The Arabian Nights in British Romantic Children's Literature

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The Arabian Nights in British Romantic Children’s Literature

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ABSTRACT

Children’s literature emerged as a new genre in the eighteenth century. In order to break away from the unrealistic and non-educational fiction available and attractive to children, writers began to create rational tales. John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and, later, Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762) both heavily influenced the rational tale trend. Writers composed rational stories of children learning moral lessons without the imaginative elements associated with the potentially detrimental genre of fairy tales. The children’s book market was popular with the middle class who had money and a desire to acquire status symbols, even for their children.

Antoine Galland’s publication of *Les Mille et Une Nuits* in 1704 introduced Europe to the *Arabian Nights*. English versions of the *Nights* circulated immediately, primarily in chapbook form; however, self-proclaimed translations appeared later in the century, such as Richard Johnson’s *The Oriental Moralist* (1790).

Alan Richardson in his book, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832*, outlines the methods used by rational tale writers to incorporate fantastic elements into their stories. Writers exploited the appeal of imaginative literature by utilizing the plot structures, settings, and themes to enhance their moral fiction. As the rational tale trend took control of the book market, the *Nights* became a text to use for didactic means. Writers revised and rewrote elements of the *Nights* tales to be appropriate for a young audience. The rational tales produced in the eighteenth century reflect the consumer presence of the middle class. The *Nights* tales, tales of merchants and traders, offered an ideal foundation for middle class ideals, such as industry, virtue, and social mobility.

In this thesis, I demonstrate the presence of the *Arabian Nights* in the children’s literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In addition, I examine the link between middle class values and the *Nights* in my selected readings. My primary sources for information on children’s literature of the eighteenth century include Alan Richardson, M.O. Grenby’s article “Tame Fairies Make Good Teachers: The Popularity of Early British Fairy Tales,” and Geoffrey Summerfield’s book *Fantasy and Reason*: 
Children’s Literature in the Eighteenth Century. The children’s texts I discuss in this thesis include “Princess Hebe” (1749) from Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess; The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor* (1805); a self-proclaimed translation by Richard Johnson, *The Oriental Moralist* (1790); “Traveller’s Wonders” and “The Travelled Ant” (1794-8) from John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s *Evenings at Home*; “Murad the Unlucky” (1804) from Maria Edgeworth’s *Popular Tales; The History of Abou Casem* (1825); “The Sea-Voyage” and “The Young Mahometan” (1809) from Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Mrs. Leicester’s School*. 
INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the early eighteenth century, publishers began to regard children’s literature as its own genre. The first books for children were chapbooks with Jack the Giant Killer, Tom Thumb, and other fairy tales of Charles Perrault and Madame D’Aulnoy as their subject. Children’s literature saw the beginning of the rational tale, a story composed with a moral and didactic purpose, in the mid-eighteenth century. These tales and their authors professed negative opinions of fairy tales and similar works of imagination. Writing in reaction to the existing popular children’s fiction, the rational tale writers created stories that adhered to Locke’s ideal children’s text, Aesop’s Fables, and to his educational philosophies in general. Geoffrey Summerfield, in his work on imagination in children’s literature, Fantasy and Reason: Children’s Literature in the Eighteenth Century, delves into the role of Locke and Rousseau in the writing for children as well as touching upon several major aspects of the controversy by highlighting select authors and their texts. M.O. Grenby and Alan Richardson both discuss the fusion of imagination and reason in self-proclaimed moral tales attesting to the continuing presence of fairies, genies, and amusement throughout the rational tale trend.

Similarly cast aside as too imaginative and fantastic for children, the Arabian Nights remained popular throughout the eighteenth century. The continued success of the Nights and the frequent exploitation by children’s literature writers brings to light the cultural setting in which it flourished. The eighteenth century also saw the rise in power of an emergent middle class and an increase in trade and colonial expansion. These significant economic and political events set the groundwork for a text like the Nights- a text relating tales of markets, merchants, and tradesmen of the East-to succeed. The primary class purchasing books were the middle class and it is to them the Nights would appeal, as Jack Zipes points out in When Dreams Come True. Grenby argues in his 2006 article “Tame Fairies Make Good Teachers: The Popularity of Early British Fairy Tales” that despite common belief, fairy tales were not completely shoved aside when the rational tale trend took over. I do not intend to dispute his claim in this essay, but rather reinforce it. My interest lies less in the question of whether imaginative fiction survived
through the rise of the rational tale, than in how imaginative fiction, specifically the
*Arabian Nights*, influenced moral fiction for children.

In this thesis, I will first review the status of children’s literature in the last half of
the eighteenth century through the beginning of the nineteenth century, focusing on the
birth of the genre with John Newbery and the controversy over unrealistic elements in
literature, stemming from the educational theories of Locke and Rousseau. Next, I will
provide bibliographical material on the *Arabian Nights*, Antoine Galland’s French
translation, *Les Mille et Une Nuits*, and the circulation of the tales in English. In addition,
I will briefly review literary devices and trends typical of the *Arabian Nights* in order to
emphasize how children’s literature writers create a text that employs the intriguing
aspects of the tales, with an emphasis on the frame story, while remaining appropriate for
an audience of children. In the bulk of the thesis, I study several didactic children’s texts
to show how these rational stories incorporated the *Arabian Nights* into the new trend in
children’s literature and how writers attempt to counteract the supposed negative
psychological effects by molding, borrowing, and twisting elements from the *Nights* in
order to attract children while also including morals to appeal to parents. The selections
discussed in the last half of this thesis include *The Governess* by Sarah Fielding,
*Evenings at Home* by John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Popular Tales* by Maria
Edgeworth, and *Mrs. Leicester’s School* by Charles and Mary Lamb, among others.
1. CHILDREN’S LITERATURE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Grenby demonstrates that children’s literature authors had “a desire to fuse the fairy tale with the new values of the moral tale” (7). A marketable children’s book emphasized “middle class values. It taught piety and decency, as well as commercial virtues such as diligence, honesty, frugality, and forethought” (Grenby 6). Richardson marks John Newbery’s publication of *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (1744) as the commencement of what would quickly become the children’s literature market. The desire of an emergent middle class to educate their children created a demand in the book industry, producing educational yet entertaining books parents and children alike would want to buy. Newbery was by no means the first to publish books aimed at a child audience, but, according to Richardson, he dominated and largely set the tone for the early children’s book trade through a happy coincidence of personal qualities and ideological allegiances, including his considerable energy and entrepreneurial skills, his Lockean conception of childhood and of books that would beguile while instructing his juvenile readers, and his identification (particularly as a self-made man) with the bourgeois values held by their parents (Richardson 109-110).

Newbery’s contributions to this new genre, in addition to *A Little Pretty Pocket Book*, include *The Lilliputian Magazine* (1751-2), *Giles Gingerbread* (ca. 1764), and *Goody Two Shoes* (1765). His success depended on producing what parents wanted, which, in the mid to late eighteenth century, was moral literature containing lessons in virtue, rationality, and good behavior. Summerfield describes the type of books parents bought, books “engaged more and more in social education, in a didacticism of manners and mental improvement” (Summerfield 245). The creation of the children’s literature market and genre dramatically separated it from ‘adult’ literature, something not done before. Summerfield also notes that children’s books “were clearly defined as a distinct category, and written for, or at, and too often down to, the specific readership of the immature, the unformed, those who were to be formed” (Summerfield 245). Fortunately, neither imaginative nor rational literature completely dominated or disappeared. What results from this controversy is rational literature which employed various unrealistic
features or more imaginative fiction with didactic overtones. With the onset of the children’s book market, the content of the literature became a subject of critique and the site of reform efforts. The imaginative literature circulating at the time stimulated discussion over what children should and should not read, leading into a controversy pitting the fantastic against the realistic.

The opposition to fairy tales in the eighteenth century derived their arguments from the educational theories of John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Their theories shaped and instigated the rational tale. Published in 1693, Locke’s Some Thoughts Concerning Education heavily influenced parents, teachers, publishers, and writers alike. His theories emphasized the importance of teaching a child to be reasonable and virtuous. Summerfield provides an overview of Locke’s major points on children’s education, points that greatly impact children’s literature writers in the century to come. Locke did not approve of books for children with the exception of Aesop’s Fables, concerned that imaginative literature did not promote reason in a child’s mind, the ultimate goal in educating a child. Locke preferred that “some easy pleasant book, suited to his capacity should be put into his hands, where in the entertainment that he finds might draw him on, and reward his pains in reading, and yet not such as should fill his head with perfectly useless trumpery, or lay the principles of vice and folly” (Locke sect. 156). In his discussion of Locke, Summerfield remarks on the lesser value placed upon reading versus the importance of “good manners, virtuous inclinations, and proper habits” (Summerfield 6). In Locke’s ideal setting, the parents and tutors discuss with the child what he has read and have him relate what occurs in order to encourage the child to continue reading. Locke viewed servants suspiciously, asserting that their interaction with children was detrimental; the immoral behavior and vice that exists among the servants corrupts children who are exposed to it. Summerfield notes the servants would “create moral confusion and contradiction” (9) by not enforcing punishments or rules given to the child by the parents. Also, the superstitions and urban legends told amongst the servants should not reach a child’s ear. Young children would not be exposed to ghost stories or boogiemen because they are not in accordance with reason; however, later in life a child may be enlightened with the relevant information on witches and spirits. Locke’s theories lay the groundwork for the children’s literature reformation and
the anti-fairy tale stance. His principles appear in the children’s literature of the eighteenth century initiating the rational tale tradition.

Rousseau’s *Emile* is another significant text in relation to the rise of the rational tale. Published in 1762, *Emile* revised Locke’s principles, claiming that children need to be treated as children. He does not encourage reading, even fables, illustrating how a fable is too complex for a child to extract a moral; rather, the child will sympathize with the immoral character. La Fontaine’s “The Raven and the Fox” is one example. Summerfield summarizes the expected reaction of children to La Fontaine’s story. Children were supposed to “be on their guard against the cunning flattery of the fox, motivated by self-interest, they were actually falling love with the wicked animal” (Summerfield 116). The only book Rousseau approved of, “the remarkable record of a man living by his wits, his resourcefulness, his natural talents, in a state of nature” (Summerfield 117), was *Robinson Crusoe*. The self-motivation within *Robinson Crusoe* is key to Rousseau’s idea behind teaching children. According to Richardson, Rousseau “imagined a pedagogy founded on establishing the child’s autonomous judgment” (Richardson 67). The parent or tutor needed to instill in the child an interest in learning and the child would henceforth take an active role in acquiring knowledge. M. F. Thwaite highlights Rousseau’s thoughts on sensibility; Rousseau felt that sentiment and “the language of the heart, these were the true guides to living. Under their sway the divine voice of conscience, rather than intellect, would point the way to virtue and so to happiness” (Thwaite 64).

Rousseau’s influence on eighteenth-century Britain is epitomized by Thomas Day, a good friend of Richard Edgeworth and the author of *Sandford and Merton* (1783), who decided to put Rousseau’s educational philosophies to the test raising two girls with the intention of making one of them his wife. He obtained an eleven-year-old girl, Sabrina, from an orphanage and soon after purchased a second girl, Lucretia. Day took them to France where he managed their education and made certain their surroundings and teachings were of the Rousseau model. The two girls fought constantly and on his return to England, disappointed with Lucretia’s lack of development, he sent her off to work in a milliner’s shop in London. Years later, still working towards an ideal woman in Sabrina, he “[puts] her through a series of tests. He dropped hot sealing wax on her
bare arms and fired pistols off at her petticoats, to see if she had achieved a Spartan state of indifference to pain” (Summerfield 153). Surprisingly, she was not indifferent to pain and Day sent her to a boarding-school.

Both Locke and Rousseau made a mark on children’s literature and education in the eighteenth century. It is to these philosophers that Richard Edgeworth and his daughter Maria, M.M. Sherwood, and Thomas Day would turn when composing their rational tales and when raising children. The rational tale evolved out of the puritan idea that rationality, moral judgment, and industry were necessary virtues to instill in children. Locke’s Some Thoughts significantly impacted and propelled this idea, confirming the importance of education and the content of children’s literature. Locke’s dismissal of fairies and magic caused an influx of rational tales heavy on morality, but light on the supernatural. Later, Rousseau’s treatise on education, Emile, renewed some of Locke’s principles, but veered from others. Both writers’ dismissal of imagination is reflected in the children’s literature of the eighteenth century.

The fears behind the anti-fairy tale stance taken by many in the last half of the eighteenth century stemmed from the warnings delivered by Locke and Rousseau. Sarah Trimmer was an advocate of the catechistic method of education and author of Fabulous Histories (1786). According to Grenby, her anxiety over fairy tales centered “around her concern that they might affect the psychological well-being of a child” (Grenby 4). This anxiety extends farther than Sarah Trimmer; evidence of the suspicions adults had concerning imaginative literature surfaces in much of the children’s literature of the time. Summerfield lists various perceptions of unrealistic fiction; fairy tales and the like, “came to be construed as vulgar, immoral, or mentally regressive—or all three compounded—it followed that many earnest minds were at pains to ensure that children’s minds should be protected from pollution by fantasy” (Summerfield xiv). Julia Briggs recognizes another feared result of children’s encounters with fantasy, the danger that the child would “let [what she read] overflow into her life and influence her actions” (Briggs 227). These fears and suspicions surrounding fairy tales stimulated reform efforts and encouraged the production of didactic books for children.

Several stories from Mrs. Leicester’s School exemplify this anxiety. Charles Lamb’s story, “The Witch Aunt,” follows the first-person narrative of Maria Howe, an
avid reader whose imagination overcomes her reason. She enjoyed reading about witches especially and filled her head with images created by her “own fancy” (68). Maria, not able to sleep, creeps into her beloved aunt’s room and sees her “sitting with her eyes half-open, half-closed; her spectacles tottering upon her nose; her head nodding over her prayer book; her lips mumbling the words as she read them” (69). This scene convinces Maria that she is looking at a witch, not her aunt. Her fears continue for weeks until she is taken from her library and sent to stay with a relative. There, “no books were allowed [her] but what were rational and sprightly”(70). Her time away cures her suspicions; she is “now better instructed” and recognizes “all these stories as mere idle tales, and invented to fill people’s heads with nonsense”(68). Mrs. Leicester’s School includes another story worth looking at in relation to the fears of imagination and the dangerous effect overindulgence could yield if not curbed; however, as it pertains to the influence of the Arabian Nights on children’s literature, I will examine it later in the essay.

The Arabian Nights tales felt the effect of the rational tale trend. Comprised of magic, genies, fantastic adventures, and other exotic and improbable people, places, and events, the Nights tales were in league with fairy tales, equally capable of corruption and thus equally the focus of censorship, revision, and appropriation.
2. THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

The origin of the Arabian Nights is vague and the tales are a hodgepodge of stories collected from Persian, Indian, and Arab cultures. Eva Sallis, in her text Scheherazade Through the Looking Glass, supplies an overview of the composition of the Nights. The Nights was

written down at an indeterminate time, was orally transmitted or created over many centuries and bears the mark of many authors and scribes, many ages, many cities and the fictionalized traces of many peoples, ranging from a nomadic pre-Islamic world to the mercantile sophisticated world of the great trade and cultural centers (Sallis 2).

The introduction of the Nights to continental Europe and subsequently to Britain began with Antoine Galland, a French scholar. The first volume of his French translation, les Mille et Une Nuits, appeared in 1704 and the last volume was published posthumously in 1717. English translations appeared immediately after Galland’s, around 1705-8 (Darton 91), but as Harvey Darton affirms, “no perfect copy seems to be known. Three other partial editions came out by 1715, and the chapmen got hold of the text at once, particularly the stories of Aladdin and Sinbad. The tales appeared in all sorts of miscellanies, including the periodical essays, from that time onwards”(Darton 91). Aladdin and Ali Baba do not appear in any manuscript of the Nights and are actually Galland’s contribution to the tales. The structure of his translation varies from the original as well; Galland’s text was created with a European audience in mind. The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales states that Galland transformed the Nights by “toning down ‘licentious scenes’; eliminating details, interludes, repetitions, and enumerations; amplifying details of plot and décor to explain culture-specific material” (‘Galland’ 193).

Sallis points out that Galland also “lacked the close of the frame, and it was initially thought that he made it up” (Sallis 48). The frame, as Sallis makes clear, is an important feature of the Nights. Scheherazade’s interruptions each night are “a reminder to the reader of the subtextual action and unresolved tale, a reminder of what hangs in the balance.” However, “this trance release and induction is deliberately left off by the translator in the body text” (Sallis 95). The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales emphasizes the loose criteria for translation at this time when “the lines between literary
creation and translation were not yet clearly drawn” (‘Galland’ 193). The liberties Galland takes in translating the *Nights* were necessary before publishing the work in France and its translation into English. The *Nights* in its original form, as Nigel Leask acknowledges, would have been “too spicy and indigestible for fastidious British appetites” (14).

There are several major narrative techniques in the *Nights*. The most discussed literary device within the text is the frame tale. It is the reason for the tales and thus gives the collection a feeling Sallis terms “unity-in-diversity” (87). The frame tale also stimulates repetition, which, as Sallis notes, “is a powerful and very simple way of emphasizing and intensifying a given feature of a story” (Sallis 90). David Pinault’s study of the *Nights*, *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights*, discusses repetition as well; however, his emphasis is on repetitive designation, the appearance of an object foreshadowing its next entrance into the text, and word repetition, highlighting major motifs through which “the theme will gradually force itself on the reader’s attention” (18). Sallis includes this point in her discussion, also mentioning the non-dramatic presence of repetition; “the core stories’ resonance of the themes of the frame is well known but reminders occur throughout, more as echoes than as explicit thematic mirroring” (95). Of course, these narrative devices have been manipulated in translations and adaptations. In fact, Scheherazade’s voice is heard before and after each tale in the original *Nights*, but “one of the failings of several versions” is “that this trance release and induction is deliberately left off by the translator in the body of the text” (Sallis 95).

The *Nights* frame tale begins with two kings who are brothers, Shahryar and Shahzaman. Shahzaman discovers his wife sleeping with a servant. After he kills them, he condemns womankind and leaves to visit his brother. There he witnesses his brother’s wife having sex with a servant while her husband is out hunting. Shahzaman proves to his brother his wife’s infidelity and they decide to leave the country and wander until they find someone “whose misfortune is greater” than theirs. Resting near the shore in a tree, the two brothers see a demon come out of the water with a locked chest and sit under them. The demon pulls a woman out from the chest and falls asleep in her lap. She spots the two brothers in the tree and implores them to come down and have sex with her. She forces them to do this, threatening them that if they do not she will have the
demon kill them. Afterwards, she tells them that she sleeps with as many men as possible to exact revenge on the demon who stole her on her wedding night. The two brothers decide that the demon’s misfortunes are greater and return to their countries. Here the narrative follows king Shahryar’s story. He returns to his kingdom, marries a woman every night and has her killed in the morning. This continues until the vizier’s daughter, Scheherazade, offers herself as the next bride against the protestations of her father. She tells king Shahryar a story every night, stopping as morning arrives and promising to relate more of the story the next day (“Arabian”). Pinault asserts that Sheherazade “is quite literally trying to talk her way out of a violent death at the hands of a husband who himself is dominated by mistrust and jealous rage” (Pinault 23), a situation that is thematically and visually present throughout the tales. She avoids death by this ploy for 1001 nights, at the end of which king Shahryar promises to not kill her as she has proved herself faithful to him. This story provides the reason for the tales and sets up several important themes, motifs, and images which pervade the tales.

Pinault’s study of the narrative techniques within the Nights takes into consideration the orality of the Nights tales, which “were originally oral evening-entertainments and were meant to be recited and listened to” (Pinault 13). The power of storytelling translates into Galland’s text. The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales highlights the various roles of storytelling; storytelling “serves many functions—to allay melancholy, to avert death, to satisfy curiosity, and to defend oneself” (‘Galland’ 193). Galland’s attempt at retaining the frame story formula, primarily the voice of Scheherazade before and after each tale, did not last long as it did not suit the tastes of his audience. Mia Gerhardt explicates one reason behind the eventual absence of the frame in Galland’s text. The frame’s presence throughout the tales “was not found ‘agréable’ so that in his later volumes Galland had to leave it out” (Gerhardt 73). Gerhardt claims that in order to make it reader-friendly, Galland “has rendered the stories simpler and more condensed; poetry and prose rhymes have disappeared; everything appears smoothed out and toned down, and a remarkable unity of style is achieved” (73). After recognizing Galland’s alterations to the Nights text, Gerhardt views Galland’s translation positively, claiming “he took no other liberties with it than those necessary to render it acceptable to European readers of the early eighteenth century” (74).
Brian Alderson wonders what, children might legitimately ask, do these fantastic stories have to do with ‘nights,’ let alone a quantity of them far in excess of the often slim selection of events which they are offered by the publisher? How is Scheherazade introduced, and is any effort made to indicate the passage of nearly three years of story-telling? (Alderson 84).

The frame tale was not given as much detail and significance in English translations, as in the tales themselves. Two examples of the incorporation of the frame tale into English translation are Richard Johnson’s *The Oriental Moralist* (1790) and Charles Morell’s *Tales of the Genii* (1764). In Johnson, “there is nothing of the sultan’s brother, and the main indication of the length of the story-telling marathon lies in the remark about Scheherazade” (Alderson 85). Morell’s *Tales of the Genii* creates a completely new frame tale revolving around a genie taking two children, with permission of their father, to his palace to tell them tales that will teach them to resist temptation and to behave virtuously. He also does not end his frame. The use of frame stories is common in children’s fiction; both John Aikin’s *Evenings at Home* and Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Mrs. Leicester’s School* use a frame story to set up the subsequent book of lessons.

The influence of the *Nights*, though long-lasting, was temporarily threatened by reform efforts aimed at children’s literature by education enthusiasts who worried about the effects imaginative fiction might have on a child’s development. Stimulated by Locke’s *tabula rasa*, these authors wrote to make a virtuous and moral impression. According to Thwaite, writers attempted to escape “fairies and fairy lore, ‘goblins and spirits’, with other superstitions, [Locke] regarded as belonging to the useless trumpery. Imagination and enthusiasm were to be avoided, and the sober light of reason and common sense was to illumine the child’s world” (Thwaite 32). One can see in English translations of the *Nights*, the conservative, moral veil placed over the more graphic and racy sections of the tales.

Alderson confirms that “the dominance of Galland’s version for so long makes it almost certain that this is the edition that children would have read” (Alderson 83). Galland’s translation closed without concluding the frame story, an absence that continues through his imitators. The adaptation by Johnson, *The Oriental Moralist*, one
of the first translations aimed at a child audience, and Morell’s *Tales of the Genii* exist as versions even further moralized. Martha Pike Conant discusses how the authors’ prefaces allow readers to see through the “incantations, genii, sudden transformations, flowery valleys, crystal palaces, deserts, volcanoes, shipwrecks” (Conant 102). Richard Johnson is explicit about his revisions:

> I have endeavoured to select a few of the most interesting tales, have given them a new dress in point of language, and have carefully expurgated everything that could give the least offense to the most delicate reader. Not satisfied barely with these reflections, wherever the story would admit of them. I have, in many instances, considerably altered the fables, and have given them a turn, which appeared to me the most likely to promote the love of virtue, to fortify the youthful heart against the impressions of vices and to point out to them the paths which lead to peace, happiness, and honour” (Johnson, Preface).

The molding of the *Nights* text by English writers reflects the needs of the intended culture and specific book market of the work. The revisions cater to the rational tale trend by censoring offensive and potentially detrimental scenes. Class plays an important part in the creation and promotion of books at this time. Those with the purchasing power and education requisite for an interest in books were primarily the middle class and thus publishers accommodated the particular tastes of their customers.

Before his twelve volume French translation of the *Arabian Nights* appeared, Galland had published Sinbad’s adventures in 1701. The popularity of *Sinbad* persuaded Galland to begin work on his twelve volume translation of the *Nights*. The chapbook editions allowed the tales to circulate among the lower classes, an uneducated population without access to Galland’s French volumes. Jack Zipes explains how the *Nights* was distributed to all levels of society. Significantly, Zipes links the sanitization of the tales with the middle class:

> At first the tales were famous chiefly among the literate classes, who had direct access to the different English, German, Italian, and Spanish translations of Galland’s work. However, because of their exotic appeal there were many cheap and bowderlized editions of the *Nights* in the eighteenth century that enabled the tales to be diffused among the common people and become part of
their oral tradition. Moreover, they were also sanitized and adapted for children so that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Arabian Nights had become a household name in most middle-class families in Europe (Zipes, ‘Dreams’ 50). Zipes identifies several reasons the Nights tales appealed to middle-class families. The tales were about “the aspirations and wishes of a strong middle class, for most of the tales concern merchants and artisans, who, like Sinbad and Junar, continually take risks to make their fortune” (Zipes 57). It is a book about middle-class pursuits, about merchants, markets, and social mobility, significant aspects of middle class life. As a new social class, the members of the middle class could appreciate stories that depicted their lifestyle, advocated their ideas of morality, and were still capable of entertaining an audience. In addition, the merchants in the Nights tales were successful at their ventures, outwitting snares and antagonists, creating a positive scene of the mercantile class as a thriving and virtuous class.

The publication of Galland’s translation coincided with the rise of the middle class in the eighteenth century, who “sought for luxury and adventure” (Ali 25). The Nights portrayal of the mercantile class and social mobility was highly relevant to the traits the middle class desired to teach their children. However, the fantastic and unrealistic components of the tales kept them from being educationally sanctioned by writers, parents, and, consequently, publishers. Children’s literature from this period reflects the consumer presence of the middle class in the subjects written about, the values promoted, and the topics avoided. The tales advocate hard work and industry, in addition to creating a favorable depiction of tradesmen and merchants. The hero of the Nights tale is usually not of rich, upper class origins, but humble, mercantile beginnings. Nonetheless moral revisions were still necessary for purchase and presentation to children. The subtle and not-so-subtle incorporation of the Nights enhanced entertainment, but also supplied an easy and credible setting for stories of markets, industrious middle class men, and social mobility. The trend in education to evade any and all negative effects from fairy tales stems from the middle class need to separate themselves from the lower class, the servants and their culture which, utilizing oral traditions, spread fairy tales and ghost stories. Grenby articulates this point in his discussion of didactic children’s literature. Rational children’s literature was aimed at the
middle class who wanted “to inscribe success on a *tabula rasa*, as Locke had taught them to view their children” (6). The aversion to fairy tales for the middle class went beyond the presence of the unrealistic and became a status symbol. Grenby argues that *Cinderella, Blue Beard*, and the like “acted as an anchor that threatened to prevent children’s literature from rising above its popular and plebian roots, and to undo all the progress that had been made to establish the genre” (Grenby, “Tame” 6), paralleling the threat to the establishment of the middle class and the progress they had made in installing themselves as a new class with money and influence in the market. In order to distance themselves from the working class, the middle class refused to “purchase humble fairy tales, the sort of literature that was available without spending a shilling or two at a bookshop, and which was already the cultural property of servants” (Grenby 6). Moral revisions of the *Nights* tales were popular, due to their position beyond the reach of the illiterate and hinting at the trade industry and colonial expansion. The *Nights*, though condemned for its immoral and fantastic aspects, was an ideal text to revise, adapt, moralize, and incorporate for rational children’s literature in that its middle class foundation provided a good basis for the promotion of English mercantile values and ideals, which is evident in the children’s selections to follow.

A significant aspect of the *Nights*, its reception, and popularity is the exotic setting and culture portrayed in the tales. According to Edward Saïd, “The Orient was almost a European invention, and has been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Saïd 1). Orientalism is a theory that explores how the West negotiates the presence of the Orient and how the West represents the Orient. Saïd uses the latter part of the eighteenth century as the beginning for his discussion on orientalism, “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient-dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Saïd 3). Saïd mentions how “many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms” were “domesticated for local European use”(4). Children’s literature does just that, domesticating the oriental tale, here the *Arabian Nights*, by moralizing, ‘restructuring’, eliminating distasteful elements and making it fit for a young English audience.
Translations, a topic Sallis develops, “represent both modes and cater for local prejudices or expectations at the same time as giving something new and immediate about the *Nights*” (68). In the act of revising the tales, authors devalue and make inferior the original text and its contents. Moreover, what they create, the resulting text, depicts eastern settings and characters teaching western morality through their censored and refined actions. In order to supplement the text, authors like Richard Johnson added moral reflections to emphasize the values a reader should glean from the preceding story. In her discussion of the *Nights* and orientalism, Sallis states that the *Nights* spawned “interest in the fantastic Other” which “was transformed into an interest in ‘manners and customs,’” (Sallis 69). Sallis views the *Nights* as “a benchmark text of both the changing and the enduring attitudes of readers” though “very few are completely free of prejudiced modes of thought and communication” (68). The appearance and immediate success of *Sinbad* and the *Nights* also poses an interesting study of cultural interests and intrigues as well as the status of trade and colonial expansion, creating another link to the text for the middle class through their investments in trade and imperialist ventures.
3. READINGS

Now I turn to the Nights in children’s literature of the Romantic period. The stories under inspection are “Princess Hebe” (1749) from Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess; The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor* (1805); a self-proclaimed translation by Richard Johnson, *The Oriental Moralist* (1790); “Traveller’s Wonders” and “The Travelled Ant” (1794-8) from John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s *Evenings at Home*; “Murad the Unlucky” (1804) from Maria Edgeworth’s *Popular Tales; The History of Abou Casem* (1825); “The Sea-Voyage” and “The Young Mahometan” (1809) from Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Mrs. Leicester’s School.*

Alan Richardson explains four ways authors create moral fairy tales; first, they employ fairy tale elements in the titles, prefaces, and other external aspects of the story in order to appeal to children, “a fairy coating over the moral pill” (Richardson 115). Second, authors could appropriate fairy tale plot structures and settings to even further disguise the didactic purpose. Third, instead of putting morals in a fairy tale world, a writer could create a rational world and install fairy tale motifs and basic plot devices into the entirely realistic settings. Last, authors could, and often did, add morals to their revisions and translations of fairy tales (Richardson 116-7). These moralizing strategies are widely evident when looking at the influence of the *Arabian Nights* on children’s literature from the Romantic period. I agree with Richardson that children’s literature exploited the appeal of fairy tales to achieve a didactic end and therefore will continue with my readings under his rubric, demonstrating particularly how the *Nights* has been used by authors in these ways.

**Sarah Fielding’s The Governess**

Sarah Fielding published *The Governess, or the Little Female Academy* anonymously in 1749. A book about nine girls and their governess, education plays a pivotal role. However, like the *Nights*, the aim is to educate through storytelling, as Briggs explains: “the girls listen to one another’s life stories and these provide opportunities for a series of moral deductions to be drawn from them. Each recounts her own story, and in doing so passes judgment upon her own actions” (Briggs 226). The eldest girl, Jenny, tells fairy tales during the course of the text, employing a different oral tradition to teach the younger girls. “Princess Hebe”, one of the fairy tales included, is
the story of a queen and her child who must leave their kingdom to escape evil usurpers. The story is set in the kingdom of Tonga over 2000 years ago. Magical events, people, objects appear throughout, giving Mrs. Teachum a reason to lecture her students on fairy tales and their use. She demonstrates how one should glean morals from fairy tales, “Princess Hebe” being the sample text. Mrs. Teachum comments on fairy tales’ composition, dismissing fairies and the supernatural as unnecessary and expendable: “Giants and magic, are only of Amusement to the Reader. For if the Story is well written, the common course of Things would produce the same Incidents, without the Help of Fairies” (179).

*The Governess* does not contain a frame story, but is rather a continuous narrative with occasional fairy tales being told by the eldest of the girls, Jenny. Princess Hebe, named after the cup-bearer of Olympus (OED), is a baby when her father dies and his brother and his wife overthrow his widow, taking over the kingdom. The Queen Rousignon and Princess Hebe narrowly escape death by fleeing the castle. A fairy aids them, providing them with shelter and necessities. They live for many years in this shelter until they can return to the kingdom of Tonga and be reinstated as Queen and Princess. In the interim, Princess Hebe learns invaluable moral lessons preparing her for her role as princess; by the time she returns to her kingdom she has the training necessary to her station.

The structure of the tale and the novel itself models the interrupted narrative of the *Nights*. Caracciolo describes the *Nights* as a work of “‘endless’ tales which hold the audience in suspense by intriguing discontinuities (not unfrequently, in the midst of some interesting adventure, when the expectation of his audience is raised to the highest pitch [the professional story-teller] breaks off abruptly)” (Caracciolo 4-5). Jenny tells her story over the course of two days, with intermissions initiated by Mrs. Teachum for dinner, bedtime, etc. The storyteller, Jenny Peace, intends to educate her audience, composed of younger students, about virtue and obedience. Her purpose is didactic and her story must win the approval of Mrs. Teachum.

To briefly look at an adaptation in the guise of a translation, *The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor* (1805) and Richard Johnson’s *The Oriental Moralist*, which are both
aimed at a young audience, I would like to review how they handle the frame story and moralize the tales for an English audience.

**The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor**

One of the most well known stories in the *Arabian Nights* is “The Story of Sinbad the Sailor.” The success of Galland’s *Sinbad* translation spurred on his work on the *Nights* manuscript, resulting in his twelve volume translation entitled *Les Mille et Une Nuits*. Though this edition of *Sinbad the Sailor* was published in 1805, the first edition likely appeared ca. 1712 (*The Hockliffe Project*). The subtitle of the 1805 edition, “A Tale for the Nursery,” implies censorship by targeting a child audience. The story of Sinbad is an example of the middle class values the *Nights* promoted and one of the reasons why the text was easily assimilated into rational tales. This summary of the voyages of Sinbad also pertains to stories discussed later in this thesis.

The story begins with a porter, Hindbad, who laments his station in life after witnessing Sinbad’s luxurious lifestyle. He addresses God, professing faith in His plans and acknowledging His role in one’s destiny. Sinbad overhears the porter and has him come inside to hear about his voyages. Sinbad intends to teach the young porter that he gained his fortune through industry and seven dangerous voyages: “I did not attain this good fortune and this place save after severe toil, great hardships, and many perils. How much toil and trouble I have endured at the beginning” ("Arabian" 5). Sinbad tells the porter the history of one voyage each day, then gives him one hundred pieces of gold, feeds him, and asks him to come back the next day.

The first voyage describes how Sinbad wastes his inheritance and finds himself destitute. He decides to set sail with a group of merchants. They stop on an island and soon discover that the island is in fact a fish. Sinbad does not make it back to the ship, but manages to hold onto a piece of wood and washes ashore an island. He stays with a group of men who breed valuable horses by tethering a mare to a tree and letting the sea-horse mount her before the men scare it away. Each voyage ends with Sinbad finding his original ship from which he obtains his possessions, sells them, makes a profit and returns home wealthy. He soon loses interest in his life at home in Baghdad, desiring to travel and make money, he sets off on a new voyage. The only varying aspect of
Sinbad’s stories are the voyages themselves, therefore I will quickly summarize the next six voyages without mentioning the frame story and the formulaic closing sequence.

On his second voyage, Sinbad is once again left on an island. To escape, he ties himself to a bird’s leg. He unbinds himself in the valley of diamonds, where diamond hunters use sheep meat to collect the diamonds at the bottom of the serpent-filled valley. He joins the diamond dealers and makes his way Baghdad. During the third voyage, apes attack Sinbad’s ship, leaving the sailors on an island. A cannibalistic giant attacks them, eating one sailor per night until the remaining sailors escape on a raft. On the next island, a serpent attacks Sinbad’s two companions. To avoid this death, he ties wood around himself and the serpent is unable to swallow him. He flags down a ship from the shore, which happens to be his original ship. The fourth voyage relates his adventures with the Magians. The Magians, when they run across the travelers, offer them food that stupefies them. The Magians fatten them up and then eat them. Sinbad escapes again by refusing to eat and arrives in a new village. He makes saddles for everyone, becoming wealthy and a favorite of the king. He acquires a wife and soon after discovers a unique custom within the village. When a person dies their body and their living spouse are thrown down a well. Sinbad’s wife dies and he is put into the well with her. He takes the valuables on the corpses and escapes through a hole. The fifth voyage is of Sinbad and the old man of the sea who lives on Sinbad’s shoulders for awhile. Sinbad eventually gets the old man drunk and shrugs him off. Sinbad quickly finds himself in a new city and learning a new trade: collecting and selling nuts.

Another shipwreck lands Sinbad on an island in his sixth voyage. He builds a raft and floats down a jewel-encrusted stream until he reaches a village and stays with the king. Yet again, a ship departs to Basra and Sinbad hitches a ride home with the jewels he collected on the island. The last and final voyage of Sinbad, follows the same pattern as the previous voyage: shipwreck, raft downstream to a village, sells goods in the market, and marries a local woman. He notices that the men of the village grow wings and fly into the sky. Sinbad rides with one of them and as they ascend Sinbad says a prayer. A fire shoots down upon them, causing the men to leave Sinbad on a mountaintop. When he returns to the village, his wife tells him that those men worship the devil and she proposes they leave for Baghdad. The frame tale ends happily; the
porter apologizes for assuming Sinbad acquired his wealth without industry and they become lifelong friends.

Richard Johnson’s The Oriental Moralist

Richard Johnson prefaces his translation, The Oriental Moralist, with an account of how he came across the Nights. After reading the tales, he compares them to “a once and luxuriant garden where scarce any thing strikes the common observer but the weeds and briars with which it is over-run.” Johnson intends to take the role of the “‘experienced gardener’ who discovers still remaining, though but thinly scattered, some of the most fragrant and delightful flowers” (Preface 2). He aspires “to improve the morals, to furnish the mind with useful knowledge, and to correct and properly conduct the ideas of the rising generation” (Preface 3). He opens his adaptation with Scheherazade’s ploy to stop the king from killing any more young women. Johnson includes less than twenty tales, Aladdin and Sinbad present. He abridges the first tale, “Adventure between a Merchant and a Genie Near a Fountain”, leaving out two sub-stories told by two old men. In Haddawy’s translation, the tale recounts the history of a merchant who at the beginning of the tale is traveling to another country and on his way back, fatigued and famished, he stops to rest and eat. While eating his dates the merchant tosses the pits around him. Suddenly a demon appears with a scimitar and tells the merchant that he is going to kill him. It turns out that one of the pits the merchant so carelessly tossed to the side hit the demon’s son in the eye and killed him and therefore the demon must exact vengeance. The merchant begs the demons for a year reprieve in order to arrange his assets and say goodbye to his family. A year later they meet again, the merchant prepared to die. Before the demon arrives, three old men appear one after another curious as to why the merchant is there. The merchant tells his story to the old men. The demon arrives and the old men bargain for the merchant’s life with their strange and wonderful stories. Each old man, if the demon is amazed by their history, will be granted one third of the merchant’s life. At this point each old man tells his story.

The first old man tells how his wife, jealous of his mistress, transforms the mistress into a cow and the mistress’ son into a bull and gave them to the shepherd. When the husband returns the wife lies about the mistress and son’s whereabouts. At feast time, he calls for a cow to sacrifice and the shepherd brings him the cow that is in
fact his mistress transformed. The cow weeps ‘my son, my son’ and the husband cannot complete the sacrifice, asking the shepherd to do it for him. When cut open, the cow reveals nothing but skin and bone. He then calls for a bull to sacrifice; the shepherd brings him his son. The bull is very affectionate, rubbing his head on the husband and he then refuses to sacrifice the bull despite his wife’s commands to the contrary. He sends the bull home with the shepherd whose daughter is a soothsayer, recognizes the enchantment placed on the bull, and tells the husband what has happened. If the old man meets two conditions the daughter of the shepherd will release him from the spell. She wants his blessing to marry the son and she also wants to cast a spell on his wife to prevent her from using any enchantments. The shepherd’s daughter transforms the wife into a deer. The genie grants a third of the merchant’s life to the first old man.

The second old man begins his tale, the only tale Johnson puts into his translation of the story of the merchant and demon. The two dogs he has with him are his two brothers transformed by the second man’s wife. His elder brother departs on a merchant ship with one thousand dinars as capital. He returns a begger and the second old man gives him one thousand dinars, half of his worth, to start fresh in town. The second man’s other brother soon leaves on a merchant ship and also returns with nothing. Once again, the second man gives his brother one thousand dinars to get back on his feet. After six years, the brothers eventually convince the second man to take his money and become a merchant trader. The second man is successful, making a profit and gaining a wife during their time abroad. One night, on their way to the next part, his envious brother throws him and his wife overboard. His wife reveals herself to be a she-demon and carries them to safety and leaves to deal with his brothers. When the second man returns home, he finds two dogs, his brothers, who remain in that shape for ten years. The demon grants the second man one third of the merchant’s life. The third old man tells a tale “that was even stranger and more amazing than the first two” (‘Arabian’ 29) and therefore the Demon releases the merchant. The third old man’s tale is not told in detail; the quotation above is the only description Scheherazade gives readers.

Richard Johnson’s translation retains the original plot line until the entrance of the old men. In Johnson’s version, only one old man comes and tells a story to save the merchant’s life. The old man in Johnson’s version is the second old man in the Nights.
The story he leaves out is the one that involves less practical material and more controversial content, such as sacrifice, open acceptance of a mistress, and several instances of magic. Johnson’s choice of which story to leave in and which to leave out is important because, once again, middle class values are given first priority. The second old man’s tale contains the history of three merchants who all become traders, one successful and two others who fail at their ventures. Readers are given an example of his prudence early on where he must come to the aid of his brothers by sharing his money with them from his shop. His good sense is rewarded and his brothers’ financial ineptitude and jealousy punished. This situation and the middle class values presented and emphasized through Johnson’s selection of the second sub-story appear in children’s literature throughout the century as a result of middle class consumerism and their presence in the book market. Maria Edgeworth’s “Murad the Unlucky” also exemplifies this trend.

**John Aikin’s Evenings at Home**

A collaboration between John Aikin and his sister, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, published in six volumes from 1794-1796, *Evenings at Home* is a collection of stories in various literary formats. Summerfield provides the count of each type; there are “40 instructive dialogues, 30 stories, 10 fables, 9 plays, and 8 poems” (Summerfield 101), all extremely popular throughout the nineteenth century and endorsed by the Edgeworths. Barbauld contributed fourteen out of ninety-nine stories to *Evenings* (“Masterworks”). *Evenings at Home* and Lamb’s *Mrs. Leicester’s School* are both collections of stories for children written out of the rational tale tradition. Both are structured similarly; there is a frame story preceding the individual stories themselves, which sets up the motivation behind the compilation. These frames create a realistic foundation for the stories that follow. *Evenings at Home* presents readers with a family, the Fairbornes, enjoying stories by the fire. The tales are acceptable entertainment for the children, written by friends of the family and approved by the mother. The friends “would frequently produce a fable, a story, or dialogue, adapted to the age and understanding of the young people” (Aikin 2). The topics covered in *Evenings* consist mainly of science and industry, producing, using Summerfield’s description, an atmosphere of “cool reason rather than rapture, natural curiosity tinged with respect” (Summerfield 103).
Despite Barbauld’s notoriety for tame, didactic children’s literature as Charles Lamb’s famous tirade vocalizes, Aikin and Barbauld wrote *Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose* in 1773 composed of essays on various topics from science to genres of literature. “On Objects of Terror” discusses the emotional response to the terrifying and the fantastic. Here they defend the Eastern tale, giving the tales credit for intriguing and entertaining their audience: “the Eastern tale, with their genii, giants, enchantments, and transformations, however a refined critic may censure them as “absurd and extravagant, will ever retain a most powerful influence on the mind, and interest the reader independently of all peculiarity of taste” (Aikin, “Pieces” 122). They approve of the *Nights* and use them as an example “of the terrible joined with the marvellous: the story of Aladdin and the travels of Sinbad are particularly excellent” (126). The continuing success and popularity of *Evenings at Home* is proof of their understanding of what attracts and interests readers as well as their ability to employ those tactics to their advantage. Their esteem for the *Nights*’ literary techniques goes beyond *Miscellaneous Pieces* and is made evident through Aikin’s use of those same techniques in *Evenings*, however toned down and revised to be acceptable to publishers and parents. In “Traveller’s Wonders” and “The Travelled Ant” he is aware of what entertains and uses this knowledge to compose stories appropriate for a young audience in respect to content. The story of Sinbad seems to have been at the forefront of Aikin’s thoughts when writing these two stories in particular. *Evenings* contains more imaginative elements in general than other similar publications such as Wollstonecraft’s *Original Stories* and Edgeworth’s *The Parent’s Assistant*. *Evenings* is an example of the move towards imagination, a trend inspired and headed by the Romanticists.

In Aikin’s “Traveller’s Wonders”, a father returns home from his travels and his son, Jack, who has just read *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Sinbad* wants to hear about his voyage. His father replies: “I never met with Lilliputians or Brobdignians, I assure you, nor ever saw the black loadstone mountain, or the valley of diamonds” (“Masterworks” 5). He does however describe who he did encounter during his voyage: “some take a mighty pleasure in filling their mouths full of stinking smoke; and others, in thrusting a nasty powder up their nostrils” (6), they “wore cloth woven from a sort of vegetable wool, growing in pods upon bushes. But the most singular material was a fine glossy
stuff, used chiefly by the richer classes” (7). It is one of the younger children who discovers her father’s scheme; “you have been telling us of our own country and what is done at home” (7). Jack, the reader of Sinbad and Gulliver, allows his imagination run rampant while his father reels him back in by giving reality an exotic spin. This story embodies rational fiction at its most obvious. Rational tales compose a scene with the potential to be interesting and exotic, only to reveal real life, devoid of magic and the supernatural. The purpose of this is to not only combat negative effects on a child’s mind, but also to prevent expectations of fairies and magic lamps in reality.

Similar in intention and concept to “Traveller’s Wonders”, “The Travelled Ant” is the narrative of an ant who undertakes to see the world, or the backyard that is his universe. His fresh perspective is an original one, a unique view of the usual occurrences in a yard. From beehives to antlions, the traveled ant describes everything through an exotic lens, ignorant of anything beyond his anthill. John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Barbauld “considered the romantic machinery of the Nights-its spells, magic, valleys of diamond as well as its structural patterns a frame-story-more significant than its few moralistic touches” (Ali 13). The opening of “The Travelled Ant” incorporates the oral tradition characteristic of the Nights. Another ant from the anthill asks the traveled ant to recount his adventures, creating the foundation for the ant’s narrative and preserving the Nights structure as best as possible.

Aikin simplifies a structural formula from Sinbad in composing “The Travelled Ant.” The ant has seven major adventures in which he encounters new geographies and inhabitants and records his observations. The second and final part of the formula is the dangerous situations the ant falls into on his journey. The dangerous aspects to his expedition are prerequisite to, firstly, create an entertaining narrative and secondly, to have that narrative resemble Sinbad which Aikin is obviously doing. The ant’s first run-in with the dangerous world occurs as he is trekking across gravel. A piece of gravel rolls in his direction: “I threw myself flat on the ground behind a stone” (103-4) and remained “in a state of insensibility” from which he “began to stretch [his limbs] one by one” (104). When Sinbad reaches shore after his ship abandons him, he throws himself “on the ground like a dead man and, overcome by stupefaction, lost consciousness till the next day” (“Arabian” 7). At another point a bird inadvertently carries the ant, who is on
the berry, to a tree where the ant hops off and recommences his exploration. Sinbad similarly uses his turban to attach himself to a bird’s feet in order to get transported elsewhere on the island. The following portion of the ant’s adventure relates his discovery of water; he “met a cold yielding matter, in which [he] should have sunk” (Aikin 107). Standing on a leaf, a breeze “carried the leaf [he] was upon away from the solid land into this yielding fluid.” He travels by makeshift raft for awhile, noting the many fish with “bodies of prodigious bulk, covered with shining scales of various colours” (108). During Sinbad’s sixth voyage, he realizes that the “best plan” to alleviate his stranded situation “will be to make a little raft, big enough to sit in, take it down, launch it on the stream, and drift with the current” (“Arabian” 41). In this stream, Sinbad discovers “a great many rubies and royal pearls and all kinds of jewels and precious stones which covered the bed of the stream like gravel, so that all the channels, which ran through the fields glittered from their profusion” (40). The ant describes the water as a “vast glittering plain” (Aikin 106) when he first approaches. Towards the end of the ant’s journey, he almost falls prey to an ant lion. Inspecting a hole in the ground, the sand “gave way, and I slid down the pit. As soon as I had reached the bottom, a creature with a huge pair of horns and dreadful claws made his appearance from beneath the sand, and attempted to seize me” (114). The ant runs back up the hole, but the ant lion uses a “crafty device” (115), throwing sand into his eyes and temporarily blinding him, to prevent his escape. The ant gets away despite all the effort of the antlion. The antlion in the ant’s narrative resembles the Old Man of the Sea in Sinbad’s fifth voyage who ensnares Sinbad, living on his shoulders for awhile. The old man’s ploy is to prey upon men’s kindness, asking them: “carry me on your shoulders, and take me to the other side of the stream” (“Arabian” 34). The old man, like the ant lion, “is obliged to make use of this crafty device to entrap his heedless prey” (Aikin 115).

The description given by the ant is that of someone new to the territory and ignorant of his surroundings. His observations mimic those of Sinbad; the ant’s second encounter provides a good example of the Sinbad narrative style:

I journeyed on over the desert, and at length came to the end of it, and entered upon a wide green tract, consisting chiefly of tall, narrow, pointed leaves, which grew so thick and entangled, that it was with the greatest difficulty I could make
my way between them; and I should continually have lost my road, had I not taken care to keep the sun in view before me. When I had got near the middle of this region, I was startled with the sight of a huge four-legged monster, with a yellow speckled skin, which took a flying leap directly over me (Aikin 104-5).

Here is sample text from *Sinbad*:

At last I arose and began to walk on the island, turning right and left, for I was unable to sit still in any one place. Then I climbed a tall tree and looked to the right and left but saw nothing but sky and water and trees and birds and islands and sands. Then I looked closely and saw a large, white object. I climbed down and walked in its direction until I reached it and found it to be a huge white dome of great height and circumference (“Arabian,” II 12).

Aikin mimics the style of the *Nights* structurally and stylistically, transforming the content into a rationalist story line.

Present in Aikin’s text, as in several other popular children’s texts, are political messages within the story line. References to war and imperialism appear at the end, but are softened by the listener’s gratitude: “farewell, and thanks for the entertainment you have given me” (116). The most obvious issue in “The Travelled Ant” is that of travel itself. Over and over the ant decries traveling, regretting his journey and not encouraging anyone else to attempt it. His expectation “has been at the expense of so much toil and danger, that I know not whether it was worth the pains” (103) and he does “not know how far [he has] benefited from [his] travels” (115). The effect of those statements in the texts is to counteract any desire the child has to do what he has read, in this case curbing any desire to strike out alone on an expedition.

Though transmigration is of Indian origin, akin to reincarnation, and there are sections of the *Nights* that are derived from Indian folklore, transmigration does not occur within the tales. Transformation occurs frequently; however, it describes the change in form from man to another form at anytime, death is not necessary for transformation and, in fact, in the *Nights*, only a demon or a woman skilled in the arts of sorcery perform transformations on others. In John Aikin’s “Transmigrations of Indur”, included in volume two of *Evenings at Home*, the foundation of Indian philosophy exists, but the plot was not extracted from the *Nights*. I wanted to mention this story because of its
uniqueness, especially within Aikin’s collection of didactic fiction. In Aikin’s story, transmigration is a reward, something bestowed on Indur in return for his kindness of animals. The positive light in which Aikin represents transmigration surprises because of its Hindu origin and fantastic elements. Aikin represents it as a way to experience or learn about animals, their lives, predators, and activities.

Aikin derived his story, “The Transmigrations of Indur,” from at least one other transmigration story, that being John Hawkesworth’s Transmigration of a Soul, “a story told by a flea, a realistic disagreeable account of cruelties inflicted by men on animals” (Conant 94). In Aikin’s story, a man, Indur, who loves animals, saves a monkey from a snake and takes the bite himself. While he is dying from the venom, the monkey transforms into the fairy Perezinda and grants him what he desires, a “rational soul, with the memory of the adventures I have gone through; and when death sets me free from one body, may I instantly animate another” (Aikin 4). Indur narrates his transmigrations from animal to animal and readers learn about the behavior of each animal. He embodies, at different times, an antelope, a goose, a mouse, an elephant, and a whale among others.

Maria Edgeworth’s “Murad the Unlucky”

Richard Edgeworth and his daughter, Maria, embody the rationalist approach to education, drawing on ideas from both Locke and Rousseau to shape their educational philosophies. Their major work on education, Practical Education in 1798, was an example of the rationalist tradition and, as Richardson notes, “exemplary of the progressive educational thought of its day” (52). They advocate a controlled environment for children; a tutor or parent should be with the child at all times and the child should be kept away from the servants; a child should not read imaginative fiction and also not come into contact with ideas of the sublime or religion as the abstract elements of these ideas are beyond a child’s mental capacity. Maria’s children’s fiction, including Simple Susan, Lazy Lawrence, and Early Lessons, adhered to these principles and stayed within the boundaries of the moral tale. Darton identifies the talent in her children’s works; if someone did not know “beforehand that [Edgeworth’s moral tales] had a didactic purpose, were based on a philosophic theory of child-nature, and were produced in circumstances which made their intention their most important feature-if you picked them up with a child’s tabula rasa for your mind, in fact, you would go straight
through them and be enchanted by the writer’s skill as well as by her humanity” (142). Education was a significant issue in the Edgeworth household and one Richard Edgeworth took seriously. Edgeworth unsuccessfully attempts to raise his son, Richard, using Rousseau’s techniques, resulting in an irresponsible and intemperate adult.

*Practical Education* was a manual of sorts for the new trend in education. Darton points out that the presence of women writers and writers from upper class backgrounds highlight the change from a courtly education to education as a “general domestic habit” (Darton 143) in the homes of the socially superior. Richardson observes the social difference which causes her and her father to revise *Practical Education* in the second edition “to accommodate those middle-class parents who could not easily afford the time or expense needed to effect the ‘total separation’ between children and lower domestics” (Richardson 54). Her upper class status also helps explain why the characters in “Murad the Unlucky” are not socially mobile.

Mitzi Myers’ essay, “Romancing the Moral Tale: Maria Edgeworth and the Problematics of Pedagogy” is a discussion of *Simple Susan* primarily, but Myers also, as the title indicates, examines the composition of Edgeworth’s rational tales in general. In Edgeworth’s moral fiction, “‘fairies, giants, and enchanters’ are as thoroughly rationalized as her pastoral setting localized”(106). In “Murad the Unlucky” pastoral setting is nowhere to be found; however, Edgeworth still applies her morality to a more exotic locale. Edgeworth’s “fiction of common sense” is rational and realistic, demonstrating through both its explicitly endorsed values and its narrative strategies bourgeois empiricist convictions of everyday experience as the source of knowledge. The linear plot appropriate to such a world view enacts the protagonist’s learning process or failure to learn; the pedagogical process itself generates the rational plot, which links causes and consequences and displays the uses of foresight and analytical assessment. Characters learn virtues like industry and honesty, and character development typically takes place through contrast (101).

“Murad the Unlucky” is not an exception to the narrative techniques attributed to Edgeworth’s “fiction of common sense.” Edgeworth clearly values Saladin’s practicality over Murad’s imprudence. The use of contrast is evident in the form of the two brothers
and their very different narratives. Murad and Saladin also depict the two possible outcomes, the failure to learn or the learning process, that Myers notes within Edgeworth’s didactic texts.

Maria Edgeworth’s “Murad the Unlucky”, included in Popular Tales (1804), is an example of her more imaginative stories, but one that is still heavily didactic. Edgeworth transforms an Arabian Nights tale into a rational tale of her own creation. In doing this, she endeavors “to avoid inflaming the imagination, or exciting a restless spirit of adventure, by exhibiting false views of life, and creating hopes which, in the ordinary course of things, cannot be realized” (Parent’s Assistant 4). This aspect of her writing is also noted by Henry Crabb Robinson in 1812: “the tendency of her writings to check enthusiasm of every kind is of very problematical value” (Robinson qtd. in Summerfield 161).

Edgeworth’s works are excellent examples of a common method used by writers to dispel illusions of the supernatural derived from imaginative literature like the Nights. In “Lame Jervas”, a story published in Popular Tales (1804), Edgeworth alerts readers to the absence of adventures like those of Sinbad or Gulliver. Jervas, narrating his voyage and arrival in India, regrets that he has “not, for your entertainment, any escape or imminent danger or shipwreck to relate; nor even any description of a storm or a water-spout.” He worries his reader will “be much disappointed to find that, upon [his] arrival in India, where doubtless you expected that [he] should like others have wonderful adventures” (“Popular Tales” 30), and, in fact, he leads a calm and peaceful existence. Edgeworth intended Popular Tales for a bit older audience, which explains the more complex plotline and ideas as well as the older language and the continuous narrative format.

Edgeworth emphasizes her position on imaginative literature, and the Nights in particular, in Belinda and “Murad” in a different fashion. In Belinda, Edgeworth has Lady Delacour “punctuate her conversation with numerous references to fairy-tales and the Thousand and One Nights, as if to underline her irrationality” (Summerfield 162). At one point in Murad’s narrative, he is following a mirage in the desert, close to death, and sees a caravan from Mecca close by. The caravan evidently has found a real spring in the desert. Murad recognizes his folly, “that he missed the reality, whilst he had been hours
in pursuit of the phantom” (21). Murad’s realization is a metaphor for Edgeworth’s position on imaginative literature.

“Murad the Unlucky” begins with a sultan and his vizier debating whether a person’s fortunate or unfortunate circumstances are due to chance or prudence. In order to prove his point, the vizier takes the sultan to hear Murad’s story. Murad begins his story with his being deemed unlucky before his birth due to a dream his father had warning him of his son’s bad luck. Throughout the rest of his life, Murad runs into one bad circumstance after another; he leaves Constantinople to avoid ruining his brother’s business, loses money given him as a reward, infects a city with plague, sets a fire on a ship, and breaks a vase his brother was going to sell. This is where the sultan and vizier find Murad, in despair over the broken pieces of the vase. Saladin the Lucky, his brother, arranges and recounts his story as well. His prudence allows him to become a successful merchant, save the city from fire and plague, and to marry well. The sultan, after hearing their stories, strips off his disguise and admits his error, knowing now that prudence, or the lack thereof, determines the outcome of one’s life. He then proclaims the brothers Murad the Imprudent and Saladin the Prudent. Readers are told that in the years following Murad dies of excessive opium use and Saladin continues to be prudent and successful. Edgeworth’s harsh ending hits her point home and affirms Myers’ statement concerning Edgeworth’s portrayal of the learning process or lack thereof.

The premise for “Murad the Unlucky” comes from the Arabian Nights. Edgeworth refers back to the tale in the beginning of her story: “as they were passing a rope-maker’s, the sultan recollected the Arabian story of Cogia-Hassan Alhabal” (5). The plot line is very similar in the Nights tale, “the Story of Khaujeh Hassan al Hubbaul”, with several noticeable and significant differences. Edgeworth’s “Murad the Unlucky” is a response to or revision of the Arabian version. ‘The story of Khaujeh Hassan al Hubbaul’ is an account of two friends trying to discover whether it takes money or just luck to become financially successful. They choose a poor ropemaker, Hassan, to be their guinea pig. Saad gives him two hundred pieces as capital to increase his production and thus his profits. A vulture takes the money from his turban and when Saad gives him another two hundred pieces Hassan hides it in a pot of bran, which his wife trades for scouring earth. Saadi now gives him a piece of lead to demonstrate that luck will make
him wealthy. The piece of lead does, in fact, through several incidents, lead to his eventual wealth. The friends, Saad and Saadi come back to hear how he succeeded and Saad concedes to Saadi that chance has more to do with success and/or failure than access to money. Edgeworth’s inspiration is supplied on the first page; she leaves no question of her source, instead making it clear that she is creating a moral revision of the original Arabian tale. When doing this, Edgeworth does not condemn or exile the exotic rather she exploits its appeal and popularity in order to get her point across. Set in Constantinople, references to sultans, viziers, Mahomet, turbans, deserts, opium, and camels are appropriate and credible. The obvious moral basis for the story is that prudence yields a fortunate existence and imprudence leads to an unhealthy, poverty-stricken and accident-prone life. Edgeworth reinforces the value of prudence: Saladin grows “rich in the common course of things; or rather, by his own prudence” (29); “take my advice, and henceforward trust no more to prudence than to fortune” (35). Murad learns that his bad luck is not a curse, but it is his lack of prudence that has gotten him into so much trouble. The child reader leaves the story without expectations of being lucky or cursed, only the sound advice to be prudent. The use of contrast is evident in “Murad the Unlucky” with the two opposing stories of Murad and Saladin and prohibits readers from sympathizing with Murad after hearing about Saladin’s rational existence.

When rewriting “Murad the Unlucky,” Edgeworth preserves one of the most important aspects of the Nights as a whole: the power and significance of storytelling. Not only is storytelling the foundation for the Nights, used by Scheherazade in the frame tale, but also a much used plot device throughout all 1001 tales. For instance, in “the Story of the Merchant and the Demon”, three old men recount their strange tales of transformation to the demon in order to save a merchant’s life. Edgeworth retains the format of the original: an imprudent and a prudent man tell their life’s misfortunes and successes to a sultan and vizier in disguise. Their stories do not hold the same life-saving power as the three old men, but they do resolve a difference of opinion between the sultan and vizier. The frame to Murad and Saladin’s story, where the sultan and vizier debate fate’s role in one’s existence, is the reason for the subsequent narratives. It is necessary in order to construe purpose. It is the individual stories within the main frame.
story as well as the adventurous aspects based on the style of the *Nights* that make the moral tale more palatable and intriguing.

Edgeworth, while showing that one can lower themselves, as in Murad’s situation, does not promote social mobility. Saladin is a wealthy merchant, as was his father, and when the sultan offers him an opportunity to become a Pacha and commit to him the government of a province, he “declined this honour; saying he had no ambition, was perfectly happy in his present situation” (46). Contrary to this, the vizier ends up the wiser man than the sultan, believing prudence determines a man’s fortune. Edgeworth depicts the sultan as less knowledgeable than his advisor. She does not make the vizier socially mobile, but illustrates that he does have the ability and the wisdom to be principled, the one characteristic all citizens should aspire to have.

*The History of Abou Casem, and His Two Remarkable Slippers*

Another instance of social immobility in a children’s eastern story is *The History of Abou Casem*. Published by Tabart & Co. in 1825, *The History of Abou Casem, and His Two Remarkable Slippers* is set in Baghdad. The Hockliffe Project approximates 1790 as the publication date of the text’s first edition. *The History of Abou Casem* is the story of a rich, old merchant who is so frugal he will not purchase respectable-looking clothing or accessories. The miser’s careless appearance distresses many, especially those who witness the sad state of his slippers. His slippers “were guarded with nails, and the upper-leathers all patch work” (5). The miser is told to dress according to his station by the Cadi: “when a man, whom I believe was once esteemed the richest in the city, debases himself so as to become the proprietor of such filthy articles, I do not wonder at the many misfortunes attending him” (15). Here the lesson is to act your part. Instead what happens is “the man is made to fit the slippers, as it were, because Abou would not make the slippers fit the man” (Hockliffe). This task, “to fulfill the proper duties of his station-to spend and thereby to distribute his fortune throughout society,” was a common one in oriental tales. This was due mainly to the fact that the Orient was envisaged by writers of both children’s and adult literature as the locus of opulence, wealth and easy social mobility, perhaps partly because of the increasing presence of ‘nabobs’ in Britain (‘nabob’ being a term applied, usually with disapproval, to Britons who had made fortunes in the East, especially in
India, and who returned to disrupt the old social order). The Orient was therefore regarded as the perfect setting for a narrative which proved the importance of a rigid social hierarchy and of everyone, rich as well as poor, knowing their place in it, sticking to it, and behaving accordingly (Hockliffe).

**Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Mrs. Leicester’s School***

Another brother/sister collaboration, *Mrs. Leicester’s School*, written by Charles and Mary Lamb, models itself after Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess*. A governess at Amwell School records the life stories told by ten girls on their first day of school as an icebreaker. Each story contains a moral lesson for the benefit of young readers. The Lambs produced several children’s books for William Godwin including the very popular *Tales From Shakespeare* and *Adventures of Ulysses*. Charles lived with his sister, Mary, who was in and out of asylums from the day she attacked their father and murdered their mother. Charles’ stance on imaginative literature is well-known through his comment to Coleridge in one of his letters concerning his trip to the bookstore:

> Mrs. Barbauld’s [sic] stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery; & the Shopman at Newbery’s hardly deign’d to reach them off an old exploded corner of a shelf, when Mary ask’d for them. Mrs. B’s & Mrs. Trimmer’s nonsense lay in piles about. Knowledge insignificant & vapid as Mrs. B’s books convey, it seems, must come to a child in the shape of knowledge, & his empty noddle must be turned out with conceit of his own powers, when he has learnt, that a Horse is an Animal, & Billy is better than a Horse, & such like: instead of that beautiful Interest in wild tales, which made the child a man, while all the time he suspected himself to be no bigger than a child (Marrs 81).

In order to make money, Lamb could not indulge any desire he might have had to compose ‘wild tales’. To gain Godwin’s approval, morality must dominate. That is not to say that *Mrs. Leicester’s School* does not possess entertaining aspects, it does, but they are clouded by didacticism. Some of the more risqué material in *Mrs. Leicester’s School*, (witches, Islam, children being switched at birth) were made agreeable through the moral reflection present in each story.

Charles Lamb’s children’s literature has never, with the exception of *Tales From Shakespeare*, been acclaimed as brilliant, entertaining, or original. However, Charles and
Mary’s works do reflect their time and society and thus are worth attention. Darton acknowledges “the fact that their children’s books neither were nor are of much value in the evolution of their kind…they inspired nothing, they showed no fresh point of view.” Their value is “simply as common objects by the wayside of social history” (190). Working with his sister on these texts, their writing was a product of the market and William Godwin’s editorial perspective of what literature would appeal to buyers. Mrs. Leicester’s School, reaching the ninth edition by 1826, was written under Godwin’s supervision, affirmed by a plug for Godwin’s business. In the story, Emily Barton’s mother proposes a trip to the Juvenile Library in Skinner Street (Ross 95). Summerfield explains the relationship between Lamb and Godwin, claiming that in order to appease Godwin and the market, Charles and Mary “chose feeble models and then failed to improve on them” (Summerfield 243). Godwin, who was being “over-ruled by the desperate need to earn cash” (Summerfield 247), put the need for didactic, moral literature before creativity and imagination. Summerfield creates a duplicitous version of Godwin, wish-washy and hesitating to commit to any side of the reason versus fantasy debate. His primary concern as publisher was to sell books and it is this priority which teaches him to “see books very differently from the way in which authors see them” (Summerfield 247). The Lambs, similarly in need of funds, produced children’s books replete with “didacticism of manners and mental improvement” (Summerfield 245) and also with “inchoate fragments of imperfectly transformed memories: neither autobiography, nor fiction, nor confessional reflection, but a confused stew of all these genres, served up in some indeterminate no man’s land” (Summerfield 254). Lamb himself was a supporter of fairy tales and imagination, as his famous letter to Coleridge confirms. Though not Cinderella or Aladdin, Lamb’s Mrs. Leicester’s School does venture further into the fantastic than other works in the same genre. The Nights influence on Mrs. Leicester’s School is subtle and merely a glimmer within two stories, which reflect the Lamb’s familiarity with the tales.

The frame tale for Mrs. Leicester’s School is used expressly to unite the individual stories, to give a purpose to their existence. This function ties their work to the Nights where the framework containing Scheherazade constitutes the reason for the subsequent tales’ existence. Scheherazade’s tales provide lessons in ethics and proper
behavior; the tales, according to Zipes, “are primarily lessons in etiquette, aesthetics, decorum, religion, government, history, and sex” (Zipes 57). *Mrs. Leicester’s School* is structurally similar and also motivated by the same interest, which is to promote good social skills and virtuous behavior. The popularity of the *Nights* insured its influence on readers and writers alike, and those with the children’s literature market in mind even more so.

Lamb is indebted to Fielding’s *The Governess* for the foundation of *Mrs. Leicester’s School*. The school setting and the structure composed of each girl telling her story to the rest is modeled after Fielding’s text. The two collections are set at school and provide exotic locales without leaving England. Briggs offers an interesting perspective on the school setting of *The Governess*. The school setting creates “a delicate balance between the familiar and the romantic by presenting nine little girls and their daily lives at school.” Her “original readers had never been to and would never attend school. Here was a fictional setting in which they could nevertheless plausibly imagine themselves” (Briggs 225). Both texts incorporate storytelling and the oral tradition, making these elements the primary mode of narration, more so in *Mrs. Leicester’s School*, but also present in *The Governess*. Both authors employ the girls’ stories to expose a moral to the benefit of the other students. The people in the *Nights* tales, Zipes notes, “save themselves and fulfill their destiny because they can weave the threads of their lives together in narratives that bring their desires in harmony with divine and social laws” (Zipes 57). In the collections similar in structure to the *Nights*, the children weave their life stories together, learning from each other and aspiring to the social ideal of virtue and obedience.

The frame is written in first person from the viewpoint of the governess who has written down their conversations and circulated them as a gift. The process of converting oral tales into written accounts is a difficult task and one that Lamb recognizes he cannot do faithfully, writing with a child’s diction, speech, and therefore the governess prefaces her rendition of their conversations, excusing the older language by reminding her students that “what is very proper and becoming when spoken, requires to be arranged with some little difference before it can be set down in writing” (4). The frame tale in the *Nights* performs a similar function, providing a reason for previously oral folk tales to be
written in one collection. Scheherazade’s story gives meaning to the tales that follow just as the governess explains her purpose in recording the girls’ narratives.

The fifth story, “The Young Mahometan”, the story of Margaret Green and her discovery of the house library, confirmed all suspicions parents had of unsupervised reading and the easily influenced mind of children. Margaret and her mother move into Mrs. Beresford’s home, an older woman who offered Margaret’s mother a way to ease her financial stress. There are no other children for Margaret to play with and her mother, “following the example of her patroness, had almost wholly discontinued talking to” (52) her. She daily explores the estate and its extensive grounds alone, yearning for a playmate and invoking a “fairy’s power” (48) to accomplish this. One of the doors to a room inside the house is locked and Margaret tries the doorknob everyday in hopes that it will give. Eventually it does and reveals to her the library. She cannot read most of the books due to the small print, dull topics, and her weak vision. The only intriguing book with large enough print is “a volume lying in an obscure corner” (49), entitled Mahometanism Explained. She recognizes the name Ishmael from her readings of the Bible and a tapestry in one of the rooms within the house. Reading the book, she converts to Mahometanism: “I concluded that I must be a Mahometan, for I believed every word I read” (51). A group of pages have been torn out, which she regrets “for it was as entertaining as a fairy tale” (50) and the story of Mahomet himself “was full of wonders from beginning to end” (51). She reads that after Mahometans die, they “are to pass over a narrow bridge, which crosses a bottomless gulf. The bridge was described to be no wider than a silken thread; and it is said that all who were not Mahometans would slip on one side of this bridge, and drop into the tremendous gulf that had no bottom” (51). Realizing that Mrs. Beresford and her mother would not make it across the bridge, ignorant of the ‘wonderful stories’ of Mahomet, “a sudden terror seized “ Margaret. She hesitates to enlighten them, scared that she will get in trouble for not asking permission to read, and consequently her ”anxiety on this subject threw [her] into a fever” (51). In the midst of her fever she attempts to convert her mother, who in turn fetches the doctor. He explains that the fever is the result of her reading; she has “read [her]self into a fever” (52). As a remedy, the doctor and his wife take her to the fair, buy her toys and bring over girls her age to play with her. The doctor’s wife explains to Margaret the fallacies in
the book she read and that the pages torn out explained that “the author of it did not mean
to give the fabulous stories here related as true, but only wrote it as giving a history” (54).
Margaret is thus “cured of the error into which [she] had fallen, and very much ashamed
of having believed so many absurdities” (54).

The ‘strange effect’ the book wields over Margaret is exactly that which parents
feared: unsupervised reading leads to mental breakdowns and unruly behavior. Lamb’s
depiction of a young girl who converts to Islam and makes herself sick from reading
embodies the common arguments against imaginative literature especially, but any
improper books in general. It emphasizes the importance of guidance and supervision
from parents and goes so far as to point the finger at Margaret’s mother, implicating her
in her daughter’s illness. Her mother pays no attention to her or her activities and ceases
to speak to her. Lamb’s sentiments on popular educational theories is also highlighted by
Margaret’s mention of Robinson Crusoe. By calling attention to Defoe’s character and
book, Lamb calls attention to Rousseau’s approval of it in relation to a child’s reading.
Rousseau asserts that once a child desires to learn a parent’s work is cut out for them. The
child’s curiosity will take control, leading them to knowledge. The child should only
know the company of its tutor until twelve years old and read Robinson Crusoe to learn
independence and self-sufficiency. Margaret, who is familiar with Robinson Crusoe,
displays an independent nature and knows only the society of Mrs. Beresford during her
bible readings. Lamb’s story is an example of what can go wrong in Rousseau’s model.
Her desire to learn is intact, but her lack of human interaction leads to her uncontrolled
curiosity resulting in her religious conversion and consequently, her anxiety attack.

Beyond the commentary on education and child supervision present in the story,
the book Margaret finds, Mahometanism Explained, is an interesting choice by Lamb.
The topic of Mahometanism immediately invokes the East and perhaps the existing
national and cultural anxiety over that specific region, culture and/or religion. Margaret
describes the stories of Mahomet in a way that reminds one of the Arabian Nights;
Mahomet’s stories contained “nothing but wonders from beginning to end” (Lamb 51).

The Nights is a manual, originally intended for a middle class audience from the
Middle East, but even through the translating and moralizing the text still retained its
Islamic basis, an aspect of the Nights critical to its reception as a genuine Eastern work.
The text as a manual then resembles *Mahometanism Explained* in its purpose. The pages torn out of Margaret’s book make up the author’s warning to his audience concerning the false nature of its contents, perceiving himself as a recorder of religious principles. Richard Johnson’s *The Oriental Moralist* also professes to be a translation, he is a recorder of tales, but Johnson takes a more proactive approach by adding his own moral tag to each tale, avoiding negatively influencing impressionable minds and hoping instead to instill in them good English virtues. *Mahometanism Explained* is a metaphor for the body of Eastern literature available at this time and the *Nights* in particular because of its success with adults and children alike from 1704 onwards. Galland’s twelve volume text, the chapbook versions of *Sinbad* and *Aladdin*, and the many translations and revisions made from Galland’s text, all of which appeared during the eighteenth century and beyond made the *Nights* the most well-known body of Eastern literature in England and most likely France. Margaret does not discover a book of Perrault’s fairy tales or *Gulliver’s Travels*, but oddly enough a book explaining the principles of Islam. This book had “a charming print” (49) and “was as entertaining as a fairy tale” (50).

The last story in *Mrs. Leicester’s School*, “The Sea-Voyage”, is told by Arabella Hardy who travels from the East Indies to England for her schooling. During the trip a sailor names Betsy oversees her care, Arabella being the only girl on the ship. In previous stories, Lamb depicts the imagination as dangerous, sending children into fevers, but in “The Sea-Voyage” he attributes to imagination the ability to expand a child’s mind. Betsy recounts “tales of the sea-monsters that lay hid at the bottom, and were seldom seen by men” and muses about “what a glorious sight it would be, if our eyes could be sharpened to behold all the inhabitants of the sea at once swimming in the great deeps.” It is “with such notions he enlarged [Arabella’s] infant capacity to take in many things” (Lamb 184).

The title of her story, “The Sea-Voyage” hearkens back to Sinbad and his seven voyages. Arabella soon dispels any expectation of an adventure tale; “I have not knowledge enough to give an account of my voyage, or to remember the names of the seas we passed through, or the lands which we touched upon in our course. The chief thing I can remember (for I do not recollect the events of the voyage in any order) was
Atkinson taking me upon deck to see the great whales” (Lamb 83). Lamb, by having Arabella forget the particulars of her voyage, avoids the possibility of fantastic occurrences or wild adventures. He begins her narrative at the start of the voyage, where she must travel alone. Lamb anticipates what the reader is expecting, a tale like Sinbad’s, and eliminates that prospect with her statement. He exploits the appeal of tales of sea voyages to create a calm travel narrative which better represents reality. Lamb quickly supplants the disappointment young readers might feel over the absence of adventure with the presence of whales, resorting to animals to appeal to his audience. To retain the interest Lamb hopes to have gained with the whales, he incorporates more exotic animals; a lion, a tiger, and monkeys, with which the sailors played hide-and-seek.

Although it appears as if Lamb avoids following the Sinbad model, he merely revises its perspective. Sinbad ventures on seven expeditions where he is without fail abandoned and must explore the island and its inhabitants on his own, learning about new cultures and their customs. His tales are concerned with these details as well as the reactions Sinbad has towards the inhabitants and those which he receives from them. Arabella’s narrative is very similar structurally. She travels by herself, “one little woman among a crew of men” (86). She encounters a new race of people, sailors, who immerse her in their culture. She learns about sea-life; when the tumultuous waves frightened Arabella, Betsy explains that “the Sea was God’s bed, and the ship our cradle” and the wind was a “sea-organ” (85). By the time they dock, Betsy has shown her marine animals and familiarized her with some of their tendencies. Whales were “sea-elephants” and dolphins and porpoises “came before a storm, and all the colors which the sea changed to; how sometimes it was a deep blue and then a deep green, and sometimes it would seem all on fire; all these various appearances he would show me, and attempt to explain the reason of them to me, as well as my young capacity would admit of” (84). Referring once again to the limited comprehension she possesses as a five-year-old, this time she limits the amount of reason let in, claiming that she can only take so much. In the next reference to her ‘capacity’, she praises imagination and abstract thought which “enlarged [her] infant capacity” (84). Arabella lives, for the length of her voyage, in a new culture. However, instead of looking on the shore for adventure and indigenous
peoples as Sinbad does, she discovers adventure on the ship and explores the unknown under the supervision of a roughhewn sailor named Betsy.

Children’s fiction depicts bad behavior to portray what not to do and illustrates good behavior to encourage the children through example. In *Mrs. Leicester’s School*, the children tell their stories to teach lessons to their peers, a therapeutic tactic employed by the *Nights*. *Mrs. Leicester’s School* begins with a letter from a teacher telling her students that she recorded the histories they related on the first day. The structure of these children’s books strongly resembles the structure of the *Nights*. The frame story pauses and tales, fables, lessons are related which are not directly connected to the frame. *Mrs. Leicester’s School* reflects the *Nights* structure in that the frame story pops up as an interruption between stories, but does not overtake the novel; the girls’ histories are the main focus. This collection also contains more imaginative elements than most due to the Lambs’ stance on fantasy’s place in fiction. The Lambs were part of the Romantic counter movements, promoting fairy tales and imaginative literature in general.
CONCLUSION

Imaginative fiction existed in the shadows throughout the eighteenth century, but the beginning of the nineteenth century saw imagination’s comeback. Darton examines several texts for children of absolutely no educational value, merely books for amusement, beginning in 1807 with John Harris’ The Butterfly’s Ball. Summerfield looks to Wordsworth’s The Prelude (1805) as an example of the defense of imagination, a defense Richardson ascribes to Romantics in general, taking “place more in private-through letters and unpublished manuscripts-than in public” (Richardson 114). Wordsworth’s The Prelude is one exception, within which he mentions, amidst his discussion of imaginative stories, the Nights: “I had a precious treasure at that time / A little, yellow canvass-covered Book, / A slender abstract of the Arabian Tales” (5.482-4). The Nights continues its success today, surviving in print and film, and still, as Disney’s Aladdin and Sinbad makes clear, censored, revised, adapted, and transformed to be presentable, and marketable, to parents and children alike.

The Nights provided children’s didactic literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with amusing characters, intriguing plotlines, and exotic settings. Though writers’ use of these elements can be subtle and the moral obvious, their attempt at rational yet entertaining fiction is noted. The Nights supplied an ideal foundation for the promotion of middle class values, a result of the economic influence the rising mercantile class held over the market as consumers. The revising, editing, and moralizing of imaginative literature is a product of the anxiety that swept English culture in the eighteenth century regarding the effect of reading on a child’s mind. Despite this fervor imaginative literature managed to survive; writers employed fantastic literature elements in their texts, supplemental to the didactic purpose, fusing imaginative fiction with moral intention.


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