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Abstract
The theme for this year’s Penn Humanities forum is that of ‘word and image,’ a broad topic indeed. Even after deciding that my project would broadly focus on the interactions between French Orientalist and North African narrative and painting, I lacked a focus for the project that would marry it firmly to this theme. Finally, I arrived at what had always been the most obvious connection: the image of the so-called "Oriental" woman. Despite my initial fears of such a focus becoming reductive, it has in fact shed a revealing light on the interplay of these two discourses. As can be imagined, however, any attempt to attack this multivalent image without first limiting one's scope temporally, theoretically, and geographically will not only expand to an unmanageable size; it will also once again reduce the huge variety of the Arabo-Islamic nations to one reductive sigil, that of the "Arab woman." This essay will therefore confine itself to the Maghreb region, comprising the modern nations of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Further, I am concentrating on the two major temporal points: mid-to-late 19th century French Orientalist painting and narrative, and post-1950's North African francophone and Arabic narrative.

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2005-2006 Penn Humanities Forum on Word & Image
Undergraduate Humanities Forum Mellon Research Fellow

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Introduction:

The theme for this year’s Penn Humanities forum is that of ‘word and image,’ a broad topic indeed. Even after deciding that my project would broadly focus on the interactions between French Orientalist and North African narrative and painting, I lacked a focus for the project that would marry it firmly to this theme. Finally, I arrived at what had always been the most obvious connection: the image of the so-called “Oriental” woman. Despite my initial fears of such a focus becoming reductive, it has in fact shed a revealing light on the interplay of these two discourses. As can be imagined, however, any attempt to attack this multivalent image without first limiting one’s scope temporally, theoretically, and geographically will not only expand to an unmanageable size; it will also once again reduce the huge variety of the Arabo-Islamic nations to one reductive sigil, that of the “Arab woman.” This essay will therefore confine itself to the Maghreb region, comprising the modern nations of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Further, I am concentrating on the two major temporal points: mid-to-late 19th century French Orientalist painting and narrative, and post-1950’s North African francophone and Arabic narrative. While it is undoubtedly important in the region’s heritage, I have neither the training nor the language ability to approach the medieval Andalusian heritage of the Maghreb in a productive fashion; I shall therefore reference superior secondary texts when necessary and attempt to give the appropriate weight to the effects of the Arabo-Islamic literary heritage where appropriate. Within these parameters of genre, time, and space, I wish to examine how the French and

1 Fiction and autobiography. I include autobiography because it is such a prominent part of the Arabic literary tradition that a study of prose narrative would be incomplete without it.
Maghrebin discourses deal with the body and the language of Maghrebines. While I shall examine each discourse independently, their similarities and interactions across time will also be a major focus.

In sum, then, I intend to work through multiple texts and paintings, focusing on the visual-spatial ways in which women are presented, as well as the ways in which this presentation is affected and even controlled by narrative. The "word-image" facet of my paper is rooted in the intimate connections between narrative and painting that make up French Orientalist discourse. On a more symbolic level, I deal with the "image," whether presented in narrative or painting, of North African women in these two cultural discourses. Given that I cannot cover every text to emerge from either mid-century French Orientalism or modern Maghrebi narrative, I have chosen those that treat the subject of women most explicitly. However, lest this be perceived as perhaps too convenient a choice, I have attempted to offset these main examples with references to other works as well as criticism concerning general trends in the medium at that point in time. While several book length studies have been devoted to each of the major subjects that I will cover in this paper, I have discovered no attempt to contrast modern North African narrative with its French Orientalist counterpart.

Here a definition of the term "Orientalist," which I have until now used rather casually, is appropriate. To first quote Said, we may think of his 'Orientalism' as "a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient" (95). To argue the finer points of the 'true' or best definition of Orientalism, and the length of its influence, would be a treatise in and of itself—and ultimately somewhat arbitrary. Within this essay I intend the word "Orientalism" to refer to a specific historical phenomenon, characterized by an explosion of

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2 North African women.

3 Such as Yeazell's *Harems of the Mind*, Malti-Douglas' *Woman's Body, Woman's Word*, and Dobie's *Foreign Bodies: Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism*. 
artistic, academic, and socio-political interest in a partly factual, partly imagined entity known in European discourse as "the Orient." This discourse could be said to extend from the early-to-mid eighteenth century until the rise of a 'post-colonial' discourse in the academy and the increasing awareness not only of the phenomenon of Orientalist thought, but of its potential negativity.

Of course, as has been made blatantly obvious by the responses to Said’s seminal text, "Orientalism" is a slippery word to define. I have not extended my definition of the word until the present day, for example, because while colonial issues continue to reverberate—perhaps especially in France and America—they do so mixed with a profoundly different set of post-colonial political realities. Further, I have not extended the definition backwards in time, in spite of ample evidence in French literature for a concern with the Middle Eastern presence in medieval literature, and for a similar reason: while aspects of the culture of its Near Eastern neighbors have continually fascinated Europe, the degree and the causes of this preoccupation vary throughout history. To muddle the matter further, what we define as "Europe" and "the Orient" or even "the Middle East" is also mutable. Such exotic locales as Venice, for example, are often featured as "the Orient" in nineteenth century painting (Benjamin 91). I have thus restricted myself to the above historical definition, primarily in order to avoid using the term 'Orientalism' as a rubber stamp for all Western thought towards the Middle East.

Finally, the question must be asked: why compare the two perceptions at all? Is it not possible, indeed probable, that there is little to no commonality between the literary

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4 Typically "the Orient" covers any territory or land from North Africa to India and China within traditional Orientalist discourse.

5 With the publication of Galland's Mille et Une Nuits, beginning in 1704.

6 As is shown in La Chanson de Roland and Aucassin et Nicolette.
production of post-colonial North African authors and that of mid-nineteenth century French Orientalist discourse? After all, one of the primary markers of Orientalist production is that it is largely fantasy, as opposed to the “true” authority one could presumably locate in North African texts. Leaving aside the question of whether mimesis is ever a true reflection of life, the relevance of the issue becomes clear when we examine traditional Maghrebi gender roles. In some ways, it was as difficult for an unmarried Maghrebi man to see a woman who was not a prostitute or an immediate family member as it would have been for a Frenchman. Thus, the issue of what is seen and unseen remains relevant through both bodies of work. Moreover, the bodies of women became a locus of immense friction between colonial, Orientalist France and the Maghreb—take the forced unveilings of Algerian women, for example. This combination of factors has resulted in a set of discourses which are intimately related and, ultimately, never politically innocent.

The Naked Truth: Women and 19th Century French Orientalist Narrative

En maisun ai un caitive franche;
Tant ad oit e sermuns e essamples
Creire voelt Deu, chrestiëntët demandet
Babtizez la, pur quei Deus en ait l’anme!
-----La Chanson de Roland, lines 3978-3981

In my house I have a noble captive
She has heard such sermons and pious tales
That she wishes to believe in God and convert to Christianity
Baptize her, so that God may have her soul!
[translations my own]

I have opened with this quote from La Chanson de Roland so that we may keep a very important fact in mind: the conscription of the North African feminine body to the service of a French ideology is not limited to the period of time I will be discussing. Nor is the conscription of the feminine body to political causes limited to conflicts between France and

7 Here Andalusian, to be specific.
North Africa. In fact, as Kathleen Davis points out, the “embodiment of national and supranational conflicts within women” is nothing new (118). In the quote above, Branimunde, the Muslim queen, is spoken for by Charlemagne. Her words are represented by his own, and her image taken as the symbol of both a military and spiritual victory. To jump forward several centuries, we again see the women of the Maghreb figured in the classics of French literature and painting. I have chosen three primary examples to discuss below: Delacroix’s painting *Femmes d’Alger dans leur Appartement*, Ingres’ *Bain Turc*, and Flaubert’s novel *Salammbô*. I represent both paintings and traditional narrative not out of a superficial concern for ‘narrative’ versus ‘image’ in the literal sense, although I feel that the literal distinction is important to maintain. Rather, the academic, artistic, and literary discourses of mid-to-late nineteenth century Orientalism form a network of perceptions; all of which are not necessarily equal⁸. In considering two of these discourses, I hope to construct a more complete analysis of the image of women within them.

The *Bain Turc* is easily one of the most iconic images of “the harem,”—or at least of the images which have come to represent the Western idea of the harem. Ingres loosely based his conception of the painting on the observations of Lady Mary Montagu, whose collected letters stand as one of the few Near Eastern travel narratives authored by a woman. As such, Lady Montagu had reasonably free access to areas about which male artists and writers could only fantasize. Among these were the women’s quarters in homes⁹ and women’s communal social

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⁸ For example, few Orientalist artists who traveled to North Africa, Egypt, and the Levant used literary themes in their painting (aside from the Biblical). If one did have art which drew on novelistic imagery, it was explicitly labeled, such as Theodore Rivière’s *Salammbô and Matho* (Benjamin 89, figure 2). On the other hand, the influence of the *Mille et Une Nuits* could be said to underlie the entirety of French cultural production on the Maghreb to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the time period.

⁹ These were, for all intents and purposes, “harems.” Fatima Mernissi discusses the everyday Moroccan harem in her autobiography *Dreams of Trespass*, which I will cover in the second half of this essay. The conception of all harems as hordes of women in the Sultan’s palace is
space—the baths. While Lady Montagu emphasizes the social and structured nature of the baths in her letters, noting the lack of "a wanton smile or immodest gesture among them," Ingres chooses to stress a different kind of space—an erotic, languid one heavily marked by the tradition of 'harem' depictions extending back in French arts and letters for roughly 150 years. Before he actually set brush to canvas, however, Ingres recopied the text of Lady Mary’s letters into his journal—over the notes on his idol Raphael, thus indicating their extreme importance. His copy was not faithful to any one of her letters; rather, it was an amalgam of various entries concerning the baths (Yeazell 40). This is less of a re-copy, then, and more of a re-interpretation, a refusal to take Lady Mary’s word at face value. In re-writing her text, he creates his own 'authentic' base for a fantasy of the 'harem.' Yet, this harem is not strictly speaking, a harem—it is a bath, a public arena—if a single-sex one—where women of different families interact. Ingres ignores this in favor of an intimate, enclosed space. To understand the profound effect of this painting as a 'harem-image' on the viewer, one has only to look at the immense amount of criticism that ignores the fact that the painting is supposed to be set in a bath at all, analyzing it purely as a harem painting (Yeazell 41).

In fact, the original canvas was rectangular, giving the illusion of a continuous space shared with those depicted in the canvas. For reasons unknown to us, Ingres later altered it to the round now contained in the Louvre (Yeazell 37). However, given the previous rejection of the painting, one could surmise that the change was intended to remove his nudes even further from the lurid realm of real world 'nakedness' by providing a more distant

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10 I refer here to the distinction between the "nude" and the "naked" pioneered by Kenneth Clark in his book The Nude. A nude figure is acceptable to a Parisian salon if it follows certain norms of presentation. For example, Venus is acceptable, a common prostitute is not. In the same vein, an odalisque is acceptable, a naked Parisian bourgeois is not. Further, a
perspective. However, this change of perspective also gives the illusion of voyeurism, a ‘peep-hole’ through which the observer can examine the forbidden space of the “Oriental woman.” What we see through this secretive vision of the bath is not the public, dignified space described by Lady Montagu. The very crowding of the bodies into an insufficiently large space suggests a teeming mass of nude feminine flesh—which, while perhaps conventionally ‘nude’ in its classical pose and attitude, not ‘naked,’ still hints at the artistic and literary trope of lesbian eroticism which, at the time, was commonly accepted in France and England as existing in all-female Middle Eastern environments (Yeazell 41). For example, the almost unavoidable physical contact results in suggestive juxtapositions of bodies and occasionally explicit ones, such as the figure in the near right of the canvas clutching her neighbors’ breast. Indeed, the liminally erotic nature of the painting to its contemporary viewers is reflected in its reception: in 1859, Ingres delivered an earlier version of the painting to prince Napoléon, only to have it returned by his wife for its perceived lewdness (Yeazell 28).

Further, the abrupt truncation of the bodies near the edge of the frame hints at the possibility that the scene extends past the viewer’s eye—a perhaps infinite multiplication of exotic flesh, limited only by the viewers’ imagination. This multiplication suggests the unlimited “Orient” of mid-century discourse, which loosely extended from North Africa to China and even Japan. This connotation brings the realm of Ingres’ fantasy firmly into that of the political—the women become the Orient and the Orient the women. As Said notes in *Orientalism*, the association of sexuality in general, and specifically female sexuality, with the Near East is a “remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes towards the Orient” (188). The Other is figured as the feminine, and then perceived as simultaneously effeminate and "nude" is not self-conscious or self-aware of her nakedness where a naked woman would be.
threatening—both feminized and feminizing

This dichotomy between the effeminate and the threatening becomes clearer if one considers the painting as an attempt to represent the “truth” of the Oriental woman. If the outside world shows only woman enveloped in veils and robes, here the veils fall away to reveal, for lack of a better cliché, the “naked truth” of how Ingres saw the feminine world of his Orient. This visual ‘truth,’ however, is strictly forbidden in the real world. As Ruth Yeazell notes in “Harems of the Mind,” Ingres recopied Lady Montagu’s final warning on the baths faithfully, “Tis no less than Death for a Man to be found in one of these places” (251). Ingres copied the notes in 1830; he did not sign and date the final painting until 1862, at the age of 82. It was his last major canvas (Yeazell 251). While Yeazell argues that this set of circumstances implies that Bain Turc is an attempt to escape death, I believe that the real-world association of the forbidden male gaze with death layers onto a deeper assumption: woman as truth or forbidden knowledge. For example, in her discussion of one of Ingres’ contemporaries, George Sand, Naomi Schor notes, “the woman writer in rose-colored glasses stands as antithesis to that figure of the philosopher’s imagining, woman-as-truth” (44). The woman is the *representation* of truth, she herself cannot be figured as a subject who will discover it. While Schor is not here discussing the Orientalist tradition, the Middle Eastern woman stands in an even more polarized relation to truth than the European one. She is the ultimate alterity, and viewing her body is the ultimate forbidden knowledge. As for her status as a subject who is able to create truth, it is a virtual non-issue in 19th century French discourse. (However, although it is beyond the scope of this discussion, the story of

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11 In other words, there did exist a very real chance that sneaking into the women's quarters or the public baths as a man, western or otherwise, could in fact cause one's death.

12 Paradoxically, viewing her body in a public art gallery is also more allowable than viewing that of a European woman, perhaps because she is so far removed from everyday French reality.
Scherezade would make an interesting case for the popularity of a fictional Middle Eastern woman as subject). The analogy of woman-as-truth, when layered with the association of the forbidden gaze-as-death, leads to the conflation of the naked feminine body with both truth and death. Hence, the Bain Turc is not an attempt to escape death; rather, the voyeuristic glance at the harem promises death as well as the ultimate knowledge. The erotic context of the painting further associates this pleasure of knowing with sexual pleasure, and it is a short jump from there to the French “petite mort,” or orgasm. The knowledge promised by the painting thus carries the threat of death as well as the potential for sex, or sexual release.

This desire to uncover the ‘truth’ explains Ingres’ need for some illusion of textual authenticity. After all, one can hardly argue that his painting represents a literal truth of the Turkish Bath; it is rather a highly fantastical, spectacular notion of what he imagines lies behind the “veil” of the feminized ‘Orient’ and the women who here stand in for her. In fact, most of the figures in the painting are plagiarized from various other harem or Oriental paintings—making the Bain Turc the ultimate pre-manufactured fantasy, a compilation of various stereotypical images into one. Yet, perhaps the most powerful fantasies are those with a spicing of truth. Symbolically, in the physical act of re-writing Montagu’s text, Ingres transfers authorship and textual ‘ownership’ to his own, male authority. Of course, one must remember here that in part Ingres copied the text out of necessity; it is not as if one had Xerox machines. However, his changes to the text and apparent disinterest in reproducing the text faithfully problematize this ‘copy.’ Through his re-writing, Ingres has become the illicit eyewitness of the harem. Having removed Lady Montagu as textual authority, he then removes her physical body from the image—in the original narrative she stands in the middle of the baths in full English riding-gear. Thus Ingres provides himself with an ‘authentic’
perspective and places himself in it, removing the European woman as mediator of the experience. Yet while Ingres removes the feminine authority from the text, both European narrators appeal to a deeper textual authority to justify their image of the Turkish bath—the Greco-Roman classics of Western literature.

In her letters concerning the bath, Lady Montagu makes reference to the figures “of the Graces,” and Theocritus’ “Epithalamion”\(^{13}\) of Helen” (Yeazell 37, 39). These kinds of texts structured the way in which Lady Montagu would describe the baths; they provided a filter through which she could accomplish several aims: one, to use the classical references to aid her attempt to describe the naked women as classical ‘nudes,’ not vulgar or sexual; two, her reliance on these texts allows her to participate in the frequent conception of “the Oriental” as also “the ancient.” Kathleen Davis convincingly argues this point in response to the frequency with which modern references to the Middle East appear in terms of a regressal ‘to the Middle Ages’; she then shows that, in the Middle Ages themselves, a perception of Eastern difference as somehow temporally as well as geographically distant already existed.

In mediating her experience through classical texts, Lady Montagu also places the scene in the baths as being as distant in time from her own reality as it was in space. Ingres, a great classicist of the nineteenth century, takes this eighteenth century perception and overlays it with the male conception of the harem. The result is an image that maintains itself on the border between nude and naked, classical and Oriental, fact and fantasy.

Thus, in viewing the *Bain Turc*, one is viewing an image whose existence was mediated through at least three separate texts, and finally appropriated by a masculine, Orientalist perspective. This perspective, as we can infer from the round, ‘peephole’ nature of the

\(^{13}\) Wedding celebration (Greek).
painting, is inherently voyeuristic. As we look through it—perhaps even participate in it—we are drawn into the illusion that the sea of female flesh continues past the boundaries of the painting—to where, our vision cannot say. The image promises us truth on the one hand; it even bases itself on an eyewitness account. Yet, on the other, it departs from that account into the realm of pure fantasy, which ultimately bears little resemblance to the original text.

Whatever the ultimate meaning of the image, one thing remains certain: we are the ones looking in through the keyhole; we are the ones looking at the baths. The eyes in the painting do not return our attention—they do not look out of the harem. In modern North African women’s narrative, the situation is reversed: women stand at the edge of their quarters and peer out, become the subject who searches for the forbidden knowledge that lies outside the harem. But here, in the complex net of texts and images that constitute the foundations of Orientalist discourse, they are trapped in a static world outside history. The power of this discourse lies in its powerful combination of truth with fantasy and narrative with images. Both reinforce each other in an ever more intricate web of significations until the “truth” one sees in the Orient and its women was always and already mediated by this potent mixture of “word and image.”

The association between death, sex, and knowledge is explicitly represented in another work: Flaubert’s Salammbô. Both Bain Turc and Salammbô are grounded in a mix of exotic fantasy and painstaking textual research; ultimately, however, the search for the fantastical truth embodied in the feminine outweighs any semblance of factual information.

Flaubert took five years to research and write the novel that would follow Madame Bovary in the winter of 1862. In fact, his readings on all things Near and Far Eastern had begun much

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14 Here I intend “voyeuristic” to refer to a secretive manner of looking at an individual or a group without their knowledge, accompanied by sexual pleasure on the part of the viewer.
earlier, and his intention to write a “conte oriental” can be traced back to 1845 (Green 29). Flaubert’s preoccupation with his Orient took a distinctly two-sided approach: on the one hand, he buried himself in classical histories and contemporary treatises on the subject, reading ancient historians alongside contemporary archeological journals (Green 28). On the other, he embarked on several “Oriental” travels, seeking inspiration in Palestine, Egypt, Algeria, and Tunis, among others. Flaubert was not alone in this; the artist’s pilgrimage to the Near East (and the resultant travelogue or paintings) had been an established feature of Orientalist art and literature since the eighteenth century. In 1858, the writer undertook a trip specifically in order to see the ruins of Carthage, after he had come to an impasse in his textual research. On his return he insisted, “Carthage est completément à refaire, ou plutôt à faire. Je demolis tout. C’était absurd! Impossible! Faux!” (Corr. I, 168). The image of Carthage he had gleaned from textual research must have lead him astray; interestingly, it is the visit to a modern Tunis which redefines his sense of the novel. Unlike Ingres, Flaubert could obtain his own eyewitness account, for viewing the ruins of Carthage was not punishable by death.

Flaubert’s long-unfulfilled desire to write his conte oriental, as well as the way in which he finally goes about that writing, bears a striking resemblance to Ingres’ creative process for the Bain Turc. Both men searched for a textual intermediary to provide a certain degree of historical and ethnographic authenticity. For Flaubert, this authenticity was to be found in his general historical research, given as there was no suitable single account of the events he wished to depict (Durr 43). As we have seen, Ingres found his authenticity in the accounts of Lady Montagu. However, both the artist and the writer used the truth they uncovered as a starting point only—it is generally accepted that while Flaubert’s careful research does inform

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15 The original title of the novel.
his work on Carthage, he is not slavishly adherent to it in the slightest. His notes, as well as
his contemporary critics, support the notion that the novel contains a clear demarcation
between the semi-historical framework and the fictional plot that turns upon it. Unlike Bain
Turc, with Salammbô we do not see the feminine textual authority re-written by a male one;
rather, the text itself contains a potent opposition of “masculine” and “feminine” narratives.
This opposition once again raises the question of the relationship of truth and forbidden
knowledge to the feminine.

I will begin with Flaubert’s comment upon returning from Tunisia, “Carthage est
complètement à refaire, ou plutôt à faire. Je demolis tout. C’était absurd! Impossible! Faux!”
Carthage was Flaubert’s original title; the character of Salammbô did not even emerge until a
later draft. These two titles reflect the separation between the supposed historical and
fictional plotlines. Carthage, the historical city, serves as the center of the events firmly based
in history, such as the Punic Wars and the existence of a mercenary rebellion. The plot
centered around Salammbô deals with her relationship with Mâtho and the recovery of the
Veil of Tanit, an extremely important—and utterly imaginary—religious artifact. Upon first
reading the novel, this distinction between the historical and fictional plots appears to be
logical. Flaubert supported it, and contemporary critics agreed on it. Moreover, the structure
of the book attempts to separate chapters dealing with Salammbô from the military-historical
ones. However, as Naomi Schor points out in Breaking the Chain, this distinction is not so
clear as it may appear. Salammbô plays a crucial role in winning the Mercenary War, first by
rescuing the Veil of Tanit, and then by consenting to marry Narr’havas, thus cementing her
father’s alliance and allowing him to win the war. Further, the dialogue between male
characters during the military, “historical” scenes is no more realistic than Salammbô’s
exchanges with her nursemaid or priest. No, what is at stake here is something different. Flaubert and his contemporaries did indeed perceive a split between the two plots. This reader-reception and authorial conception reflects an idea of the Oriental and the feminine that allowed and even made sense of this division.

Two contemporary French critics, one who detested the novel, and one who adored it, illustrate this bifurcated reception particularly well. In spite of their differing opinions on the aesthetic value of the text, the way they treat the fiction/history plot separation remains constant. Cuvillier-Fleury, the favorable reviewer, separates his two-part review into “l’histoire,” and “le roman,” ending the first section with the rather portentous statement: “après l’histoire, le roman” (3). His decision to separate the critique is in part undoubtedly due to space: Le Journal des Debats is an extremely short daily newspaper, with about two pages of brief articles and two of advertisements. However, why this separation between “history” and “novel”? It is as if one took the French roman historique and separated out the two terms into completely different entities coexisting in the same text. The definition of history we might expect—the most factual version of the events—does not appear. Instead, “la guerre des Mercenaires” is figured as history. While this might appear logical in light of the fact that the war is the event that has survived historical records, a telling slippage appears when Fleury discusses the characters in the “histoire” section. He waxes enthusiastic about the “portrait” of Splendius, the “beau” description of Narr’Havas and Mâtho, and quotes numerous passages describing Hamilcar (3). And then we have “Laissons-nous pour l’instant avec l’étrange fille d’Amilcar, avec Salammbô” (3). And that is the first and last we hear of “la fille d’Amilcar”—note her introduction to the “history” through the patronymic—in this

16 This short format was not atypical for daily newspapers at the time.
17 This wording supports Schor’s conclusion that Salammbô’s relation to the polis (Carthage) and thus to the "history" of the novel is mediated through her father.
section of the review. Salammbô hence belongs to the novelistic and not the historical. Given as Salammbô is no less imagined than Mâtho, for example, her omission from ‘history’ here is telling. “L’Histoire” becomes a masculinized history of war while the feminized “roman” deals with Salammbô’s mingling of a “sensualité étrange” with “l’art le plus exquis” (3). Like Fleury, Taillandier excludes Salammbô herself from his dissection of Flaubert’s skills as a historian, which he dissects mercilessly. He first begins to discuss Salammbô with six pages left, making it over halfway through his review before mentioning the novel’s title character. She receives about a page and a half of attention; for the critic, Flaubert’s failure to provide us a glimpse into her “vie morale” becomes yet another failing of realism—should Salammbô not feel some kind of shame, he wonders? It is the choice of “sujet” in realism that he deplores, questioning how we are to ever sympathize or understand the “énigme” of Salammbô (854).

These two reviews share a common vision of Salammbô, and the plot involving her, as somehow removed from the progress of history: She possesses a “strange sensuality” mingled with “art” for Fleury; for Taillandier she acts as a “sleepwalker” with no moral virtue. Both reviews are more preoccupied with the novel’s relation to realism and Madame Bovary than with its status as a “conte oriental;” in fact, most contemporary and modern criticism of the novel deals with it as a historical novel. Some question this ‘historical’ status; however, I have found few considerations of Salammbô as an Orientalist novel in 1860s or modern day criticism. However, their comments on Salammbô match nearly perfectly with several key characteristics of Orientalist discourse. First among these is the sense of

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18 It stand to reason that 1860s critics would not have considered Said’s thesis. However, an awareness of a trend towards art and literature dealing with the Orient did exist, most notably among art critics (Benjamin 40). That critics fail to recognize Salammbô as a text participating in this well-established tradition is thus somewhat unusual, though partially explained by their preoccupation with the furor surrounding Madame Bovary.
Salammbô’s sexual alterity. Her sexuality is described as “strange” and “bizarre” by both reviews. Said specifically comments on this attribute, noting that Flaubert’s “almost uniform” association of sex with the orient is simply an artistically standout example of a “remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes towards the Orient” (188). Her perceived “sleepwalking” attitude further recalls the frequent characterization of the East as timeless, without progress, and somehow “sleepy” in its corruption and lack of innovation.

Yet why separate her from the history of the war, which also arguably takes place in the “Orient”? Why should Salammbô bear the brunt of these associations? In Orientalism, after Said notes Flaubert’s near-obsessive relation of the Orient to sex, he comments that the reason for this general obsession in Orientalist discourse “is something on which one could speculate,” and leaves it at that (188). As often happens with issues of gender and sexuality, the answer is bound to be overdetermined. One clear answer is political: the feminization of the Orient allowed the West to play the role of the masculine conqueror whose intellectual and physical superiority allowed it to rule ‘naturally.’ Europe’s fear of the Middle East as a potential political threat layered onto this desire for superiority, possibly resulting in the two-sided weak/threatening dichotomy we saw in Bain Turc. Yet, this explanation alone does not suffice. The feminization of the Orient does not necessarily equate to its sexualization. Again, a very basic answer presents itself: it was acceptable for European men to ogle and sexualize odalisque paintings and harem paintings, or to read sexual descriptions of harem-girls. It was not socially acceptable for the same to be done to French women. Hence Madame Bovary is put to trial for “outrage to the public decency” and Salammbô dismissed as a historical novel, despite the premarital prostitution of the title character. There are some hints of moral indignation, such as when one review exclaims, “Une vierge parmi ces
horreurs! Une Velleda africaine dans ce chaos sanglant!” (Fleury 1). Even Ingres’ *Bain Turc* reflects this explanation: the white skins of his models were, in all likelihood, drawn from local Parisian women. Finding North African models willing to sit unveiled—let alone naked—for artists was, of course, difficult to dangerous and near-impossible. Local Parisian models were often used even in supposedly ethnographic painting (Benjamin 43). This stand-in may be as simple as a naked Parisian model wearing a few of the conventional signs and posing in the style of an odalisque. The viewers of the painting could thus satisfy two desires simultaneously: they could view a sexualized European body in a socially respectable setting, and they could imagine a look behind the veil of respectable Muslim women. In the case of *Salammbô*, the look behind this veil is both undertaken by Salammbô herself and by the reader. In the end, we return to the same knot of death/sex/knowledge that underlay the *Bain Turc*.

Though Salammbô is quite religious, and wishes to become a priestess, she has been saved by her father for “quelque alliance pouvant servir sa politique” (103). In spite of this she spends all her spare time praying and consulting with her eunuch, Scharibimm. Her father’s “politique” eventually becomes tied up with the fate of Carthage—a fate she saves both practically (she promises to marry Narr’Havas) and metaphysically (she brings back the Veil of Tanit). While she never undergoes the marriage, she does undergo what many critics have called a “sacred prostitution” with Mâtho in order to regain the veil. On one level, her attempt to save the veil and thus Carthage can be seen as an act in compliance with her father and through him, with the city. She only agrees to travel “sous la tente” of Mâtho at Schahabarim’s urging, an urging which consists of telling her “pour mieux enflammer son coeur,” all the “invectives que l’on hurlait contre Hamilcar [her father] en plein Conseil”
Salammbô’s ignorance of what awaits her is nearly pathetic; in fact, she even exhausts the eunuch in her ignorance:

“Tu seras seule avec lui”
“Après?” dit-elle.
“Seule dans sa tente.”
“Et alors?”

Schahabarim se mordit les lèvres. Il cherchait quelque phrase, un détour.
“Si tu dois mourir, ce sera plus tard,” dit-il, plus tard! […]
“Si tu m’accompagnais, ô père?”
“Non!” (293).

This painfully funny exchange becomes even stranger when read alongside the descriptions of Salammbô in religious ecstasy. She tells her old nurse that sometimes, when the spirit is upon her, she feels a “globe de feu roule et monte dans ma poitrine, il m’étouffe, je vais mourir; et puis, quelque chose de suave […] passe dans ma chair…c’est une caresse qui m’enveloppe” (102). She continues her litany, ending with a cry to be let out of her body and allowed to rejoin the goddess. The pace of her description, which consists of nearly a half-page of brief statements, interspersed with exclamation points, provides the illusion of breathlessness and speed. At the climax of her episode she nearly faints, sinks to the ground, and calls the priest. Her ‘prayers’ here become extremely sensual in nature, almost orgasmic. Indeed, the parallel between the pacing of her religious experience and that of a sexual one is difficult to miss. This sensuality inspired by her prayers remains separate from any apparent knowledge she possesses of men; indeed, the only thought she gives to a spouse is disgust at their “rires de bête fauve” and “grosses membres poussières” (102). Salammbô’s quest for knowledge becomes tied up with sex exactly here. When the priest arrives, she implores him with all the “désir de la vierge” to show her the last secrets of religion, which he has been forbidden to teach her (102). He relents finally, telling her that Tanit rules the “amours des hommes,” but angrily refuses when she finally asks for what is beyond the pale: to see Tanit unveiled (102).
It is easy here to equate ‘seeing the goddess’ with a loss of virginity and the consummation of the earthly desire that the moon goddess rules. Salammbô’s ignorance of what will happen “sous la tente” with Mâtho and Flaubert’s insistence on her “désir vierge” point to her utter ignorance up to this moment. The reason Salammbô’s father keeps his daughter from learning about religion thus translates fairly simply to keeping her mental and physical virginity intact. If the cult of Tanit has anything to do with the “amours des hommes” that she rules, one can assume that ‘drawing back the veil’ on this knowledge would equate neatly to sexual intercourse—rendering Salammbô useless as a political pawn.

If we choose to read the text in this way, then how can we interpret Salammbô’s later actions? Her basic plot structure is as follows: Salammbô urges the eunuch to show her the veil, and he refuses. Mâtho steals the veil and brings it to Salammbô’s room, declaring that he is in love with her and is her master. She is fascinated but does not touch the garment, for to do so is thought to bring death. With the war taking a worse turn, she agrees to go into the enemy camp and steal the veil from Mâtho, although she fears her own death. She obtains the veil, and Flaubert describes the broken chain between her ankles, leading the reader to assume that she has also finally gained the knowledge of the “amours des hommes” she had sought. However, at the end of the novel, she dies “pour avoir touché au manteau de Tanit” (469).

It is appealing to write off Tanit and her veil as a symbol for sex alone, and leave them as a stand-in for the explicit desires Flaubert had too recently been put on trial for writing. However, that would be to follow in the same road as the many critics who have ignored the importance of Salammbô as a work indebted to both French realism and to the “contes orientals” which Flaubert specifically mentioned in his desire to write Salammbô. In the French genre of ‘oriental tales,’ whose heyday arguably came in the previous century, the
removal of the veil was often synonymous with the revelation of truth (Dobie 102). These stories, however, generally figured a man as the figure who unveiled or looked upon the revealed female form; the woman was only the one looked at. Salammbô becomes both the one looked at and the one who attempts to look. In both cases, the veil or drape signifies this erotic and voyeuristic gaze. However, unlike the men in the tales, Salammbô is punished with death.

As preparation to go into the enemy camp, Schahabarim orders Salammbô to perform a ritual with her black python, supposedly a national and private "fétiche" of the Carthagénians (283). There is nothing to suggest that the python was an actual religious fixture of Carthage; in fact, there is little discernible reason for this scene. Before beginning, her slave drapes heavy curtains all around the room, "car Salammbô ne voulait pas être vue, même par les murailles" (294). If we discard the veneer of "historicism" that lies over the scene, we have an elaborately dressed woman who then strips down, dances with a python, and faints in a bout of ecstasy caused by erotic asphyxiation. Even the "Babylonian tapestries" the servant drapes along the walls recall the curtains frequently seen as signifiers of private women's space in Orientalist painting. If one adds to this Salammbô's intense desire not to be seen, "even by the walls," we again have little more than our familiar harem-girl dancing nude to a flute, with a snake—in a space utterly unavailable to the French 19th century reader.

Yet, here we are privy to the most secretive moment of the novel, and it is described in the overwhelming detail so characteristic of Flaubert as if it were historical truth. None of the contemporary critics who so carefully comb over Flaubert's historical facts mention this scene as lacking in accuracy; even Taillandier, who is so concerned with the historical accuracy of Flaubert's religious speculation, lets this point go. While it is impossible to know for certain,
the ubiquitous nature of set scenes such as this one may have finally simply inscribed them as
‘fact’ in French consciousness. If one sees an image enough, one may start to believe it—especially if one desired to in the first place. Once again, we have textual research and ‘eyewitness’ accounts bolstering an utterly imaginary scene. However, there is still the matter of this not being the 19th century Middle East or “Orient.” Salammbô is supposed to be set in the Punic Wars! Even contemporary reviewers often describe Salammbô as “Flaubert’s historical novel.” In the sense of the military, “historical” plot, perhaps it is. But the “feminine” plot, the one concerned with Salammbô, passes for historical in spite of its blatant inaccuracy in scenes such as this. As Saïd points out, one of the key pillars of Orientalist thought is the idea that the Orient does not change and has never changed. Another key factor is the persistent association of the Orient with the sexual. As we saw in the Bain Turc, the Orient is here present in the feminine portion of the narrative. It, and Salammbô, thus take on the characteristics of this Orient. They are sexual, unchanging, and “somnambulate” as Taillandier puts it. And when they attempt to regain the gaze, it is punished with death.

Salammbô’s fierce desire to touch the Veil and see the goddess behind it stand for more than just a symbolic desire for sex. When Mâtho first steals the veil and brings it to her room, he is frantically declaring his love for her, and she has eyes only for the veil:

“Je t’aime!” criait Mâtho

Elle balbutia:—“Donne-le” (311)

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19 “Eyewitness” accounts are here meant as Flaubert’s travel to 19th century Tunis.
20 To be exact, Said does distinguish between the imagined golden age of Oriental antiquity and the slothful state into which it supposedly sunk until the West could resurrect it. He reads Salammbô as Flaubert’s attempt to resurrect this golden age of the Orient. However, I disagree with his interpretation: while Flaubert does try to lift Carthage out of obscurity, he also reproduces the conventional signs of the ‘decadent’ Orient—and he does so through the figure of Salammbô. The entrance of the decadent Orient through the woman reinforces the association of the 19th century Orient with the feminine and vice versa.
She nearly touches the veil, but at the last moment remembers that it is sacrilege and screams for her guards. Her desire is never for Mâtho, but rather she desires the veil and the goddess while he desires her, whom he believes to be the incarnation of the goddess. For example, when she goes to his tent she is heavily veiled so no one can see her face. She uncovers herself only in his tent, and he asks, “que tu ne sois Tanit?” (312). She then rides back to her father’s camp, the veil floating out behind her, to the adulation of the Carthaginian army. This marks the turning point in the battle against the mercenaries, and arguably causes the eventual death of Mâtho. He dies for having touched Salammbô, the representative of Tanit. Yet Salammbô dies for no apparent reason except that given in the last line of the book, “ainsi mourut la fille d’Hamilcar pour avoir touché au manteau de Tanit” (469). In a sense they both die for having desired the same thing—a glimpse of what lay behind the veil. However, Mâtho dies for a very tangible reason. He has his heart cut out and offered to the principal god of Carthage. Salammbô dies simply for having touched the veil, not for having seen what lay behind it. No one executes her; she just falls from her seat, suddenly dead. If we read the “veil of Tanit” here as another loosely historicized metaphor for the veil of the Oriental woman and the “veil” of Flaubert’s Orient, then Mâtho has put himself in the situation Lady Montagu threatened. He snuck into the “harem” of Salammbo’s private quarters (it is mentioned that she lives in total isolation), abducted the veil, and slept with the caliph’s daughter (Hamilcar Barca). He is caught and executed. But Salammbô dies for a much more perverse sin. The ‘Oriental woman’ is not supposed to possess the same voyeuristic, inquisitive gaze that the foreign man (Mâtho) does. But here her desire for the veil drives her not only to look but also to touch. With that, the system that supports the ‘feminine’ side of the novel, the “conte oriental” and not the historical novel, comes crashing
down. Salammbô must die or the logic of the fantasy would not hold true. While the images
of the women in Le Bain Turc and in Salammbô may be utter fantasy, even fantasies may
have their own internal logic. As in the Bain Turc, women are to be fantasized about and
looked at, and not to look back. As we will see in the section dealing with modern North
African narrative, looking back is still a risky enterprise—even when the opposing gaze is no
longer European.

In contrast to the blatant eroticism depicted in both Bain Turc and Salammbô, Femmes
d'Alger dans leur Appartement makes an attempt to portray Algerian woman ethnographically
in a domestic setting. In what remains a rare instance among his contemporaries, Delacroix
actually witnessed a domestic Algerian harem—or, at least, he thought he did. It is a matter
of debate if Delacroix actually saw the genuine article. Some have suggested that the women
were more likely Christian, Jewish or simply prostitutes. Even if they were real Muslim
housewives, their elaborate dress and studied pose—complete with a virtual still life of a fruit
bowl and hookah—suggests that they arrayed themselves in their best attire, well aware that
they were being watched (Yeazell 26). This possibility resounds with a theme we will
develop further in our discussion of Magrebi narrative: the possibility of performing
authenticity for the European viewer. In any case, the fact remains that Delacroix viewed his
opportunity as a rare chance to capture the authenticity of the harem once and for all. Unlike
Ingres, who never traveled further than Rome, Delacroix traveled extensively in the Middle
East, and was invested in seeing the actual objects or people that he painted. His interest in
capturing an exact image can be seen in the multiple sketches of pieces of clothing and other
details that he made on-site, and his subsequent attention to the details of the scene when he
painted the full canvas. His women do not parade their fantastical status in the same way
Ingres’ do; rather, Delacroix turns a Flaubert-esque attention to detail towards providing a level of visual information which suggests that the scene might, in fact, be truthful—much as Flaubert’s excess of historical does in *Salammbô*. In terms of other literary movements occurring at the time, it is interesting that both Flaubert and Delacroix chose to emphasize clothing as a subject of such extensive detail. Flaubert and his Realist contemporaries frequently chose to stress fashion in their novels, perhaps most famously in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, but also in novels by Balzac and Stendhal. This discourse of fashion was one of the threads leading Realist writing to be considered “indecent.” Flaubert describes both Madame Bovary’s and Salammbô’s attire at great length, leading one to believe that the Realist movement in art and literature may have seeped over into Orientalist art and narrative. This link between Orientalist and Realist discourse is important here for what it implies about the stakes of mimesis in *Femmes d’Alger*: namely, that the representation of visual detail in the painting, in this instance clothing, provides a link to the French conception of “realistic” representation in art and literature.

Of course, it is possible to point out countless flaws in the details, showing the cracks in the paint as it were, and thus demonstrate how Delacroix does not represent the “real” of Algerian womanhood.²¹ To this I say: it is not the point. Rather, the dedicated attempt to represent the real itself points to the same fantasy/authenticity mixture we have seen in the other two representations. The painting’s fantasy rests in its self-conscious attempt to present the privileged and accurate view of Algerian womanhood to the European viewer. Even the title of reflects this: *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement*. Neither the generic “Turkish Bath” nor the “Grande Odalisque” of Ingres is found here. Rather the painting presents “Algerian.”

²¹ For example, Delacroix altered the position of the three women to make the composition more pleasing, and he added in the curtain at a later date (Yeazell 2).
not ‘Oriental,’ women in a small, domestic space. Of course, we have the stock indicators of odalisque and harem painting present here as well: the curtain in the corner of the frame provides a sense of looking into a private space, as does the small perspective of the room. Further, we still see hints of the erotic in the flashes of plump white leg and cleavage. In fact, the very lack of complete, unselfconscious nudity or classical presentation in some ways appears more scandalous, as it does not follow the standard guidelines of “the nude” that applied at the time. The same potential threat of death in the other two works also resounds here, for even if the knowledge represented dresses itself as more realistic, the threat still holds. Delacroix is given a stolen glimpse at a space he knows to be normally forbidden and dangerous, his intense excitement at being afforded a glance at this secret tableau showed in his hurried sketches and his friend’s reports of his unassuagable frenzy to capture the scene (Yeazell 26). In the end, however, the hints of erotic desire present in the painting are sublimated to the desire to represent the real—once again the “truth,” but in its clothed aspect.

Finally, in my search to find a focal point which would link these two disparate discourses, that of the 19th century Orientalist artist, and that of the post-1950s Magrebi prose writer, I could only discover one link which truly resonated: the story of the *Mille et Une Nuits,* in Arabic *Alif Layla wa Layla.* To sketch an extremely brief history of this complicated tale, the French text appeared in translation by Antoine Galland in 1704. It was later re-translated into the other European languages, notably the Burton edition in England. As the wild popularity of the tales continued to grow, more “nights” were added to the original so that the totally would actually comprise one thousand and one nights of stories. The work, virtually unknown in the Arab world in this new form, soon caught on to intense popularity there as well. In recent years, the original Arabic version has been re-published,
and in critical literature much ado has justly been made about the process by which the tales were Westernized and thereby robbed of much of their original thematics and intentionally open, oral structure. However, for this essay it is important to remember that at the time the majority of these texts were written, the European *Mille et Une Nuits* exerted the primary influence on both cultures as regards the texts themselves. Of course, the role of storytelling and oral literature with respect to women remains, as always, important to keep in mind when reading the Magrebi texts.

In France, *Mille et Une Nuits* became the basis for the 18th century craze of often explicit “contes orientals” which mimicked the original text in their episodic style and fantastic landscape (Dobie 84). This appetite eventually passed in favor of a more ethnographic style in the arts, but had begun to swing back towards the fantastic and erotic in the middle of the 19th century. Exactly why the overarching obsession with the Middle East occurred is a matter that could be debated at great length in several books, and would likely never find a satisfactory answer. Dobie suggests that the preoccupation with the French Orient may in fact be a kind of national denial of France’s involvement in the slave trade and their eventual loss of most of their North American colonies. However, this explanation is dubious for several reasons, not the least of which is the apparent ease with which French painters continually depict slavery in their paintings of the Middle East.

In any case, we can see the echoes of Galland’s work in Salammbô’s attempt to save the city of Carthage by entering into two “marriages” (Narr’Havas and Mâtho) just as Scheherazade marries the king in order to save her own people. Salammbô is the daughter of a general, Sherezade of a high-ranking government official (the vizier). In *Bain Turc*, the

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22 As Malti-Douglas notes, *Alif Layla wa Layla* was not considered "high" literature by the culture which created it. Men such as al-Jahiz dominated written prose, while oral storytelling was confined to either the street or the women's quarters (6-7).
influence is less obvious but plays off of the later contes which often depicted huge harems of willing women displaying themselves for the sultan and the viewer [fig 4]. And in Femmes d’Alger, the signs of the recent French military conquest are ignored in favor of the harem-image, though one now dressed in ethnographic clothing. This cultural obsession is not solely due to the literary influence of the Mille et Une Nuits; however, the text was certainly one of the foundational influences upon the way in which Europeans structured their mental landscape of the Orient. By contrast, in modern Magrebi women’s writing, Scheherazade often assumes the role of a pre-feminist heroine who can stand for the figure of the women writer, the intellectual capacity of women, a figure of women’s solidarity, and the ultimate seductress.

**Confronting the Harem: Women’s Post-1950’s prose fiction and autobiography**

The literature of post-1950s North Africa presupposes several factors: the end of French colonial occupation, an intensely multilingual culture, and, whether it is considered desirable or not, increasing Westernization. What does this mean for women? First of all, as Fatima Mernissi points out in Beyond the Veil, the roots of the feminist movement in the Middle East are, for better or for worse, bound up with Westernization and its ensuant problems. When North African society attempts to reject French ideals, often women’s rights get thrown out with the bathwater (vii-viii). My own reading supports the idea that French, which a politically charged language in the Maghreb under the best of circumstances, takes on a new meaning for women. French may be the language of their “liberation” through education and Westernization, but also of their alienation from home and tradition. Yet there is little to be found directly linking modern Magrebi writers to their old observers—no direct repudiation of Orientalist literature, little criticism of Orientalist painting. An exception to this generality is a novella by Assia Djebar titled Femmes d’Alger dans
literature may have influences or only reflected the larger socio-political culture of the occupation, it is that socio-political entity which is responded to, when it is addressed at all.

In spite of this, there are two identifiable threads which link the discourses: the *Mille et Une Nuits*, or *Alif Layla wa Layla*²⁴, and the ever-present concern with the place and boundaries of women's sexuality. For the sake of parallelism, I will again follow the format of several thematically linked close readings, here using three female authors²⁵. I intend to examine Fatima Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass* and Djebar’s *Ombre Sultane*. First, however, I will begin at the ending, as it were, with the most recently published novel read for this project: the anonymously authored *The Almond*.

*The Almond: the sexual awakening of a Muslim woman*, originally *L’Amande*, was published in France to a startlingly large reception for an anonymous, semi-autobiographical book of erotica. It sold 50,000 copies in France in 2004, and appears to be doing quite well in America, where it was published in translation by Jane C. Hunter in the summer of 2005 (James 1). The woman claiming to be the author has appeared on French television with her voice distorted and her face hidden behind large sunglasses and a hat, supposedly out of fear for her life²⁶. In the preface, the author of the novel positions herself as a kind of warrior for *leur Appartement*. Further, one could argue that the realistic harems presented in much of Magrebi women's literature serve as an implicit rebuttal.

²⁴ While there were a large number of active French women novelists at the time in question, few of them appear to have written much Orientalist literature. The most popular movements for women writers at the time were Romanticism or Idealism. Orientalism, along with Realism, was a largely masculine domain. Hence, all three Orientalist writers and painters I used were male. My choice to deal with female writers only for the second half of this paper results from the fairly simply fact that women tend to respond more directly to the French Orientalist gaze than men do in their writing. In the novels I read by male Magrebi authors, the world of women tends to limit itself to prostitutes, mothers, and sisters—wives, oddly enough, seem to be rarely discussed. A notable exception to this generalization is Tahar Ben Jelloun; however his novels deal more with code- and gender-switching than those of most female authors.

²⁶ The irony of a Muslim woman claiming to liberate her people through frank speech and
the sexual freedom of "Arab women":

My ambition is to give back to the women of my blood the power of speech confiscated by their fathers, brothers, and husbands. In tribute to the ancient Arab civilization in which desire came in many forms, even architecture, where love was liberated from being sinful, in which both having and giving pleasure was one of the duties of the believer (1).

This seems to be a noble enough aim, one even likelier to appeal to Western audiences than a book of erotica that purports to be no more than the same. With this preface the reader can now feel that he or she is righteously participating in the sexual and feminist liberation of "the Muslim woman" in the title, and not merely titillating him or herself at the spectacle of a naked femme orientale performing various naughty acts. Hence, reading the novel becomes a politically correct act as well as a pleasurable one.

One might also question the stated goal of the novel: to return "the power of speech" to Arab women. This of course immediately raises one of the major issues in writing about post-colonial North African literature: language. "Nedjma" wrote her story in French and gave herself the pseudonym of Kateb Yacine's title character Nedjma—also a francophone novel.27 If the goal of the novel is to empower Muslim women through a "brutal" discussion of sex, one would expect it to be marketed, at least in part, towards them. Yet the novel was published, marketed, and sold in French and in Paris. Further, if the writer's invocation of the then hiding behind the equivalent of a veil does not escape notice; however, the author may have some legitimate reasons to fear for her safety. She may also be aware that her French reading public would respond even better if she remained unidentified and thus simply the cipher for an explicit "Muslim woman."

27 In spite of its language, Yacine's novel is still considered one of the founding classics of modern Magrebi prose fiction. The author's choice to name herself after Yacine's lead character situates her as a descendant of his literary talent. Whether this honor is deserved is another question. In addition, the character of Nedjma serves as a cipher for all things female and sexual in Algeria at the time, including Algeria itself. Thus in taking this name the writer makes herself the all- or every- woman with insatiable sexual desires, playing further into the anonymous image she presented to the French press.
“ancient” Arab civilization is genuine, then writing the novel in French would seem to contradict her attempt at “tribute” (1). This is rendered even more problematic when she cites her textual inspiration as “very old Arabic volumes” from which she found the inspiration to write “freely, informally, with a clear hand and a quivering sex” (10). Evidently the narrator, if not the author, reads and presumably can write literary Arabic. To be fair, it is beyond unlikely that ‘Nedjma’ could have had the novel published anywhere in the Maghreb, given the prevalent censorship. In addition, French publishing houses frequently support North African francophone writers. For example, the original *Nedjma* was published by Seuil in Paris. Yet it still begs the question of how effective a protest literature can be if the majority of those with the need to protest do not read it? Arguably, the most brutally repressed sections of the Muslim population in the Maghreb—and France—are those women who do *not* speak French, but rather only Tamazight or the local Arabic dialect. Hence *L’Amande*’s readership must comprise those privileged Magrebines wealthy enough to visit Paris and buy novels there, those educated and living in France already, and native Frenchmen and women. The majority of the readers are thus, for the present time, French.

In the previous section of this essay I discussed the ways in which French Orientalist texts construct a fantasy of the ‘Oriental woman’ and the importance of a semblance of authenticity to that fantasy. The author or painter arrays his more-or-less imaginary women before us, and they play their roles at his discretion. But in *The Almond*, the socio-political and economic consequences of decolonization have created a curious reversal: the “Oriental Woman” has become the “Muslim Woman” who now sells her story to the ex-colonizer. Politically, she cannot publish this novel in her own country due to censorship, which can be partially

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28 Knowledge of French is often a good indicator for at least some basic education in the Magreb, those who have no knowledge of either formal Arabic or French are generally the least educated and more prone to poverty.
attributed to a reactionary return to Islam in response to French attempts at Westernization.

Economically, the pressure on writers who can write in French nearly compels them to sell to the far greater market available in Paris. In a perverse way, L’Amande brings the entire cycle full circle: the objectified now sells the erotic tale to the objectifier. Hence the novel could be seen as a kind of literary prostitution in which the teller only seems to empower herself; rather, she is performing empowerment for the European reader—just as the women in Femmes d’Alger appear to perform “harem life” for Delacroix. Into this idea of performance and desire comes the Mille et Une Nuits once again. Badra narrates a story of desire and passion, implicitly reaffirming the connection that Malti-Douglas argues exists between narration and desire in the original narrative. Nothing happens to Badra until she finishes her tale—perhaps the pleasure of the text has held off any harm. When she puts down the pen, however, she is confronted by a menacing angel who announces “Now you’ll pay” (237). In contrast to Scheherazade, Badra’s narration does not save her from the retribution of masculine power—and arguably does not save the “Muslim women” she set out to rescue from silence either.

While the above argument does seem very tempting in light of the reception and language of the novel, it is important to note that this text is not simply a re-hashing of the conte oriental that was so popular in 18th and 19th century France. While the language, presentation, and audience of the text may arouse suspicion, the text itself has much in common with its Maghrebi contemporaries in both French and Arabic. For example, the basic plotline of

29 There is a larger issue at stake here, however, and this is the extent to which all post-colonial literature is at least in part written for an audience in the developed world.
L'Amande is as follows: a working-class Moroccan girl, Badra, is given in marriage to a much older man who has repudiated three previous wives for their supposed infertility. She flees the marriage and takes refuge in Tangiers with her uncle's former wife. She eventually has a long-term affair with a Western-educated Moroccan doctor, Driss, who fears she will leave him like his mother, yet refuses to marry her. After much drama and scandal, she returns years later to her village with this same man who is now dying of cancer. He dies and the novel ends with an angel threatening to rape or possibly kill her for her "obscenities" (237). The marriage to the older, frequently cruel or sexually incapable man is a frequent trope in Maghrebi writing: it appears in Djebar's Ombre Sultane and Si Vaste La Prison, Boujedra's La Repudiation, Fadhma Arouche's short piece My Mother, Zoubeida Bitari's short The Voice of Happiness, and Choukri’s For Bread Alone, to name only the most blatant examples. The delimiting of the male world to "fathers, brothers, and husbands" is also extremely frequent in women's writing (1), and Driss' troubled relationship with his mother echoes the difficult relationship described in many Maghrebi novels, such as For Bread Alone, La Repudiation, and L'Enfant de Sable. Therefore the text is not completely removed from its predecessors, nor completely commercialized.

There are, however, several odd circumstances surrounding the novel that make one think that perhaps the writer has pasted these tropes together, and is perhaps not even North African or Moroccan. For example, she refers to a saint, Sidi Brahim, as Sidi Brahmin, and names the mother-in-law "Negaffa" (a kind of hairdresser) without any apparent joke in mind. Still, although the French reader may enjoy reading about the repression of women in the post-colonial Maghreb, the social problems "Nedjma" confronts are real issues for those living in the region. If we choose to read her attempt to restore "the power of speech" to women as

30 Meaning full moon.
even half genuine, then the point that we must interrogate becomes startlingly familiar. Does pornography, even “high” literary pornography, have a place in the feminist movement? Does it empower women through giving a voice to express their own sexuality, or does it simply re-create the pre-existing structures of oppression? Having read, if not lived, the ferocious battles fought on this subject in American feminist and queer thought throughout the 1980s, I can find nothing but a profound ambivalence on the subject. Both sides viciously defend their own views, and have never truly reconciled. As with the question of The Almond’s purpose, the answer to this question probably lies somewhere in the middle. When traditional feminist thought is further complicated with the racial, political, linguistic, and economic issues which inform the Maghrebi feminist movement, Nedjma’s position as a potential liberator can only become more problematic. Although there is no clear answer, the novel does resist both the cultural silence about sex still imposed on Maghrebi women and, by the very virtue of its bluntness, stymies the 19th—and perhaps 21st—century French desire to look “behind” or “beyond” the veil. There is no need to search for the forbidden knowledge located behind the veil of Flaubert’s “Oriental woman”, L’Amande lays it out on a platter—and in doing so, frustrates the voyeur’s desire to unveil the Muslim woman by doing it herself—although she still retains some of that mystery around her own persona. Whether this is a positive development remains to be seen; yet, it is certainly a novel one, and for that I have included it here.

Fatima Mernissi’s autobiographical work Dreams of Trespass comes in a slender paperback edition. On the back of this edition are the standard positive reviews, one of which comes from the magazine Elle, “[Mernissi] creates a necklace of tales as delightful as Scheherazade’s.” A search for Dreams of Trespass on JSTOR brings up several articles, the
first of which is titled *Scheherazade's Sisters*, in part a clear reference to the English title of *Ombre Sultane*\(^{31}\), Djebar's novel, but also intended to place Mernissi’s narrative style in line with the fabled *raconteuse*. On the one hand, one is tempted to question why every Middle Eastern woman who recounts her story appears to be preordained for a slot as some form of relation to Scheherazade. However, while the association is overused, it resounds on several levels with this particular text. First, Scheherazade’s original tales, before their Gallification by Galland, had a strong focus on violence against women and its ramifications. Mernissi’s tale, as does much of Magrebi women’s fiction, grapples with the situation of women within an everyday life that places chafing restrictions upon them. In *Scheherazade's Sisters*, Matthes argues that *Dreams of Trespass* seeks “to shape the popular living memory of their [its] contemporary culture[s]” (69). Further, she argues that Scherezade can be seen as actively re-shaping her own political reality within the world of the text *through* her control of narrative. Political memoir thus becomes more than empty rhetoric about one more arranged marriage or one more abusive father, brother or husband—it actively re-writes cultural history and moves the oppressed group into a position of power over culture instead of remaining obedient “carriers of [traditional] culture” (Matthes 72). While Matthe does present an interesting theoretical view of the texts, her utter lack of suspicion for memoirists who “seek an audience in the West” strikes one as a little naïve. While on the one hand Matthe is correct to assert that a text popular in the West should not be automatically considered “less authentic,” she ignores the practical questions of language, readership, and literacy rates that I addressed in my discussion of *The Almond*. For example, *Dreams of Trespass* was originally written in English—not French, not Arabic, not even Spanish—but English. English is not,  

\(^{31}\) *A Sister to Scheherazade.*
and never has been, a major language group in North Africa. Mernissi has had the benefit of an excellent Western-style education (in English), and her English prose is elegant and near-flawless. She also frequently authors original texts in English. However, the choice to write creatively in a non-native language is an unusual one in any scenario. If, as Mernissi does, one uses the *Mille et Une Nuits*, a story centered around narrative and the power of language, as a way to inspire and structure her cultural critique, the choice becomes even more interesting.

In “Edward Said and Assia Djebar: A Contrapunal Reading,” Mildred Mortimer describes the ways in which Assia Djebar re-reads colonial texts from a colonized perspective. Djebar will often be blatant about this act, using her historical training to find and re-interpret passages from the French occupation. Her novel *A Sister to Scheherazade* does not display as obvious a contrapunal reading as *Si Vaste La Prison* or *Femmes d’ Alger dans leur Appartement*, although it is part of the same quartet of novels as they. However, like *Dreams of Trespass*, *A Sister to Scheherazade* uses the Arabian Nights as a method to both structure and thematize the narrative. In Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass*, the deployment of Scheherazade functions as a kind of contrapunal reading towards the fantasies of the harem and ‘Oriental woman’ whose roots were established in 18th and 19th French society. This reading tutors the European reader in the same way that Scheherazade tutors the king Shaharyar. Ironically, it is Shereza’s tale that provided the impetus for these fantasies, and it is again her story that liberates these writers from them.

The full title of Mernissi’s memoir is *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*. The word “trespass” strikes one first. If one trespasses, one can be either committing a sin or

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32 The novel has, however, been translated into 21 languages, including both Arabic and French.
unlawfully entering another’s property. The two notions together connote a *spatial* sin, especially appropriate given the harem’s firm distinction between private women’s space and public male space. Mernissi follows a concept of the harem as an abstract spatial boundary throughout her memoir, ending with the idea of a “line of power” which separates the “planet into two halves” (242). To dream of “trespass” upon that line can be seen as a journey from powerlessness into power. While we can choose to read Mernissi’s text as a woman-centered one, which it largely is, there is another shade of meaning here. As I discussed in Part One, Said describes in *Orientalism* the persistent feminization of the Orient. The “oriental woman” of the 19th century came to stand in for the Orient itself—at once subjugated and an object of intense curiosity. To dream of trespass can either be to dream of escaping the domestic harem and joining the outside world; or to dream of transgressing the boundary separating colonized and colonizer—in this case, ex-colonized and ex-colonizer. In either journey, one progresses from a position of subjugation to one of power. If the person “trespassing” these political, cultural, and economic boundaries happens to be a woman, the ramifications of her act are rapidly compounded. Mernissi writes her memoir in English, moving across the linguistic boundary separating the language of her education (and that of a major colonizing power) from that of her homeland. Interestingly, she consistently refers to the Burton translation of the Arabian Nights, although making clear that she was told the stories in Arabic.

The second part of the title, *Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, hints disturbingly at the second half of *L’Amande*’s title, *The Sexual Awakening of a Muslim Woman*. Were one to only view both titles, both appear to preface potentially scandalous content—although the latter almost guarantees it. “Trespass” could connote any kind of potential transgression; when read in conjunction with “harem” calls up the all too-familiar stereotypes of the harem. Finally,
“tales” invokes the Arabian Nights theme that will pervade the memoir; in the title, however, it remains ambiguous, perhaps hinting at the aura of sexuality surrounding the European reading of the Arabian Nights, perhaps not. Unlike the *Almond*, however, the memoir does not fulfill the potential for titillation.

In fact, in an interesting reflection on the audience for which the book was written, Mernissi fills the book with informative footnotes on such subjects as harems, Islam, and the Arabian Nights. These footnotes subtly interject factual information into the narrative while still pulling the reader through the “tales” that make up the main text. For example, a footnote on harems runs for the bottom half of two pages, and mentions:

[...] a distinction between two kinds of harems: the first we call imperial harems, and the second, domestic harems. [...] It is the Ottoman imperial harem that has fascinated the West almost to the point of obsession. It is this Turkish harem which inspired hundreds of orientalist paintings of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, such as Ingres’ famous *Baill Turc* [...] domestic harems [...] are rather dull, for they have a strong bourgeois dimension and, as it is said above, are more of an extended family, with hardly any erotic dimension to speak of (34-35).

The reader is thus rather abruptly informed that the harem he or she might have expected to witness is not what will be represented here. Instead, “the domestic harems” are placed front and center, with their corresponding lack of any “erotic dimension to speak of” (35). Mernissi ignores an important point here: life in the “imperial” harems was probably not fraught with eroticism either—with a certain number of women and only one sultan, the amount of infighting and boredom within the imperial harems would have rivaled, if not exceeded, that in the domestic one. Yet the point Mernissi seems to be trying to make here is
that the reader must not expect her “tales” to reflect the Western obsession with the harem. Just as Scheherazade subtly guides and instructs with her narratives to Sharyar, Mernissi slides in these implicit ‘corrections’ of the Western readers perceptions even as she uses their desire to keep reading to draw the reader through the narrative. As they continue to read the main narrative, they receive a better understanding of specifically Morocaan and generally Islamic life, aided by Mernissi’s footnotes. Revealingly, one of the first sentences of the memoir notes, “women dreamed of tresspassing all the time. The world beyond the gate was their obsession” (2). The unknown Turkish imperial harem was the main focus of the West’s “obsession”—and its parallel was the obsession of the women in “domestic” harems with the outside world, a milieu almost as unknown to them as the inside of the harem to Westerners. Mernissi thus sets up very early on the idea of women looking out of their harems even as the French “foreign armies” try to look in (2).

Another footnote begins:

Early feminists are quite famous in the Arab world, where there is a strong tradition of documenting women’s lives, accomplishments, and exploits [...] Unfortunately, the Arab feminists, who are key figures in the modern history of human rights in the Muslim world, are hardly known in the West. One very good profile of the major Muslim feminists [...] could be very useful for Western readers if translated (128).

And another:

Quoted from the wonderful translation, The Book of the Thousand and One Nights [...] Modern translations may be easier for beginners to read (14).

What stands out in these two footnotes are their suggestions for further reading by the American and European—specifically English speaking, as we can see with the reference to
the Burton translation—audience. One book “could be very useful” if someone in the
Western world translated it.\textsuperscript{33} This statement could also be read as a suggestion—someone
(you) should translate it. Mernissi and Djebar both work to re-create women’s history in the
Arab world; the first footnote reflects some of Mernissi’s scholarly efforts on this front. Her
book Forgotten Queens of Islam, also written first in English, deals with re-constructing
powerful women figures from the Islamic empires. Hence Mernissi’s narrative obviously
contains a second function: to encourage the reader, both through tidbits of fact and
suggestion, to extend their knowledge of women in the Arab world beyond what they have
learned within her memoir. They further serve to guard against the reader slipping back into
old stereotypes (as in the harem footnote). Even the side comment about the Arabian Nights
encourages further reading—“beginners” may wish to start with an easy-to-understand
translation.

But how will they read this translation after having read Mernissi’s memoir? It could be
argued that Mernissi does not use her footnotes for any suggestive purpose; rather, as a
formally trained sociologist, she simply cannot manage to write a text without footnotes. Be
that as it may, even academic footnotes have a long history of strategic deployment. In
Beyond the Veil Mernissi attempts to argue for a Muslim view of sexuality as different from
Freud, an intellectual whose use of footnotes to guide and even subvert the main text is
nothing short of legendary. Further, the thematization of the Arabian Nights within the text
supports the conclusion that the text’s structure, footnotes and all, is linked to this primary
text in such a manner as to treat the Western reader as Shahryar. For example, we see the
direct influence of the text as early as page ten. After ruining the women’s secret opportunity

\textsuperscript{33} I say “someone Western” because generally one translates into ones native language; thus, a
native English speaker would translate into English from Arabic.
to listen to the radio by spilling the secret to her father, Mernissi recalls her mother’s instructions to “turn each word around your tongue” before speaking, for “once your words are out, you might lose a lot” (10). As soon as her mother says this, the narrator recalls how, “in the Thousand and One Nights, a single misspoken word could bring disaster to the unfortunate” (10). Here words and their careful are swiftly set up as crucial to crossing the boundary between power and powerlessness. Listening to the radio gave the women freedom; careless use of words took it away. But if one uses words “artfully,” as Scherezade does, “words could save [you]” (10).

The very next “tale” in Dreams of Trespass is titled “Scherezade, the King, and the words” (11). As Mernissi sketches the frame story of the Arabian Nights for the reader, she mentions that Sherezade’s intent was not to save her own life but to “cure the troubled Kings’ soul simply by talking to him about things that had happened to others. She would take him to faraway lands to observe foreign ways, so he could get closer to the strangeness within himself. She would help him see his prison, his obsessive hatred of women” (15). In this way she would save her people and heal the king. Of course, Mernissi slides in a footnote to her own story of “faraway lands and foreign ways,” telling the reader of her amazement that “for many Westerners, Scherezade was considered a lovely but simple-minded entertainer […] she makes us bolder and more sure of ourselves and of our capacity to transform the world and its people” (15). To circle back to Matthes article, we see that Mernissi here is shaping “the popular living memory of their [its] contemporary culture[s]” (69). Except contrary to Matthes argument, the primary cultural memory she is shaping here is not that of her own contemporary culture, but that of the Western reader to whom she continually addresses her novel both explicitly through her footnotes, and implicitly, through her choice to write the
memoir in English. Matthes does briefly note the possible equivalency of the King to the West Mernissi to whom Mernissi speaks; however, she then makes the odd equivalency between Shaherezade’s sister and Mernissi’s native Moroccan culture. While the text would obviously be of some interest to the Moroccan reader, linking that reader to the sister does not appear logical. The sister is sympathetic to Sherezade and helps her to survive; she is essential to the success of her mission. Mernissi’s narrative makes very clear how opposed a large section of Moroccan society, both male and female, was to the liberation of women. Connecting Dunziyad and the Moroccan reader demonizes the West at the expense of the realization that many of the larger social problems about which Mernissi speaks are caused by Moroccans themselves, and only they can cure them.

Hence, *Dreams of Tresspass* addresses itself to the Western reader, and guides that reader to a different perception of Muslim culture than they may have held previously. She accomplishes this through turning familiar Orientalist tropes such as “the harem” and “Scherezade” on their heads. Through her “tales of a harem girlhood,” she draws the reader into a “foreign land” where at every mention of the exotic there is bound to be a clever footnote drawing the readers attention away from the fantasy he or she might possess and into the realities of modern North Africa. In the best tradition of political memoir, her text both engages and instructs—much like the *Arabian Nights*. In weaving so much of her narrative around the idea of Scherezad as liberator and crafty narrator, Mernissi uses the very same text that began the craze leading to *Salammbô*, the *Bain Turc*, and *Femmes d’Alger* to dismantle their concoction of authenticity and fantasy. She thus demonstrates how a different reading of a single text can move against an entire literary and cultural discourse. Of course it could be argued that since all these discourses are “on the page,” political memoir is a genre of talk and
not action. However, just as Sherezad saved her own kingdom with idle storytelling, so Mernissi attempts to rescue her own.

The last novel I will discuss here, *Ombre Sultane*, was published in 1987 by the Algerian emigré Assia Djebar. It is the second novel in her “Algerian Quartet,” and is generally discussed in conjunction with its longer, more famous siblings *L’Amour, La Fantasie,* and *Si Vaste La Prison,* when it is discussed at all. Djebar lived in Paris for a period and currently teaches francophone studies at New York University. She is perhaps best known for what Valérie Orlando dubs a “historiographic metafiction”—a style which bridges the gaps between the “facts” of history and the possibilities, the maybes, of a history which does not rely on canonical sources for its facts (113). In other words, Djebar writes plausible historical fiction with a political purpose. Unlike Mernissi, she is not a trained sociologist and thus the quasi-academic footnotes which structure *Dreams of Trespass* do not occur here. Notably, however, both women appear to view it as their duty to create a space for women’s history amid the blockages formed by both Orientalist thought and Maghrebi tradition.

*Ombre Sultane* confronts the issue of women’s solidarity through incorporating the motif of Dunziyad, Scheherazade’s sister, into the novel. This story of Scheherazade and her sister appears at first to suggest a possible solution to the problems faced by women in Maghrebi society. However, a closer reading of the novel reveals the conflicts inherent when one goes, as Mernissi would put it “from power to powerlessness,” and the complex negotiations between the one “on top of the bed” and the one beneath it. Most simply, *Ombre Sultane* tells the story of two women, Hajilia and Isma. Asma ran away from her husband and daughter and then chose a second wife “pour la précipiter dans le lit conjugal” (9). Hajilia becomes attached to the children of “l’homme” who is still obsessed with Isma; however the husband is
abusive and Hajila is miserable, especially after she becomes pregnant. In the end Asma re-takes custody of her daughter and decides to help Hajlia by giving her the house key so she can run away to obtain an abortion if she chooses. Hajilia is hit by a car in the street and survives, but loses the child. Isma narrates the entire text, switching between referring to Hajila as “tu” and “elle.”

Isma’s name gives us the first indication of the imbalance between the two sisters. Although it is difficult to say for certain, as the text is in French and not Arabic, a similar word in Arabic means “lofty.” Isma’s position as narrator immediately places her in a “lofty” position of power; however, she initially seems to deny this power. For example, in the first pages of the narrative, Isma describes them as “Isma, Hajila: arabesque des noms entrelacés. Laquelle des deux, ombre, devient sultane, laquelle, sultane des aubes, se dissipe en ombre d’avant-midi?” (9). This opening implies that the two women are almost interchangable—the shadow gives way to the dawn, the dawn gives way to the shadow, but which of the women is the shadow, and which the dawn, is uncertain. Soon after, Isma informs Hajilia, “Je te dis ‘tu’ pour tuer les relents d’un incertain remords, comme si réaffluait la fascination des femmes d’autrefois” (10). Her intimate address to this woman she hardly knows can be read as an attempt to “tuer les relents” of her regret in an attempt to “befriend” Hajila, or at least to do it within the realm of grammar alone. In reality, she barely speaks to Hajila, meeting her briefly at the baths to give her the key to the apartment. But there is another facet here: there is one party that one may always tutoyer, and that is a child. Indeed, Isma even remarks that she thought she had “imaginé l’épouse de son père en femme-enfant, transportant une insouciance intarissable” (90). She had imagined that this “woman-child” would “rester au

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34 The rhyme here between “tu” and “tuer” also throws Isma’s motives into a suspicious light by hinting at the violence of her first person narrative. In speaking for Hajila and then in calling Hajila “tu,” Isma erases Hajila’s own subjectivity, “pour [la] tuer” (9).
foyer,” and take care of Isma’s child (90). While she realizes that this assumption was incorrect, and evidently feels “remords” for her actions, the use of the familiar “tu” to refer to Hajila hints at the power disparity between the two women. While on the one hand the consistent use of the familiar can be read as an attempt to create a feeling of sisterhood between the two women, on the other, it reflects the attitude of a literate, educated North African emigré towards her less fortunate counterpart. Hajila is the child-bride, Isma the adult.

Isma later complicates this hierarchical distinction when she directly introduces the motif of Dunziyad. At this point it is difficult to tell if the narrator “Isma” is speaking or if the implied author has taken over, since the “je” disappear for a period of time, as do Hajila and Isma. The second major section of the book opens with a re-telling of Dunziyad’s role in the frame story. Dunziyad “contempla la fête sensuelle, ou du moins l’écoutera” as her sister sleeps with the king, then wakes Scheherazade to “libérer son imagination vierge” (104). It is only through her intervention that her sister can continue to live. To equate Isma with Sherezade is tempting: she controls the narrative power, and she periodically recounts her own “fête sensuelle” with her former husband. Yet Hajila is not Dunziyad: instead of working together with her sister, Hajila was procured by the “sultane” as the price of her freedom from the husband. Thus the story of Hajila and Isma becomes a kind of Scheherazad/Dunziyad pairing gone wrong.

The description of the mythological pairing is followed by two short sections, one called “L’Enfant” and one “La Soeur” (105, 107). The first tableau shows a girl-child under a raised brass bed; every night, she hears “le chant du mère” as she sleeps with the father, but does not understand it and falls asleep. Only later, when she takes her mother’s place with her own
husband, does she understand “pour la première fois […] la voix sous le lit” (106). This can be read two ways: the child, now woman, finally understands the carnal meaning of her mother’s cries, or, she for the first time understand the role of the voice under the bed, the voice of Dunziyad, now that there is no one to safeguard her. The final line of the section suggests the second reading: Dans ce secret du nid, and ce recoin de l’ignorance, s’est noué pour nous totes le harem” (106). The opposing tableau, “Le Soeur,” changes the figure under the bed from Dunziyad, to the child, and now to the generic “soeur” who is in a position to protect because the laws of polygamy dictate that she can never be the co-wife of her sister (107). As the sultana “invente; elle combat,” the sister “rameute les victimes du passé (108). These two passages show the sister-figure as essential to the survival of every woman “above the bed.” While one women engages in active “combat,” the other lies both temporally and spatially—hence the “victimes du passé—beneath her. This vision of women’s solidarity necessitates an active/passive dichotomy in which one woman must literally put herself beneath the other in order to support her daily attempts to stay alive.

It is this concept of sisterhood that becomes dangerously twisted in Ombre Sultane, and leaves the reader with a profound ambiguity on the implications of the Scheherazade/Dunzyad pairing. Hajila does act as Dunziyad in that her presence allows her “sister” to escape. Unlike Isma, Hajila actually does sleep on a mat below the bed, reinforcing the image of Dunziyad once again. As Anjali Prabhu points out in her reading of the novel, Isma’s sexuality and skill with narration are continually privilegged over Hajila’s, leading to a semi-violent eradication of Hajila’s status as a subject within the text (81). She is always the “ombre,” never the sultana—or the educated francophone émigré. And although Prabhu correctly observes that this novel seems the among those least concerned with colonial
politics of all of Djebar's work, we find in Isma's struggle for freedom echos of Paris and the possibility of finding liberty only in exile. For example, chapter two is titled "Isma" and within two paragraphs presents the reader with the following monologue:

Mordre dans une pomme, fredonner en dégringolant des escaliers, traverser imprudemment une avenue, un chauffeur de taxi, à Paris—pourquoi pas à Paris!—sifflote de me trouver belle, le café brûle dans ma gorge quand je rêve assise au terrasses des brasseries (19).

It is Paris that Isma retreats to after her divorce, to live in exile for a time—after choosing an illiterate "femme-enfant" whose only language is Arabic to replace her. The guilt of having escaped brings the sultana back to her terre natale where, after "freeing" Hajila, she retreats to her hometown to raise her daughter, teach elementary school, and wear the veil again. But something is rotten in the entire scheme. The last portion of the novel is called "La Sultane Regarde," and is divided into three sections, "La Mère," "Le Bain Turc," and "Sur le Seuil" (173). The Bain Turc section, knowing Djebar's penchant for contrapunal readings of Orientalist painting, is probably a reference to Ingres' canvas. Yet in the baths Isma observes Hajila's "enfantine" behavior upon slipping her the key to the apartment, and notes her "pose de baigneuse un peu gauche (163-5). Once again we have returned to Isma, having crossed the barrier of the harem, regarding Isma as a child, even once she has understood that she will not be content to stay home and have children. Even more, her view of Isma begins to be structured in terms of French Orientalism. The phrase "pose de baigneuse," when taken with the title "Bain Turc," begins to posit Hajila as an 'infantile' sexualized bather. Further, the final section of the text declares that now "l'odalisque est en fuite," after describing the moment of the car crash with a quote from Eugène Fromintin's Une Année au Sahel (169).

The "odalisque" is not a North African invention; rather it is a strictly European convention of
how one goes about painting an “Oriental” figure. While it would be far too simple to write off Isma as an emigre so thoroughly acculturated that she herself has become Orientalist, her persistent attitude towards Hajila as childlike or infantile, combined with her structuring of Hajila’s escape with the metaphor of an “odalisque in flight,” suggest that the character’s attitude towards the problems of women in her country has at least in part been shaped by Orientalist art. The idea of the women escaping from the harem of the *Bain Turc* or from Ingres’ *Grand Odalisque* is a powerful one indeed; yet, it has little to do with the plight of Hajila, who had probably never seen an ‘odalisque’ or even heard the word.

*Je dis “tu” pour te tuer*: Conclusions and New Directions

In the course of this essay I have attempted to shed some light upon the interactions between the modern literature of the Maghreb and that of ‘high’ Orientalism. To focus this discussion, I concentrated on the position of women within the two discourses. In *Bain Turc*, *Salammbô*, and *Femmes d’Alger dans leur Appartement*, we saw how the desire to view the “Oriental woman” unveiled was intimately related to the pre-existing image of woman-as-truth or *philosophia* which already existed in European philosophy, and how this desire for knowledge became conflated with a fear of the harem that was half-grounded in truth. Further, in an attempt to answer Saïd’s question, ‘why is the Orient associated with the sexual,’ we speculated that the feminization of the Orient allowed the West to play the role of the masculine conqueror whose intellectual and physical superiority allowed it to rule ‘naturally.’ Europe’s fear of the Middle East as a potential political threat layered onto this desire for superiority, possibly resulting in the two-sided weak/threatening dichotomy embodied in the sexual threat of the Oriental woman. Moreover, this sexualisation provided a socially acceptable outlet through which men could view naked Frenchwomen—who largely modeled
for the paintings—thinner disguised as _odalisques_. Whatever the true reason, women appear as objects in this period of Orientalist art and literature, rarely subjects. While the figure of Scheherazade did inspire "active" heroines of _contes orientales_ in the 18th century, these fictional women acted out their heavily sexualized roles for the _frisson_ of the French viewer.

In an attempt to find a focal point between the two discourses, the story of the _Mille et Une Nuits_ appeared to be the clearest link between the two. Interestingly, the paper finally contained three works by female writers because Maghrebines are overwhelmingly the ones who engage in what Saïd called a contrapunal reading" with Western images of the harem. These women writers are also the ones who choose to integrate the myth of Scheherazade extensively into their work. However, in reading _The Almond_, this contrapunal tactic came into question. Given the political and economic forces compelling politically active novelists who write in French to sell their novels in France—and often to live in exile there—the harem-woman of the _Bain Turc_ can now sell her own erotic image back to the colonizer, after having thrown in several politically correct tropes such as the arranged marriage to an older man. The French reader can thus enjoy the same _conte orientale_ as old; yet, now he or she can feel justified, even righteous in their titillation. Even if, as with Assia Djebar, the goal of the text does not seem as suspect, one must question the effectiveness of a protest literature if its native audience is next to none. Fatima Mernissi addresses this question head-on in _Dreams of Trespass_, writing in a language that has never been one of the many of the Maghreb, to guide the Western reader through her own version of a _conte orientale_ while using that very politically correct desire for "tales of a harem girlhood" on the part of the Western reader to educate him or her even as they read.

I titled this section "Je dis ‘tu’ pour te tuer’ after the eerily similar sentence in Assia
Djebar’s *Ombre Sultane*. And it is with this final text that the question to leave this discussion with raises its head. The female, if not feminist, writer’s reaction to French Orientalism is largely one of educated, literate women. They, like Djebar, often live away from the country they speak of in their writings, and they sell these writings to those not from their land. What does it mean for these women to speak so intimately of the situation of the less fortunate? Do they, as Dunziyad, now act as she did to “awaken” their sleeping sisters, or do they merely exploit their image for profit—climbing over the bodies of others to earn their emancipation? Their control over these women’s figures within narrative is as complete as that of Ingres over his bathers—the subaltern here does not speak; it is spoken for by the more fortunate. It may be a benevolent control; in fact, it appears nearly certain that such figures as Djebar and Mernissi do not view themselves as peddlers of images of the less fortunate. Yet the implicit violence contained in speaking for another, in taking their subjecthood, must be kept in mind. To say “tu” can easily become “tu pour te tuer.” And if the “odalisque est en fuite,” as Djebar closes her novel, where is she going, by whom will she be read, and when, ultimately, will she truly be set free?

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figure 3