression because it could be viewed as a threat to civic well-being” (3). By the end of the 17th century, French censorship had been “officially secularized and bureaucratized” (DeJean 13) and at this same moment, works by Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Rabelais were being expurgated in unprecedented ways. Discussions of sexuality that were tolerated in Renaissance works and had continued to be tolerated into the early modern period were suddenly deemed inappropriate.

It’s impossible to know the extent to which censorship laws (which, evidence suggests, were lightly enforced anyways) were a deterring factor, but it’s easy to imagine that this may have at least partially dissuaded Galland from
publishing explicit material. Additionally, sexuality didn’t sell –at least, not in the 17th century. Aside from the plays of Molière, censored works “never translated into significant financial profits” and it wasn’t until well into the 18th century that “authors and printer-booksellers had a great deal to gain from the celebrity conferred on a work by a public suppression” (21). Most effective in influencing Galland’s decision to censor the *Nuits*, however, may have been the “broad reading public, rather than simply an inner circle of literati and professional critics, [that] intervenes to police literary decency…” (19). Above all else, Galland’s readers had the power to dictate what he could or could not say, so that in adapting his translation, Galland was appeasing a shift in the French public’s intolerance for sexuality in literature.

However, Galland goes one step further than simply not translating the descriptive moment when the sultana and Masoud engage in sexual intercourse. In writing “modesty does not permit me to recount everything that happened between these women and these black slaves,” Galland is setting up a diametric opposition between his own culturally conditioned values and the values of the source culture. What he is effectively saying, therefore, is “what these people find appropriate, we find immodest.” Not only did Galland domesticate his translation by purging all traces of the source culture deemed offensive, but he ensured that the reader *knew* that he was doing so. In this way, the text appeared to be that much more catered towards the specific needs and tastes of his readership, rendering it even more accessible.
A second way Galland domesticated his translation was by adding didactic elements to his version of the “Sindbad” story cycle. “The Seven Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor” are unique in that, as mentioned earlier, they were the stories that originally sparked Galland’s interest in the Nights. Although they were not a part of the Nights before Galland mistakenly introduced them into the collection, the tales are, in some ways, so Nights-like that its easy to see why Galland believed it to be so.

One thing that sets the Sindbad cycle apart from the Nights, however, is Sindbad’s lack of culpability. We see it countless times in the Nights: characters act recklessly, make mistakes, and always feel the full weight of the consequences. In “The Tale of the First Old Man,” the first old man turned his wife into a deer because she put a curse on his son and mistress, and in “The Tale of King Yunan and the Sage Duban,” king Yunan died because he wrongfully killed the sage Duban after heeding the advice of his mischievous Vizier. In other stories, a woman’s sisters were turned into dogs as a punishment for their envy, and a dervish lost his eye for his curiosity after entering a chamber he was forbidden from entering.

However, Sindbad is never punished for his impulsivity, general lack of common sense, and unwillingness to learn from his mistakes. Sindbad narrowly cheats death in all seven of his voyages: he’s shipwrecked in almost every one, and he falls into the clutches of cannibals, vicious serpents, an evil “old man of the sea,” angry Rukhs, and giants. He nearly starves to death several times, and on his fourth voyage he gets thrown into a cave and left for dead. Sindbad suffers
so greatly that he even contemplates suicide; and yet, this suffering is fleeting. After each of his first six voyages he returns home a rich man, becomes bored of his idle lifestyle, and embarks on a merchant ship yet again, instead of being content with his wealth and properly weighing the risks of such reckless and perilous voyages. Thus, not only is Sindbad not punished, but he is seemingly rewarded, returning home after each voyage having accumulated more fabulous wealth than the last. Unlike the characters in the Nights, Sindbad is seemingly immune to retribution.

Galland attempts to rectify this unsatisfactory element by seizing every opportunity to include moralizing lessons. For example, in Haddawy’s translation, Sindbad prefaces his first voyage with the following:

Porter, my story is astonishing, and I will relate to you all that happened to me before I attained this prosperity and came to sit in the place, where you now see me, for I did not attain this good fortune and this place save after sever toil, great hardships, and many perils. How much toil and trouble I have endured at the beginning!" (305)

In Galland’s version, Sindbad begins with, “Je puis vous assurer que ces travaux sont si extraordinaires, qu’ils sont capables d’ôter aux hommes les plus avides de richesses l’envie fatale de traverser les mers pour en acquérir [I can assure you that these trials are so extraordinary, that they would dispel any fatal desire, even in the most greedy of men, to travel the seas to obtain wealth]” (230). The insertion of this explicit cautioning against avarice at the beginning of the tale, entirely absent from Haddawy, sets the tone for the rest of the cycle.

This message is noticeably reinforced in “The Second Voyage of Sindbad the Sailor,” after Sindbad offers a man who saves his life his pick of precious
The man takes the smallest one, which prompts Sindbad to ask if he would rather have something larger, to which this man replies, “Non, me dit-il; je suis fort satisfait de celui-ci, qui est assez précieux pour m’épargner la peine de faire désormais d’autres voyages pour l’établissement de ma petite fortune [No... I’m just as satisfied with this one, that is so precious that it deters me from the pain I would endure by undertaking any more voyages to make my fortune]” (243). This exchange, also missing from Haddawy’s translation, foregrounds once more the overriding moral of the story, that it is better to be satisfied with what you have than to be driven by greed to pursue what is beyond your reach.

In “The Fourth Voyage of Sindbad the Sailor,” Sindbad is trapped in a cave with seemingly no means of escape. This is arguably the height of his despair, and he bemoans his fate saying,

Il est vrai, disais-je, que Dieu dispose de nous selon les décrets de sa providence ; mais, pauvre Sindbad, n’est-ce pas ta faute que tu te vois réduit à mourir d’une mort si étrange Plût à Dieu que tu eusses péri dansquelqu’un des naufrages dont tu es échappé ! tu n’aurais pas à mourird’un trépas si lent et si terrible en toutes ses circonstances. Mais tu te l’esattiré par ta maudite avarice. Ah ! malheureux ! ne devais-tu pas plutôtdemeurer chez toi et jouir tranquillement du fruit de tes travaux [It’s true, I said to myself, that God determines our lot in accordance with providence. But, poor Sindbad, is it not your fault that you see yourself condemned to such a death? Would to God that you had perished in one of the many shipwrecks that you escaped! You wouldn’t have died such a slow and terrible death in those circumstances, but you would have avoided them all had it not been for your greed! Ah! Cursed! If only you had stayed home and peacefully enjoyed the fruit of your labor]. (260)

In Haddawy’s translation, this cry of anguish has a markedly different feel:

By God, I deserve everything that has happened to me... There is no power and no strength, save in God the Almighty, the Magnificent. What possessed me to marry in this city? Every time I say to myself that I have escaped one calamity, I fall into a worse one. By God, this death is a vile
death. I wish that I had drowned in the sea or died on the mountain; that would have been better than this horrible death. (329)

While Haddawy’s Sindbad certainly assumes some of the blame for this particular catastrophe by questioning, “what possessed me to marry in this city?” this self-chastisement is lenient when compared with “is it not your fault that you see yourself condemned to such a death?” Similarly, the “but you would have avoided them all had it not been for your greed! Ah! Cursed! If only you had stayed home and peacefully enjoyed the fruit of your labor” is perhaps the most straightforward and definitive admonishment that we see in the entire cycle: this message is impossible to misinterpret. In all, Galland’s “Sindbad” packs a real moral punch that’s entirely missing in Haddawy’s.

Now if you’re thinking, “Hey wait a minute, fantastical creatures and in-your-face morality, that sounds familiar…” then prepare to be amazed: seven years before Charles Barbin published Galland’s first volume of the Nuits, he published another work, coincidentally another collection of stories by a close friend of Galland’s. It was Charles Perrault’s Histoires ou contes du temps passé, also called Les Contes de ma Mère l’Oye [Mother Goose Tales]: Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood –ring any bells? Perrault was the first to publish these fairy tales and many others. His intended audience was the French aristocracy, the gatekeepers of the salons, precisely whom Galland was attempting to reach with his Nuits. Thus, given the success of the contes (and they were tremendously successful even when they were first published), it’s not surprising that Barbin and Galland tried to capitalize on Perrault’s model less
than a decade later, specifically imitating the contes’ moralizing and instructive qualities.

Each fairy tale in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* concludes with a *moralité*, a rhymed verse passage where the moral of the fairy tale is explicitly stated. For example, the *moralité* for “Le petit chaperon rouge,” or “Little Red Riding Hood,” goes:

>> On voit ici que de jeunes enfants,  
Surtout de jeunes filles  
Belles, bien faites, et gentilles,  
Font très mal d’écouter toute sorte de gens,  
Et que ce n’est pas chose étrange,  
S’il en est tant que le loup mange.  
Je dis le loup, car tous les loups  
Ne sont pas de la même sorte:  
Il en est d’une humeur accorte,  
Sans bruit, sans fiel et sans courroux,  
Qui privés, complaisants et doux,  
Suivent les jeunes demoiselles  
Jusque dans les maisons, jusque dans les ruelles;  
Mais hélas! qui ne sait que ces loups doucereux,  
De tous les loups sont les plus dangereux  

[To summarize: Young girls, gentle and beautiful, are often led astray by all sorts of people, and it’s not uncommon for the “wolf” to win. It’s often the ones that are quiet, sweet, without bitterness or anger, that follow the young ladies, and these are the most dangerous of all]

In concluding each fairy tale as such, Perrault spoon-feeds his reader to ensure that he or she comes away with what he thought were the moral lessons contained in each story. In this way, his *contes* were intended to be both entertaining and instructive, a means of teaching his readers about, for instance, the dangers of naïveté.

This is precisely what we *don’t* see in Haddawy’s version of Sindbad: what’s the lesson to be learned if, in spite of these reckless adventures, Sindbad
makes a fortune and gets to return home after each voyage? This is what compels Galland to salvage the cycle by making it more instructive through the inclusion of edifying passages and utterances, like “You wouldn’t have died such a slow and terrible death in those circumstances, but you would have avoided them all had it not been for your greed!” or, “it deters me from the pain I would endure by undertaking any more voyages to make my fortune.” In moralizing as such, and in this deliberate manner, Galland was playing into fictional conventions that his French literary contemporaries had capitalized on, emulating that which had proven so successful for Perrault.

As I’ve repeated several times throughout this chapter, Galland translated the Nights with a literary sensibility. Now this may seem self-evident: I mean, how could one translate a work of literature without a literary sensibility, right? However, as will soon become clear in the case of Lane’s translation and eventually Burton’s, the Nights actually lends itself quite nicely to appropriation for non-literary purposes. Therefore, the fact that Galland treated the Nights as a work of art should not be overlooked. Back in the introduction, I stated that this very treatment enabled Galland to preserve what I called the “exotic, miraculous, almost supernatural essence of the Nights.” By this, I don’t mean to say that Lane and Burton’s Nights were devoid of anything supernatural: we’ve got genies, enchanted sorcerers, magical fish, humans breathing underwater, the works. However, what makes reading the Nights a truly miraculous experience, much more so than any genie, is the complete suspension of disbelief that the stories
themselves require. In dramatizing, embellishing, and sensationalizing, Galland portrays the world of the *Nuits* as that much more *otherworldly*.

In other ways, however, Galland’s *Nuits* isn’t otherworldly at all: in fact, at times it seems to be entirely the product of an 18th-century French author writing for an 18th-century French audience in the sense that it has been domesticated, both censored and molded into culturally approved forms. However, it’s imperative that the *Nuits* don’t appear to be solely the product of Galland’s own fictionalization, or else the very essence and novelty of the collection would disappear completely. *This* is precisely what Galland gained in promoting the *Nuits* as a unified and homogenous collection of stories. The minute he begins to identify other sources, like a separate Sindbad MS or his friend Hanna Diab, the authenticity of the collection comes into question. In presenting the *Nuits* as one text with one identifiable source, however, it appears to be totally legitimate. So long as his readers truly believed that they were reading a faithful translation of a real Arabic work and not, say, a fictionalized adaptation of an oral source, Galland could preserve the marvelous and extrinsic nature of the *Nuits* while simultaneously adapting it for an 18th-century French audience.
Chapter 2: Edward Lane, The Ethnographer

One hundred thirty-seven years separate the publication of the first volume of Galland’s *Nuits* in 1704 and the final installment of Edward Lane’s *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment* in 1841. Over the course of that period, the Englishman and Frenchman’s (and, to a lesser extent, the German’s) stunted and ill-defined conceptions of the Orient, “chameleon-like” and “free-floating” as Said would say (119), blossomed into the full-fledged, systematized discourse, defined as “Orientalism” in Said’s seminal work of the same title, a discourse that would come to shape European intellectual and cultural life, from universities and learned societies to the works of some of the 19th-century’s most beloved artists. In the early 18th century however, when Galland was writing, his expert knowledge of the Orient was by no means typical; those who took a professional and academic interest in the Orient were few and far between. However, certain historical developments throughout the 18th century gradually prepared Britain and France for the golden opportunity afforded them by Napoleon’s French campaign in Egypt, a watershed moment in the ever-evolving relationship between East and West.

Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, interest in the Orient was primarily confined to the biblical lands, so that “by and large... Orientalists were Biblical scholars, students of the Semitic languages, Islamic specialists” (Said 51). This is not altogether surprising: it’s easy to see why the biblical languages and lands might, from a European standpoint, be considered the most culturally and historically relevant aspects of the Orient, holding the key to both the historico-
linguistic origins of Christianity and to the study of Islam. However, over the course of the 18th century, this geographical designation of what constituted the Orient expanded drastically to include much more than just the Levant. Galland himself, in his Paroles remarquables, bon mots et maxims remarquables des Orientaux, writes, “Sous le nom des Orientaux, je ne comprends pas seulement les Arabes & les Persans; mais encore les Turcs & les Tartares, & presque tous les peuples de l’Asie jusques à la Chine, Mahométans & Païens ou Idolatres [Under the name Oriental, I do not mean only Arabs and Persians; but also the Turks, the Tartars, and almost everyone from Asia to China, Muslims, pagans, or idolaters]” (Galland 4).

Other important 18th-century developments that paved the way for Orientalism include new methods of historicism, like the emergence of comparative historical anthropology so that, “to understand Europe properly meant also understanding the objective relations between Europe and its own previously unreachable temporal and cultural frontiers” (Said 120) and a greater awareness of historical sympathy, one example being Napoleon, whose words were always “translated into Koranic Arabic, just as the French army was urged by its command always to remember the Islamic sensibility” (82). Finally, the new scientific emphasis placed on physiologico-moral classifications allowed for “race, color, origin, temperament, character, and types” to greatly complicate “the distinction between Christians and everyone else” (120). Without these four elements (the geographical expansion of the Orient to include lands outside of the Levant, the emergence of comparative historical anthropology, a greater
sensitivity towards historical sympathy, and a new interest in physiologico-moral classifications) Said writes, Orientalism never could have developed.

In this way, the stage was set for Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798. Unable in 1798 to launch a direct attack against Great Britain, Napoleon conceived of using Egypt as blockade to prevent Britain from reaching her economic strongholds in India. Furthermore, Napoleon’s compulsion to prove himself as one of the great conquerors in the history of the world made Egypt a particularly coveted prize, since he shared the view that, “no considerable power was ever amassed by any nation, whether in the West or in Asia, that did not also turn that nation toward Egypt” (Said 84).

Establishing a greater French presence in the Near East was never the intended goal of the mission, but it was a natural consequence. One product of this increased involvement was Napoleon’s Institut de l’Égypte, a learned society of 48 scholars who conducted field research in Egypt on topics ranging from mathematics to political economy to the arts all in conjunction with the French campaign. The culminating project of the Institut, the Description de l’Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l’expédition de l’armée française was a “collective monument of erudition” (Said 42) that was integral to the emergence of Egyptology and was to be used as a model for compendiums of Oriental scholarship to come. In this way, the Institut came to represent “the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another, apparently stronger one” (42). Its importance can hardly be overstated: “Quite literally, the occupation gave birth to the entire modern
experience of the Orient as interpreted from the universe of discourse founded by Napoleon in Egypt” (87). The Institut held its final meeting in March of 1801, but in just a few months, a new torchbearer of Orientalism would be born.

Edward William Lane was born in Hereford, England on September 10, 1801. His father oversaw his early education, but after his death in 1814, Lane attended schools first in Bath, then in Hereford (Arberry 87). Lane excelled in his studies and showed a tremendous aptitude for learning; yet, despite his ability, his education was cut short when he dropped out of Cambridge after only a few days. Thus, while Lane was an extremely intelligent man, he was by no means a scholar like Galland. After Lane left Cambridge, he went to live with his brother in London, where he would go on to studying engraving. It was around this time that he secretly took up studying Arabic, and in 1825 Lane set sail for Egypt.

This trip lasted three years, during which Lane gathered enough information to begin working on his first book, Description of Egypt, upon his return to London. The Description was intended to be a compendium not unlike the Description de l’Egypte that preceded it, a massive source of information on both ancient and modern Egypt. His publisher at the time advised him to leave out the section on the “manners and customs of the modern Egyptian” and save it for another book altogether, which Lane reluctantly agreed to do (Thompson 253), and thankfully so. The Description was ultimately never published, and, being unable to afford a second trip to Egypt given its failure, Lane used his research on modern Egyptians to secure the financial backing of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, with which he would return to Egypt and begin
working on a book that would focus exclusively on modern Egyptians. He traveled to Cairo in 1833 and started collecting material for what would soon become his masterpiece, *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptian* (253).

In *Manners*, published in 1836, the daily life of the Egyptian is described in great detail, broken down into a multitude of categories beginning with “infancy and early education” and ending with “death and funeral rites,” encompassing everything in between ranging from “government” to “religion and laws” to “the bath” or “music”. In this way, the book was meant to be read as a “lived experience” (Ahmed 119), as if we were going through the motions of Egyptian life ourselves. The book was an instant success, tremendously well received by critics, Orientalists, and his readers alike, and was hailed as “the best account that we have yet met, of the state of society and manners in Modern Egypt” (119). It was this work more so than any other that established Lane’s reputation as one of the foremost authorities on Egypt in 19th-century Europe, if not the authority (Said 158).¹ This is the backdrop against which Lane began work on the *Nights*, which appeared in monthly installments just two years later from 1838-1840.

England’s enthusiasm for their native son was perhaps only matched by their enthusiasm for the country that had captured both Lane’s imagination and their own. *The Eclectic Review* in 1822 wrote, “in every point of view, Egypt is an object of the highest interest, and is likely to become increasingly such” (Ahmed

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¹ Lane continues to be influential to this day: I was looking up the Basmala on Wikipedia (to be discussed later) and the section describing its usage begins with “According to Lane...”
2). In 1828, a Brit complained that it was “scarcely possible to turn the corner of a street without meeting an Englishman recently arrived, either from the borders of the Red Sea, the cataracts of the Nile, or the ruins of Palmyra” (2). For the first time, Europeans (and Englishmen in particular) by and large began to experience the Orient empirically, and Egypt was the most natural starting point.

Jean-Baptiste Joseph Fourier, in his *preface historique* to the *Description de L’Egypte*, succinctly encapsulated the reasons for European interest in Egypt in particular. Specifically, he cites “Homer, Lycurgus, Solon, Pythagoras, and Plato” and their studies in Egypt, along with Egypt having “witnessed Pompey, Caesar, Marc Antony, and Augustus deciding between them the fate of Rome and that of the entire world” (Said 84). Egypt was therefore a place of great historical significance by virtue of its role in cultivating Western civilizations’ brightest minds and acting as ground zero for the arbitration of its greatest politicians. In a similar vein, the “English traveller’s reasons for travelling to... Egypt, were much more closely related to and were, indeed, extensions of... his activities in Greece” so that “it was above all for... exploring the civilization of ancient Egypt in the way they explored that of the ancient Classical world that the traveller visited Egypt” (Ahmed 6). The neoclassicism of the 18th century here found its logical extension, so that it was with a western identity infused with a finely-tuned awareness of ancient Greek and Roman tradition that the European turned towards Egypt.

In the early 19th century, Egypt became “the unit... in relation to which English notions of and responses to the Near East most frequently found
expression; and it became the unit in relation to which Arabian culture and society were first elaborately defined for the English reader” (Ahmed 19). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that whereas Galland’s *Nights* sources were primarily of Syrian origin, Lane worked entirely from editions that were printed in Egypt from 1814-1835. Hence, both Lane and his readers came to envision the world of the *Nights* as being synonymous with the world of modern-day Egypt, and it was this understanding of the Orient that came to define Lane’s *Nights* translation, an understanding that was colored, if not completely beholden to, Orientalism.

It will not be necessary here to discuss Orientalism in as much detail and with as much attention as the subject warrants, but an explanation of several key aspects of Orientalism will be crucial in better understanding Lane’s approach to the *Nights*. To reiterate, Orientalism as defined by Said is the system of specialized knowledge, representations, interests, manipulations, and judgments that takes as its basic premise the division of the world into two unequal halves, that of East and West, in which the West exerts its position of power as a means of essentializing the East and exercising authority over it. One fundamental aspect of Orientalism is its scientific methodology, specifically in that Orientalists studied Oriental peoples as if they were passive subjects that could be readily and unaffectedly observed, described, catalogued, and recorded objectively like specimens. As previously stated, Orientalism came to stand as “the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another” (Said 42, emphasis added).
Said writes that Lane belonged to the category of “the writer who intends to use his residence for the specific task of providing professional Orientalism with scientific material, who considers his residence a form of scientific observation” (157) and whose text eliminates “the human content of its subject matter in favor of its scientific validity” (161). Although these quotations are in reference to his Manners, they can be applied just as easily to Lane as Nights translator. The defining characteristic of Lane’s Nights, his excruciatingly exhaustive notes were meant to provide his readers with highly detailed observations and generalizations spanning every topic imaginable, and in this way he used the characters of the Nights as a pretext for consummating an objective and scientific record of Egyptian customs and peoples.

A second component of Orientalism is its achronicity. The Orient that the Orientalist studied was, more often than not, the Orient of the golden age of Islam, specifically the 8-13th centuries. However, Orientalists would consistently apply their knowledge of this particular time period to the contemporary Orient of the 19th century as if the two were identical, conflating the medieval and the modern. As stated earlier, “an observation about a tenth-century Arab poet multiplied itself into a policy towards (and about) the Oriental mentality in Egypt, Iraq, or Arabia” (96). In this way, Orientalism required the Orientalist to view the East atemporally, as a land that was completely static and frozen in time.

Lane continually grappled with this question of temporality. For one, his Description of Egypt covered both ancient and modern times, and, as quoted
earlier, he believed that, “if the English reader had possessed a close translation of [the Nights] with sufficient illustrative notes, I might almost have spared myself the labour of the present undertaking” (xviii). This claim, conflating the 12th-century Nights with the contemporary Egypt that Lane experienced, is clearly indicative of achronicity. In translating the Nights, Lane absolved himself of any responsibility to act as a storyteller and instead assumed the role of Orientalist ethnographer: he took an objective approach, one that was detail-oriented to a clinical degree, to describing the peoples of Egypt, their lives and customs. We’re no longer dealing with Galland’s fantastical, uncharted Orient, but rather an Orient that has become increasingly legible, and the development of Orientalism as a discourse signals this shift precisely.

One example of Lane’s lack of appreciation for the Nights as a work of literature was his decision to eliminate the nightly interruptions that refer the stories back to the frame tale. He includes the following parenthetical after the second nightly break:

On the second and each succeeding night, Shahrazád continued so to interest King Shahriyár by her stories as to induce him to defer putting her to death... and as this is expressed in the original work in nearly the same words at the close of every night, such repetitions will in the present translation be omitted. (20)

Embedded narrative is the defining literary characteristic of the Nights, without which the collection becomes completely unidentifiable. With each nightly break, the reader is placed in the same position as King Shahrayer, desperately awaiting the conclusion of each tale; without them, the connection between the reader, Scheherazade, and Shahrayar is irreparably severed. Galland not only
preserved the nightly interruptions, but extended them a few nights longer than they continued in his MS. Lane, however, found the repetition exceedingly tedious and therefore chose to sacrifice such a crucial thematic element.

Obviously, repetition in a work of art is never meaningless: imagine “The Raven” without the constant repetition of “nevermore,” or perhaps the Il.liad or the Odyssey without the inclusion of Homeric epithets like “fleet-footed Achilles” or “dawn with her rose red fingers rose once more.” Repetition serves to reinforce thematic, structural, and literary elements, and repetition in the Nights is no exception. In failing to realize this, Lane demonstrated a complete lack of respect for the Nights as a work of art. He had little use for anything that was devoid of ethnographic value, and did not hesitate to alter the text accordingly.

Further evidence that Lane was, from a literary standpoint, perhaps not particularly qualified to translate the Nights is his use of positively archaic language. As mentioned earlier, Lane discontinued his education and was therefore, consequentially, not very well read, so that his only knowledge of literature essentially came from the Bible (Irwin 24). As a result, the tone of his translation is quasi-biblical and his language is grandiose and pompous. For example, one passage from “The Second Old Man’s Tale” reads,

In the morning, however, she returned, and said to me, ‘I am thy wife, who carried thee, and rescued thee from death, by permission of God, whose name be exalted. Know that I am a Jinneeyeh: I saw thee, and my heart loved thee for the sake of God; for I am a believer in God and his Apostle, God bless and save him! I came to thee in the condition in which thou sawest me, and thou didst marry me; and see, I have rescued thee from drowning.’ (25)

The same scene Haddawy:
When we awoke, my wife turned into a she-demon and carried me out of the sea to an island. When it was morning, she said ‘Husband, I have rewarded you by saving you from drowning, for I am one of the demons who believe in God.’ (34)

While we obviously can’t expect to be as accustomed to the sound of Lane’s English as to Haddawy’s modern translation, this contrast highlights just how heavy and formal Lane’s language was. One could surmise that this would have taken quite a toll on the reading experience. Interestingly enough, Lane’s Manners employs a much more conversational and accessible tone, so that it is only in translating from Arabic to English (he uses a similar style in his translation of selections from the Qur’an) that his archaisms shine through.

In this way, the literary merits of the Nights were sacrificed for its perceived value as an ethnographic text. To restate what Lane wrote in his introduction to Manners:

There is one work... which presents most admirable pictures of the manners and customs of the Arabs, and particularly of those of the Egyptians; it is ‘The Thousand and One Nights’; or ‘Arabian Nights Entertainments’: if the English reader had possessed a close translation of it with sufficient illustrative notes, I might almost have spared myself the labour of the present undertaking. (xviii)

I mention this for a third time because it sums up his project precisely: to unleash, through the use of painstakingly thorough notes, the full potential of the Nights as a means of representing, with perfect accuracy, 19th-century Egyptians. And yet, as becomes clear early on when reading the text, the Nights was never meant to portray daily life. Genies, enchanted kingdoms, magical creatures (oh my!) – the average, the ordinary, and the day-to-day don’t stand a chance once the reader’s unbridled imagination is unleashed. This was precisely the essence
that Galland remained true to as both translator and storyteller. He understood well enough that the *Nights* was anything but an accurate portrayal of a daily modern Egyptian experience, nor did it pretend to be. The purpose of the notes, therefore, was to ground the *Nights* in a contemporary reality, “binding it irrevocably with the Arabian world” (Ahmed 141).

The first note of Lane’s *Nights* is in reference to the opening line of the introduction, the Basmala, which reads “in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.” He explains that,

The exordium of the present work, showing the duty imposed upon a Muslim by his religion, even on the occasion of his commencing the composition or compilation of a series of fictions, suggests to me the necessity of inserting a brief prefatory notice of the fundamental points of his faith, and the principal laws of the ritual and moral, the civil, and the criminal code. (introduction n.1)

“Brief” implies some attempt at concision, but this note, coming in at 2,000 words, was anything but. The story literally has not yet begun, but that doesn’t stop Lane from embarking on a full-scale exposition of Islam, covering everything from what percentage of property must go to alms annually to the laws forbidding men from wearing silk to the appropriate the punishment for drunkenness (80 whip lashes, in case you were wondering). Now the obvious question is, what does any of this have to do with the *Nights*? I’m glad you asked: most of the information that Lane supplies is completely irrelevant. While having a basic understanding of the tenants of Islam or some working knowledge of the core ideas of the faith when reading the *Nights* certainly can’t *hurt*, it’s by no means necessary. Some bits of information that Lane volunteers, like what type

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2 Which Lane refers to as “the Mohammedan faith”
of punishment adultery typically warrants, actually do pertain to the tale in question, but most of what Lane describes does not. This is not to say that a discussion of Islam at this particular moment, following ““in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,” the phrase recited before each Sura in the Qur’an and before daily prayers, is not relevant. However, instead of briefly stating the significance of this particular epithet, or even giving an Islam highlight reel, Lane seize the opportunity to flex his ethnographic muscles.

In some of the more concise notes, like note 10 in chapter 1, Lane makes use of insignificant plot points to recount some of what he’s observed in Egypt. In this particular note, which references the line ““he immediately gave orders to prepare handsome presents, such as horses adorned with gold and costly jewels, and Memllooks, and beautiful virgins, and expensive stuffs,” Lane writes,

Presents of provisions of some kind, wax candles, &c., are sent to a person about to celebrate any festivity, by those who are to be his guests: but after paying a mere visit of ceremony, and on some other occasions, only money is commonly given to the servants of the person visited… To reject a present generally gives great offence; being regarded as an insult to him who has offered. (ch. 1 n. 10)

This is classic Lane: he uses trivial details as a pretext to make broad generalizations about Egyptian customs that he then applies presumptuously to the Nights, as if there were a logical correlation between the world being described in the text and the 19th-century Egypt he’s representing.

Unfortunately for the casual reader, not all of Lane’s notes are so succinct. For example, his note on Jinn (ch. 1 n. 20) is 4,869 words long: that’s longer than the chapter you are currently reading up to this sentence. Spent talking about GENIES. In this note, Lane describes the entire mythological history of the Jinn,
its “common forms and habitations,” and the “services and injuries done by Jinn
to men,” among other things. This level of complexity is, needless to say, entirely
unnecessary. Granted, Jinn appear often in the Nights, but any reader can easily
understand their role without knowing, for example, that “it is related that
'Áisheh, the Prophet’s wife, having killed a serpent in her chamber, was alarmed
by a dream, and, fearing that it might have been a Muslim Jinnee... gave in alms,
as an expiation, twelve thousand dirhems (about £300), the price of the blood of
a Muslim.” Thanks for clearing that up for us, Lane.

While this is the longest note, his notes on Cosmology, Magic, and Fate
and Destiny are also quite lengthy. To give a sense of just how comically tedious
these notes truly are, some perspective: the frame tale alone has 41 notes with a
total of 14,643 words; the actual text of the frame tale is 4,142 words. This
delusional venture would be downright entertaining and even impressive if I
didn’t have to be the one suffering through reading it. Unsurprisingly, of these
14,643 words, very few bear any direct relation to the text. Instead, the notes are
weighed down by random and unnecessarily detailed accounts of anything and
everything Lane felt obliged to describe.

All disdain for this project aside, it becomes perfectly clear early on that
Lane’s notes were the product of astute and highly disciplined observation. How
else would he know, for example, that “the letters of Muslims are distinguished
by several peculiarities dictated by the rules of politeness. The paper is thick,
white, and highly polished: sometimes it is ornamented with flowers of gold; and
the edges are always cut straight with scissors” (ch. 1 n. 11); or that, “it is a
common custom for a Muslim, on a military expedition, or during a long journey, especially in the desert, to carry his grave-linen with him; for he is extremely careful that he may be buried according to the law” (ch. 2 n.7). However, in painting these observations as the customs of “Muslims” or “Arabs” (never as “Egyptian,” and god forbid he ever mention a specific person, although, since so many of his notes are based off of personal observations, this is probably exactly where he’s getting his information from), Lane dehumanized the very people he was describing: there are no longer individuals, only Orientals, one-dimensional specimens who all live according to the same social and religious customs.

These notes allowed Lane to paint a picture of the Orient that extended far beyond the reach of the Nights, and as a testament to just how far removed they were from the actual text, Lane’s nephew Stanley Lane-Poole published the notes as their own book several years later. These notes were the product of close observation and intensive study, and their sheer number and scope do not let us forget this fact. Lane’s project can be described as “coaxing the optimal factual data out of the text” (Shamma 35) and using the Nights as a “pretext, to describe Arab, Islamic, and generally Oriental, cultures and illuminate literally all aspects of their lives” (29). In this way, the Orient was presented to the West as something that could be described in great detail, generalized, and understood, and the responsibility fell to Lane –or rather Lane took it upon himself –to decide exactly what the reader ought to know about the Orient and how that information was to be presented. Lane once and for all lifted any veil of mystery that still remained over the Orient, displaying “the world of the Arabian Nights as
unequivocally that of the Arabian East” (Ahmed 150) and as a result the sublime, otherworldly essence of the *Nights*, of Galland’s *Nights*, became inextricably epitomized as the mundane, daily life of the modern Egyptian.

One final note: of the three *Nights* translations that I discuss in this thesis, Lane’s *Nights* was by far the most-well received. The *London and Westminster Review* hailed, “Mr. Lane’s version is beyond all doubt a most valuable, praiseworthy, painstaking, learned and delightful work; worthy to be received with honour and thanks by all lovers of the ‘Arabian Nights’ and to form an epoch in the history of popular Eastern literature” (Ahmed 141); the *Eclectic Review* wrote that one could acquire “a much clearer notion of oriental manners... than from the most judicious book... ever written” (Ahmed 150); and the *Athenaeum* raved “[Lane is] the fittest perhaps of any man living for the task he has so ably executed” (Ahmed 156). While it’s hard to believe that even the most astute reader would have taken the time to carefully pour over Lane’s notes, they are precisely what set Lane’s *Nights* apart from the less ambitious translations of his predecessors and garnered him such enthusiastic praise.
Chapter 3: Richard Burton, The Rebel

If Edward Lane was the prototypical, generic Orientalist, then his successor, Sir Richard Francis Burton, was the Indiana Jones of the 19th century.

His résumé was impressive:

A soldier, a traveller, a military surveyor, a stunning linguist with nearly thirty languages to his credit, an African explorer, an anthropologist, an ethnologist and a pioneering sexologist, as well as one of the founding members and first presidents of the organization that would become the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. The author of over fifty books, he still found time to become a master swordsman and amateur geologist, botanist and inventor (Nurse 165)

Burton was born on March 19, 1821 in Devonshire, England. His formative years, however, were spent in France and Italy. He matriculated at Oxford at the age of 19, but was expelled just two years later, at which point he decided to become an officer in the 18th Regiment of the Bombay Native Infantry in India. He spent eight years in India, mastering Arabic, Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi, and various other Indian languages. During his stint as an officer in the city of Karachi, Burton’s commander, Sir Charles Napier, asked him to investigate cases of homosexuality in city brothels. Burton reported that,

Not women but boys and eunuchs, the former demanding nearly a double price, lay for hire... being the only British officer who could speak Sindi, I was asked indirectly to make enquires and to report upon the subject... on express condition that my report should not be forwarded to the Bombay Government. (Burton 205)

Unfortunately, Burton’s very detailed report –too detailed given the sensitivity of the investigation –did find it’s way to government officials, resulting in Burton’s discharge. This incident was perhaps the defining moment of his career, since

1 All of the following biographical information is taken from Fawn McKay Brodie’s Encyclopedia Britannica article on Burton unless cited otherwise
from this point onwards his name would forever be conflated with provocation and perversion.

Following his discharge, Burton returned to England with his tail between his legs, secretly harboring a plan for his return to the East. In 1853, Burton traveled to Cairo disguised as a Muslim and completed the forbidden pilgrimage to Mecca, detailing his travels in his successful book *Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Mecca*. Afterwards, he spent the next few years exploring Africa in an attempt to discover the source of the Nile River with a companion, John Speke. Speke got most of the credit for their explorations, leading Burton to direct his attentions elsewhere. He traveled to America and resided for a number of years in Equatorial Guinea and Brazil before returning east and securing a consular appointment in Damascus. However, conditions in Damascus at the time were volatile, and under Burton the situation went from bad to worse. In 1872, he was transferred to Trieste, a move that virtually amounted to diplomatic exile; Burton’s career was as good as finished. However, he was extremely productive during this time and published a great number of books, ranging from a history of the ancient Etruscans to a study of Icelandic volcanoes to verses of original poetry.

It was during his time in Trieste that Burton first learned of a fellow Englishman named John Payne and his work on a translation of the *Nights*. It’s believed that Burton first had the idea of translating the *Nights* way back in 1852, and sometime soon after began working in collaboration with his friend Dr. John Steinhaeuser (Nurse 167). Steinhaeuser died in 1866 with very little of
his prose translation completed, leaving Burton with the gargantuan task of translating the rest on his own (Burton’s Nights was by far the longest English translation to date) (168). It’s unclear how much of the Nights Burton had translated by the time he reached out to Payne in 1881, but he offered his notes and assistance to his rival translator, which Payne gratefully accepted (171). The two remained in close correspondence throughout the process, and Payne even dedicated the first volume of his translation to Burton in return for all of his guidance (172).

Burton showed a great deal of respect for Payne as well, praising his translation very highly in the London journals and dedicating the second volume of his Nights to his companion (173). However, in spite of their relationship, Burton ultimately decided to move forward with his own translation, believing that Payne played it too safe in translating the sexually explicit passages. Burton’s goal was to produce a “full, complete, unvarnished, uncastrated copy” (Burton ix), not a project for the faint of heart… or anyone with something to lose. For one, literary censorship in Victorian England posed a very legitimate threat: unlike the censorship laws in France during Galland’s time, the Pure Literature Society, the National Vigilance Society, the Society for the Suppression of Vice and the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 all had serious teeth (161). For example, the Society for the Suppression of Vice secured convictions in 154 of the first 159 cases they tried, many of which resulted in jail time (161). “In such an atmosphere of social and legal repression,” Nurse writes, “anyone looking to
issue an unexpurgated English translation of the *Arabian Nights* ran a real risk no matter how they chose to disseminate it (162).

Burton published his *Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments. Now Entitled The Book of the Thousand Nights and A Night With Introduction Explanatory Notes on the Manners and Customs of Moslem Men and a Terminal Essay Upon the History of the Nights* in 1885-1888 through the fraudulent Kama Shastra Society, a “bogus publishing society that would act as a smokescreen for translations of English versions of eastern erotica” (174). This may have been enough to protect Burton from public outcry had he taken the precaution to publish the *Nights* anonymously, as did every other translator publishing material through the Kama Shastra Society (175), but Burton couldn’t resist the temptation to publish under his own name. Although his *Nights* was, in theory, inaccessible to the public (although in practice less so), since it was limited to 1,000 subscribers and cost 1 guinea (approx. 75 pounds today) per volume (181), Burton nonetheless ran a huge risk in publishing it; and, in going so far as to attach his name to the work, Burton was playing with fire.

But walking that fine line between mildly objectionable and egregiously deviant was where Burton thrived. His penchant for shock and provocation, described by Nurse as “a deep streak of social immaturity that often worked against his best interests; a perverse tendency to tweak authority that he never outgrew” (166) was the undercurrent that coursed through all of Burton’s many accomplishments. This antagonistic relationship with authority was due in large part to a crisis of identity: after having lived an “unusually nomadic childhood”
(N166), Burton felt like an outsider in Victorian society when he returned to England as a young man. He rejected it outright, just as he felt that it rejected him. He writes in his introduction to the *Nights* that,

> In our day, when we live under a despotism of the lower ‘middle-class’ Philister ... the prizes of competitive services are monopolized by certain ‘pets’ of the Mediocratie, and prime favourites of that jealous and potent majority- the Mediocrities who know ‘no nonsense about merit’ ... how perfect is the monopoly of the commonplace... how fatal a stumbling-stone that man sets in the way of his own advancement who dares to think for himself, or who knows more or who does more than the mob of gentlemen-employés who know very little and who do even less. (x)

Clearly, Burton had little respect for his contemporaries and viewed the Victorian-era meritocracy as a system that reinforced a status quo of mediocre philistinism fatal to anyone who dared to challenge the established order. He was equally critical, if not even more so, of how sexuality was discussed in Victorian public life.

Burton believed that the societal ills of his day were a direct result of sexual repression. Dane Kennedy, in his article “‘Captain Burton’s Oriental Muck Heap’: *The Book of the Thousand Nights* and Uses of Orientalism” (2000), presents Burton’s case: “Civilization,” Burton believed, “breeds repression and repression breeds perversion” (329). While this may be an oversimplified interpretation, Kennedy writes that even if the “sexual attitudes of his countrymen and women were in fact a good deal more complex and varied than Burton acknowledged or appreciated, it is true that antisensualism held a prominent place in the ethos of the Victorians” (330), and it was this disavowal of sensuality that Burton so adamantly combatted, specifically the deprecation of female pleasure. Kennedy explains, “Burton saw female sexuality as a source of
disorder if left unsatisfied. It was the obligation of men to keep it in its appropriate channels, something he felt his countrymen had failed to do” (333). Essentially, “Burton’s critique of the West centers around its failure to satisfy the physical woman” (322).

In this respect, Burton used the *Nights* as a means of foregrounding explorations of female sexuality. He recounted specifically that, “readers of these volumes have remarked to me with much astonishment that they find female characters more remarkable for decision, action and manliness than the male; and are wonderstruck by their masterful attitude” (331). In acknowledging the female sex drive and by placing an even greater emphasis on female sexual desire than male desire, Burton remains faithful to the *Nights* and the many instances in which the male is fulfilling the sexual needs of the female, not the other way around. Yet, this was not meant to be an empowering message for women. In fact, Burton didn’t even think women should be allowed to read his translation. Rather, he “intended to provide male readers with the insights of the Orient into the physical woman, to inform them of the erotic responsibilities they were obliged to shoulder in their relations with the opposite sex, responsibilities that an over refined civilization had sought to repress” (333).

Burton set out to accomplish this by translating explicit passages in the *Nights* that had hitherto been censored. Let’s take a look at Burton’s treatment of some of the raunchier passages. One such passage is the description of the sultan’s wife engaging in sexual intercourse with the slave Mas’oud in the frame tale. A quick refresher: Galland omitted this passage outright and informed his
readers that modesty forbade him from translating it in good conscience. Lane’s translation includes some embracing, “kissing” and “carousing” (3), but nothing too provocative. Haddawy’s 20th-century translation reads, “a black slave jumped from the tree to the ground, rushed to her, and, raising her legs, went between her thighs and made love to her. Mas’ud topped the lady...” (7). Burton’s goes, “the hideous blackamoor dropped from the tree straightaway; and, rushing into her arms without stay or delay... all fell to satisfying their lusts and remained so occupied for a couple of hours... and the blackamoor dismounted from the Queen’s bosom” (9).

Okay, so “satisfying their lusts” and “dismounting from the Queen’s bosom” are pretty suggestive, but don’t be fooled: this is Burton on his best behavior. Remember the Baqbaq story from the Galland chapter? The one with the man abused by a beautiful woman whom she tricks into cross-dressing before he winds up in a crowded bazaar and is paraded throughout town on the back of a camel? Whereas Galland and Lane both omitted the bit about Baqbaq having to chase the woman around until his penis became erect, Burton went there. He translates, “it is her wont... to let no one have her until... she will bid thee doff thy clothes and run... and do thou follow her from place to place till thy prickle stands at fullest point, when she will yield to thee” (327).

However, one of Burton’s most stunning displays of his complete lack of propriety comes in “The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies.” In this tale, three women invite a porter into their home and, after some feasting and carousing, the three women proceed to strip naked and wash themselves in a
pool, all in front of the porter. They then sit in his lap and point to their vaginas and ask the porter what he calls this part of the female anatomy. This prompts crude and vulgar responses from the porter, like “sex tool,” “pussy,” and “cunt” in Haddawy. Even by 21st-century standards, this exchange is pretty R-rated. Unsurprisingly, Galland and Lane don’t even touch this. Burton, however, _actually translates it in its entirety_. Could you imagine someone in Victorian England _reading_ “thy womb, thy vulva”, “thy coynte” or “thy clitoris” (90)? They would have spat out their afternoon tea and crumpets on the spot! Not to mention, these descriptions of vaginas go on for several pages, so it’s by no means something that one could easily glance over. _This_ was an assault on prudery if there ever was one.

It is true that all three of these tales deal specifically with female sexual desire, but Burton’s crusade of sexual enlightenment did not stop there: in the “terminal notes” section of the final volume of his translation, his note on “pederasty” effectively became the “first inquiry into same-sex liaisons to address a public audience in Britain” (Kennedy 337). In this note, he posited the existence of something called the “Sotadic Zone,” a geographical region encompassing “meridional France, [the] Iberian Peninsula, Italy, Greece, coast-regions of Africa from Morocco to Egypt, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Afghanistan, Punjab and Kashmir, China, Japan, Turkistan” (Burton 206) where sodomy is more common than in the rest of the world. He explains further,

> Within the Sotadic Zone the Vice is popular and endemic... whilst the races to the North and South of the limits here defined practise it only sporadically amid the opprobrium of their fellows who, as a rule, are
physically incapable of performing the operation and look upon it with the liveliest disgust. (207)

What’s remarkable about this theory is that it’s “geographic and climactic, not racial” (207). Burton hypothesized that, within the Sotadic Zone, there was supposedly a “blending of the masculine and female temperaments, a crisis which elsewhere occurs only sporadically” (208), and that this was the primary cause of increased pederastic activity.

This note on pederasty is a perfect example of what Foucault describes in *History of Sexuality* as the emergence of the “science of sexuality”. He explains,

> Since the end of the sixteenth century, the ‘putting into discourse of sex,’ far from undergoing a process of restriction, on the contrary has been subjected to a mechanism of increasing incitement; that the... will to knowledge has not come to a halt in the face of a taboo that must not be lifted, but has persisted in constituting... a science of sexuality. (12)

In divorcing sodomy from any moral or religious bias by describing the practice as climactically determined and in analyzing the causes, history, effects, etc. of pederasty, Burton transformed it into a subject of quasi-scientific discussion driven by a desire for knowledge about sex.

Discussions of sexuality in Victorian England (or lack thereof) were believed to have typically revolved around a “triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence” (Foucault 5). In *The Other Victorians*, Steven Marcus offers what Foucault calls the “repressive hypothesis,” the argument that, in response to these limitations, there emerged “Other Victorians” who broke free from the confines of this repression and established their own space within which to discuss sexuality freely and produce pornographic literature. While Burton’s *Nights* could certainly be understood as corroborating this theory to an extent,
it’s also true that he expanded his discussion of sexuality beyond simply pornography for pornography’s sake to include the discursive “science of sexuality” that Foucault describes.

As Foucault writes, “it is a ruse to make prohibition into the basic and constitutive element from which one would be able to write the history of what has been said concerning sex starting from the modern epoch” (12). Instead, what the “modern epoch” truly witnessed was a proliferation of “devices that were invented for speaking about [sex], for having it be spoken about, for inducing it to speak of itself, for listening, recording, transcribing, and redistributing what is said about it” (34). In this way, there was not merely an increase in the publication of illicit material, but rather a complete reformation of sexual discourse like, for example, Burton’s note on pederasty.

Whatever codes did exist for discussing sexuality in the public sphere, Burton violated them all with his translation. To cite a few examples: the *Edinburgh Review* hailed it, “a jumble of the vulgarest slang of all nations” (Burton 412) and similarly claimed that “probably no European has ever gathered such an appalling collection of degrading customs and statistics of vice as is contained in Captain Burton’s translation of the *Arabian Nights*” (Burton 438). Henry Reeve deplored, “Galland is for the nursery, Lane is for the Library, Payne for the study and Burton for the sewers” (Irwin 36). Other reviews called it “one of the grossest... books in the English language” (Colligan 40) and “the garbage of the brothel” (Colligan 40). This is not to say that there weren’t any reviews praising Burton’s translation: on the contrary, many thought it to be
more faithful to the Arabic for its lack of censorship and lauded it as the best Nights translation to date. As Haddawy writes, “If Lane attempts to guide the prudish Victorian reader through Cairo... Burton attempts to bring Cairo, in all its color, to England” (xxvii).

Kennedy describes Burton's Nights as “a daring bid to provoke a confrontation with those forces in British society that he identified with moral intolerance and intellectual pedantry” (317). Unlike the translations of Galland and Lane, Burton accosted his readership by presenting them with a translation that challenged, unsettled, and even offended their own cultural history. Lawrence Venuti describes foreignizing translation as one that places “an ethnodeviant pressure on those [target-culture] values to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text” (15), and this is precisely what Burton did. In his uncensored Nights, the faithful rendering of illicit material undermined and destabilized the moral authority of Victorian England, as is clear from its controversial reception. Burton used the Nights to pass judgment, and harsh judgment at that, imbuing the text with an ethical conviction.

Venuti argues that another way in which Burton’s translation was foreignizing, albeit to a lesser extent, was through his use of archaic language. One example from the frame tale, after king Shahrayar has invited his brother to go hunting with him:

‘O brother, my soul yearneth for naught of this sort and I entreat thy favor to suffer me tarry quietly in this place, being wholly taken up with my malady.’ So king Shah Zaman passed his night in the palace and, next morning, when his brother had fared forth, he removed form his room and sat him down at one of the lattice-windows... and there he abode
...thinking with saddest thought over his wife’s betrayal and burning sighs issued from his tortured breast. (5)

In Haddawy:

‘Brother, I feel distracted and depressed. Leave me here and go with God’s blessing and help’... After his brother’s departure, Shahzaman stayed in the palace and, from the window overlooking the garden... as he thought of his wife and what she had done to him, [he] sighed in sorrow. While he agonized over his misfortune... (7)

You may remember that Lane’s Nights language was pretty antiquated as well, the difference being that while Lane’s Nights sounded stilted and dull, Burton’s reads more like an outdated yet eccentric translation. However, Venuti claims that Burton’s appropriation of Jacobean language served a far greater purpose than simply adding idiosyncratic flair: in re-appropriating the language of Shakespeare, formerly reserved for the classics of the English cannon, he writes, Burton both “deflated” its superiority and placed revered works of literature on level ground with the “literature of a stigmatized foreign culture” (272) thus, “undermining the cultural basis for the formation of a British identity” (270). It’s significant that at this particular moment in English history, the British Empire was at the height of its colonial and imperial rule, so that the identification of the Nights with Renaissance literature, the pinnacle of English civilization, may have also compromised England’s status as a colonial power in the minds of Burton’s readers (270).

Burton not only established this relationship between the Nights and England’s rich literary tradition on linguistic grounds. In fact, the primary connection that he draws between the two is the prevalence of sexual content. He concludes his essay on pederasty with the following:
In an age saturated with cant and hypocrisy, here and there a venal pen will mourn over the ‘pornography’ and the ‘garbage of the brothel’... To be consistent he must begin by bowdlerizing not only the classics, with which boys’ and youths’ minds and memories are soaked and saturated at schools and colleges, but also Boccaccio and Chaucer, Shakespeare and Rabelais; Burton, Sterne, Swift and a long list of works which are yearly reprinted without a word of protest... (254)

This is an argument that Burton espouses time and again in his defense of an uncensored Nights. When threatened with being brought to court for a violation of censorship laws, Burton supposedly countered, “if the matter comes to a fight, I will walk into court with... my Shakespeare and my Rabelais under my arm, and prove to them that, before they condemn me, they must cut half of them out, and not allow them to be circulated to the public” (Nurse 183). This logic –that the Nights should be exonerated by virtue of the fact that Western literature deals with sexuality in more or less similar terms –is at odds with another tendency of Burton’s to understand all difference in terms of cultural relativity, like when he writes that, “we must remember that grossness and indecency, in fact les turpitudes, are matters of time and place; what is offensive in England is not so in Egypt” (xvi).

These two conflicting arguments exemplify an unresolved tension in Burton, which Kennedy refers to as his “competing uses of Orientalism” (319). On the one hand, Burton was an “eccentric and embittered outsider, at odds with the Foreign and Colonial offices, as well as with the Church and with most of the literary and academic world” (Irwin 35). A rebel who identified the hypocrisy and shortcomings of his adopted society, Burton was unafraid to combat them. His individuality was what distinguished him from an Orientalist like Lane, for
unlike Lane, he belonged to the category of “the writer who... is less willing to
sacrifice the eccentricity and style of his individual consciousness to the
impersonal Orientalist definitions” (Said 157).

However, this individuality was obviously complicated by the fact that, in
spite of Burton’s contempt for Victorian England, he was nonetheless a
European, and by extension a “voice of European ambition for rule over the
Orient...” infused with “a sense of assertion and domination over all the
complexities of Oriental life” (Said 196). He was both a rebel against authority
and a figure exercising that very same authority he attempted to subvert.

Furthermore, one could also make the counter-argument, as Tarek Shamma
does, that Burton doesn’t undermine English identity at all, but rather validates
his readers’ feelings of cultural superiority. Venuti claims that Burton’s Nights
won “acceptance for the literature of a stigmatized foreign culture” (272). Except
that, of course, as reviews have shown, many didn’t accept it. Burton himself
writes in the introduction to the Nights that,

For instance the European novelist marries off his hero and heroine and
leaves them to consummate marriage in privacy... but the Eastern story-
teller... must usher you, with a flourish, into the bridal chamber and
narrate to you, with infinite gusto, everything he sees and hears. (xvi)

And, as quoted earlier, he reminds the reader that “what is offensive in England
is not so in Egypt” (xvi). Isn’t it true that comments like these, in “foregrounding
...the alterity of the source text and culture” can act as “affirming the self in
contrast to the emphasized difference – or eccentricity – of the Other” (Shamma
74)? And doesn’t this foregrounding of the other allow for the type of judgment
implicit in every criticism of uncensored sexuality in Burton, that “Oriental
societies lacked the same sensitivities regarding women as did European society or that the Oriental present stood at an evolutionary stage comparable to a European past” (Kennedy 326)? Lastly, is his evocation of authors like Shakespeare and Swift not just a way to save his own skin?

Of course, there’s no definitive answer: Burton’s translation can be read in both ways, as either validating English cultural superiority or uprooting it, depending on the reader. Yes, Burton was unable to escape the fact that, as a European, he was writing from a vantage point steeped in authority, and while his appropriation of a foreign culture to serve his own quasi-political ends was perhaps imperialist, and his reduction of Arab culture to a sexual case study, cultivating the “myth of the erotic and exploitable east” (Irwin 35) definitely Orientalist, I do believe that in the Nights Burton discovered a radical treatment of sexuality that he genuinely appreciated and favored over the ineptitude of his own society’s engagement with sexual discourse. Kennedy describes Burton’s project as a “quixotic enterprise” (317), and I believe that’s exactly correct: he attempted to expose the hypocrisy of his world and hoped that the Nights would challenge his contemporaries to do the same. He was perhaps unable to single-handedly overhaul Victorian mores, but by exposing his readership to perspectives so dissimilar from their own, he was able to at least spark a conversation.
Conclusion:

Although the *Nights*, with the exception of a handful of stories, has ultimately fallen out of favor, it was a trademark of 18th and 19th-century European literature, one of those rare works that appealed to both the masses and the educated elite alike. It’s fair to say that the *Nights*’ western fame was due in large part, if not entirely, to Galland, Lane, and Burton. Now that’s not to claim, as some *Nights* scholars who I’ve cited throughout this thesis have suggested, that the text, which has been devalued practically throughout its entire history, was in any way improved upon by the translations of these three men. While one could certainly make that argument, and again many have, that’s not what I’ve set out to do. One can, however, unquestioningly attribute the popularity of the text to the fact that, for reasons that I’ve only briefly touched upon in this thesis, Europeans *craved* the Orient, and Galland, Lane, and Burton knew precisely how to epitomize it in a way that would satisfy the desires of their respective audiences.

Galland remained faithful to the imaginative literary spirit of the *Nights*, and as such the Orient appeared fantastic and surreal in the minds of the 18th-century French. In order to appease his readers, however, Galland was also required to adapt the text to both their values and literary tastes, thus making it more widely accessible; Lane, on the other hand, used the *Nights*, to which he appended extensive notes that allowed him to draw far-reaching conclusions about the Orient, as a pretext to characterize the east as knowable and pre-disposed to methodical observation; Burton, finally, came to represent the
Orient as highly eroticized as a means of critiquing prudish and outdated sexual attitudes that pervaded his own society or, as has been argued by certain scholars, as a means of purposefully validating his readers’ cultural superiority by establishing a distinction between the enlightened West and the depraved East.

These representations, obviously, hardly reflected the Orient at all, but rather that which Europeans believed and/or wanted the Orient to be. Translation, Venuti writes, is not an “untroubled communication of a foreign text, but an interpretation that is always limited by its address to specific audiences and by the cultural or institutional situations where the translated text is intended to circulate and function” (14). What we gain from reading these translations, then, is precisely a better understanding of for whom Galland, Lane, and Burton are reproducing this text.

In the early 18th century, when Galland was translating, the Orient was the new frontier: few Europeans aside from missionaries traveled there, so that Galland, despite having lived in the Orient for over a decade, tried to reinforce, albeit guardedly, the foreignness that his readers assuredly experienced. By the 1830s, however, anyone with the means to do so had already traveled to the Orient, and if not, they perhaps belonged to royal Oriental societies, studied in Oriental departments at European universities, or read any number of popular books that dealt, directly or indirectly, with the Orient. Therefore, Lane’s translation appealed to his readers’ curiosity: with every note, the Orient came that much closer within reach. As Europeans increasingly experienced the
Orient, the *Nuits* of Galland’s literary propensities was rendered wholly inadequate in favor of a text that instead prioritized ethnographic study. When the 1880s rolled around, the British Empire’s presence in the Orient was as manifest as ever, and back home, Victorianism was in full swing. Despite this outward appearance of stability, however, discontent and a sense of foreboding were rumbling just beneath the surface. Burton himself acutely sensed these tensions, and was able to ignite them with his translation.

This trajectory is quite clearly illustrated by the shift that occurred from domesticating translation, the method used by Galland and Lane, to Burton’s foreignizing translation, revealing an imprecise yet illuminating evolution of European attitudes towards the Orient. The main premise of domesticating translation is that the source text be adapted to align with the values of the target culture, so that regardless of whether or not the Orient was remote or brought within reach, readers of Galland and Lane’s translations were spared the difficulties of having to identify with cultures other than their own.

What is significant, therefore, is that Burton conceived of looking towards the Orient, specifically the world of the *Nights*, as a means of shocking his readership out of complacency. Now, I’m not arguing that Burton somehow managed to rise above the prejudice of his day: as stated in the previous chapter, he did appropriate a foreign culture to serve his own quasi-political ends and reduce Arab culture to a sexual case study. However, the fact that Burton even thought to suggest that his readers should not just study, but rather learn from the Orient is pretty remarkable. Although this view was perhaps not widely held,
it nonetheless represents, in this one particular instance, a decisive break from a mentality that lay at the heart of Orientalist discourse, a perspective that Burton’s readers were finally ready to be exposed to.

“I will begin to tell a story,” Scheherazade explains, “and it will cause the king to stop his practice, save myself, and deliver the people” (Haddawy 21). If there’s one thing I’ve learned from this whole experience, it’s the power of a good story: aside from merely entertaining a listener, characters in the Nights are often compelled to tell stories to save lives, whether it be their own life or the lives of others; Scheherazade’s stories saved an entire kingdom and inspired love. Antoine Galland, Edward Lane, and Richard Burton each told “stories” as well, in the sense that they used the Nights to cultivate their own highly personal narratives of the Orient. They may not have saved lives, but they did capture the hearts and imaginations of nearly two centuries’ worth of readers, inviting them to experience this dynamic relic of medieval Arabic literature whose survival was both a miracle and a blessing.
Bibliography


