The Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges wrote of the *Thousand and One Nights*: ‘[I]t is not necessary to have read it, for it is part of our memory.’¹ He was most certainly right: from Sir Richard Burton’s illustrated volumes for Victorian England to contemporary Disney films, the *Nights* has become a global myth – one might even say it is one of the most global of all texts. The earliest known manuscript of the *Thousand and One Nights* dates from ninth-century Persia, but versions of the tales have been found from various regions across the ancient Islamic Empire and as far away as China, revealing a process of transmission that was clearly transcultural.² Where an individual tale originated is not always possible to discern, and a game of chicken-and-egg has entertained scholars for generations. Much of the energy spent on investigating the manuscript history of the *Nights*, however, has been geared towards uncovering origins and purity, especially in regard to creating ‘definitive’ translations.

Two such attempts – one early modern, one postcolonial – by translators to create and promote their work as a faithful representation of an authentic and original *Nights* are of particular interest. Despite being rooted in two ostensibly opposing projects: orientalism and postcolonialism, the objectives and methods of the two translators are remarkably similar. In both cases the translators tried to erase, cover or ignore the actual history of the *Nights*: that it is an authorless text, the product not of one nation or people, but of widespread transculturation; it is a text which, because of its long history, is impossible to pin down. The first of these projects was undertaken by Antoine Galland, a Frenchman and orientalist who became the first to translate the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights* for Europe in the early 1700s. The second project was headed by Husain Haddawy and Muhsin Mahdi in the 1980s and 1990s in an attempt to de-colonise the *Nights*, to rid them of what they believed were their impure, corrupted parts, and in so doing to reclaim them for Arabs, and, more specifically, to further Arab nationalism.³

The comparative analysis that I will pursue here of the methods and ideologies behind these two translations is useful in two ways: 1) it demonstrates the tension between nationalist and transcultural impulses and the continued importance that ideas of nationhood have in the way we seek to study and understand literature and 2)

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³ This charge has been made by several critics of the Mahdi/Haddawy edition, most seriously by H T Norris (Review of *The Arabian Nights: Based on the Text Edited by Muhsin Mahdi by Husain Haddawy, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 55.2 (1992) 330-1), but it is also clear in the anti-Egypt statements made by Haddawy in the introduction to the English edition, as will be discussed later.

it shines a critical light on the great ongoing project of the Enlightenment, the premises of which played a central role in orientalism, that still underlie many postcolonial projects. Before beginning such an analysis, however, an overview of the transcultural manuscript tradition of the Nights is necessary for those who may be unacquainted with it.

The Transcultural Tradition of the Thousand and One Nights
Stories travelled, and did so with no regard for national boundaries. Choose any tale from the Thousand and One Nights and it is likely to be found elsewhere, often slipped into the canons of ‘national’ literature of any number of nations. Storytellers who heard a tale from a travelling merchant, for example, might retell the story as their own, sometimes with slight changes for the tastes of their particular audiences. ‘The Merchant and the Two Sharpers’, also called ‘The Treasure-finders who murder one another’, is found in a thirteenth-century version of the Nights, but it is also found in the fifth-century Jataka (a collection of folklore literature native to India) and is told as the ‘The Pardoner’s Tale’ in the late fourteenth-century Canterbury Tales. ‘The Tale of the Woman who Wanted to Deceive her Husband’ from the Sindbad cycle of tales (which itself has links to Homer’s Odyssey and Vishnu Sarma’s Panchatantra) is also found in the eleventh-century Sanskrit Katha Sarit Sagara, in the twelfth-century Latin Disciplina clericalis, the Middle English tale ‘Dame Sirith’ and in the fourteenth-century Italian Decameron.

The earliest written documentation for the existence of the Nights is a ninth-century fragment containing little more than a title (Kitab hadith alf layla, or A Book of Tales from a Thousand Nights) and the names of Shahrazad and Dinarzad. The tenth-century historian Ibn al-Nadim also writes of the existence of Hazar AfSana, or One Thousand Tales in his catalogue of books, but the manuscript to which he refers has never been found. He does note, however, that despite the book’s title, the work contains less than 200 stories. A discrepancy between ‘1000 Tales’ and ‘1000 Nights’ is also apparent, a subtle difference that caused problems for later European translators, and in particular for Antoine Galland, as will be discussed in the following.4 The title as we know it today, the Thousand and One Nights, first appeared in the record of a twelfth-century bookseller in Cairo. Despite variations in the title in its early history, the manuscripts agree in one respect: the frame-tale was not meant to contain an actual number of tales, but to represent the possibility of an infinite number of tales.5 Thus any number of tales could be added, amended or removed to suit the teller or his audience, facilitated by the ingenuity of the frame-tale story in which Shahrazad will die if the storytelling ends.

As a result, the recorded tales show a remarkable flexibility in what was understood or accepted to be the tales of the Thousand and One Nights, and it was possible for a storyteller to include tales from different cultures and storytelling traditions at will. Because the material passed through all regions of the far-reaching Islamic Empire (and particularly in Persia and India), F. Rafail Farag remarks that ‘[a]

4 Existing manuscripts contain anywhere from 267 to 870 nights of storytelling.
5 No version before Galland’s European translation contained a conclusion. In Arabic mathematical tradition the number 1000 signifies ‘infinity’ and thus 1001 means a never-ending collection of tales, plus one.
juxtaposition of foreign elements imported from the East and elements of pure Arab origin is noticeable." Different versions bear the stamp of different cultures, including changes in plot, adaptations from polite to popular, a replacement of foreign place names with locally known names, an exchange of Christian feasts for general non-religious outings, and sometimes a removal of religious references altogether. Many of the tales are not of Islamic origin – they were translated into Arabic and Arabised as well as Islamised, set in Cairo or Baghdad. The Bulaq edition printed in Cairo in 1835 includes a page-long invocation to Allah that is absent from the fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript. Thus the Nights clearly belongs to a world tradition, which is to say that the one-thousand-year history of the Nights reveals a continuous mingling of traditions, cultures, religions, histories, languages and politics that has, for the most part, remained fluid. Even when written down, the text was always open for revisions, exchanges and additions. Despite attempts to claim a definitive version of the Nights, no author, nor any pure origin can be attributed to them.

The history of the Nights is an example par excellence of the transnational, of the transcultural, a tradition which continued after Galland and up through the twentieth century. After the publication and fame of Galland’s error-laden and orientalist eighteenth-century translation of the Nights for European audiences, copyists in Egypt, Syria and even India scrambled to re-translate Galland’s edition back into Arabic to sell original hand-written manuscripts of the Nights to European collectors. In addition, Europeans began compiling their own books of Arabic stories, such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s New Arabian Nights (1882) and Guillame Spitta Bey’s Conte arubes modernes (1883). The latter contained Spitta Bey’s own invention, ‘The Captain’s Tale’, which, in an ironic twist, eventually found its way into Joseph Mardrus’s translation of the Thousand and One Nights in 1899.

Each version, each new story is a testament to the border-crossings and continual mediations referred to by Anne Holden Rønning (in this volume), of the transformations and transgressions theorized by Benita Parry. Thus, postcolonial criticisms of orientalism, while rightly placed, are also overly simplistic in regards to the Nights. Rather than being the product of an East/West power struggle, the stories of the Nights demonstrate a mongrel history, a history created not only by Europeans translators, but by each individual storyteller from around the globe who, for any number of reasons, chose to put his personal cultural stamp on the Nights. Robert Irwin, in his companion to the Arabian Nights, refers to the various and numerous

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7 For examples of these types of alterations, see: G.J.H. van Gelder, ‘Slave-Girl Lost and Regained: Transformations of a Story,’ Marvels and Tales 18.2 (2004) 201-17.
9 An interesting debate by customer reviewers at Amazon.com of The Arabian Nights: An Encyclopedia (ed. by Ulrich Marzolph) testifies to the fact that the ongoing debate between Persian and Indian origins is not confined to the world of academia. 20 July 2010 http://www.amazon.com/review/R17E4TZID55CEO/ref=cm_cr_pr_cmt?ie=UTF8&ASIN=1576072045&nodeID=&tag=&linkCode=#wasThisHelpful.
translations as ‘Beautiful Infidels’;\footnote{11} the Nights is a text that came into being precisely because of the unfaithfulness of both the early storytellers and the later European translators, to any ‘original’.

**Pursuing Authenticity: The Early Modern and Postcolonial Projects of Translating the Nights**

The clear goal of Galland’s translation was to introduce the East to Europe. In his Avertissement (Foreword) for the book he writes,

> All the Orientals, Persians, Tartars, and Indians are characterized there and appear as they are, from the sovereigns down to persons of the humblest condition. Thus, without having to endure the hardship of meeting these people in their own land, the reader will enjoy right here the pleasure of seeing them act and hearing them speak.\footnote{12}

Galland was an orientalist in every sense of the word, and had travelled extensively in the Arabic-speaking world, but he belonged to the earlier phase of orientalism entwined with German Romanticism. It is now well known that Galland invented or copied several hundred tales not previously considered to be a part of the tradition of the Nights. Curiously, many of these invented tales are those most famous to Western audiences: the Sindbad Tales, the Ali Baba stories and Aladdin and the Magic Lamp were all inserted by Galland.

On one of his travels in Turkey, Galland came across the Sinbad stories and was informed that they belonged to an even larger collection of tales in Syria. It should be pointed out that no manuscript containing both the Sindbad stories and the stories from the Nights prior to Galland’s translation has ever been found;\footnote{13} thus, he either received incorrect information, or these stories formed part of an oral tradition. Any version of the Nights containing the Sindbad stories must therefore have been compiled post-1720s and based on Galland’s version.\footnote{14}

Galland was, of course, eager to have all of the tales – the complete collection, as it were – and he requested that this manuscript be sent to him in France. He was nearly ready to publish the Sindbad tales as a separate collection when his Syrian manuscript arrived. The manuscript was bound in three thin volumes, but did not meet Galland’s expectations: it contained only 282 nights, and the Sindbad tales were not among them.


\footnote{13} Mahdi 21.

\footnote{14} Such is the case with one of the most famous translations made for English audiences, that of Sir Richard Burton, who based his translation on the Bulaq edition from Cairo, printed after Galland’s version.
This must have come as a deep disappointment for Galland, who, it would seem, could not conceive of a book called the *Thousand and One Nights* that did not actually contain 1001 nights. He wrote repeatedly to Syria asking for the remainder of the stories to be sent and in the meantime began work on translating those stories in his possession with a plan to insert the others when they arrived. He also decided against publishing the Sindbad tales as a separate collection. Galland never received a response from Syria, but this did not discourage him in his belief that the remainder of the stories existed, and he wrote to a friend: ‘A thousand and one Nights! And I have only finished seventy: this can give you an idea of the length of the entire work.’

At some point Galland must have realised that no more stories were coming and decided to publish the Syrian manuscript as a ‘complete’ collection by supplying the missing number of Nights himself. To achieve this Galland needed to insert some of the stories he had collected during his travels, and some which he most likely invented himself. (The seventh volume of Galland’s *Nights*, and most of the sixth, for example, contain stories not found in the manuscript Galland received from Syria.)

Remarkably, however, Galland makes every attempt to promote his book as a ‘complete collection’. In his statements in the Avertissement for the book and in his introductions to the separate volumes he clearly leads his audience to believe that he not only possesses a complete version containing 1001 nights, but that it is the work of a single author. For example, the Arabic original from which he translated the story only contains night breaks up to night 60, and thus, for nights 61–90 Galland inserted his own night breaks, but then discontinues them because he found ‘the difficulties so great’. To explain the irregularities in the manuscript, and to justify his decision to not standardise the night breaks further, he invents an author: ‘[N]ot all the Arabs approved of the form given to the stories by the Arab author ... a large number of them were annoyed by these repetitions.’ He then writes: ‘It is enough that the readers be informed of the intention of the Arab author who made the collection.’

The lengths that Galland went to in trying to prove his ruse and disguise his real sources raises a number of questions: Why was it not acceptable to Galland to simply publish the stories under a title such as ‘Tales Gathered on My Travels in the East’? Was the idea of a complete book with a single author required to sell the book to a European public? Would an incomplete set have made Galland less of an authority on the Orient, or was Galland trying to create a comprehensive picture of the Orient with a comprehensive set of its stories?

In attempting to answer these questions it might be useful to look at the corresponding rise of the modern nation-state with the rise of the novel, a study undertaken by Franco Moretti in his *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800–1900*. According to Moretti, ‘[t]he novel functions as the symbolic form of the nation-state’, and, ‘ readers needed a symbolic form capable of making sense of the nation-state’. The idea of the novel as a symbolic form by which readers could comprehend the

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16 Mahdi 29–30.
17 Galland *Les Mille* 2: 257; translation in Mahdi 30.
18 Galland *Les Mille* 2: 257; translation in Mahdi 30.
Orient is indeed reflected in Galland’s Avertissement for the *Nights* in which he informs his audience that they need not travel to the Orient to experience the Orient — they can simply read his book. Here we see clearly the great project of orientalism: writing the Orient was equivalent to creating the nation of the Orient (as a congruent space that could be understood through its literature). The project is underlined by Sir Richard Burton’s edition which included an appendix entitled ‘Explanatory Notes on the Manners and Customs of Moslem Men’. Burton’s *Nights* served not just as storytelling, but as an authoritative guide for understanding the peoples of the ‘nation’ of the Orient.

Galland’s *Nights* did not represent a collection of tales that had been understood for more than 800 years as incomplete, alterable, and that could be read in any order to suit the storyteller or the audience. Because Galland understood ‘complete manuscript’ to mean ‘complete book’, he took a literal interpretation of the number 1001 nights rather than the figurative, infinite number traditionally associate with it. He turned the tales into a totality — arguably, into a *novel*.

To publish the tales in a form acceptable to his European readers Galland first ‘completed’ the book by adding a conclusion (a European fairy-tale conclusion, no less, in which the king marries Shahrazad). Second, he professed to his public that the stories came from a single source, a single compiler, whom he even went so far as to call an author. Third, he unified discrepancies in style: older versions of the *Nights* reveal the traces of many cultures and many voices, demonstrating a remarkable variety in style in poetry, songs, and cultural references. Many of these poems and songs Galland simply chose to not include. Fourth, he tried to make the tales look more logical in order and structure by adding night breaks, and ensuring that the stories continued from one volume to the next; thus they had the appearance not of a random collection of tales, but of a unified whole, a story from beginning to middle to end. When there are lacunae in the manuscript, Galland invents endings and then goes back to alter earlier parts to match up with the endings. To give the impression of continuity between the volumes from which he translated, he was forced to insert stories and invent new night breaks.

What emerges from this overview of Galland’s translation is that Galland made a considerable effort not just to translate the *Nights* but to put them into modern European form: a coherent, unified, original, authoritative book which, one could argue, was a novel. Other translations of the *Nights* would follow — those great Victorian works by Edward Lane, John Payne, and Sir Richard Burton, to name a few — but it must be emphasized that each of these works entailed corrections, editing and the construction of a ‘collection’ that was based on the idea of the *Thousand and One Nights* as a complete book, as was first imagined by Galland.

Although Muhsin Mahdi’s endeavours in the 1980s could be categorised with other postcolonial attempts to undo the projects of orientalism by reclaiming the *Nights* for the East, Mahdi was, no less than Galland, also on a quest for a coherent, unified, original, and authoritative version of the *Nights*. He hoped to ‘pursue the

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20 This view was of course, most famously projected by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (NY: Vintage, 1979, 1994), which includes strong criticism of the European infatuation with the *Nights* as The Orient.
21 See fn. 5.
22 Mahdi gives a full description of these and other changes by Galland.

history of the manuscript tradition of the Nights, the fate of the Arabic original in the hands of his [Galland’s] successors in Europe, Egypt and India’. In other words, Mahdi intended to debase all other manuscripts – and in fact excise the entire transcultural history of the Nights that was, for better or for worse, furthered by Galland – by unearthing what in his assessment was the earliest witness to the Nights, a manuscript he deemed to be not only authentic but uncorrupted.

Mahdi began his research by preparing an edition of the fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript from which Galland translated his Nights. It is here that Mahdi, by his own admission, came across an uncanny amount of luck: ‘by an act of fate’ he found that the manuscript copied by Galland and now in his possession was in fact the earliest witness for the archetype.

The archetype and original of the stories in this manuscript can be situated at the mid-point between the ninth century when Arab authors first report on the Nights and the nineteenth century when all the four first editions of the Arabic Nights were produced ... Galland’s manuscript includes what all knowledgeable students of the Nights have considered the original core of the work as we know it today, stories that impress even the casual reader as having been strung together with some care rather than merely stacked the one next to the other as was much of the contents of the nineteenth-century editions. Most of the stories strike one as the work of an author who is trying to elaborate variations on a common theme and to develop new structures. And the discourse impresses a student of the history of Arabic language as having been written, or rewritten, in a style that is on the whole uniform, using a vocabulary ... that pertains to a particular time and particular region of the Arab world.

The italicised words in the quote above demonstrate a remarkable similarity in the beliefs of Galland and Mahdi regarding authorship and authenticity, uniformity and coherence – beliefs steeped in Enlightenment discourse and modernist epistemology. Galland and Mahdi were both guilty of distorting the Nights for their own purposes, and ultimately of shunning the transcultural, hybrid, mongrel, global traditions that produced what we now know today as the Nights.

The fault cannot be said to rest entirely on Mahdi, however. Husain Haddawy’s introduction to his English translation of the Syrian manuscript Mahdi edited overflows with praise for the Syrian version above all others, while belittling the Egyptian branch in particular. Haddawy writes: ‘If the Syrian branch shows a fortunately stunted growth that helped preserve the original, the Egyptian branch shows a proliferation that produced an abundance of poisonous fruits that proved almost fatal to the original’. Comments like this provoked reviewer H.T. Norris to

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23 Mahdi vii.
24 Mahdi 8.
25 Mahdi 8-9; italics added for emphasis.
proclaim Haddawy’s introduction as ‘a sort of vendetta’, and he points to Haddawy’s ‘crypto-Ba’athist Arab nationalism’ revealed in statements like the following:

What emerged, of course, was a large, heterogeneous, indiscriminate collection of stories by different hands and from different sources, representing different layers of culture, literary conventions and styles tinged with the Ottoman cast of the time, as work very different from the fundamentally homogeneous original, which was the clear expression of the life, culture, and literary style of a single historical moment, namely, the Mamluk period.

Whether or not Haddawy should be accused of promoting Arab nationalism in his introduction is debatable, but the above quotation certainly shows a view of both culture and nationhood that is distinctly Enlightenmentist in tone, and conspicuously antagonistic towards the transcultural and transnational. Heterogeneity, differing layers of culture and styles mixed with those of other ethnicities does not result in beauty, as Robert Irwin saw it, but in ‘poisonous fruits’.

In short, the sins of stripping the Nights of its true origins, for which Mahdi accuses Galland in his study of the translator, are committed by Mahdi and Haddawy as well, as will be demonstrated in the following. Moreover, and quite incredibly, the very worst cases of injustice to the Nights in Galland’s translation are the very acts Haddawy mentions as the strengths in Mahdi’s edition. For example, Mahdi writes of Galland:

Much of what is usually found to be departures from his manuscript consists of editorial and other liberties he felt free to take in order to complete or embellish the Nuits ... He felt free to abridge, omit, and change with impunity; remove repetitions at will; amplify the text or add explanations where he felt readers could benefit; and link the elements of the story and make it look more logical.

Yet, according to Haddawy, when ‘Mahdi fills lacunae, emends corruptions, and elucidates obscurities … what emerges is a coherent and precise work of art.’ In fact, Haddawy goes so far as to claim that in Mahdi’s edition

a long-standing grievance has been finally redressed, and redressed with a sense of poetic justice, not only because this edition redeems all others from a

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28 Norris 330.
29 Haddawy xiii.
30 Mahdi 34.
31 Haddawy xv.

general curse, but also because it is the work of a man who is at once the product of East and West.\textsuperscript{32}

The conferring of legitimacy visible in this quotation on both Mahdi and his edition of the \textit{Nights} highlights key assumptions at work in the project of Mahdi and Haddawy. In their view, a definitive version of the \textit{Nights} can only be found by someone who has the authority to make such a claim, an authority now bestowed on those with an insider’s knowledge of both hemispheres, as well as those with a proper education in postcolonial theory. Mahdi and Haddawy seem not to recognise, however, that the same ideas about authority, grounded in Enlightenment thinking, allowed Galland to produce his translation. Galland had, after all, also claimed a knowledge of both hemispheres, having lived in and travelled throughout the ‘Orient’ over a period of nine years and having learned the language and literature of Turks, Persians and Arabs.

Referring to Galland’s many omissions and alterations, Mahdi writes, ‘It is curious … that [Galland] did not find it useful to take the reader into his confidence and indicate how he arrived at the composition of his \textit{Nuits}.’\textsuperscript{33} But reviewer Michael Beard exposes the similarly furtive actions of Mahdi:

Mahdi’s text gives us, for instance, a narrative where the third old man’s story in ‘The Merchant and the Demon’ doesn’t appear (we simply learn that ‘the third old man told the demon a story that was even stranger and more amazing than the first two’ (Haddawy, 29)). Surely this is a logical lacuna that begs to be filled somehow – if only by a footnote informing us that other manuscripts add a story here.\textsuperscript{34}

The comparisons between the early modern project of Galland and the postmodern / postcolonial enterprise of Mahdi are numerous, and I will mention only one more here. At the beginning of his research Mahdi was fascinated by the efforts involved in the Western imagining of the book of the \textit{Thousand and One Nights} and its origins:

How did they come to think that a collection of stories presumably originating in ancient India could survive transmission from one How did it come about that they saw a book that can now be shown to have been compiled, one could almost say fabricated, during the eighteenth century in Paris and Cairo as having been ‘originally’ produced in ancient India or ancient Iran? ... How is it that from disparate motifs of uncertain authorship and times they reached conclusions about the origin of a collection of stories not brought under one cover until recent times? culture to another, from one language to another, and from one storyteller to another and yet remain identifiable in eighteenth-century Paris or Cairo as belonging to a particular ancient nation, when

\textsuperscript{32} Haddawy xv.
\textsuperscript{33} Mahdi 35.
common sense should have told them that in such cases the transformation will be so thorough that no original, if such an original ever existed will be recognizable?  

I would like to put the same question to Professor Mahdi: How is it that you, ‘After years of sifting, analysng, and collating virtually all available texts [have] published the definitive edition of the fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript … ’ declaring it to be ‘of all existing manuscripts the oldest and closet to the original’ version of the Nights that we can ever hope to have?

Conclusion

Mahdi and Haddawy seem unaware that their project of stripping a transcultural text like the Nights back to its ‘uncorrupted’ origins left readers with a book that was no longer the Nights. In a slightly more humble introduction to The Arabian Nights II: Sindbad and Other Popular Stories, Haddawy opines:

> Because of the authenticity, or rather the relative purity, of the stories in the Syrian manuscript version … I limited my first-volume translation to this text. But that left out an entire tradition, both written and oral, spanning the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries, and comprising hundreds of stories; I was reminded of this omission by both scholars and general readers, particularly those who missed their favorites … [but] to turn from the Syrian version, which is the closest to what one might call the ‘original’ version of the written tradition … seemed inconsistent and somewhat hard to do. Yet, somehow, the gap had to be filled … Therefore I decided to compromise, by selecting among the stories those which, by representing the essential nature of the Nights, have captured the popular imagination.

The Arabian Nights II takes its place with the centuries-long tradition of hundreds of other translations, editions and redactions in which the selection of the stories is made according to the particular tastes of the audience. Whether invented by Galland or stemming from oral sources from the tenth century, ‘infidel’ stories such as Sindbad and Ali Baba are now widely considered as synonymous with the Nights, and so Haddawy felt a need to re-insert them into the collection. This, of course, testifies to the fact that despite Mahdi and Haddawy’s laborious attempt to produce an ‘original’ version, the same questions that have always plagued the Nights remain: ‘Which Nights? Whose Nights?’ The answers leading to origins, purity and authority have been consistently problematic, perhaps because the easiest answer – that the Nights has no origin and is not pure – is too unsettling.

The literature of a nation, from Robinson Crusoe to Midnight’s Children, has long been viewed as a guidebook for real information about that nation’s history,

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35 Mahdi 1, 2.  
36 Haddawy xv.  
37 Haddawy xii.  
people, and culture. Mahdi and Haddawy wanted to believe in the existence of a ‘fundamentally homogenous original, which was the clear expression of the life, culture, and literary style of a single historical moment’ no less than Galland wanted to believe in the existence of a manuscript containing all the stories of the East, and no less than Burton believed he could tell Victorian Britain about the customs and manners of the Oriental through a fictional portrayal of him in the Nights.

According to Franco Moretti, a nation is ‘the sum of all its possible stories,’ but in recent years nationhood itself has been placed into question and the terms transnational and transcultural are becoming ubiquitous. An awareness of the processes of transculturation should dismantle the links between nation, literature and identity, rendering a search for origins and authors trivial and requiring us to move beyond an out-dated Enlightenment epistemology in our study of literary traditions and manuscript histories.

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39 Haddawy Arabian Nights xiii.
40 Moretti 20.