

Empathy for the beast: Sinbad the sailor promoting and destroying empathy throughout the centuries

In 1704 Antoine Galland published the first French translation of *Sindbad the Sailor* which he said was based on traditional stories collected on his recent travels through the Middle East. The tale is a series of adventure stories with outlandish beasts and narrow escapes from death that were meant to thrill European readers. In addition to feeding the audience's appetite for excitement, Galland hoped that his text would be "plus instructif sans être moins amusant" [more instructive without being less amusing], teaching western readers about "les mœurs, les usages et la religion des peuples orientaux" (vij) [the traditions, customs and religion of the Asian people]. The stories were wildly successful, frequently re-translated and issued with new illustrations and formats, eventually becoming a staple of early British and American children's literature. However, instead of reflecting Galland's desire to enhance empathy for Eastern people, the versions that emerged in 19th century America were used to incite fear and distrust of those designated as "other," adding characters and events which demonstrated the barbarity and sub-human nature of non-white people. In addition to illustrating how children's "classic" literature was utilized to promote the socio-political agenda of its later publishers; a close reading of the areas left untouched by the biased revisionists retains a surprising element of anti-colonialism and proto-post humanism in Galland's work. Specifically, his depiction of the many non-human monstrous beasts, and Sinbad's interactions with them, shows a significant respect for animal autonomy and the natural world. By tracing the multiple and sometimes contradictory uses of this story, we can see how one story moves between lessons but retains traces of the humanity of its original creator.