Animals, Sex and the Orient: a feminist retelling of the *Arabian Nights*

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To Sophie

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This exegesis explores contemporary retellings of the *Arabian Nights* (the *Nights*). This collection was first translated for European audiences in 1704, and subsequently became something of a ubiquitous cultural icon in the West, particularly in nineteenth-century England. On the basis of texts influenced by the *Nights*, such as *Vathek* (1786) by William Beckford, *Arabian Nights and Days* (1979) by Naguib Mahfouz, *Nights at the Circus* (1984) by Angela Carter and *When Dreams Travel* (2003) by Githa Hariharan, this exegesis argues that there is a literary tradition of using the collection, and the frame story in particular, as a platform from which to critique power. The nature and scope of this critique has changed over time: texts from the nineteenth century have tended to consider the moral consequences of colonialism, while those in the twentieth and current century are generally using the *Nights* as a vehicle to explore feminist, ecological and postcolonial issues.

In addition to the exegesis, this thesis includes a novella length piece of creative writing that speaks to this tradition, specifically by using the *Nights* to critique male power over women, and female complicity in this process; references to human power over animals are also frequently embedded in the text. The novella, an eroticised reimagining of the *Nights*, is narrated in the first person by Scheherazade and includes a number of individual stories that reference the tropes of fairy tale and traditional British children's literature. Thematically, the novella challenges what Val Plumwood has called the "the lower value accorded the underside, the body, the senses, emotion, the imagination, the animal, the feminine and nature" (*Feminism* 123). By conflating Scheherazade's storytelling with her embodiment, it introduces the concept of 'skin narratives' – or sexual performances- and suggests that these play an important role in her perception of empowerment. This focus on the body is meaningful primarily because it accepts embodiment as the ultimate source of all culture and cognition, thus reversing a fundamental Western binary. The novella suggests that if stories emerge from bodies, and both are conceived as having liberatory potential, then storytelling is a type of imaginative becoming that invites agency into our material lives.

Introduction:

Stories about Stories

The creative portion of my exegesis, the artifact, is a novella length piece of fiction that revisits the well-known frame story of *The Arabian Nights* or *One Thousand and One Nights*. For convenience, I will refer to the source text as *The Arabian Nights* — the title by which it is popularly known in English (Kabbani *Imperial Fictions* 29) — or just the *Nights*, and my version as *1001 Nights* or the novella. As no commonly agreed spelling of Scheherazade's name exists (Caracciolo xxviii), I have chosen this particular spelling, as the French writers referred to her, in recognition of Antoine Galland's first European translation of the *Nights* in 1704. My histrionically titled novella, *1001 nights: being an Erotic Memoir, and Private Journal, of the Virgin Scheherazade —a gripping tale of love, death, identity, transformation and metamorphoses*, may be categorised as falling within the English Oriental or Romantic literary tradition, and has strong associations with the Victorian era, including a fascination with fairy tale, and feminist concerns. As we will see, the novella also connects with the emerging body of knowledge referred to variously as Animal Studies, Critical Animal Studies or Human-Animal Studies. Thus, *The Arabian Nights*, Orientalism and animals form the reference points of the following analysis, and represent the organising logic of the chapter structure. As a feminist re-imagining of a canonical text, and one that foregrounds erotica in a text often subject to pale shades of bowdlerisation, my novella connects with a constellation of ideas including power, imagination, art and artists, animals and the female body. However, the novella's ultimate focus is an exploration of the transformative apparatus of female empowerment.

Like the original text, *1001 Nights* represents a series of short stories woven together by a female narrator. In my novella these narratives (including fairy tales, fables and allegories) arrive from various sources including texts, dreams or nightmares; presented in a journal style format, they are sometimes stories Scheherazade tells the Sultan, or stories that other people tell her. Many of these stories derive from short pieces of erotic fiction that I had previously written, in a private journal, as a creative response to Cinthia Gannett's study *Gender and the Journal: diaries and academic discourse* (1992). In fact, the structure of the exegesis mirrors the journal approach of the creative artefact; like the chronological nature of journal writing, various frames of reference are addressed. This procession of ideas indicates how my thinking about my own writing changed as this research progressed.

Gannett's book traces the history of women's writing within the creative 'wild zone' of the journal; this discussion is grounded in frequent extracts from notable female writers' diaries. It argues that the journal is a literary form that, being generally written only for the writer, exists outside normative cultural and gender hierarchies, and is thus innately subversive. As Hélène Cixous writes in *The Newly Born Woman*, cited in Gannett's text:

> Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where *it* writes itself, where *it* dreams, where *it* invents new worlds. (ix)

The *Nights*, with a structure that lends itself to serial publication (Carriacolo 2), and whose division into individual nights highlights the temporal quality of Scheherazade's existence — and its fragility — suggests the fragmentation inherent in the journal format. And perhaps this quality was one of the factors that contributed to the *Nights'* considerable impact on English Literature: Cornelia Cook points out that "writers, such as Dickens, who worked with serial or part-published fiction must have been drawn to the figure of Scheherazade" (198). In my novella, this fragmentation results in each story existing in its own temporal zone, emphasising the night/day pattern of the Scheherazade narrative, and underscoring the formation of her identity that each story signifies. Structurally, this is reinforced by the use of sub-headings. By carrying its own time frame with it, individual stories function as concretised indicators of internal change. For example, in "the hummingbird's song" story (150) Scheherazade dreams that a bird twists its claws into her skull and lifts her high above the ground, so high that she can see "the ebb and flow of the landscape" (151). In her mother's voice, the bird reminds the girl that her sense of self matters — "you've forgotten who you are" — and instils hope by suggesting that there is a life beyond confinement in the Sultan's palace — "it's a big world out there" (151). The act of flying reminds us of Marina Warner's observations about magic carpets, a trope which has "clearly emerged as the universally understood, contemporary symbol of the *Arabian Nights*" (*Stranger Magic* 77)[1] but more importantly of the connection between flight and epiphany:

[1] This is despite the fact that this device was not part of early Arabic editions (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 76).

> The flying vehicle grants the flyer superior powers—to see farther, to know and control more…The aerial view defies the laws of time and space, and for the narrator in the story… flying gives a chance to lose those constraints and bodies forth a literal, dream pun on flight of fancy on the one hand, and the rush of enhanced knowledge—enlightenment—on the other. (*Stranger Magic* 67)

The physical act of flying twins its metaphorical significance, and inspires my Scheherazade by enabling her to see her life in perspective and imagine other destinies. Flight remains a wonderful metaphor for empowerment. That the vehicle of this transformation is non-human, a bird, foregrounds the liminal zone between human and animal, an ongoing theme throughout my text.

At the time of writing *1001 Nights*, I was struggling with issues around power and control in my personal life. I began writing at night, after I had put my young daughter to bed, as a way of testing Gannett's ideas and retaining my sense of self. I felt an affinity with the Scheherazade character, storytelling at night, using art to stay alive. Creating stories, in a darkness both metaphorical and literal, allowed us both to keep going. This connection is reflected by my novella's first line: "soon the night will come, and to save my life, I must tell another story" (122). Not surprisingly, I felt a desire to write us both out of our predicament, and so echoes of transmogrified autobiography still mark *1001 Nights*, the resultant text. Gannett identifies this locus between private writing and power. She articulates a vision of writing as a process by which people, especially women, can invert power relationships by expressing views completely at odds with prevailing understandings. Gannett quotes Muriel Rukeyser, "what would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open" (81), and later the indomitable Catherine Sforza: "could I write all, the world would turn to stone" (Gannett 81). It seems that if writing acts to consolidate our social worlds, giving us boundaries and normative expectations — what should happen versus what does happen — then it is equally possible for writing to disrupt our perceptions. I acknowledge Susanne Kappeler's position on feminist critique, that it should reclaim "writing as a form of communication: for change, not for the maintenance of the eternal same" (146). Simply put, we can write change into our lives, and certainly this is the central premise of the *Nights*, that art leads to empowerment.

While my novella began as a literary experiment designed to test the potential of journal writing, it soon became a meditation on the erotic. There are many reasons for this focus. Primarily, it was suggested by my choice of hypotext[2]. As Malcolm Lyons observes in his preface to his recent translation, "the stories of the *Nights* are suffused by sex. Their protagonists languish and faint from excess of desire" (xiii); similarly, in his Companion to the *Nights* Robert Irwin notes that "sexual themes — incest, adultery, sadism, and so on — are pervasive in the *Nights*. Indeed, a series of sexual incidents furnishes the pretext for their narration" (*Companion* 159). The erotic sub-text of the Scheherazade frame is a theme that a number of contemporary writers have explored. For example, in her 1999 novel *When Dreams Travel*, Githa Hariharan frames Scheherazade's corporeality as integral to her artistry:

> She has never paid as much attention to bodies as she has in the past few months. Her own has been, with the greatest care and deliberation, bathed, scented, ornamented; kissed and caressed; licked, pierced, penetrated. The nights of tale-telling have not in any way diminished the rights of bodily matters. If anything, the body has been supreme. It has literally been the object of the enterprise—to keep bodies whole and alive, just as it was the subject of the original transgression, the body as a vessel of the unchaste. (123)

Yet like Hariharan, my focus on the erotic was also political. In my professional life, I had recently finished writing a series of notable women's biographies for a university publication; subjects included female academics, businesswomen, creatives, politicians and professionals, as well as those who had overcome substantial obstacles as part of their everyday lives. Two things struck me after interviewing nearly fifty of these women about their lives. The first was how far their journeys had departed from the typical narrative arc of the 'happily ever after' fairy tale. Like the *Nights*, these female subjects were subject to sudden reversals of fortune, amazing good or bad luck, chance encounters, divine inspiration, illness, poverty and love. The second was that as this publication was a corporate project, I sometimes felt as if I was writing female stories as if their bodies did not exist, that the visceral had become bland or

[2] Throughout this exegesis I will rely on terminology derived from Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997): "By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (5).

was simply ignored. It was an experience that strongly recalled the centrality of the body to feminist discourses, yet its surprising absence in canonical figures such as Scheherazade.

Beyond this role, my fairy tale research had recently reintroduced me to the bloodier, bawdier traditions of these tales. Fairy tales are not normally associated with the erotic, although this may be "an effect of the infantilization" of this genre in modern times (Bacchilega, Preface 13). Angela Carter observes that

> removing 'coarse' expressions was a common nineteenth-century pastime… The excision of references to sexual and excremental functions, the toning down of sexual situations and the reluctance to include 'indelicate' material… helped to denaturize the fairy tale. (*Virago* xvii)

I remember the thrill when a friend told about early versions of 'Little Red Riding Hood', where one variant has the girl defecating in the wolf's bed, and in another she performs a striptease. Julia Kristeva's framing of abjection describes an "ambivalent process of subject formation in which elements that the self cannot assimilate are expelled, disavowed and considered repugnant" (Hazra). The thrill I experienced combined both fascination and horror, but my creative instinct was that such stories offered a way forward. It struck me that these stories were worlds away from the pale versions currently circulating in my culture, and simultaneously, that power would return to these stories once female protagonists possessed what Cary Wolfe calls — in another context — the "bodily sensorium" (*Animal Rites* 4). As a consequence, the focus on sex in my novella partly represents a protest against what Alan Bryman has called the "Disneyization" of society (1999); Bryman built on Ritzer's 1983 influential concept of McDonaldization to argue that the four aspects he associates with Disney theme parks — theming, de-differentiation of consumption, merchandising and emotional labour — are "dominating more and more sectors of society" (25). Within this broader social dynamic is what British scholar Simon Hardy calls, in relation to cyber-porn, the "highly efficient commercial homogenization of desire" (62). Fairy tale scholar Cristina Bacchilega ties these strands together, commenting that "all too often, then, fairy-tale wonders in popular culture today promote a heteronormative and capitalist promise of happiness". Given their widespread circulation, these stories become ideal vessels from which to critique such paradigms; Bacchilega speaks of an "an emerging poetics of wonder in

today's activist fairy-tale adaptations". Certainly, the fairy tale revisions of Anne Sexton (*Transformations* 1971) and Angela Carter (*The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* 1979) locate this dynamic within a wider cultural arc, while pluralism's more recent "call for attention to embodiment, to the specific materiality and multiplicity of the subject" (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 9) offers rich potential to again reimagine these stories. As we will see, this splintering of the humanist lens offers new ways of thinking about not only human characters, but animal ones too.

As a literary strategy, I intended the overloading of orientalised fairy tales with erotica to function as an ironic protest against the homogenisation of culture. In my context — the Australian cultural landscape of the late 2000s — it seemed as if women's identities were being subject to a kind of cultural foreclosure, that the walls of the collective room were closing in, much human experience was commodified, and social roles were being bled dry of any eccentricity or individuality; thus writing about sex was a form of protest that insisted on the primacy of people's bodies — that they are part of the material and animal worlds — and the unique nature of their inner landscapes. This connects to wider nature/culture critiques, such as Val Plumwood's work on the "western hyperseparation from nature" (*Feminism* 73). Plumwood argues that the division between nature and culture is a root cause of the current ecological crisis (2), and woven through Western philosophy via a series of interconnected, hierarchical binaries; this results in negative consequences for both women and nature. She suggests that challenging this paradigm requires a re-examination of "the lower value accorded the underside, the body, the senses, emotion, the imagination, the animal, the feminine and nature" (*Feminism* 123). Interestingly, this list is a fairly good précis of my novella's themes and priorities. The novella itself must be contextualised within my creative practice, which evidences a recurring desire to give status or cultural credibility to the marginalised. Therefore, the fundamental assumptions underpinning this exegesis are that stories are crucial to this creation of a counterhegemonic space, and have real world consequences; and that like Scheherazade, women need to tell their own stories, not have them told for them.

Scheherazade's story has become world literature (Sankaran 67): the erotically charged tale of a young woman who tells Shahriyar a new story every night — prompted by her younger sister Dunyazad — for a thousand and one nights, breaking off at dawn each day, and saving her life in the process. The obvious metaphor is of storytelling as a form of

seduction. Yet if the characters are collapsed and read as the constituent parts of creativity — inspiration, audience and an overriding desire to create — it remains a wonderful cameo of an artist's life, albeit one that acknowledges the vulnerability of such vocations. "She would fret over her stories as her own children", writes Anthony O'Neill in *Scheherazade: A Tale* (2001), "living with the unending terror that inspiration or memory would one night abandon her" (78). The analogy he draws between creativity and children is apt. At the end of the cycle of stories, Scheherazade presents the Sultan with their three sons, apparently conceived and birthed "unnoticed by her groom" (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 5), and having found her "noble, pure, chaste and without sin" (Lyons 734) announces his decision to marry her. Inspired by Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* to write an erotic version of the *Nights*, and having recently had a child, I found that these sons presented an intriguing challenge. Eroticism does not seem to sit well with swollen ankles, a Scheherazade exhausted by childbirth or breastfeeding. In fact, 1001 nights literally represents "two years and 271 days" (Irwin, *Companion* 3) and if we accept an average human gestation period of 280 days, then this leaves only 161 days when Scheherazade would not have been pregnant. In *When Dreams Travel* (1999), Githa Hariharan weaves this corporeal landscape into her text. Her Scheherazade "must conjure a plan: how to deliver, with safety and speed, this baby that swims so purposefully in her; and how to recover in time for the night's storytelling performance in the sultan's ravenous bed" (121). In my novella, this desire to explore the erotic without conception led to a focus on non-penetrative sex. The Sultan's determination not to penetrate Scheherazade may be read as kind of 'loophole' that contributed to her chances of survival. As he had vowed to execute his virgin brides before they had a chance to cuckold him, he could presumably tell himself that as the marriage was not yet consummated, Scheherazade could be permitted to live another night. Arguably, the *Nights* frame story represents the world's most famous abusive relationship, with a happy ending that ends in marriage under duress to a mass murderer. As one Edwardian writer bluntly reminded his readers, she must share "the pillow of a homicidal maniac" (Caracciolo 41). Despite the fantastic nature of my storytelling, the eroticism of Scheherazade's account needs to be read as accurately reflecting a domestic context of psychological and material dependency, underpinned by a violent and unequal division of power.

Despite Shahriyar's violent psychosis, it is difficult to read the *Nights* as primarily offering positive or negative depictions of women (Irwin, *Companion* 160). Scholars such as Rana

Kabbani see the Scheherazade character as primarily interested in self preservation: "she describes the crafty and malicious wiles of women to the king in one tale after another: she survives by condemning her kind. She sides with the king against her own sex, and is thus allowed to keep her head" (*Imperial Fictions* 50). But others suggest that the depictions of women presented in Scheherazade's stories represent a highly organised act of manipulation. Warner suggests that Scheherazade gradually introduces "an increasingly shining procession of women: refracting the virtues of the storyteller herself and her audience— but not so undilutedly or obviously that her purpose shows too much" (Warner *Stranger Magic* 4). Similarly, literary responses to the Scheherazade frame also vary in their reading of her consciousness, stratagem and intent. Anthony O'Neill's Scheherazade comments:

> but I learned to read his moods as a sailor reads the sky. The stories only deflected attention from my motives, because what I was really doing was just a more studied form of what hundreds of others had done before me: I was trying to save my life with my charms. (496)

In contrast, Angela Carter makes this manipulation explicit. Her neo-Victorian *Nights at the Circus* (1984) features Fevvers, a winged aerialist and Scheherazade-like figure, who tells her story to Walser, a curious journalist. "And she fixed Walser with a piercing, judging regard, as if to ascertain just how far she could go with him" (35). In my novella, Scheherazade exhibits a similar kind of close scrutiny of the Sultan's responses, and adapts her behaviour to suit. For instance, "last night, while I was telling my story, I noticed the Sultan looking at me with a new expression on his face. It was a look that I cannot describe, and like all those whose life lies precariously balanced on the whim of another, this troubles me" (131). My novella clearly frames sex as both corporeal performance and manipulative stratagem, while underlining the body as a constitutive part of creative processes; simultaneously, sexual expression represents a key aspect of Scheherazade's identity formation, underpinning the sense of self that progressively emerges throughout the narrative.

Within the *Nights'* frame story, in at least one major translation, descriptions of sex between Scheherazade and Shahriyar are cursory. For example, after Dunyazad embraces her sister she sits down, and then "the king got up and deflowered her sister" (Lyons 10); "they spent the rest of the night embracing one another until the sun had fully risen" (13); "they

spent the rest of the time embracing one another until the sun had fully risen" (19). As such, evidence of Scheherazade's embodiment is largely absent in the *Nights*. In my novella, however, the body is given primacy. Scheherazade story-tells with her body, a corporeal performance enacted in much the same way a writer approaches their craft. This meshing of the metaphorical seductiveness of literature with actual sexuality is made explicit in the following passage:

> In the centre of the stone floor, a canopied bed as large as a living room, with sheets that I write the story of my life on, blank as the pages of a book. The white cotton stained with body fluids: blood, sweat, semen, shit, stringy pieces of globular snot, tears, urine, hot spit, my own jellyfish come. (125)

This imagery connects with gender theorists who frame the body as something to be read.

In *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz explores the concept of the body as a historically, socially and culturally specific entity, alongside the need to "develop a philosophy which refuses to privilege mind at the expense of body" (20). Grosz acknowledges the importance of Luce Irigaray to her work, pointing to the latter's "concept of the irreducibility of sexual difference… the very engine of life on earth" (*Chaos* ix). Grosz specifically explores the concept of the inscribed body, making the point that while the "metaphor of writing or inscription" (*Towards* 156) is potentially useful for feminist thought, conceptions of the body that do not pay attention to the material specificity of bodies are flawed. She critiques Foucault's writing in this area, noting that "the specific modes of materiality of the "page"/body must be taken into account" (*Towards* 156) as the same narrative may be inscribed on different bodies with different results (Grosz, *Towards* 156). My notion of Scheherazade's 'skin narratives' – a term I will use to describe her sexual performances - proceeds from Grosz's key point that bodies are not nature in culture. Instead, "The body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product" (*Towards* 23).

The idea of a skin narrative is intended to speak back to the forces that inscribe bodies. It insists on the cultural, historical, social and, most importantly, material specificity of bodies as storytelling entities. By framing sex as a form of storytelling, it invests bodies with agency, creativity and intention, in the process insisting on their subjecthood. As Grosz notes,

> The body is a most peculiar "thing," for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it ever quite manage to rise above the status of thing… If bodies are objects or things, they are like no others, for they are the centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency. (*Towards* xi)

In the context of my novella, the concept of a skin narrative underscores the absence of evidence of Scheherazade's physicality from many of the extant versions of the *Nights.* It questions the nature/culture distinction, revealing bodies as products and producers of culture, and highlights Grolsz's idea that art may be framed as a form sexual expression. "There is much "art" in the natural world, from the moment there is sexual selection, from the moment there are two sexes that attract each other's interest and taste through visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory sensations" (*Chaos* 7). Implicitly, the notion of a skin narrative connects with Judith Butler's point that "gender is performative" and that "what we take to be an internal essence of gender is sustained through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (17). Yet by emphasising how Scheherazade's stories intertwine with the skin narratives of her fantasies, I also frame sex as akin to a craft-like process, and suggest the embodied nature of creativity, a strategy that exposes the corporeal aspect of the magic trick of the imagination. It makes explicit the point that literature is a human construction and, like all human activities, it derives from a body; these bodies are often female, and thus have their own stories.

In addition to her lack of corporeality, as for a schematic fairy tale heroine little of Scheherazade's psychology is visible in the *Nights*: we know her only through her stories. Drained of emotion and bodily sensation, she exists largely as an archetype. In her polemical preface to *The Sadeian Woman* (1978), Carter suggests that archetypes restrict gender roles and consequentially foreclose human freedoms (6). As a way of exploring this notion of a false universal, my novella foregrounds Scheherazade's complex – and sometimes peverse - sexual and emotional responses. I wanted to create something that spoke to her anxiety, and invidious predicament, as a way of unpicking a canonical text, a narrative that leaves many

issues about power relationships and gender unexplored. By creating a fictitious journal, I aimed to create a manuscript that sounded as if it had been found, or scribed from an oral source, and published without significant revision by an entrepreneurial editor. It was to be a previously unknown historical fragment, forgery or a long lost record emerging into the light. (I will not problematicise my decision to write from the perspective of a Middle Eastern woman, other than to say that the constructions of humanity and gender – as opposed to race – were the main focus of this project. My assumption of this narratorial identity reflects the pattern of unreliable provenance and identity woven throughout the text). Indeed, the framing of the novella suggests that it is a piece of writing from the Victorian era, perhaps something created with a specific audience in mind, such as a private club or anthropological society, a British entity with a limited publication circle. Victorian England— a time when "pornography and especially pornographic writing became an industry" (Marcus 2) — was replete with such figures; for example, Frederick Hankey, "a wealthy Englishman who spent most of his adult life in Paris attempting to live out the fantasy that he was another Marquis de Sade" or James Monckton Milnes, "whose collection of French pornographic writings, particularly those by Sade, was well known through the upper reaches of English literary society" (Marcus 37). The implication that the novella is a piece of Victorian erotica manufactured for wealthy male collectors accords with some scholarship on the *Nights'* pre-European audiences: Rana Kabbani indicates that the *Nights* "were originally recounted to an all male audience desiring bawdy entertainment" (*Europe's Myth of the Orient* 48) although Robert Irwin suggests this may be an oversimplification (*Companion* 160). As well as pornography, a "veritable fairy tale industry… flourished in nineteenth century England" (Hillard 545) yet as we have already seen, this was also the century in which fairy tales were stripped of much of their bawdy content. Thus, the intersection of a Victorian manner, pornography and fairy tale in my novella parallels an actual historical and cultural landscape, and comments on the era's tendency to strip the erotic away from these tales. By implication, it explores the consequences of this for contemporary culture and our current understanding of fairy tale. Like many such works, the Victorian frame simultaneously obscures and reveals the contemporary nature of its thematic concerns.

My interest in fairy tales has a long history. As a child growing up in 1970s Tasmania, I was one of the generation of children who encountered these stories largely before they were deemed too bloody for young readers, and had much of their violent or overtly sexual content

expunged. I read Hans Christian Andersen's stories during this time, and came to agree with A.S. Byatt's assessment of him as a "psychological terrorist" (xxiv) and Angela Carter's quip that he was "a tortured dement" (*Shaking a Leg* 451). The description of the Little Mermaid's pain as she walked across solid ground, like a thousand knives driving into the soles of her feet, inscribed itself into my developing psyche. I could not understand why the mermaid should choose to sacrifice herself, and for so little. As Carter notes regarding "the feet the little mermaid bought for herself in order to walk on dry land; the price she paid for them was the perpetual sensation of walking on knives. And, in spite of it all, she did not win the love of the prince" (*Shaking a Leg* 451). This willing self-abnegation was a mystery that I was unable to solve, and so I assumed that I must have missed some crucial detail; later this feeling of incomprehension became part of the story's malignant charm. "Paradoxically, Andersen seems to be arguing that true virtue and self-realization can be obtained through self-denial" (*Hans,* Zipes 37). Like so many others, I absorbed the stories' glorification of self-immolation and abnegation within romantic love. Love, it seemed, was a destructive state, best stretched thin, with little gratification or mutuality. Similarly, the typically schematic characters and atonal writing of fairy tale— "one-dimensional, depthless, abstract, and sparse; their characteristic manner is matter-of-fact" (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* xx) — suggested an act of reporting rather than invention, so as a child I engaged with these stories as literal truths rather than metaphorical ones. Yet even as a young reader, I was curious about what happened on the day after the 'happily ever after' wedding, and what characters felt and thought about their fates. Years later, I was to seek my own answers to fairy tales' peculiar riddles, with the *1001 Nights* novella a key part of this investigation. Inspired by Naguib Mahfouz, Anthony O'Neil, Githa Hariharan and a number of contemporary writers who imagine Scheherazade's life after 1001 nights had passed, I was eventually led to focus the narrative lens on the resolution, and not the inception, of her dilemma.

My narrative lens brings with it some important definitional issues. As sex is a prominent trope throughout my novella, I will briefly explore the distinction between pornography and erotica. Relevantly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'erotic' as meaning "relating to, or tending to arouse sexual desire or excitement"; and 'pornographic' as "printed or visual material intended to stimulate sexual excitement". The meanings are close, but the key difference relates to the degree and the directness of this intention, and perhaps the level of obscenity that drives this outcome. Carter initially echoes this definition, stating that

"pornography's principal and most humanly significant function is that of arousing sexual excitement" (*The Sadeian Woman* 12). But beyond this, she suggests that pornography relies on archetypes, socially de-contextualised representations of sex involving a "spurious charade of maleness and femaleness" (8); thus, for both men and women, pornography operates as an instrument of repression (18). Yet across Carter's practice, there is tendency to look for transcendent potential in such instruments (for example, she refers to folktales "as extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree" (*Shaking a Leg* 38) yet skillfully reinvents fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber*.) In *The Sadeian Woman*, she introduces the concept of the 'moral pornographer':

> The moral pornographer would be an artist who uses pornographic material as part of the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual license for all the genders, and projects a model of the way such a world would work. A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes. His business would be the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequent revelation, through the infinite modulations of the sexual act, of the real relations of man and his kind. (19)

Relevantly, Carter suggests that if pornography fuses with the techniques of art or literature, then this has the potential to create a subversive outcome that challenges the reader's worldview (19). Her position may be interpreted as a kind of fused binary. Although Carter regards the majority of pornography as "reactionary", she suggests its subversive potential via her conception of the moral pornographer (Sheets 635) and creatively explores this via stories such as "The Bloody Chamber". As Robin Ann Sheets notes, Carter holds a "problematic place in the debates about pornography that have polarized Anglo-American feminists" (633) with anti-pornography feminists being among those most critical of her stance (642). For example, Lorna Sage notes that in 1979 "the specific issue of pornography was dividing feminists" (70) and *The Sadeian Woman* was dismissed by Andrea Dworkin as a "pseudofeminist literary essay"" (84). Yet Sheets also argues that the themes of stories such as "The Bloody Chamber", where the heroine is partly seduced via her own objectification and conversion into an image – a representation – lay bare the complex politics of erotic domination. "Carter insists that the young woman understand why she finds her objectification erotic" (656). Arguably, by allowing the reader to be lured into a trap along

with her heroine, Carter offers a perspective on pornography that transcended the strict binary oppositions of this era. “Carter refuses to define pornography as the primary cause of women’s oppression, for she believes that complicated economic, social, and psychological forces contribute to the objectification, fetishisation and violation of women” (Sheets 655). In my novella, Scheherazade’s active complicity in her own objectification takes place in a context of social, economic, corporeal and psychological control. Like Carter’s heroine in “The Bloody Chamber”, the exaggerated nature of her ‘cage’ may prompt identification by female readers of the structures – external and internal - that bind their lives.

Like Carter, Steven Marcus accepts the unidirectional focus and social disconnect of pornography — “literature possesses, however, a multitude of intentions, but pornography possesses only one” (278) as well as its lack of interest in characterisation and individual difference: “psychology is the one mortal enemy of pornography” (22-23). I regard my novella as primarily erotic, rather than pornographic, because its focus on literary elements such as characterisation and plot move it beyond the uni-directional gaze of pornography; additionally, while it deploys pornographic tropes — that is, a virginal female narrator— irony continually operates as a deconstructive strategy. Donna Haraway notes that “Irony is about humor and serious play. It is also about rhetorical strategy and political method, one that I would like to see more honored within socialist-feminism” (*Manifestly Haraway* 5). My decision to utilise the forms of fairy tale and the *Nights* is also meaningful. Carter was criticised by some scholars for appropriating ‘reactionary’ forms such as fairy tale, but Merja Makinen suggests that “Carter’s tales do not simply ‘rewrite’ the old tales by fixing roles of active sexuality for their female protagonists— they ‘re-write’ them by playing with and upon (if not preying upon) the earlier misogynistic version” (5). In a similar vein, I am seeking to undermine pornographic tropes by quoting them and changing their meaning via the vehicle of the orientalised fairy tale. As for Carter’s point that pornography may be used as a critical vehicle to explore relationships between the sexes, my novella utilises representations of sex to critique gender roles, yet it also extends this critique to the species barrier — the line between human and animal — and human relationships with nature. It is hoped that the reader will find parallels between female sexual objectification and the instrumentality accorded to animals and the natural world.

The first chapter of this exegesis traces the history of the *Arabian Nights* and definitional issues surrounding this collection of stories. It will discuss the impact of the *Arabian Nights* on Western culture, particularly English literature, and specifically the genre of Oriental tales that emerged in the eighteenth century, largely as a result of such texts (Conant xxvi). I will explore various translations and their cultural impact. As the *Nights* became a keystone in the arch through which the West imagined the East, this chapter also considers the socio-political realities underpinning cultural phenomenon such as the Oriental tale. This discussion frames my novella as belonging to a stream of pseudo Oriental literature that, while it had considerably longer roots, flourished during the nineteenth century in England. Alongside the personal circumstances of artists and writers, the chapter assumes the historical contingency underpinning any act of expression. It seeks to demonstrate that the *Nights* is regarded as something of a ubiquitous cultural icon in the West. While interest in the collection may have peaked in England during the Victorian era, it remains a significant text for many contemporary writers.

The next chapter explores Kabbani's and Said's critique of Orientalism, essential for works of fiction— such as mine— that derive from a literary stream that is intertwined with the politics and aesthetics of British and French imperialism. It considers literary works from a range of cultures that reference the *Nights*, from across the nineteenth, twentieth, fin de siècle and millennial period— *Vathek* (1786), *Arabian Nights and Days* (1979), *When Dreams Travel* (1999) and *Crescent* (2003)— and uses this to track both commonality and change in the purposes to which the frame story has been put. The central argument of this chapter is that many reworkings of the *Nights*, and particularly the frame tale, use the text as a platform from which to critique power. As we will see, texts from the nineteenth century have tended to consider the moral consequences of colonialism, while those from the twentieth and current century are generally using the *Nights* as a vehicle to explore feminist, ecological or postcolonial issues. In either case, the primary focus is on the human misuse of power.

The final chapter discusses my novella in relation to *Nights at the Circus* (1984), Carter's penultimate *Arabian Nights* and fairy-tale-influenced novel. This chapter's central point is that power is expressed through the body, but that some bodies are ascribed greater agency than others, and that consumption is highly indicative of both agency and status. My novella and *Nights at the Circus* will be considered in relation to the emerging field of Animal Studies. Pauline Greenhill and Leah Claire Allen explain that:

> Animal studies is founded on the concept that humans are themselves animals, not superior, exceptional, enlightened beings who, unlike their non-human relatives, transcend their biology. Animal studies joins with related theoretical positions, such as posthumanism, an intellectual location seeking to destabilize conventional notions of the human and its discursive centrality.

Helen Tiffin suggests that the imaginative power of literature may function as a vehicle by which such longstanding tenets are reframed (42). I was curious as to whether I could communicate unpalatable ideas about the species barrier by creating a piece of writing, delivered in an accessible format, reminiscent of Children's Literature and fairy tale, yet sugarcoated with sex. This is a literary strategy I refer to as 'trojan horsing' in that it conceals a subversive idea within an appealing façade. As we will see, this experiment did not deliver the polemical outcome I had expected; yet it remains interesting none-the-less, and helped shape a number of my eventual conclusions.

Finally, in my conclusion, I endeavour to piece together the various themes that sustain both the exegesis and the novella. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex terrain, I regard the metanarrative as being one of empowerment. I have always been fascinated by the movement from subject to object, and vice versa, the exact moment of this transformation and what triggers related epiphanies. Connectedly, I am interested in the role of literature in changing destinies, whether for writer or reader, or perhaps even non-human animals. I map the key themes as imagination, power and the body, and to a lesser extent I am concerned with the Orient, sexuality and animals. As an artist, the novella obliquely comments on the often difficult trajectory experienced by creative or visual thinkers within the academy. For example, "the tale of the white peacock" was inspired by a friend's description of a particularly non-collegial postgraduate writing circle, and the fact that the Grand Vizier is described as resembling an "academic" (167) is not accidental. Having said this, I would like to reiterate my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Caroline Webb and Dr. David Musgrave, as well as the University of Newcastle faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. In many ways, the journey of this research has changed how I see the world.

Chapter One: The Power of the Imagination

Defining *The Arabian Nights*

Emerging from the sea of Western Literature like a vast island, on closer inspection the *Arabian Nights* fragments into an archipelago: something that at first appears clearly defined and absolute, but dissipates into an amorphous form, forever obscured by historical mist and magical thinking. It is a colossus that many writers must grapple with at some stage in their vocation. A common metaphor used to describe the *Nights* is a labyrinth. Certainly, the stories, with their intertwined or boxed narratives, with one story resting inside another like a series of Russian dolls, can be overwhelming in their complexity. Yet as Robert Irwin, in his Companion to the *Nights*, writes "but then, having entered the maze, why should one ever want to leave?" (*Companion* 6).

Every generalisation that can be made about the *Nights* must also be subject to qualification. The *Nights* is a collection of Arabic stories: yet it is also a collection created, curated and substantially modified via European translators, writers and audiences. It has no precise author, and despite the many cultures that contributed to its stories, is regarded in the West as "a masterpiece of Arabic literature" (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 8) yet considerable authorial weight has been attached to its first European translator, Antoine Galland (Irwin, *Companion* 14). "Now in this version, now in that, it has no known author or named authors, no settled shape or length, no fixed table of contents, no definite birthplace or linguistic origin" (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 7). As the collection changed over time, it is difficult to precisely date, as this largely depends on one's definition of the *Nights* (Irwin, *Companion* 4). This text is not a solid core of stories that were subject to revisions and inclusion or exclusion, and aged at the same rate; rather it is a loose collection that evolved over centuries (Gerhardt 10). As Christa A. Tuczay notes, the genealogy of the text is complex, dating back at least one thousand years with many individual stories certainly more ancient (272). "Over the centuries, new stories were not only added to *The Arabian Nights* literature, but it is likely that many of the ancient stories were changed" (Tuczay 286). Notions of authorship and date, usually the anchor points of literary analysis, here possess the same incomprehensible wonder as floating stones.

Accurately capturing the kinetic fluidity of the text, Marina Warner describes the collection as "a huge narrative wheel" (*Stranger Magic* 9). Culturally, Scheherazade's stories derive from many sources — Warner mentions India, Persia, Iraq, Syria and Egypt (7) — forming a

"polyvocal anthology of world myths, fables and fairy tales" (*Stranger Magic* 8). Noting that the boundaries between East and West were always less absolute than military history or ideology would admit, Warner suggests that "the stories flowed with the traffic across the frontier of Islam and Christendom", forming the literary residue of a permeable trading and cultural membrane (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 12). Underscoring Warner's point, military campaigns, although primarily concerned with domination of one population by another, allowed stories to build bridges between different cultures and religions. "Transmission of folklore between Christian Europe and the world of Islam flourished during the Moorish occupation of Spain (from 711 to the fifteenth century), as a result of the Crusades (1095 to the fifteenth century), and during the Turkish Wars" (Tuczay 278). It is important to note that not only did stories continue to flow across borders (Howe 46), but that this movement was multi-directional. "The Arabs originated and exported at least as much story lore as they imported, and the Christians took their stories while often removing them from all their specifically Islamic features" (Irwin, *Companion* 77). Peter Caracciolo indicates that some stories arrived in England from about the fourteenth century (xv), and certainly individual stories associated with the *Nights* were included in Renaissance and medieval collections (Irwin, *Companion* 42). Like any history of cross-cultural narrative exchange, this rests on two pillars — one visible and the other largely invisible — of oral and textual transmission.

In terms of textual origins, one of the *Nights*' forebears is *A Thousand Legends*, a book of Persian tales that may have its origins in India; this was translated into Arabic in approximately 850AD, and about a hundred years later at least one reference refers to this text as *The Thousand and One Nights* (Tuczay 272). Similarly, the Greek *Romance of Alexander* contains many motifs — including a flying machine — that would later appear in the *Nights* (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 7). By the tenth century a version titled *The Thousand Nights* was in circulation; however, little is known about what form the collection took prior to the fifteenth century, and the tenth-century version was based on older stories (Irwin, *Companion* 4). Despite the rich cross-cultural bedrock alluded to above, Warner identifies three principal sources that informed the Arabic cycle of stories — Persian influences, the culture of medieval Baghdad and also of Egypt (*Stranger Magic* 8); in particular, stories from these latter cities, Baghdad and Cairo, were added to the collection (Tuczay 272; Gerhardt 9). Indeed, three quarters of the stories in the collection are particular to medieval Arabic traditions (Beaumont, "Review" 299). By the early 1500s, the *Nights* had "more or less assumed its final

form" (Tuczay 272) yet still went on accumulating stories "until as late as the early nineteenth century" (Irwin, *Companion* 4). Not surprisingly, given the complexity of these cultural and literary origins, the stories are incredibly diverse in terms of their style, intention and structure; this juxtaposition of genres, styles and narrative structure is mirrored in my novella.

Largely regarded as low-brow in its countries of origin (Gerhardt 4), and in the contemporary Middle East usually not worthy of literary status (Irwin, *Companion* 4), the *Nights* is a patchwork of various narrative styles and structures. As well as fairy tale, Irwin mentions "long heroic epics, wisdom literature, fables, cosmological fantasy, pornography, scatological jokes, mystical devotional tales, chronicles of low life, rhetorical debates and masses of poetry" (*Companion* 2) while Peter Caracciolo accurately describes the collection as an "encyclopedia of genres" (xiv). The *Nights* veers between didactic tales and well-known "frivolous" erotica such as the 'Porter and the Three Ladies' (Marzolph, "Review" 111) and is, in parts, vulgar and naïve (Irwin, *Companion* 4). Warner observes how "proverbial anecdotes, riddles, lyric songs, love poems, epigrams and jokes lift the simple unfolding of the fable or fairy tale" and notes a rich sexuality that includes "erotic incidents, bawdy scenes, cross-dressed encounters" (*Stranger Magic* 9). In terms of the *Nights*' construction, there was a certain amount of pragmatism in how the stories were assembled; Robert Irwin suggests that some manuscripts written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century were "produced to meet the demands of European manuscript-hunters" (*Companion* 46) or stories may have been added to bring the number of stories up to 1001 (Gerhardt 10). So not only did the stories arrive at different times, from various places, but their assemblage into what we now know as the *Nights* was somewhat haphazard. "On the whole, the various repertoires of the *Nights* give the impression that the later a compilation was produced, the more it appears to be patched together at random rather than to result from deliberate organization" (Grotzfeld 224). It is hardly surprising that this affected the standard and style of writing, which also varies (Conant 8). "The stylistic poverty of the Nights is well known" quips Jorge Luis Borges, who refers to the collection as the "pulp fictions of the thirteenth century" ("The Translators" 101). Again, this commingling of different forms, genres and literary styles is patterned throughout my writing. Within the frame story of my novella, stories arrive from various sources and exist in different temporal contexts — for example, Scheherazade's dreams, stories told to her or that she tells to the Sultan, books and memories — and this reflects the *Nights'* complex, trans-cultural assemblage.

Thematically the *Nights'* collection of stories, while bound together by the Scheherazade frame, is similarly diverse. "Alongside the wiles of women there is the injustice of tyrants, as well as the caprices of destiny, the perplexity of desire and the power of love, luck in money, and its opposite, misfortune' (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 8). No central message emerges from the cacophony of stories, other than that fate and fortune toss men and women about like paper boats, or as Warner puts it, "if rewards fall at random, so do punishments. Curses work. Luck holds, sometimes" (9). The *Nights* presents a vision of humanity as fallible, credible, scheming, betrayed, greedy, generous, noble and full of hope; despite the multiple twists and turns of the stories, the characters continue to act, and although prone to fits of despair, nobody gives up. Characters stumble across the pages, engaged in various quests, always seeking and striving for something that has been denied them, or refusing to accept the inviolability of destiny. Any predictable schema of reward for good and punishment for evil is largely impossible to discern; Michael Slater accurately notes "the totally arbitrary nature of justice in the *Nights*" (138). Characters lust after what they do not have, refusing to accept the strictures of their lives, whether these are material or metaphysical. "When a motive drives the action", writes Warner, "envy often rules. Besides envy, lust is the principal catalyst" (*Stranger Magic* 10). Fantastic interventions interrupt descriptions of everyday matters, such as finding enough money to buy food, as a protagonist is born aloft by winged bird. It is perhaps this vision of humans engaged in ceaseless, often pointless quests, in turns tragic and comic, that has given the *Nights* its enormous cross-cultural appeal.

The first European translation of the *Nights*

When the *Nights* was translated for European audiences for the first time by Antoine Galland (1704), an enterprising French scholar, it sparked a fascination with all things Oriental. The text circulated at a time when literary fairy tales, such as those penned by Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, Charles Perrault, Marie-Jeanne L'heritier de Villandon and Henriette-Julie de Murat, were fashionable in French salons.

> As the *Nights* stories started to appear, they were read and discussed in the salons, and, as with Perrault's stories, society ladies were Galland's most influential partisans. The publication of the *Nights* inaugurated a mania for oriental stories, whether translated or made up. (Irwin, *Companion* 18)

The collection's translation into French, at a time when it aligned with eighteenth century tastes, ensured its success (Irwin, *Companion* 81). "The enthusiastic reception of the *Arabian Nights* can to a certain extent be explained by the contemporary craze for fairy tales" suggest Marzolph and van Leeuwen, editors of *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia* (664). Galland's timing was impeccable. Perrault, with whom he shared a publisher, had recently published *Contes de la mère l'Oye* (or *Tales of Mother Goose*) a collection that helped establish the fairy tale as a discrete genre, and contributed to the popularity of such narratives both at court and in the salons of "high ladies" (Irwin, *Companion* pp. 99-100). These salons, fashionable in France from the end of the previous century, functioned as a cultural space where the aristocratic could mingle with intellectuals and exchange ideas, stories and dramatic or musical performances (Griswold 68). In this context, female writers - "among them some of the best writers of the day" (Roemer and Bacchilega 11) - such as Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy were instrumental to the development of fairy tale. "In 1690 salon participant Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy embedded her invented magical tale "L'Isle de la Felicite" (The island of happiness) in her novel *Histoire d'Hippolyte, Comte de Douglas.* Her example quickly prompted a spate of literary fairy tales by other authors" (Roemer and Bacchilega 11). Yet the contribution of these women has tended to be overlooked in favour of Perrault's writing (Roemer and Bacchilega 11). That the tone of Galland's translation was ideally suited to his audience's tastes must have also facilitated its reception and transmission. "His version," writes Warner, "urbane, polished, witty, assured the triumph of the oriental tale in eighteenth-century Europe" (*Stranger Magic* 12). According to Irwin, the collection created such a stir that people waylaid Galland in the street, pestering him for more of the Arabian stories (Preface vii); in a story that may be apocryphal, others threw stones at his window at night (Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions* 28). While Jorge Luis Borges decries Galland's edition as "poorly written", he suggests that contemporary readers encountered this text with joy and wonder ("Translators" 93). "Its Orientalism, which seems frugal to us now, was bedazzling to men who took snuff and composed tragedies in five acts" (Borges, "Translators" 93).

A brief history

The *Nights'* positive reception in Europe becomes clearer when considered within the broader sweep of history, as it arrives at something of a tipping point in terms of European

power. Long before Galland's translation, Stephen Howe observes the growing power of an "Islamic-ruled, multinational empire" (47), so vast that by the start of the ninth-century it was "by far the largest state in the world, extending from Africa's Atlantic Coast to the Pamir mountains and Indus river" (45-46). The round city of Baghdad was built on the banks of the Tigris by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur between 762-6 (Irwin, *Companion* 23), over which Harun al-Rashid — who appears as a fictionalised character in the *Nights* — ruled for part of his reign. Encapsulating the residual cultural impact of this history, Edward Said writes that "For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma" (59).

> After Mohammed's death in 632, the military and later the cultural and religious hegemony of Islam grew enormously. First Persia, Syria, and Egypt, then Turkey, then North Africa fell to Muslim armies; in the eighth and ninth centuries Spain, Sicily, and parts of France were conquered. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Islam ruled as far east as India, Indonesia, and China. And to this extraordinary assault Europe could respond with very little except fear and a kind of awe. (59)

When the Abbasid empire fell, the Ottoman empire — as one of the empire's "smaller successor states" centred on Modern Turkey — "dominated Eastern Europe, gradually undermined the ailing Byzantine empire, and battered at the gates both of Vienna and of Malta, keys to central and south-west Europe respectively" (Howe 46). The "Ottoman peril" was seen as a "constant danger" to "the whole of Christian civilization" (Said 59), however as this empire in turn entered a long, slow decline (Howe 50-52), the balance of power began to shift. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Muslim Ottoman Empire was no longer regarded by Christian central Europe as a military threat (Yamanaka and Nishio 4). In fact, "Britain and France dominated the Eastern Mediterranean from about the end of the seventeenth century on" (Said 17) and this helped create a cultural climate that was conducive to artefacts such as the *Nights*. Ulrich Marzolph notes that:

> In consequence, the previously reigning anxiety directed against the Turks faded away and soon gave rise to an uncritical enthusiasm for everything Turkish, a turquoiserie that in its turn generated a popular enthusiasm for everything Oriental. An essential constituent of this form of Orientalism — notably both product and producer — were the various European translations of the *Nights*. ("The Arabian Nights" 4)

Many eighteenth-century writers and readers revelled in the erotic potential of the source text, creating versions that epitomised "the Western vision of a magical lost kingdom of pleasure, beyond classical and humanist rationality" (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 19). Yet even though the *Nights* represented a kind of cultural escapism, this paradise came at a price. "To Western sensibilities, this magical destination in the Orient simultaneously represented beauty and sensual refinement, as well as a paradigm of religious fanaticism, oppression, and despotism" (Tuczay 273). Similarly, Peter Caracciolo observes that "the *Nights* served as 'alter ego' to the West, evoking dread as well as fascination" (xvi). This tension between fear and desire arguably lies at the heart of many narrative types, but specifically the fairy tale. It is embodied in the figure of the Sultan, who coalesces the qualities of both romantic hero and psychopathic killer, and represents the personification of absolute power. As Angela Carter, a writer "familiar" with the *Nights* (Marzolph and van Leeuwen 514), would later exclaim of another dashing murderer, "the atrocious loneliness of that monster!" (*The Bloody Chamber* 35). In my novella, this push-pull of fear and desire becomes central to Scheherazade's narrative, and implicitly, its critique of power.

Female tastes

Like the fairy tale, the *Nights* appealed to female tastes (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 12-13). The heroism of Scheherazade, using "teaching-stories" to win "the Sultan Shahriar back to love and humanity" (Caracciolo xv) reflects the slightly discordant mix of courage and martyrdom so often considered the epitome of female virtue. This virtue, the ability to be 'brave for other people', is possibly one of reasons for the collection's popularity amongst women. The *Nights* foregrounds female self-sacrifice, implicitly throughout the collection, and explicitly at the beginning and end of the frame tale. At the start of the frame, a care-worn vizier returns home. He had scoured the kingdom but had been unable to find a single "nubile" girl to marry to the Sultan that night: "he searched but could not find a single one, and had to go home empty-handed, dejected and afraid what the king might do to him" (Lyons 7). His daughter, Scheherazade, asks him what was wrong, and when he tells her she insists that he marry her to the Sultan. Wishing to protect other women, she says to her father, "either I shall live or else I shall be ransom for the children of the Muslims and save them from him" (Lyons 7). This begins 1001 nights of story-telling. At the end of the story, when the Sultan announces his

intention to spare Scheherazade's life, he says to his vizier "it is thanks to her that I have turned in repentance from killing the daughters of my subjects" (Lyons 734). The frame story's focus on male redemption via female self-sacrifice may have contributed to the *Nights*' early hold over the feminine imagination. In contrast, I have chosen to undermine the prevalence of this trope by repositioning the narrative so that it revolves around a characterisation of Scheherazade as both selfish and rather spoiled, and while fearful, primarily focused on her own needs. These needs first and foremost relate to survival, then sexual and artistic gratification, and finally empowerment and escape. Consideration of the Sultan's salvation is not part of her psychological landscape; she is not trying to save him, rather it is his depravity that moves her beyond simple egocentricism. This is evidenced by her statement "he is the nightmare that has made me human" (196). The sacrifice implied here is turned inward, representing Scheherazade's willingness to do battle with her own arrogance and emotional immaturity, and thus transcend her earlier self.

Perhaps it was not just the *Nights*' imagining of Scheherazade as heroic martyr, and her enactment of a multiplicity of female roles (daughter, lover, storyteller, teacher, mother and wife), that consolidated the collection's appeal to women. As Robert Irwin points out, "one of the most striking features of the *Nights* (especially if one compares it with western literature in the same period) is how active and vigorous the heroines of the stories are and, contrariwise, how passive and idle many of the nominal heroes are" (*Companion* 167). Marzolph and van Leeuwen express this observation more emphatically: many of the collection's older stories "show a remarkable preference for strong, dominant women and ridiculously weak men" (565). This pattern, while not as absolute, recurs in my novella, where nearly all of the stories embedded within the frame feature female protagonists (the one exception revolves around animal characters). Similarly, the frame tale, constructed along the lines of a journal or memoir, describes Scheherazade's lived experience, and reflects her growing empowerment through the twin vehicles of art and eroticism: notions of body and identity thus intertwine. The journal structure foregrounds Scheherazade's psychology, yet the Sultan exists as little more than a stereotype, an ominous presence who is largely silent — he speaks only a few times during the narrative — and shows little capacity for change. As such, he is a static figure who acts as a counterpoint to her transformative one. Despite this, the Sultan's psychological remoteness and intense physicality operate to highlight his function as a romantic yet sexualised object of desire. This characterisation is very much in

line with Western ideals of the Romantic hero, exemplified by figures such as Conrad, the pirate hero of Byron's poem "The Corsair," (1813) which formed part of his immensely popular suite of *Turkish Tales*:

That man of loneliness and mystery,

Scarce seen to smile, and seldom heard to sigh. (Byron)

The psychological remoteness of such hero figures underscores the idea that the withholding of intimacy is often used to demonstrate power. Collectively, it is this refusal to engage — a disconnection from humanity — that enables exploitation, particularly in colonial or imperial contexts. Reminding us of Borges' pointed observation about "British reticence, the delicate central solitude of the masters of the earth" ("Translators" 94), this withholding of self seems to form the backbone of the colonial mindset. Therefore, while my novella continues the *Nights'* tendency towards strong female characters, it also complicates the binary noted earlier, and foregrounds the transfer of power between the Sultan and Scheherazade. The visibility of her psychology represents a significant reversal of the original text (a strategy utilised by many contemporary re-tellings, such as Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days*, Anthony O'Neill's *Scheherazade: A Tale* and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*) and positions transformations within her inner landscape as key themes. The individual stories embedded within the frame are intended to function progressively as external markers — like stepping stones across a river — of internal change.

Ironically, the *Nights*' courageous heroine and active cast of women and girls, and associated appeal to female tastes, undermined the collection's literary status. "These were stories in which women mattered, and they consequently mattered — and appealed — to women, a quality which caused some trouble in their standing as literature" (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 12-13). For example, in *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, Bishop Atterbury described the *Nights* as "the product of some Woman's imagination" and opined that "they may furnish the mind with some new images: but I think the Purchase is made at too great an Expense" (Caracciolo 3). Even if readers liked the *Nights*, there was a tendency to dismiss them as stories only fit for women and children (Caracciolo 3). This reception repeated the pattern of low regard already established in the East (Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions* 23). "Stories, such as those found in the *Nights*, were classified as *khurafa*, lies or fantasies,

tales fit for women and children, and only suitable for telling in the evening when serious work had been done" (Irwin, *Companion* 81). Similarly, my novella aligns itself with genres commonly associated with women and children. For example, it includes references to the canonical texts of British children's literature, such as C.S. Lewis's character Prince Caspian (140-144) and the Narnia-like talking animals of "the tale of the white peacock" who are led by a peacock with an upper-class British accent (180-185). As a child, Lewis disliked the *Nights*, although as Peter Caracciolo points out, this did not mean that he was unfamiliar with their content and form, and thus adapted such material to his "Christian proselytizing ends" (51-52); as a specific example of this intertextuality, the reader of *Prince Caspian* is asked to imagine when "a magician in the Arabian Nights calls up a Jinn" (Lewis 83). As well as drawing on Lewis's canonical work, my novella relies heavily on forms such as romance and fairy tale, with many of the individual stories either explicitly or implicitly referencing their conventions, motifs or literary tropes. For instance, two stories begin with 'once upon a time', a phrase inextricably bound with the fairy tale form, and which writer Carmel Bird describes as operating within the "incantatory nature of the tales" to bind "the mind of a writer to these stories" (28), and two more start with a similar phrase 'there was once'. That the forms of romance and fairy tale are frequently associated with women adds to my sense of their immense, latent, communicative power.

The *Nights* arrives in England

Following Galland's French translation[3], some of his stories from the *Nights* were soon translated into English, anonymously in journal or chapbook forms. The first Grub Street translation appeared in 1706 (Caracciolo xvi) — or perhaps even earlier (Schacker-Mill 167) — and by 1715 this Grub Street version was in its third edition (Caracciolo 2). Margaret Sironval reminds us that Grub Street, where the first English version of the *Nights* emerged, was a district of London where many printers and bookshops were located and "'grey' literature or marginal (hack) literature was printed" (221). At this point in history, as is the case now, London was characterised by "marked disparities in living standards" (Rogers 10); well-heeled boroughs bordered onto slums, with the latter sometimes built on marshlands,

[3] Galland published twelve volumes of stories from the *Nights* between 1704- 1717 (Irwin, *Companion* 16).

and thus vulnerable to the seasonal influx of disease. Yet these differences in living conditions were not only economic but also social and cultural. As Pat Rogers points out, "Grub Street was a mere stone's throw from the City within the walls: but in sociological terms it was light-years distant" (21). As a number of impoverished writers sought cheap lodgings in this area, 'Grub Street' passed into the vernacular as a term denoting "the essentially ephemeral production of the literary hack" (Rogers 19). The culture of such an area inspired satirists such as Hogarth, Swift and Pope — and is an interesting subject of study in its own right — yet what is most relevant to my novella is the way criminal and literary cultures intersected in this area, with the specific points of interest being anonymous or pornographic publication and literary fraud. Rogers describes this convergence of cultures — art and crime — as a "point of tension" (291), and posits a number of causative factors:

> The hacks were vulnerable to the law, especially the law of libel, as often as they set pen to paper. Their uncertain way of life, with its irregular payment and lack of security, bred other evils in its wake: not least the fact that many scribblers were compelled to live in the lower quarters of the city, where ordinary crime was rife. (Rogers 291)

Thus, the *Nights*, a work of Oriental literature described by Ulrich Marzolph as having a singular impact — secondary only to the Bible — with a "long lasting and deep impact on world culture" ("The Arabian Nights" 3) entered the English language as cheap chapbooks, emerging anonymously from the shadowlands of London slums.

Within a few years, the *Nights'* audience expanded from the literary elite of French salons across all levels of English society, rich and poor, young and old. With chapbooks available at low prices, and often sold during fairs and markets (Yamanaka and Nishio vii), or by itinerant peddlers to household servants (Dickson 202), this form of publication facilitated widespread transmission, with an audience that included both adults and children. Frequently omitting any reference to the frame tale, chapbooks usually included one or two stories and thus offered "an extremely limited introduction to ever-changing story collection", and although this domestic format was not intended for children, it may have been read by them (Dickson 202). Again, individual tales within my novella speak to this history of a text shared between adults and children, or of literary conventions that cross readership lines — themselves reasonably recent historical phenomena. For example, "the tale of the white peacock" begins,

conventionally, as a fairy-tale narrative for children: “there was once a powerful king who lived in a castle on a rock on a mountain in a land far, far away” (180). The explicit title, animal protagonist and sing-song quality of “far, far away” — with a phonology that suggests both rhymes such as ‘ba-ba black sheep’ and a baby’s first words — as well as the use of onomatopoeic language such as “zig-zagging” in the first paragraph indicate that this is a story intended for children. However, this impression is quickly contradicted in the following paragraphs, which describe an erotic kissing episode between two human characters. Similarly, an earlier story’s reference to the C.S. Lewis figure of Prince Caspian, re-imagined as a debauched dilettante who rides “with the severed heads of his enemies bouncing along behind his horse like children’s toys” (141), speaks to this intersection of parallel streams of literature; yet at the same time it implicitly questions the apparatus of canon formation and wryly pokes fun at Lewis’ aversion to the *Nights*. When encountered during childhood, texts such as the *Nights* coalesce in the imagination, functioning on an almost unconscious level as literary touchstones. Childhood books become the compass points of the adult imagination: the North, South, East and West of creativity.

Like coloured dye dropped into water, the *Nights* uncurled in every direction, blooming in a multi-dimensional arabesque. Within eight years, the *Nights* went from being unknown in Western Europe (Irwin, *Companion* 42) to being recommended — in Brian Alderson’s words — as “attractive fare” for children (82). This popularity effectively coincided with the rise of the new genre of Children’s Literature, itself symptomatic of an emerging conceptualisation of childhood as distinct from adulthood, a shift that happened across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. “It was during this time that the notion arose of the child as a special creature with unique needs and a distinct nature” (Griswold 70-71). In eighteenth-century England, this philosophical division marked an increasing interest in specialist literature for children, driven by figures such as John Newbery in the 1740s, a bookseller who is largely credited with creating the genre (Griswold 71). By 1814 illustrated versions of the *Nights* were being produced, attractive editions that Brian Alderson wittily tags as “cocoa-table” books (39). The didactic intent of such publications was overt: Melissa Dickson notes “a clear attempt to monitor children’s reading more closely and to impose order and moral purpose upon the realm of magic” (208). As well as being read by children, the *Nights* was also a text that appealed across the spectrum of social classes: for example, Robert Irwin mentions the presence of entire editions of Galland’s translation “on the shelves of gentlemen’s libraries”

(Preface vii), and William Beckford — an Englishman of enormous private means — would later write a novel, *Vathek* (1786), significantly influenced by the *Nights*. Whether consumed by readers, writers or future writers, the *Nights* became something of an omnipresent text — or as Dickson argues, so widely read in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (199) that it became "metonymic of childhood itself" (204).

The paradox of the Enlightenment

Despite this early pattern of rapid transmission, the *Nights* continued to evoke mixed responses amongst European readers (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 20-21; also see Conant xxiii). In the first book devoted to the study of the collection, *Remarks on the Arabian Nights Entertainments* published in 1797 (Caracciolo 4), Richard Hole surveyed contemporary responses to the text, concluding that:

> The sedate and philosophical turn from them with contempt; the gay and volatile laugh at their seeming absurdities; those of an elegant and correct taste are disgusted with their grotesque figures and fantastic imagery; and however we may be occasionally amused by their wild and diversified incidents, they are seldom thoroughly relished but by children, or by men whose imagination is complimented at the expense of their judgment. (qtd. in Caracciolo 4)

The last part of this observation — expressed as a tension between reason and imagination — highlights a key aspect of the *Nights*' reception in Europe. Kabbani suggests that the collection succeeded partly because it provided a counterbalance to the prevailing zeitgeist; the collection was "greeted with great enthusiasm in an era that was fidgeting under the stern dominion of rationalism, desiring imaginative and relief from sobriety" (*Imperial Fictions* 28). It is indeed an intriguing paradox that such a text should find favour during the Enlightenment, "when rationality was prized — the most contradictory possible time" (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 20). In fact, Oriental tales would become "a typical genre of Enlightenment literature" (Marzolph and Leeuwen 521) with the *Nights* a "permanent factor in the development of the oriental tale in England" (Conant xxvi). This paralleled the literary landscape of France, where elements of the *Nights* merged with fairy tale, creating a fantastical response to the dominant discourse of rationalism; "from Fairyland and the Far East two streams began to flow into the

main current of French Romanticism", observes Martha Pike Conant in her much cited study, *The Oriental Tale in Eighteenth Century England* (xxiii). It is interesting that this strange cultural intersection of fantasy and rationalism resembles some aspects of contemporary magical realism; it is also embodied in one of the key elements of the text, what Conant describes as the *Nights*' "strange sense of reality in the midst of unreality" (5).

This finds echo in my novella, where Scheherazade responds to the dream-like horror of her incarceration with a strategic awareness that indicates a rational mindset. At one point, she insists that the Sultan wear a dress — paralleling an earlier scene where she resembles a boy — and thus breaches his indifference: "With the part of my mind that is always cold, I realise that I have survived another night, perhaps even two" (147). The use of the descriptor 'cold' to indicate rationality implies the opposing pole of 'heat', signifying passion or emotion. This indicates that Scheherazade is aware of the binary discourses of rationalism; furthermore, that she accepts the logic of a situation that is not logical and responds accordingly. Yet at the same time, she recognises it is imagination that is keeping her alive, and grounding the leap — as Warner reminds us in *Stranger Magic* — into new knowledge.

> The faculties of imagination — dream, projection, fantasy — are bound up with the faculties of reasoning and essential to making the leap beyond the known into the unknown… Magical thinking structures the process of imagination, and imagining something can and sometimes must precede the fact or the act; it has shaped many features of Western civilization. But its influence has been constantly disavowed since the Enlightenment and its action and effects consequently misunderstood. (23).

The precariousness of Scheherazade's situation, while woven through the text, is emphasised by her reliance on these vehicles of imagination — particularly dream — to provide the raw material of her stories and skin narratives. Like many contemporary writers, I have considered the possibility of her imagination failing. For example, Anthony O'Neill writes that: "You must be able to appreciate how, in my days of darkest despair, I feared that inspiration would desert me and bring me undone" (235-236). In my novella, a Scheherazade paralysed by fear records that: "My imagination is dead, my creative mind a locked door. I am no more capable of inventing a story than I am of flying like a bird, running on all fours like a horse, or perhaps even swimming like a fish" (131). The reference to the locked door obliquely

reminds us of that most famous locked door — found in the Bluebeard fairy tale — and metaphorically the "danger and allure of imagination itself — the godlike act of artistic creation" (Llewellyn 216). The animal metaphors suggest that the animal — like women, nature, the body, imagination, instinct and emotion — is so often positioned on the lower side of hierarchical Western binaries, which pivot around the central organising principle of reason, described by Val Plumwood as the "protagonist-superhero of the western psyche" (*Feminism* 3). Thus, the focus on the power of the imagination — in both contemporary *Nights* re-tellings and my novella — may be read as not only a validation of creative processes, but as a comment on the reason-oriented binaries that were so sharply articulated during the Enlightenment.

Reception and transmission

The popularity of the *Nights* inspired numerous further editions and translations. Galland's first French translation was used as the basis for many eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century translations (Marzolph and van Leeuwen 724) and was highly influential in terms of what stories European readers consider to be an integral part of 'The' *Arabian Nights.* Fuelled by the collection's immense popularity, Galland's decisions about what stories to include or exclude became authoritative (Gerhardt 11; Borges, "Translators" 92). "Here is a book, then, whose author's name is legion; a book that simply grew, snowball-fashion, at random, until finally the first printed editions settled a more or less fortuitous form of it" (Gerhardt 39).

Galland, who stressed "the gallant and the pleasing" (Irwin, *Companion* 19), was followed by Edward William Lane (1839). Lane, who asserted that his translation presented "faithful pictures of Arab life and manners" (as cited in Schacker-Mill, 170), clearly saw his project in anthropological terms. Via the "seemingly incongruous combination of ethnographic detail and translated fantasy narratives", he sought to offer his British readership an experience that was entertaining but also "improving" (Schacker-Mill, 165). Lane produced his version for public consumption, chiefly family and parlor use, and therefore edited material he deemed inappropriate for these contexts (Marzolph and van Leeuwen 516). With the parlor culturally deemed a site of "placid reading and chaste conversation" (Borges, "Translators" 94), Lane's rendition purified the *Nights* "of bawdy and salaciousness, violence and eroticism" (Caracciolo 182) and thus aimed at a mass readership. "Lane sought to locate *Alf Layla wa-Layla* in a broad cultural and oral discursive context for a newly widened readership" and

despite the popularity of later versions by Payne and Burton, Lane's continued to be used as a "point of comparison for subsequent efforts to render the tales in English" (Schacker-Mill 164).

Yet not all readers were impressed. Richard Burton (1885) was apparently so exasperated by Lane's piety and politeness (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 186) that he seemed to take exuberant pleasure in the lascivious possibilities of the text. "Burton relished the sexual passages of the *Arabian Nights*" and in contrast to Lane, published his edition for a limited audience in order to avoid censorship (Marzolph and van Leeuwen 516). This was enabled via the formation of a "Kamashastra Society", effectively consisting of Richard Burton — nicknamed 'Dirty Dick' (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 18) and his friend F.F. Arbuthnot, who anticipated the publication of a series of Oriental erotica (Gerhardt 81-82). Burton, "keenly marketing a profane work while largely avoiding the watchful eye of Victorian censors and social police" (B. Irwin, "Review" 119), printed his edition in a London suburb but had Benares inscribed on the title page (Gerhardt 86). This edition closely followed John Payne's earlier 1882-84 version, something of a literary scandal in its day. Mia Gerhardt observes that "Burton borrowed extensively from Payne… Burton's translation really is Payne's, with a certain amount of stylistic changes, and the poetry translated anew" (82). However, Paul McMichael Nurse devotes a chapter titled 'The Victorian Rivals' to these translations, with a detailed chronology of both men's drafts that tends to indicate that this interchange was more complex than previously assumed (160-191). Yet even today, Burton's footnotes — in turns eccentric, obscene, scholarly, obsessive, sexist and racist — remain something of a striking landmark in literary annotations; Mia Gerhardt notes that his translation is "overannotated with anthropological information, especially on subjects connected with sex" (68). Neatly summing up the differing character of these editions, an early reviewer quipped "Galland is for the nursery, Lane for the library, Payne for the study, and Burton for the sewers" (qtd. in Warner, *Stranger Magic* pp186-87)[4]. As we will see, within this rich history of translation and publication it is the period from around the middle to the end of the nineteenth century — an era that roughly spans the Victorian translations of Lane and Burton

[4] During this era, Enno Littmann also provided a comprehensive German language translation (1839), relied on by later *Nights* scholars such as Mia Gerhardt and Malcolm C. Lyons, but decried by Jorge Luis Borges, citing its lack of creativity (Borges, "The Translators" 108; Marzolph, "Review" 111).

— that is of particular interest to my novella. As Rana Kabbani observes, these translations mark "the contradictory penchants of the Victorian age" (*Imperial Fictions* 45) and along with Galland's edition, were influential in the West's imaging of the East, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (12).

The diffusion of the *Nights* into world literature would be strongly marked by these first European translations. As Robert Irwin notes, during the course of the eighteenth century, Galland's translation would in turn be translated into many other European languages (Preface vii); beyond the Middle East, few scholars were fluent in Arabic, "therefore for a long time translations of the *Nights* into languages such as Hebrew, Polish or Russian tended to be based on French or English intermediaries" (Preface ix). As the stories spread beyond Western Europe, they became:

> subtly Europeanised, as, in the process of their transmission, they tended to acquire something of Galland's courtliness, or Lane's ponderous, pedagogical glossing approach, or Burton's raunchy exaggerations, or the sugar-sweet, louche whimsicality of Madrus. (Preface ix)

Later European versions of the *Nights* included Powys Mathers' "still widely read" English translation of Joseph Charles Victor Madrus' French version (1899-1904) (Marzolph, "Review" 110). Like Burton, Madrus would exaggerate "the obscenity of the original" (Irwin, *Companion* 19) and substantially embellish the original, an adaptation praised by Jorge Luis Borges — "it is his infidelity, his happy and creative infidelity, that must matter to us" ("The Translators" 106)[5]. More contemporary versions include N.J. Dawood's selection of tales (1973) and Husain Haddawy's English translation (1990) of the fragmentary Galland manuscript, as edited by Muhsin Mahdi in 1992 (Marzolph, "Review" 110).

At the time of writing this chapter, the latest complete translation was Malcolm C. Lyons' *The Arabian Nights: Tales of the 1001 Nights* (2008); after briefly considering Richard Burton's 1885 translation, I selected Lyons as the source text for this exegesis, largely due to the precision and accessibility of his prose. According to a 2012 review by Ulrich Marzolph, Lyons'

[5] In contrast, Madrus' version was judged by Mia Gerhardt as having "spurious modern material scattered through the later volumes" as well as being "extremely free with translator's additions" and thus "unreliable" (68).

translation used the Calcutta II (1839-42) edition, which is considered more reliable than the earlier Bulaq I (1835). These editions, of which Calcutta I was the first to be printed in Arabic (1814-18), were largely produced as a result of European demand (Irwin, *Companion* 43). Warner states that Calcutta I and Calcutta II are the editions "on which the most reputable recent editors draw" (*Stranger Magic* 76)[6]. Marzolph describes Lyon's work in positive terms: "up to the present day and notwithstanding the plethora of existing translations, English readers have not had access to a readable version of the complete text of the *Nights* in modern English as translated directly from the Arabic" ("Review" 110). Each major new translation has marked a turning point in the "fabulous muddle" (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 20) of the collection's history. As past translations have functioned as reference material for writers and scholars, it will be interesting to see how Lyons' work will impact future generations of readers and writers. The title of Lyons' translation, *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, reflects the *Nights*' position on the cusp between East and West, with *The Arabian Nights* a Western denomination, whereas the original Arabic title was *1001 Nights* (Marzolph, "Review" 112). Similarly, my novella positions itself on this cusp, with its reference to *1001* Nights followed by a self-consciously florid Victorianesque sub-title *Being an Erotic Memoir, and Private Journal, of the Virgin Scheherazade — a gripping tale of love, death, identity, transformation and metamorphosis.* The sub-title implicitly locates the novella as a cultural artifact of the Victorian era, and this is reinforced by the writing's somewhat archaic tone and flowery use of language. Given the popularity of Oriental and pseudo Oriental tales in England during the nineteenth century, the novella may therefore be properly classified as a 'neo-Victorian Oriental tale' in that it is a contemporary work that mimics the cultural production of the Victorian era. Clearly, its strong focus on the erotic aspects of the *Nights* is in line with Burton's influential translation and with Madrus' later version.

Forgery

In the complex journey of the *Nights* from East to West — and back again — a journey necessarily mediated by translation and differing cultural and historical perspectives, forgery emerges as a prominent issue. Marzolph writes that in 1787 Dom Chavis, an Arabic teacher

[6] However, it is worth noting that Heinz Grotzfeld suggests that the final volumes of Calcutta II, on which Lyons relies, "are nothing but a reprint of the Bulaq I edition" (227).

living in Paris, forged an Arabic manuscript that included Galland's 'Aladdin', one of the stories included in his 1704 volume, into Arabic ("Grimm Nights" 78). Readers will remember that Galland provided the first French translation of the *Nights* for European audiences. This forgery was significant for a number of reasons, but chiefly because it helped authenticate 'Aladdin' as part of — for want of a better word — an authentic Arabic *1001 Nights*. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, an examination of Galland's diary by Hermann Zotenberg showed, 'Aladdin' actually became part of his translation after he heard the story in an oral performance by Syrian Maronite storyteller Hanna Diyab[7] ("Grimm Nights" 78). Apparently Galland later expanded the story from these brief diary notes, and Hanna wrote other stories for him in Arabic, but "unfortunately the autographs have disappeared" (Gerhardt 13).

Diyab's oral performance was thus the source of stories that are now popularly considered an integral part of the *Nights*. "It is from this man, and not from manuscript translation, that many of the now most famous tales — such as those of Aladdin and Ali Baba — were drawn" (Schacker-Mill 167). A second manuscript containing 'Aladdin' later surfaced, this time dated 1703, a year before Galland's translation, and thus providing further evidence that the tale was part of the *1001 Nights* prior to European translation and adaptation. However, this second manuscript, very similar to the first, was also a forgery, this time produced by Michel Sabbagh, a scholar of Arabic literature ("Grimm Nights" 78). Historically, these forgeries were significant because they helped position tales such as 'Aladdin' as part of the collection of stories that European audiences considered authentic. A related issue is that eighteenth and nineteenth century scholars, and indeed scholars from much of the twentieth century, came to see such tales — dubbed "Galland's orphan stories" by Mia Gerhardt (13-14) — as an integral part of the collection. Notably the Grimm Brothers, during their search for fairy tales and folktales they considered part of German culture, also considered translations based on these forgeries to be genuine ("Grimm Nights" 77). Marzolph writes that it was not until documentation by Muhsin Mahdi in 1994 that it became 'unambiguously clear…that both documents are conscious forgeries' ("Grimm Nights" 79).

While Gerhardt notes the difficulty of working with oral sources, "the Hanna stories, of course, cannot be checked at all" (71), she concludes that about half of Galland's translation

[7] Some scholars — e.g. Irwin and Warner — use the spelling 'Diab'.

is “based on a 15th century manuscript, while the other half is due to expedients, partly even to oral transmission” (10-11). However, scholars such as Borges clearly doubt whether Hanna Diyab actually existed. He dismisses Galland’s “invisible manuscript” (95) and refers to Diyab as a “dead Maronite” (95) whose “memory was no less inspired than Scheherazade’s” (92) before continuing in a similar vein:

> To this obscure consultant — whose name I do not wish to forget: it was Hanna, they say — we owe certain fundamental tales unknown to the original: the stories of Aladdin; the Forty Thieves; Prince Ahmad and the Fairy Peri-Banu; Abu al-Hassan; the Sleeper and the Waker; the night adventure of Caliph Harun al-Rashid; the two sisters who envied their younger sister. (“Translators” 92)[8]

In contrast, Robert Irwin appears to accept Diyab as a real figure, but observes that when comparing the diary notes Galland took from dictation with the resulting published versions “it is clear that Galland took extraordinary liberties with the stories he received from Diab” (*Companion* 17). Yet scholars such as Warner are more forgiving: “if Galland pieced and patched together from other stories, he was only doing what storytellers have always done, before and since” (*Stranger Magic* 77); at the same time, she notes that stories such as the Fairy Peri Banou closely match some of the fairy tales written by Galland’s contemporary Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy, which would tend to indicate that his range of sources — oral and textual — may be wider than previously thought. From this discussion, we can see that *1001 Nights* exists in a historical and cultural context where the line between fact and fiction remains permanently blurred. Not only do real historical figures such as Harun al-Rashid ghost across its pages, but critical figures such as Diyab prove elusive, vanishing like a daydream. Similarly, the journey of the collection into English is marked by a spectrum of translator intention that ranges from a certain dignified culling to pure invention. My novella’s implication of unreliable narration thus exists in a historical context where its hypotext had

[8] Robert Irwin uses the spelling ‘Harun al-Rashid’, Salman Rushdie uses ‘Haroun al-Rashid’, Anthony O’Neill uses ‘Harun Al-Rashid’ and gives ‘785-809’ as his lifespan, Jorge Luis Borges uses ‘Harun al-Rashid’ as does Marina Warner, Mia I. Gerhardt uses ‘Haru er-Rashid’ and uses 786-809, while in *Vathek* William Beckford uses Haroun Al Raschid.

already been subject to significant interventions, both in terms of its content and publication history (the chapbooks); not surprisingly, the *Nights* has been described by Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum as a "vertiginously unstable" text (as cited in Dickson 200).

The prominence of forgery in this condensed history embeds my novella in a literary context where notions authenticity and provenance are already strained, and gives a certain credence to its framing as a lost manuscript. In fact, despite the incompatibility of the dates, I imagined Scheherazade as a latter-day female confidence artist, a kind of Hanna Diyab figure, arriving in Victorian London and regaling Burton with stories about her past — or those of a female relative — and eventually selling him her diary. She would thus be akin to one of the women who emerged after the slaughter of the Russian tsars, claiming to be a descendant of a noble line, but ultimately discovered to be a fake. Like a bad liar, at a number of points within her account Scheherazade undercuts her own veracity. For example, the stories contain a number of characters who are blonde or with blue eyes, or exist in a nebulous setting or timeframe, features that mark the work as inauthentic. Her laced corset and high heels clearly stand out as fabrications (177), and at one point she hints that she is looking back on events at the palace: "'Fuck off', I tell her, the gutter language of my village returning to my mouth as naturally as the air that I still breathe" (189). The use of the word 'still' undercuts the apparent spontaneity, or implication that this is a contemporaneously written journal of her life, and instead reveals that she is looking back on her life as a story. This apparent slip makes the reader aware that, like the Sultan, they are being manipulated. Within my creative practice, notions of authenticity — the blurring of the line between fact and fiction — are recurrent themes. I once worked as a sports writer, and invented a number of personas including one named after Les Patterson — a tribute to Barry Humphries' character, racist, sexist and wearing a colonial era uniform shorts and long socks — as a way to critique the dominant gender constructs of sports journalism. I continue to view writing as a performative act, and tend to adopt 'characters' as different writing personas, then use these constructs as a platform to create. The creative process is thus concretised as a 'real' person, with the writing's voice emerging from what I imagine this character thinks and feels. When writing Scheherazade, I imagined her as an egocentric young woman- barely out of adolescence- who had been indulged by her parents, but possessing a kind of lightness that usually only comes with youth and a lack of worldly experience. The visual image that I used to focus this depiction was that of a tiny aquatic creature, like a mudskipper, so light that it

can run across the water's surface without breaking through. This kind of psychic lightness was necessary to transcend the horror of her predicament. The resultant style opens up a dialogue between the narrator and the reader, playfully inviting them to engage in an ironic reading of an apparently real 'journal'.

Oral versus textual transmission

Before moving on, it is interesting to note another key point that emerges from this brief history of the *Nights*. The figure of Hanna Diyab personifies a debate that, particularly within folklore and fairy tale studies, continues to divide scholars: the intricate relationship between literary and oral sources[9]. The relationship between textual and oral transmission is both longstanding and complex. Oral and textual sources mark opposing ends of an evidentiary spectrum; they matter because they are pivotal to narrative creation and transmission; as sources vary greatly according to cultural and historical contexts, transmission also varies; and while clearly there are evidentiary issues associated with any form of transmission, the ephemeral nature of oral transmission renders it particularly vulnerable to questions of proof. In the context of the *Nights*, while some scholars privilege one form of transmission over another, many regard this relationship as dialectical or symbiotic, concluding that "there is ample evidence that the two influenced each other in various ways" (Gerhardt 39). Kabbani foregrounds the *Nights'* oral origins, stating that stories "were narrated by itinerant *conteurs* or *hakawatieh,* who augmented their content, elaborated on their plot structures, and larded them with anecdotes or verses which reflected their respective tastes"; she suggests that this may help explain the "amorphous and diverse" quality of the resulting manuscripts (*Imperial Fictions* 23). Marzolph provides a neat example of the multi-directional flow of narrative in relation to Hanna Diyab's 1709 performance of 'Ali Baba'. This is a story that derived from an unknown source — and which provided the basis for Galland's notes, which in turn were elaborated on and included in subsequent editions of the *Nights* ("Grimm Nights" 84). 'Ali Baba' in turn closely corresponds to "Simeli Mountain", a story included in the Grimm Brothers' collection, and this publication itself triggered further oral retellings (85). Furthermore, Marzolph suggests that as the relationship between text and orality is fluid,

[9] An intersecting area of contention is how literary canons are formed on the basis of these sources, but this discussion is largely beyond the scope of this paper.

rather than focusing on the primacy of one mode of transmission over another, it may be useful to instead focus on the role of storytellers and their mechanisms, and motivations for, creative adaptations ("Grimm Nights" 84). Warner, in a discussion of the performative aspect of storytelling — and stories shaped in response to audiences not readers — notes that the "passage from oral to written and back again is much more complex than a simple contrast between literature and orature" (*Stranger Magic* 11). Peter Brooks speaks of an "oral residue" in literature (285) while Robert Irwin notes that the tales in the *Nights* "were written to be read aloud" (*Companion* 13). The complexity of this interaction between oral and textual sources is patterned throughout my novella.

In my novella, Scheherazade's voice apes speech, creating an impression of an oral testimony that has been transcribed and transmitted via text. For example, in the frame she speaks directly to the reader, exhorting them to "hush, now it's story time, and like the nightingale, I must sing for the darkness" (126). The frequent use of present tense underscores this positioning of the frame as testimony. The overall impression is of a witness, a survivor of a horrific experience, sharing her memories and re-living them at the same time. However, beneath this layer of apparent sincerity, a self-conscious irony is at work. The voice apes the breathless conventions of romance narratives, "this has never happened before!" (192), as well as the faux naïve characterisations of pornography, where sexual objects often play a kind of displacement game with their own agency. A great deal of eroticism seems to hinge on the changing balance of power within human relationships, this giving or taking away of one's empowerment, or specifically the transition or negotiation that moves an entity from subject to object; this is also a trope seen in romance literature. Late in her narrative, Scheherazade comments on the fluidity of power, or this conception of power as an entity that may be exchanged or traded: "A wise woman once told me that freedom is never given: it must be taken" (192).

In contrast, the stories embedded within the frame operate inside a more literary sphere, with the language selection and grammar suggesting written not spoken traditions. These stories tend to contain a more ornate vocabulary, they explicitly borrow from the conventions of traditional British children's literature and Western European fairy tales, or reference specific texts, and the sentences are typically longer and more complex in both style and construction. For example, "the weight of beauty" story considers the consequences of the fairy tale convention of female beauty, and specifically the Snow White mirror — described

by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* as the voice of patriarchy. Noting the King's absence from the story, they identify his voice as "the voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgment that rules the Queen's- and every woman's- self-evaluation" (38). In my novella, this dialogue between literary and oral forms suggests that Scheherazade is 'talking back' to canonical texts.

An amorphous text

One of my favourite stories in the *Nights* features a princess fighting an *'ifrit*, each rapidly shape-shifting from one animal to the next — the *'ifrit* becomes a black cat, then a red pomegranate, which bursts scattering seeds, only to be pecked up by the princess, who has transformed herself into a cockerel. Alas, the cock misses one final seed, and the monster is able to regenerate. Finally, the girl triumphs by burning her opponent, but is destroyed in the process; the narrative baton is then passed to a man watching the fight who continues with his story (Lyons 86). The figure of the shape-shifter, a being of fluid identity, provides a neat metaphor for the *Nights*' many forms. As well as the clear differences in the translations I have outlined, the collection proved a curiously flexible entity, adapted for a range of audiences, which spanned the spectrum from educational texts for children to pornography for men (Marzolph and van Leeuwen 520; Yamanaka and Nishio, 129). "In general, the *Arabian Nights* in the European tradition adapted to various shapes that changed according to the cultural vogues or the intentions of translators, critics, and editors" (Marzolph and van Leeuwen 664). It is oddly appropriate that the *Nights* itself should reflect such a rich history of adaptation, especially as its adventure-driven narratives rely heavily on change processes. Cook identifies metamorphosis as "a chief wonder of the *Nights*" (207); likewise, Marzolph and van Leeuwen observe that transformation is important to the collection both as a vital aspect of storytelling and as a recurring narrative motif (721). All texts are essentially malleable, being human products mediated by multiple acts of transmission, yet the pliability of the *Nights* is woven into its history. Not only as the *Nights* itself been presented in a multitude of different forms, but it has inspired untold variations and re-tellings. Marzolph writes of its "tremendous effect" across the Creative Arts, noting that "the *Nights* has served as a continuous source of inspiration" ("The Arabian Nights" 3). Thus, my novella not only represents one of the many examples of the *Nights'* impact on the Western imagination, but references particular editions produced for didactic or erotic purposes.

There is clearly a link between this malleability and the *Nights'* profound cultural impact. As a massive yet amorphous text, the diffusion of the *Nights* into Western culture — whether via image, text or oral storytelling traditions — is a remarkable phenomenon. Since Galland's 1704 publication, the *Nights* has become a ubiquitous cultural icon. "No other work of fiction of non-Western origin has had a greater impact on Western culture than the *Arabian Nights*" state Marzolph and Leeuwen in their *Encyclopedia of the Arabian Nights* (xxiii), and it would be difficult to dismiss this as hyperbole. Daniel Beaumont suggests that the *Nights*' transmission is intertwined with its positioning as a commercial entity. "Long before Coca-Cola or Clint Eastwood movies, the *Nights* proved to be a commodity that could be adapted to almost any taste" ("Review" 300). Certainly the impact of the collection has been pervasive, occurring throughout high and low culture, and across all creative media. "The influence is marked in the work of the "French artists known as *Les Orientalistes*; in architecture, the Nights played a role in fashioning a particular Orientalist style; and in the early twentieth-century films, they served as a matrix for such highly influential works as the 1924 *Thief of Baghdad* featuring Douglas Fairbanks" (Yamanaka and Nishio 3) Later, films as divergent as Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* (1974) and Disney's *Aladdin* (1992) would all turn to the *Nights* for inspiration, representing the spectrum of uses to which the collection had earlier been put, from children's literature to pornography; this usage continues, with a number of *Arabian Nights*-themed computer and online games. As Sheila Shaw wrote in 1959, the "impact on the artistic imagination of novelists, dramatists, poets, musicians and painters that, even in the twentieth century, may be too kaleidoscopic to measure" (as cited in Caracciolo xix). Yet the popularity of the *Nights* came at a price. As we will see, the collection became pivotal to Western conceptions and imaginings of the East, and this thinking was itself grounded in the historical context of imperial expansion.

Chapter Two: Truth and Lies

Orientalism

Like a sandcastle built on top of a cloud, my fictional narrative takes place in the impossible location of the Orient. While the Orient and Orientalism are loaded, polysemous terms, it is this understanding of the Orient as a fluid imaginative space, or thinking platform, that is most relevant to this discussion of my novella. This is beautifully communicated in V.G. Kiernan's phrase: "Europe's collective daydream of the Orient" (131). This phrase suggests both thte imaginative power of such discourses, and the depth of their cultural impact. Marzolph and Leeuwen define Orientalism expansively to include "all attempts to integrate visions and representations of the East into European thought, culture and artistic representation" (661). A striking aspect of this definition is that it suggests an instrumental relationship between a passive East and an active West. This is a key point made by Edward Said in his seminal text *Orientalism*. Said writes that the "essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (42) and that the "relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (5). A similar point is made by Kabbani, who knots together the strands of political power, culture and imagination as an expression of this culture, concluding that:

> The more fully the Orient fell under the sway of European powers, the deeper it came to be sublimated in the imagination, in literature, painting, music, and fashion. The *Arabian Nights* appeared in Europe at a time that coincided with Turkish defeat. (*Imperial Fictions* 138)

Yet Orientalism is also a body of knowledge that flourished alongside this cultural sublimation, and we may view the *Nights* is an important bridge between these different fields. After the publication of Richard Hole's *Remarks on the Arabian Nights Entertainments* in 1797, the study of the *Nights* began in earnest in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and this coincided with the development of Orientalism as an academic discipline (Irwin, *Companion* 42). This was accompanied by a proliferation of learned societies to support this new branch of knowledge: the Société Asiatique was founded 1822, with the Royal Asiatic Society opening in 1823 and the American Oriental Society in 1842 (Said 99). Indeed, that idea that *Nights* was "a potentially valuable source of information regarding Arab

life-ways was well established by the early years of the 19th century" (Schacker-Mill 168), and commentary by translators Lane and Burton was framed in terms of explaining "the manners and customs of the Arabs and Persians" (Yamanaka and Nishio xii). Thus, many editions were framed in didactic terms as being "improving" for their readers (Schacker-Mill 165). The growth of Orientalism as a specific discipline largely overlapped with Bonaparte's occupation of Egypt in 1798-99, the East India Company's need for good linguists, and a growing focus on language and literature of the Arabs (Irwin, *Companion* 42-43). More importantly, it coincided with a "period of unparallelled European expansion; from 1815 to 1914 European direct colonial domination expanded from about 35 percent of the earth's surface to about 85 percent of it" (Said 41). As such, Orientalism — as a discipline — was inextricably bound up with the imperial expansions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the term has fallen out of favour precisely because "it connotes the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European colonialism" (Said 2).

Defining the purview of Orientalism then leads to the obvious question of which countries and/or geographic areas represent the Orient. This is surprisingly difficult to answer, as it largely depends on which era, country, entity or even vocational group was drawing this imaginary line; it is also complicated by the changing terminology of imperial expansion — for example, what was once the Near East is now the Middle East. In his study, *The Lords of Human Kind: European attitudes towards the outside world in the Imperial Age*, V. G. Kiernan writes that "men who talked about the Orient had in mind…the Islamic world, from Morocco to Turkestan, the realm of minaret and muezzin, bashaw and bulbul, camel and veil and palm" (131). To state the obvious, the 'men' referred to by Kiernan are generally either English or French, the major imperial players of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The imperial baton would pass to America in the middle of the twentieth: "since World War II America has dominated the Orient, and approaches it as France and Britain once did" (Said 4). And, to return to Kiernan's point, these 'men' were usually male: Stephen Howe speaks of "a man's world…empire as a vast outdoor extension of the gentleman's club, officers mess, or masonic lodge, or indeed as an open field for predatory male sexuality, both hetero- and homosexual" (93). Alongside the broader landscape of empire building, technological advances would impact what was seen as the Orient. For instance, outside the practices of an academic discipline, British Orientalist artists initially defined the Orient as places they could visit and paint, meaning coastal regions of the Muslim Mediterranean: "the hinterland well

beyond the coasts…remained the province of soldiers and explorers" (Tromans, Introduction 11); but as steam-powered vessels opened up new destinations, this conceptual boundary also expanded (10). The Orient, therefore, may be read generally as the Middle East and North Africa, with a particular fascination for Turkey and Persia — "the Muslim country apart from Turkey that touched the Western imagination was Persia" (Kiernan 123) — as well as India. Egypt, perceived by the British as crucial to overland communication with India, was of crucial strategic interest and this "explains Napoleon's eagerness to occupy Egypt in 1798 in order to divide Britain from India" (Tromans, Introduction 11). Yet the exact boundaries of the 'Orient' remain intriguingly ambiguous. As Edward Said observed in 1994, terms such as Orient and Occident "correspond to no stable reality… all such geographical destinations are an odd combination of the empirical and the imaginative" (331). The *Nights*, as a hugely influential text, provided a key platform from which the East was known or imagined.

We may therefore read Orientalism, through Said's lens, as an attitude that splits the world, a way of thinking oriented along geo-political axes of power. In line with Said, Marzolph and Leeuwen talk about how this thinking represents "a fundamental dichotomy in the European vision of the world" (662). This dichotomy is underpinned and further reinforced by a series of cultural binaries that correspond to the constructed poles of East and West: mind/body, reason/emotion, light/darkness, civilization/barbarity, progress/stasis, self-control/violence, reality/dream. As we will see, it was only in the realms of the sensual, and sexuality, that the Orient was deemed to have the upper hand. For example, during a discussion of the work of Richard Burton, Kabbani notes that he focused on translating texts such as *The Perfumed Garden* and *Kama Sutra* "since eroticism seemed the only interesting thing the East had to offer the West" (*Imperial Fictions* 65). As such, we may view my novella as a dream about a dream: a hyperbolic version of the erotic East, grounded in culturally embedded imaginings of the Orient, seeded in the pragmatic soil of imperialism.

This recurring fascination with the lascivious possibilities of the East is made visible by many of the representations associated with Orientalism. For example, Nicholas Tromans observes that "sexual despotism is the theme of some of the most famous French Orientalist paintings" ("Harem and Home" 128) such as Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827). Inspired by Lord Byron's play of the same name, the painting tells the story of the last King of Assyria who, faced with military defeat, ordered that his concubines and other possessions be destroyed. In this image, a strong compositional vector points towards the King, reclining

at the top of left hand side of the image, with his dying concubines spread out below; a terrified horse is being dragged towards the King's divan, and presumably those doing the murdering will soon also kill themselves. This image is the visual equivalent of the 'Great Chain of Being', "a ladder-type ordering system with God at the top, humans below God, other animals below humans, and the rocky earth at the very bottom" (Ritvo 3) or "in other words, the entire created universe" (Lovejoy 316). Sardanapalus may be read as the embodiment of the patriarchal ideal. Indeed, themes of conquest run strongly through much of this art, paralleling the political landscape of imperialism, and asserting human dominion over nature; this conquest is imagined as both gendered and anthropocentric, with the West synonymous with masculine power and the East with female acquiescence. As Kabbani observes, to view "the East as a sexual domain, and to perceive the East as a domain to be colonized, were complementary aspirations" (*Imperial Fictions* 59). For our purposes, some of the most interesting aspects of these representations are those where the Orient was depicted as ripe for exploitation or 'saving' from itself by the West. In my novella, the tensions between these qualities is embodied by Scheherazade, a character constructed as a lustful virgin.

Scholars such as Said and Kabbani argue that such representations effectively represent a kind of cultural softening up of the East for imperial exploitation. "To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact" (Said 39). Similarly, Kabbani sees these cultural manifestations as preparatory to acts of conquest. "If it could be suggested that Eastern peoples were slothful, preoccupied with sex, violent, and incapable of self-government, then the imperialist would feel himself justified in stepping in and ruling" (*Imperial Fictions* 6). In fact, there is an interesting parallel to be drawn between pornography — as a vehicle for exploitation — and its depictions of available female bodies, and the eroticisation of the East. While representations of the Orient often had a strong sexual dimension, this coalesced in Western fascination for depictions of the harem, frequently imagined as a space of "unfettered masculine power" (Tromans, "Harem and Home" 128). Ideas about male power intertwine with both imagination and aesthetics; Kiernan notes the "harem image appealed to an instinct of possession and domination as well as of mere pleasure" (135). While the *Nights'* impact on Western imaginings of the East was profound, the harem represented the epicentre of imperial discourses about sexuality, power and otherness.

In my novella, the harem scenes represent the baroque nadir of the Sultan's earthly pleasures, his collection of human toys the spoils of dominion. His control is so absolute that the courtesans and eunuchs perform for their master, never knowing whether he is watching them or not, in an Orientalist version of the panopticon. In *1001 Nights*, the harem and the menagerie exist in symbiosis, operating to be read in conjunction with one another. As an evocative twinning of human and animal incarceration, they are the home of the marginalised, the less than human or not quite human, the others; here live those excluded from social, sexual and racial hegemonies. For example, the courtesans enact the mechanical sexuality often attributed to lower human social orders, while the animals are similarly concerned with base appetites, each locked in a cycle of eating and mating, all watched by an all-powerful male, himself representing the construct of patriarchy. Yet the harem and the menagerie may also be seen as a comment on the division of animals into the human categories of 'tame' and 'wild', a divide based on human use of animals, with meat eating central to this sorting process. This recalls the European zoos of the late nineteenth century, where indigenous humans were often exhibited alongside exotic animals (Rothfels 81), and Harriet Ritvo's observation that the zoo keeping and hunting discourses of this century "justified and celebrated Britain's imperial enterprise" (5). The process of collecting humans and animals is clearly premised on their status as objects.

In my novella, the harem scenes are reminiscent of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' *The Turkish Bath (Le Bain Turc)* of 1863, a painting so stuffed full of naked female flesh that it loses its erotic impact, becoming, instead, an unintentional parody of a popular Oriental theme. There is something unearthly about such a scene. Indeed, when viewed for a period of time, the painting's kaleidoscope of flesh begins to suggest a scene of extreme violence. Technically, the composite assemblage of a large number of nude figures into a circular composition presents a number of spatial challenges, notable in small jumps and shifts in perspective. These inconsistencies in perspective shatter the picture plane like a broken window, a visual effect that suggests scoring, dismemberment, slashing. Like the cut pages of a book, this fragmentation of the pictorial surface affects not only the naturalism of the image, but also how individual figures are read. Posed for the viewer's enjoyment in tableaux that are clearly artificial, the individual figures resemble an assemblage of body parts. Akin to meat in a butcher's shop, even the embracing lesbian pair suggest cannibalism rather than

sexual pleasure. In fact, Carol Adams suggests an evocative relationship between representations of meat and female bodies:

> The association between attractive human female bodies and delectable, attractive flesh appeals to the appetitive desires as they have been constructed in the dominant culture in which we interpret images from a stance of male identification and human-centeredness. (*Neither Man nor Beast* 30)

Thus, the image of the harem, as a site of patriarchal consumption of metaphorical human flesh, is deeply and complexly ingrained in the Western psyche as a site of absolute power; this is reflected in many Oriental representations of the imperial era. In an essay written to accompany an exhibition of British Orientalist paintings, Kabbani suggests a strong connection between the colonisation of public and private spaces. "There seems to me to be a suggestion, conscious or not, that jealously guarded harem doors and long centuries of fortifications can all be kicked open by the painter — as by a colonial jackboot — to let the Western voyeur in" (42). This observation underscores the idea that, particularly during the imperial era, acts of representation often ran parallel to acts of conquest. This dynamic may also be reversed; in fact, one of the novella's fundamental tenets is that power begins in the imagination.

As a popular Oriental trope, images of the harem also challenged ideas about personal freedoms, including sexuality and the imagination. With sex potentially the one area of dominance that the West allowed the East, at least in popular imaginings, it is curious that the perceived site of such excesses — the harem — was also an image that provoked ambivalent responses. For example, in his *Turkish Tales* Lord Byron — in alignment with liberal ideals — generally spoke against the harem, yet he also portrays it as a "voluptuous world of fairy-tale opulence" (Llewellyn 221). Later Charlotte Brontë, who read the *Nights* as a child and Byron's *Tales* during her teenage years, would come to regard the harem with a "morally superior and contemptuous attitude" (Llewellyn 220). But like many women, Brontë was also fascinated by the Orient, and the imaginative and sensual freedom it seemed to represent:

> Although Oriental tales embodied a combination of longing and fear for the majority of their readers, Charlotte Brontë's work suggests that they held an especially symbolic

> place for women, much more effectively sundered from the adventure, danger, and sexual experimentation they had come to represent. (Llewellyn 224)

Tanya Llewellyn persuasively argues that for Brontë, the Orient ultimately became synonymous with the imagination itself (217). This may also be true of a number of important English writers, particularly those creating work during the imperial expansions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is an intriguing thread to unpick here: this is an era when many Oriental representations served imperial priorities, yet the imagination that produced these representations was also seen as a kind of Orient of the mind. Certainly, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, when "there was no such thing as psychology" (Marcus 22), writers such as Brontë seemed to have conceived the imagination as a mysterious, dangerous, foreign, sensual, unbridled space, perhaps a concretised version of the subconscious, an idea that would not emerge until later in the century. For example, Llewellyn writes of how Brontë's "life-long struggle with the danger and allure of imagination itself — the godlike act of artistic creation — is transposed on to an Orientalist fantasy beyond the borders of English identity" (216). Specifically, the *Nights* provided many of the images that were used to conceptualise creative processes. Ruskin, in *Modern Painters* (1843-60), uses the image of the genie in the bottle as a metaphor for the imagination as well as the 'open sesame' to a treasure cave (Caracciolo 31). From a broader perspective this Orientalisation of the imagination, particularly its sexual aspects, may have provided a counterbalance to restrictive cultural mores. "The Orient of the Western imagination provided respite from Victorian sexual repressiveness. It was used to express for the age the erotic longings that would otherwise have remained suppressed" (Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions* 36). Similarly, Llewellyn argues that for Charlotte Brontë the *Nights* and Byron's Turkish Tales merged to form a powerful, personal conception of the Orient. She associated the Orient with both imaginative freedom and "sexual corruption" (222); these parallel registers thus became conflated "so that the dangers of the imagination carry with them a threat of subversive sexuality" (222). I am reminded of Howe's observation of empire as a "vast outdoor extension of the gentleman's club" (93). Perhaps for female writers, shut out from the imperial meta-narratives of conquest, heroism and adventure, a desire for power may have turned inwards. Like the Orient itself, the imagination represented a strange new territory, a place continually opening up for exploration and invention.

As we have seen, my novella belongs to a stream of literature and other representations that are inextricably tangled up with the European colonial expansions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Specifically, it speaks of sexual conquest and control, the imagined "lascivious sensuality" of the East (Kabbani *Imperial Fictions* 6). Yet it is part of a larger history too, of Western imagining of the Eastern other. In his classic study, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance*, Samuel Chew notes that from "the time of Herodotus travelers wrote of the wonders of the East" (7). Later, returning travellers would unpack their souvenirs along with exaggerated stories of the Orient that played on their audiences' credulity and gradually wove their way into the Western imagination:

> There is a ready demand for coarsely piquant anecdotes of exotic sexual customs; the plurality of wives, the lawfulness of concubines, the universal prevalence (if Christian prejudice is to be believed) of homosexuality, the rite of circumcision, and the barbarous custom of castrating the guards and servants of the seraglio. The audience listens eagerly to tales of the violent cruelties and dark sensualities of the harem. (548-549)

Such tales are part of dominant Western mythology that imagines the Orient as akin to a body without a head; as Said observes, "the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies" (Said 188). My novella plays with this mythology, deploying all the clichés of the Orient of the Western imagination: the nightingales, hyper-sexual women, harem, deserts, dates and palms. This anti-naturalism is heightened by the magnificent unlikelihood of the narrative, creating the cumulative effect of a sexualised tall tale — like those told by Chew's early travellers — albeit one that continually undercuts its own veracity. Here Scheherazade's unreliable narration suggests the entire imaginative apparatus of the West. My decision to write from the perspective of a Middle Eastern female references this history of projection, unreliable provenance and exoticization; the frequents anachronisms woven throughout the text are just one strategy used to highlight the constructed and fictive nature of Scheherazade's voice.

From a technical perspective, the novella's detailed descriptions of decorative surfaces and objects may also be read in relation to one of the dominant tropes of Orientalism. As Rana Kabbani notes, British Orientalist paintings of the nineteenth century were "a pictorial

catalogue of the 'goods' of Empire" (*The Lure of the East* 41); significantly, these darkened interiors, crammed full of richly decorated surfaces, often acted as a visual foil to naked female skin. Such imagery emphasised that flesh and furnishings were alike, both objects to be consumed, implicitly by the Western male. In my novella, this is demonstrated when Scheherazade describes the objects that surround her during sex in the Sultan's bedroom:

> In the corner of the room, a piece of furniture that I should call a wardrobe, but cannot bear to do so. It is vast, taking up all of the wall and most of the ceiling too, a solid black ebony, with a mess of jewelled birds and tiny red flowers veining the dark wood. (3)

Marina Warner observes that "Orientalist fiction of the same period shares the hunger for the concrete" (*Stranger Magic* 185). In relation to Theophile Gautier's 1842 fable, *La mille et deuxieme nuit* (The 1002nd Night), she notes that he "juxtaposes ancient and modern visions of the Orient in a *mise-en-scène* so detailed in description it could double as an interior decorator's sales catalogue" (*Stranger Magic* 185). Warner sees this tendency to 'read down' the *Nights* as part of a nineteenth-century attitude "and its curious fundamental violation of the stories' magic nature" (*Stranger Magic* 186). The Orient was permitted to be beautiful but not to be taken seriously; we may even read the conventional relationship between East and West as a macro-level enactment of the Cartesian divide.

Yet the juxtaposition of sexuality and object, mentioned above, links to another powerful analogy used by Said: that of the stage. "The idea of representation is a theatrical one", he argues:

> … the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe. (63)

This analogy perceptively communicates this sense of the flattening and simplifying of a complex reality into a two-dimensional space, for public entertainment and consumption, on which a limited number of 'stock characters' appear. It links to actual theatrical traditions, for example, V. G. Kiernan notes that "among the figures of Victorian pantomime were sultans

with huge mustachios and scimitars" (112). The objects so crucial to Orientalism become akin to theatre props, crucial to a production enacted within the Western imagination. The analogy also recalls the deliberate construction of a set, removed from reality and lit by artificial lights, visually suggesting the *Nights'* "intimate and darkened setting" (Warner *Stranger Magic* 147) but also the importance of illusion. Most of all, the notion of an audience is embedded within the theatre metaphor, reminding us that the *Nights* is "after all, to a certain extent … created in response to European demand" (Marzolph, "Review" 111).

Similarly, my novella, with its heightened sense of artificiality and presentation of sex as performance, evokes this metaphor of a theatrical stage. Like the idea of the Orient itself, the narrative takes place in an imprecise location, organised according to the architecture of a dream; there are the same sudden twists of action, random conjunctions and leaps of reasoning. Spatially, there is the sense of a flat space made three-dimensional. The restricted locations mentioned in the narrative — bedroom, garden, menagerie — operate like theatre sets, on which a collection of stock-types perform: the beautiful ingénue, the powerful Sultan, the evil Grand Vizier, a young manservant with a secret, the treacherous maid. This emphasis on construction (via the overblown style, Oriental clichés, even the artificial divisions of the text into discrete blocks) assumes a viewer's gaze, where the voice of the spectator merges with Scheherazade's, like a child's narration as they play with their toys. This is spectacle, where each narrative clambers for attention, offering an almost hyperactive profusion of Oriental tropes. It recalls the selective focus of scholars such as Lane, writing partly for erudition, partly for popularity:

> Yet Lane could not help falling victim to the common distortion of selectivity — of choosing to stress mainly what would interest a Western reader. Thus he wrote a great deal about magic, astrology and alchemy, about hemp and opium, serpent-charmers and public dancers, enumerating superstitions and recounting bizarre incidents of a sensational nature. (Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions* 38)

Similarly, one of my aims when writing the novella was to present a re-telling of the *Nights* so loaded with Oriental stereotypes, animal metaphors and exaggerated sexuality that it would begin to 'fall apart' under the weight of its language. The wager was that a piece of writing that actively foregrounded its own unreliable narration – via increasingly ridiculous

scenarios - would make clear the arbitrary nature of many 'stories' told about women, animals and non-Western people. The reader will need to judge for themselves the success or otherwise of this strategy. Arguably, while the apparatus of its construction is constantly visible, and continually engaged with its own critique — often delivered via the strategies of irony or humour — the writing still manages to inveigle the suspension of disbelief. As we will see, this may indicate the deeply ingrained nature of Western assumptions about the instrumentality of animals, women and the East. Such assumptions are part of the broader cultural ecosystem, yet this exegesis is specifically concerned with their communication via literature.

English Literature

As demonstrated in Chapter One, the *Nights* profoundly influenced many prominent eighteenth — and nineteenth-century English writers. Because the collection was considered suitable reading material for children, this influence often occurred during their formative years. In his essay "Scheherazade in the Nursery", Brian Alderson states that "hardly a writer of note, from Johnson to Dickens, does not hint at, or mention, somewhere or other the recollected pleasure of reading the *Nights* in childhood" (82). Similarly, Melissa Dickson notes that "significant scholarly attention has been devoted to the fact that writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Mary Shelley, De Quincey, Tennyson, the Brontë sisters, and Dickens read the tales in their youth" (199) and indeed novels such as *Jane Eyre* (1847) are, like the *Nights*, "much concerned with authority and who has the power to tell their story" (198). The influence of the collection is probably best gauged by Robert Irwin's quip that it would be easier to list the writers not influenced by the *Nights* — such as William Blake and Evelyn Waugh — than attempt to trace its pervasive impact (*Companion* x). As a monolithic text, *1001 Nights* continues to engage many contemporary writers. These include A.S. Byatt in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, Salman Rushdie in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Diana Abu-Jaber in *Crescent* and Githa Hariharan in *When Dreams Travel*, as well as Australians Janette Turner Hospital, Anthony O'Neill and David Foster (*Charades*, *Scheherazade*: *A Tale*, and *Sons of the Rumour* respectively). While many of these re-tellings represent, to a greater or lesser extent, a critique of power, others stress the sexual dimension of Scheherazade's relationship with the Sultan, or examine this from a feminist perspective.

From the moment the *Nights* arrived in Europe, it operated like a fantastic literary prism, influencing writers not only as a primary text, but lying at the heart of a vast network of inter-textual or imaginative connections. It was constantly refracted back and forth in new forms. To further illustrate this ongoing phenomenon, and to connect my novella to the Oriental or pseudo Oriental literary streams of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a few examples will suffice. In the eighteenth-century, a relatively early and notable response to the *Nights*, and other contemporary Oriental materials such as the *Bibliothèque Orientale*[10], was *Vathek*, a 1786 novel by William Beckford written in the pseudo-oriental genre. Peter Caracciolo notes that "Beckford used the *Nights* and his knowledge of other oriental materials to create a fantasy that at times is more potent, bizarre and cruelly sensual than anything which had yet appeared among English imitations of the Eastern tale" (4). *Vathek* not only used the Orient as a site of imaginative liberation, but would also influence Lord Byron's later 'Turkish Tales'. These Tales, in turn, along with her early exposure to the *Nights*, would inspire Charlotte Brontë's highly personal vision of the Orient.

Vathek

Vathek tells the story of a sybaritic yet brutal Caliph, one of the Abbasid rulers of Baghdad, and grandson of the legendary Harun al-Rashid. Vathek, "addicted to women, and the pleasures of the table", was simultaneously capable of such fury that when angry, "one of his eyes became so terrible that no person could bear to behold it; and the wretch upon whom it was fixed instantly fell backward, and sometimes expired" (7). Seized with hubris, and the desire to penetrate the secrets of the heavens, Vathek constructs a huge tower, which catches fire, killing many loyal subjects in the process. When a curious messenger arrives in his kingdom, offering objects of exquisite workmanship and magical properties, such as a knife that cuts without being touched, Vathek becomes determined to trace the objects' provenance. He sets off on a quest and finally, after many acts of cruelty and violence, comes to a deserted mountain. Descending a vast staircase that appears in the rock, Vathek and his lover Nouronihar find themselves in an immense chamber, full of people with "the livid paleness of death":

[10] Before translating the Nights, Antoine Galland had earlier worked on the *Bibliotheque* (Irwin, *Companion* 15).

> a vast multitude was incessantly passing, who severally kept their right hands on their hearts, without once regarding any thing around them…. They all avoided each other, and though surrounded by a multitude that no one could number, each wandered at random unheedful of the rest, as if alone on a desert which no foot had trodden. (138)

Vathek discovers that although the vast subterranean palace is full of treasures, through which he may wander at will and "recline on these heaps of gold", it is a place of "vengeance, and despair" (144). Too late he learns that "for the sake of empty pomp and forbidden power, (he) hath sullied himself with a thousand crimes" (151). He has irretrievably turned away from that which makes him human. The novel closes with somber commentary, praising humility and ignorance as humanity's true condition, a surprisingly conventional close after the originality of the climax.

Roger Lonsdale observes that it is difficult to attach "any clear meaning or satiric purpose to *Vathek*" (Beckford viii). Problems with analysis seem to derive in part from the strangeness of the tale — so different from anything that had been seen before (Conant 69) — and from the number of parallels between the anti-hero and Beckford himself, suggesting a strongly autobiographical element. J. W. Oliver observes that the "story of an over-indulged and vastly wealthy young Caliph disregarding all moral restraints in the pursuit of his appetites is… the story of Beckford himself" (as cited in Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions* 31). The image of the tower offers a good example of this nebulous interchange between art and life. Beckford built a 280 foot tower, reportedly high enough to be seen from London, which was eventually destroyed in a fire. A tower, embodying the Caliph's hubris, also features prominently in *Vathek*. Mallarmé observed that *Vathek* starts with this tower but finishes deep beneath the earth in an enchanted vault (Borges, "Vathek" 237). This descent from sky to subterranean realm metaphorically indicates the Judeo-Christian positioning of Heaven and Hell, but also parallels the Caliph and Beckford's fall from grace. Yet beyond concrete expressions of ego, such as the tower, *Vathek's* autobiographical references include more intangible psycho-social elements. Roger Lonsdale sees the novel's "defiant, over-insistent, sometimes childish ridicule of all religion, and the unexpected power and conviction with which the Caliph's final damnation is represented" as a complex response to Beckford's "autocratic and possessive mother, with her Calvinistic leanings" (viii). If we adopt a Freudian line of analysis, the

underground chamber becomes akin to a poisoned womb, with the two main female characters — the Caliph's mother and lover — presented as chief agents in his destruction. Beckford, described by Belloc as "one of the vilest men of his time" (Borges, "Vathek" 237), was eventually exiled from British society for his sexual transgressions. *Vathek* may thus be read as a young man's expression of mocking anger, directed against Establishment hypocrisy and sexual mores, but beneath this surges a child's interminable fear of abandonment. Beckford, from occupying a position of power in British society, must have raged against the invisible bars of social exclusion.

If, as Warner suggests, the *Nights* is about telling truth to power (*Stranger Magic* 22), then *Vathek* may be read as both a critique and homage to the notion of absolute authority. "It drew on the forbidding aspects of the East, the violence of the arbitrary will released from any curb when this was looked at seriously instead of comically" (Kiernan 132). Similarly, it is impossible not to read *Vathek* as, in some way, functioning as a cautionary tale about class-based political upheaval in France: the revolution began seven years after his manuscript was written in French (1782), and after revisions of the French and English editions, three years after its first English publication. Simultaneously, Beckford was, in Lord Byron's words, "England's wealthiest son", who inherited huge wealth from his father's West Indian plantations (Beckford i) and thus with presumably a strong, class-based interest in maintaining the status quo. As the son of a famous MP and Lord Mayor of London, it is possible that Beckford took an active interest in continental politics, and that these concerns would suffuse *Vathek*; this interest is suggested by his offer (1797-8) to negotiate peace with France, an approach that was rejected by Pitt (Beckford xliii). The novel may even be considered as a reaction against the liberal and Enlightenment principles that underpinned the revolution. But regardless of whether *Vathek* is read as a juvenile expression of rage, oblique social criticism or disguised autobiography, it offers insight into how Beckford's wealth would have exposed him to enormous freedoms, in an era when — apart from social approbation — his actions would have been largely devoid of consequence. The links between the Caliph, the fictitious Sultan of the *Nights*, and Beckford himself are clear; in fact, the importance of Scheherazade's redemptive role, poignantly encapsulates by Brooks' phrase "finally telling cures" (286), is highlighted by such a comparison. *Vathek* offers an unrelenting portrait of a man sliding towards purgatory, largely deaf to messages of impending doom, acting beyond the limits of conscience. Sadly, no gifted story-teller comes to his aid.

Even as Beckford the man was shunned by British society, Beckford the writer was esteemed. In particular, a number of commentators nominate his depiction of Hell as an enduring literary achievement. Borges states, approvingly, that the "final ten pages have brought William Beckford his fame" ("Vathek" 237). Similarly, Martha Pike Conant judges that *Vathek*, while "not a great book, … is entitled to live chiefly for the sake of one remarkable scene — the catastrophe in the Hall of Eblis" (62). If the first part of *Vathek* is characterised by mockery, coarseness and flippancy, the climax sustains a powerful feeling of horror (Conant 62) that is surprisingly effective. "I would maintain that it is the first truly atrocious Hell in literature" writes Borges, comparing it to Dante's vision of purgatory which he distinguishes as "not an atrocious place; it is a place where atrocious things happen" ("Vathek" 238). Beckford's Hall of Eblis is both. The industrial scale of the torture represented by this organised and clinical Hell, its sense of living entities consuming themselves, foreshadows the concentration camps of the twentieth century, and to a lesser extent the factory farms of the twenty-first. Its vision of Hell as a place where people are separated not only from each other but also from nature, in a way that undermines their sense of human integrity, reminds me of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon or inspection house, with this design "first used in the construction of the famous menagerie at Versailles in the seventeenth century" (Kalof and Fitzgerald 8). Interestingly, Beckford's Hell is roughly contemporaneous with the establishment of penitentiaries in New Holland, and particularly Van Diemen's Land, themselves the concrete embodiment of exile. Closer to home, it suggests the social upheaval of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Beckford's vision of a "vast multitude…incessantly passing" suggests the working class shuffling robot-like between factory and home, pallid with exhaustion and too tired to acknowledge one another's existence, with the social cohesion of village life a distant memory. Yet as well as recalling London street-life, the Hall of Eblis also suggests a kind of interior landscape. Borges accurately describes the great subterranean hall as being like "the tunnels of a nightmare" ("Vathek" 238). Again, in an era before psychology, Beckford's Hell may represent a metaphoric awareness of what would come to be called the id, or the deep subconscious. Certainly, the breach through the surface of the earth — when Vathek and his lover descend to the Hall — representing a shift from conscious to subconscious mind, is mirrored by a significant shift in literary tone. While the writing largely proceeds with a kind of jaunty, class-based insouciance — priggish, British

public school and self-conscious — it drops into a somber urgency towards the end of the narrative, like a skater breaking through a frozen lake.

As we have seen, Beckford uses the Orient as site of sexual permissiveness and imaginative liberation. In this intangible space, he explores ideas that may have been considered taboo in his own context, circumventing social mores in the creative process. In a similar way, my novella uses the amorphous literary construct of the Orient to deconstruct ideas about female narrative, sexuality and representation. In both cases, the Orient is viewed as an imaginative platform from which a writer's 'truth' is told, and which offers the freedom to deliver a potent social critique.

Arabian Nights and Days

As the *Nights* was reflected and refracted through English literature, and British imperial power grew, this had an impact on the collection's status in its countries of origin. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, an increasing number of important Arabic writers were influenced by the *Nights*, for example Naguib Mahfouz, Tayeb Salih, Gamal el-Ghitan, Radwa Ashour, Elias Khoury, Hanan Al-Shaykh (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 9). Like William Beckford, some chose to use the *Nights* as a vehicle to deliver social commentary fused with autobiographical elements. Towards the end of the twentieth century, a powerful example is to be found in the work of Nobel Prize winning Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz.

In *Arabian Nights and Days*, first published in Arabic in 1979, Mahfouz offers a powerful indictment of the misuse of power and corrupt social institutions. The overall impression is of a text using parable and the smoke and mirrors of fiction, as well as the lofty anonymity of a medieval text, to offer a potent contemporary critique. Mahfouz himself reportedly observed that the *Nights*' setting provided a good backdrop for both "political realism" and "metaphysical speculation" (qtd. in Marzolph and van Leeuwen 633). Indeed, the standard disclaimer at the front of the book, reassuring the reader that all characters are fictitious, seems to ring hollow. Drawing on key aspects of the *Nights* frame, Mahfouz presents a vision of a city where the Sultan's ethical blindness and brutality has filtered down into every level of governance. Throughout the narrative, successive waves of city leadership commit various criminal acts — murder, rape, theft, blackmail, extortion, bribery or fraud — and are usually tried and executed, only to be replaced by similarly corrupt individuals. It is only quite late in the narrative that the Sultan, troubled by his past slaughter, experiences an epiphany.

Walking in his palace gardens, he is unable to enjoy his surroundings, as he suddenly recognises that power without conscience is meaningless.

> The falseness of specious glory was made clear to him, like a mask of tattered paper that does not conceal the snakes of cruelty, tyranny, pillage, and blood that lie behind it. He cursed his father and his mother, the givers of pernicious legal judgments and the poets, the cavaliers of deception, the robbers of the treasury, the whores from noble families, and the gold that was plundered and squandered on glasses of wine, elaborate turbans, fancy walls and furniture, empty hearts and the suicidal soul, and the derisive laughter of the universe. (216)

The location of this epiphany in the palace gardens suggests the tension between nature and culture, yet also provides a striking contrast between the lovely surrounds and the Sultan's grotesque behaviour, or the 'unnatural' conduct of humans. The novel concludes with a penitent Sultan abandoning "throne and glory, woman and child" (222). The city itself, almost an external manifestation of his inner turmoil, ends with a Marxist utopian vision of the poor assuming civic leadership. With this triumph of humble working men — honest and incorruptible — the cycle of corruption ends.

Interestingly, Mahfouz's novel begins where the original frame ends, at the close of the 1001 nights. Similarly, my novella suggests that Scheherazade is nearing the end of her captivity:

> I have given up counting the number of days I have been here: I think it is about a thousand. I know that he will keep me alive, and play with me, listen to my stories until he is no longer fascinated. Then I will be as dead as the hundreds of other girls he enjoyed before I came here. (14)

This is reinforced later in the narrative, where Scheherazade again questions the length of her captivity, and by implication the literary apparatus surrounding her characterisation. "I used to keep a record, a piece of paper scratched with dates, but now I am no longer sure. I think it has been about a thousand, maybe more, perhaps less" (166). But while my novella positions Scheherazade as narrator, recording attempts to navigate her own way out of the cage, Mahfouz humanises this period by imagining it through the worried eyes of her father:

> Three years he had spent between fear and hope, between death and expectation; three years spent in the telling of stories; and, thanks to those stories, Shahrzad's life span had been extended. Yet, like everything else, the stories had come to an end, had ended yesterday. So what fate was lying in wait for you, O beloved daughter of mine? (1)

His fears are unfounded. The Sultan pronounces Scheherazade's stories "white magic" adding that "they open up worlds that invite reflection" (2) and she becomes his wife. In the original text, this wedding is treated with all the frenzied excitement of a fireworks display: the city was decorated for thirty days, at the expense of the royal treasury not the citizens, while the Sultan gave precious robes to the Vizier and his advisors, as well as distributing alms to the poor. "The splendour of the decorations had never been matched before; drums were beaten; pipes sounded and every entertainer displayed his skill" (Lyons 734). Instead Mahfouz depicts a reluctant bride, haunted by her husband's unconscionable conduct, and physically revolted by him. "Whenever he approaches me I breathe the smell of blood", Scheherazade tells her father (4). Unlike the triumphant culmination of the original frame tale, it seems that repentance is insufficient. Mahfouz describes the ethical consequences of the Sultan's killings radiating outwards, poisoning not only the culture of the city, but his relationship with his bride.

Thematically, the relationship between Mahfouz's Scheherazade and the Sultan echoes his growing disenfranchisement. This is a man who has lost faith in power, but cannot yet conceive of another way of living. Scheherazade's spontaneous physical abhorrence parallels the Sultan's internal disintegration, until he finally confronts her with this aversion: "The truth … is that your body approaches while your heart turns away" (217). Ironically, it is only once the Sultan becomes truly penitent, and renounces the outward trappings of power, that his bride opens her heart to him. But throughout the novel, Scheherazade offers an explicit ethical critique. For example, in a conversation with her mother she observes that the "worst affliction a man can suffer is to be under the delusion he is a god" (99). And when the vizier suggests that the Sultan operates in his own moral sphere, and is "not like the rest of humankind", she vehemently disagrees. "But a crime is a crime. How many virgins has he killed! How many pious and God-fearing people has he wiped out! Only hypocrites are left in the kingdom" (4). This explicit commentary, coupled with her visceral language, may

therefore be read as a plea for justice; within Mahfouz's critique of absolute power and moral consequence, Scheherazade represents a kind of 'moral compass' or the personification of conscience.

In contrast, my Scheherazade character indicates the complex relationship between power, subjugation and desire. The relationship between the Sultan and Scheherazade is played out in an emotional and psychological landscape where ideas around relational autonomy, domestic violence and Stockholm Syndrome are given prominence. Whereas Mahfouz's Scheherazade is represented as having a high degree of moral authority in their relationship, and thus the ability to offer a dispassionate ethical critique, my protagonist struggles with the complexity of her feelings towards the Sultan; as such, she is often unable to sufficiently disengage from her situation to formulate an objective response. Here agency is presented as a fluid entity, strongly marked by an individual's social context and perception of their own power. While Mahfouz's Scheherazade is imagined as a centred character — strongly aligned with her family and own value system, stoic and morally attuned — my character fears losing her identity or sense of self. At one point, late in the narrative, she concludes that "fear of a rival, even a beautiful dead woman, is nothing compared to the terror of losing oneself" (175). Unlike the *Nights*, where a long, magnificently detailed narrative arc brings the couple together, these re-tellings speak of people gradually moving apart. Mahfouz's Sultan leaves his wife once his unworthiness becomes clear to him, while my Scheherazade leaves the Sultan only once they achieve intimacy, or a more equal status. This equality is communicated by the "comfortable" (195) nature of their final embrace, a word that effectively signals the termination of desire, or more generally ends the meta-narratives of romantic or erotic literature. It is worth noting that as she leaves, the Sultan pretends to sleep, symbolically absolving himself of this challenge to his authority. As Scheherazade notes, "For some reason, he has decided to let me go, or rather he has decided not to stop me leaving" (195). There is clearly an ethical difference between actively choosing to do good or evil, as opposed to choosing the passive path of inaction; thus, this scene has consequences for reading the overall trajectory of the narrative, but also indicates the provisional nature of the Sultan's return to humanity. Importantly, Scheherazade defines herself oppositionally to his lack, yet finally recognises something of the Sultan's brutality within herself: "Although the man lying on the bed in front of me is a murderous beast, I feel a kinship with him that I will never find with another. He is the nightmare that has made me

human" (196). The reference to beast suggests the collapsing of the species barrier and links to a long literary tradition where abhorrent human behaviour is described in bestial terms. Incidentally, this is one of the few times where Scheherazade gives an indication that she has survived life at the palace, and is looking back on an earlier episode in her life.

In my novella, identity is strongly connected with artistry, and story-telling is conceived as one of Scheherazade's multiple paths to empowerment. My Scheherazade suggests the dominant, post-Renaissance view of artist as an individual creator. This becomes critical to the young woman's emerging sense of identity. "When he sickens of me, as he has sickened of us all, and they drag me off to be slaughtered like a pig, I will cry out only this one truth: I am an artist" (124). As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar remind us, "For all literary artists, of course, self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative "I AM" cannot be uttered if the "I" knows not what it is" (18). My novella positions storytelling as a key human attribute, vital to the process of identity making. Having discovered her identity as an artist, Scheherazade regards stories as the constituent parts of this entity, and the imagination as a form of currency within this system. "We are made of stories, and having sold my own collection to cheat death, I find that I have none left for myself" (132). Yet stories not only function to consolidate Scheherazade's sense of self, they also help attenuate her trauma. Magali Cornier Michael describes the "teaching and healing aspects of storytelling" and observes that the *Nights* "positions fantastic storytelling as enormously powerful and useful to individuals who have experienced trauma arising from the effects of violence or the threat of violence" ("Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*", 315). So Scheherazade embodies not only one of the novella's key themes — the power of the imagination — but also the centrality of art to human experience. The positioning of my Scheherazade as the source of many of her stories underscores this link between creativity, identity and empowerment.

The *Nights* now

Regardless of the degree to which the *Nights* was perceived as representative of Arab culture during the imperial era, it is interesting to note that a number of contemporary versions are using the text as a vessel for ideas about culture, race, identity and power. In 1983, Angela Carter made the broad observation that there were

> certain Third World writers, both female and male, who are transforming actual fiction forms to both reflect and to precipitate changes in the way people feel about themselves — putting new wine in old bottles and, in some cases, old wine in new bottles. Using fictional forms inherited from the colonial period to create a critique of that period's consequences. (*Shaking a Leg* 42)

Within the postcolonial dynamic, a number of more recent writers are using the *Nights* as a vehicle to insist on plurality, to champion multiple or hybrid identities that transcend the polarities of East and West, and to create new literary forms that align with these aims. In some cases, this includes a reconfiguration of the line between human and animal.

Twenty years after the first publication of Mahfouz's novel, Githa Hariharan — winner of the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Fiction (1993) — continues his focus on the "after life of the *Nights*" (Parashkevova 88) and act of 'writing conscience' into the world. In *When Dreams Travel* (1999), Hariharan uses characters from the *Nights* to explore both contemporary women's issues and re-examine "some deeply embedded misogynist ideologies in cherished patriarchal texts" (Sankaran 66). Like Mahfouz, Hariharan questions the redemption of Shahriyar, noting the injustice of a person escaping punishment for their crimes; the implication is that without a denouement, such attitudes continue unchallenged into the present. In Hariharan's novel Dunyazad's mother, Raziya, appears to her in a dream.

> 'Does remorse always absolve? Is there no such thing as a permanently brutalized man?' Raziya's words have all the certainty they did not in life. 'This man,' mouths her potent whisper, 'thought he was God and every night and morning proved this pitiful delusion. Do you have so much compassion to spare?' (Hariharan 96)

Interestingly, this mirrors the conversation that occurs between Scheherazade and her mother in *Arabian Nights and Days*: "The worst affliction a man can suffer is to be under the delusion he is a god" (99). In a story that parallels histories of colonial and political oppression, and contemporary discrimination against women, Hariharan imagines the aftershock of the Sultan's murders. This includes some of the more practical details surrounding the killings; for example, Shahriyar's bed has to be moved into a less dangerous location because

> Some of the virgins had angry fathers, shamed brothers, desperate mothers and sisters. By the time Shahrzad and Dunyazad moved to the palace, a thousand brides had died. Shahryar's bed lay in its dungeon throbbing with festering secrets, the palace rising like a fort above it. (Hariharan 67)

When Dreams Travel "belongs to a stream of contemporary reworkings that emphasise the Dunyazad role" (Parashkevova 87). By doing so it invites the reader to consider what other stories or voices have been overlooked or forgotten. The story has a complex structure, with a narrative that jumps from past into future, often mediated via mirrors, dreams or reflective surfaces that act almost like time-travel portals (Parashkevova 87). This device suggests that the past will continue to surface into the present until injustice is addressed. According to Vassilena Parashkevova, *When Dreams Travel* explores "the persistent rigidity of preexisting scripts — of fairy tales, of myths, of fictions about women" (87). For example, at one point a character exclaims "'Is there no way out of this old story?'" (231) and she is thus able to escape a dangerous forest through this realisation that "she is living a script" (Parashkevova 86). Here gender identities are conflated with stories in high cultural circulation, connecting with Donileen Loseke's observation about the political importance of narrative: "it is not surprising that many social movements now are characterized as "identity movements," the goals of which are to construct new narratives or to change moral evaluations of existing narratives at all levels of social life" (663). To put this more succinctly: change the story, change the outcome. It also suggests that by identifying these narratives as constructions, women may experience a critical transformation. My Scheherazade initially 'goes along with the script' of her narrative, enacting her portrayal as a lusty virgin/poor-little-me with aplomb, seemingly unaware that she is participating in a narrative that has been performed many times before. It is only as the novella progresses that her story begins to deviate from the accepted cultural script. By the end, she metaphorically rides out of her own story, leaving conventional narrative tropes behind.

Similar to Angela Carter's observation about imploding narrative tropes from within (*Shaking a Leg* 42), Hariharan's novel introduces us to the concept of 'storyseekers' who enter and transform the stories they find, either by engaging with their tellers or changing these tellers — or the story-seeker themselves — into a character (Parashkevova 89). This fracturing of the narrative landscape not only destabilizes the line between 'truth' and 'fiction', but

transforms the Scheherazade frame, allowing stories to enter from multiple viewpoints and from many tellers. This is a feature my novella shares. In Hariharan's writing, this suggests a sharing of narrative voice, with storytelling power often located within collaborative or teaching relationships as opposed to hierarchical ones. As such, the structure of the novel chimes with its political concerns, and specifically the idea of women reclaiming traditional narratives and adapting them for new purposes. The structure and framing of Hariharan's stories articulate "a new rhythm that moves between variations on and deviations from the familiar frame narrative, the centre stage, the power hub" (Parashkevova 88), a repositioning that speaks to both gender and postcolonial cultures. As Chita Sankaran suggests, the novel operates to "centre those marginalised in different ways by erstwhile colonial and enduring patriarchal power structures" (67). In my novella, the sharing of narrative voice highlights the multi-dimensionality of the Scheherazade character, embedding her in a rich social network — literally a narrative economy — and narrative's role in shaping personal and social identities. The fact that stories arrive from multiple directions suggests both the fluidity of stories and their endless capacity for reinvention.

The physicality of Hariharan's writing is impressive. Scheherazade is imagined in graphic, corporeal detail and also as embedded within a network of social relationships. As such, this unpicks the narrative knots that surround depictions of Scheherazade, allowing her to be seen from the perspective of other characters. My depiction of Scheherazade-as-performer, aligns with Hariharan's characterisation — "Shahrzad has got used to being on-stage" (127) — and specifically the erotic nature of her relationship with the Sultan:

> Eyes glazed, jaw hanging loose, Shahryar moans like a stag that has escaped the tiger only to die of its wounds. And there, there is Wise Shahrzad, her skin dripping with sweat and slime. Lying on her back, breasts splayed, legs thrown apart. Her eyes are shut. She looks incapable of saying a word again. (Hariharan 56)

It is notable that the animal language of this passage also finds echo in a hybridised character, Satyasama, one of the "freaks who are only half-women" (90) in the harem, with "a sheath of hair all over her body, too dark to be called down. It was more like a sleek, lightweight fur" (91). Satyasama dies fairly early in the narrative, metaphorically passing narrative licence to another character by kissing her and leaving a date-shaped patch of fur

on the girl's face (Parashkevova 88), but continues to exert her presence throughout; defying categorisation, and frequently vilified, she nevertheless communicates a vast sense of human potentiality. In a sense, Satyasama may be read as an archetypal figure denoting art and artists.

Across different cultures, the *Nights* is being used as a platform to explore issues of identity and power and how these are communicated through storytelling. Diana Abu-Jaber's recent novel, *Crescent* (2003), is an examination of hybrid identity and literary forms that explores the consequence of Arab migration to, and inter-marriage within, contemporary America. "Crescent is just one of many contemporary texts continuing the tradition of adapting *Nights* to a particular socio-historical context, in this case late twentieth — and early twenty-first-century U.S. culture" (Michael, "*Arabian Nights* in America" 317). Like Hariharan, Abu-Jaber adapts the structure of the *Nights* as an inclusive strategy linked to the performance of identity. Magali Cornier Michael observes that both the content and structure of the novel unsettle "xenophobic stereotypes" ("*Arabian Nights* in America" 314), with the rich descriptions of food marking regional differences in Arab populations. Specifically, the writing fuses the Western form of the novel with storytelling practices usually associated with the East. Like Hariharan's novel, this indicates Michael's point that new or hybridised identities necessitate the creation of new storytelling forms. This is particularly apt for Arab Americans, described by Joanna Kadi as "The Most Invisible of the Invisibles" (xix). Michael sees novels such as *Crescent* as part of a wider dynamic: "I would argue that many writers in the United States and internationally are creating fascinating hybrid narratives as a means of exploring the phenomenon of hyphenated, in-process identities that dominates contemporary life" ("*Arabian Nights* in America" 329). As we will see in the next chapter, these hybridised identities sometimes extend across species lines. Angela Carter's penultimate novel, *Nights at the Circus*, continues this pattern of using the *Nights* as a platform from which to critique power, but with a specific focus on the female body.

Chapter Three: Beautiful Beasts

Nights at the Circus

First published in 1984, *Nights at the Circus* tells the story of Fevvers, a late Victorian circus artiste with wings, who may or may not be a genuine human-animal hybrid. It is a complex text, featuring a kind of tug-of-war between narratorial perspectives, distortion of time and reality, delivered with the frequent implication of unreliable narration. "Like so much of her work," writes Margaret E. Toye, "the novel explores boundaries and limits, marginal figures, mimesis, performance, theatricality, spectacle and looking, carnival, the grotesque, sexuality, and the body" (482). The novel asks the reader to believe the impossible, the beautiful possibility of a 'true myth', and the hilarious scenario of a mythological figure — literally the angel in the house — adapting to life in the Victorian era. From a literary perspective, the novel continues Carter's "fiery" exploration of the fairy-tale genre, alongside a title that represents a gesture towards the *Nights* (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* 156); Marzolph and Leeuwen indicate that the collection forms the main source of inspiration for her novel (514). Certainly, Carter describes Fevvers and her adopted mother, Lizzie, as being like "not one but two Scheherezades, both intent on impacting a thousand stories into a single night" (40) and there are a number of other references to the collection or to Oriental tropes[11]. From a historical perspective, this suggests the convergence of Oriental literature with fairy tale in eighteenth-century France (Conant xxiii), a feature it shares with my novella. In particular, the novel's playful distortion of time — imagery of broken clocks or chimes recur — suggests both the fairy-tale suspension of natural physical laws (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* xxii) as well as the rapture generated by storytelling, a key theme of the *Nights*. More fundamentally, this suspension of natural laws signifies reversal: that normal rules do not apply. As noted by a number of scholars, *Nights at the Circus* may be read through a Bakhtinian lens, and strongly resonates with his ideas about carnival (for example, Toye; Mirmusa; Dennis; Michael) and the grotesque body. This is a world where a hybridised woman/animal, a figure who embodies and celebrates otherness, demonstrates power through control over her own narrative, sexuality and representation. Although carnival and the grotesque body are usually read as

[11] This interest recurs in *The Bloody Chamber*, for example a is bedroom described as having "a jinn's treasury of Oriental carpets" (65).

disruptive of normative social practices, my novella approaches such disruption via narrative, representation and sexuality. Scheherazade's skin narratives (sexual performances) function as an embodied act of representation, with her shifting relationship to story — her own voice — used to evidence her increasing sense of empowerment.

Set at the turn of the nineteenth century, in the final years of Queen Victoria's reign — "when critiques of the discrimination of imperialism, gender, and sexuality gained cultural prominence in Britain" (Douglas 10) — *Nights at the Circus* begins with Jack Walser visiting Fevvers in her dressing room after a performance. Walser, an American journalist with "eyes the cool grey of scepticism"(10), is determined to investigate Fevvers' claim that she is a genuine bird-woman. The centrality of his investigation thus reflects a question that recurs through the novel: is she fact or fiction? (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* 156). Magali Cornier Michael suggests that "one of the novel's central preoccupations is its challenge to the traditional Western opposition between reality and fiction" ("Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus"* 495) and as Abigail Dennis observes, *Nights at the Circus* "revels in ambivalence" (117). The uncertain reality of Fevvers' story underpins her relationship with Walser, and also the relationship of the reader to the text; this is patterned in my depiction of the relationship between the Sultan and Scheherazade, and my novella's frequent inference of unreliable narration. This inference is announced by the title, which conflates the distinctive genres of memoir and journal, through the incorporation of objects such as high heels and a corset, via the exaggerated use of stereotypical Oriental imagery, and also communicated by the tone: in turns breathless, ironic and beguiling. As Abigail Dennis observes of Carter's text:

> A sense of uncertainty pervades the novel: that of the audience who flock to see the spectacle of the bird-woman who seems real, yet cannot be; that of journalist Walser, who spends the narrative (unsuccessfully) attempting to make sense of Fevvers's stories and prove her a fraud; and that of the reader, who Carter engages in a sometimes pleasurable, sometimes frustrating attempt to discern a narrative "truth". (117).

The opening section of the novel clearly foregrounds the possibility that Fevvers may be a fake. It records her false eyelashes, wings hidden under a "soiled" dressing gown, as well as her arch offer to share a drink with Walser: "a touch of sham?" (8). Fevvers' hometown of London is described as a city "in which the principal industries are the music hall and the

confidence trick" (8) while Walser is a "connoisseur of the tall tale" (11) with a "characteristically American generosity towards the brazen lie" (19). By exploring this liminal zone between truth and fiction, the novel sets up an imaginative space — rather like a circus ring itself — where supposedly solid constructs (time, gravity, space, gender, bodily integrity, reality, humanity) become open to question. As Magali Cornier Michael observes, this challenge to an objective narrative 'truth' functions to destabilise power across a number of platforms:

> The novel's rejection of any neat demarcation between reality and fiction functions as a pivotal strategy for undermining the Western conception of the subject and of traditional gender categories and for offering forms of liberating power. ("Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*" 495)

Similarly, my novella's implication of unreliable narration allows the reader to stand back and question not only the discourses of Orientalism, but also the gender and cultural stereotypes that allow Scheherazade's invidious predicament to be exoticised, both now and in the past. This sense of unreliable narration is reinforced by the novella's structure, where stories arrive from various sources and intersect with the apparent 'truth' of Scheherazade's narrative. This parallels Carter's structure, where, as Michael observes, Fevvers' "narrative is fragmented by various embedded stories, told by and about women, that further destabilize notions of reality, truth, and authorship" ("Angela Carter's *Nights at the* Circus" 495). Thematically, *Nights at the Circus* is organised around a series of challenges to the dichotomies of fact/fiction, male/female and human/animal. Erin Douglas notes the intersectionality of these challenges, observing that "Fevvers's movements among these binaries trouble constructions of gender, sexuality, humanity and nationality" (9). Helen Tiffin observes that "sexism, especially the abuse of women, and racism are intrinsically interwoven with speciesism" (39). Effectively Carter plays with the reader, inviting them to unpick the interlinked structures of oppression, like unraveling knitting. As Lisa Kemmerer writes in her Introduction to *Sister Species: Women, Animals, and Social Justice*, the world may be seen as divided into oppositional, hierarchical categories that undergird systems of domination, consumption and exploitation.

> Through dualism, those living in patriarchies tend to categorize in terms of opposites, beginning with male and female, and extending to a plethora of other contrived divisions, such as white/other races, human/animal, culture/nature, and reason/emotion. (11)

A powerful example of Carter's challenge to one of these fundamental Western binaries — human/animal — may be found in the passages that describe a troupe of circus chimpanzees, and especially their interactions with Walser. They remind us that *Nights at the Circus* was published within a decade of Peter Singer's seminal text, *Animal Liberation*, when ideas about 'speciesism' and the species barrier were becoming increasingly prominent, and of Carter's ability "to anticipate intellectual currents before they became fashionable" (Dennis 118). In one passage, the chimpanzees rehearse their classroom act, with one animal imitating a teacher and the others his students. Then the Professor "leapt lightly across the barrier" (108) and made eye contact with Walser[12].

> Walser never forgot this first, intimate exchange with one of these beings whose life ran parallel to his, this inhabitant of the magic circle of difference, unreachable…but not unknowable; this exchange with the speaking eyes of the dumb. It was like the clearing of a haze[13]. Then the Professor, as if acknowledging their meeting across the gulf of strangeness, pressed his tough forefinger down on Walser's painted smile, bidding him be silent. (108)

The questioning of the primacy of language as a form of communication is highlighted by the Professor's actions, just as this reminds us that human language, and cognitive abilities connected with language, such as rationality, are often relied on as evidence of human superiority. Although rationality itself is a complex construct, Susan Hurley and Matthew Nudds note it "is one of the main hooks on which human distinctiveness and specialness has been hung" (80). By placing the chimpanzees within a classroom setting, Carter implies that just as ideas about 'humanity' and 'animality' are constructed, so may they be reconstructed

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[12] It is possible that the reference to 'barrier' — that is species barrier — continues a series of puns found throughout the writing, announced by the novel's title and embodied by the winged Fevvers' riotous deconstruction of Victorian angel in the house imagery.

[13] Interesting this language, "the clearing of a haze" (291) recurs in the final stages of the novel, where a transmogrified Walser sees Fevvers — and by extension all women — afresh.

to produce alternative ontologies and epistemologies. This is reinforced by the chimpanzees' interest in studying Walser's vestigial tail, and his comment that they were exploring Darwin's theory from the other end. In my novella, references to the menagerie are intended to suggest the species barrier, with the menagerie gates and cage bars a concretised representation of this idea. For example, "soon we arrive at the huge iron gates of the menagerie, the gates that separate man from beast, but in my heart, I know the division does not exist" (194). Here Scheherazade distances herself from rationality — a key indicator of humanity (Lakoff and Johnson 3) — and relies instead on an emotional platform to critique this barrier; her reference to "man" is also important because it implies that the female experience may not fully correspond to this binary, or that she has not fully internalised the human/animal distinction. This is reinforced when she uses the word 'fur' to refer to her pubic hair. Implicitly, this challenges the prevalent discourses of the species barrier, represented and enforced by human language; and simultaneously the 'wrongness' of the language reminds the reader that such barriers are a construction.

The numerous human-animal crossovers woven throughout *Nights at the Circus*, often delivered via the unstable narration of a bird-woman, posit humanity itself as a 'great fiction'. Erin Douglas observes that as a "half-bird and half-woman, Fevvers … challenges human and bodily norms that govern how people's genders, sexualities, and nationalities are read, lived and recognized" (1). Carter appears to suggest that what makes us human is not necessarily innate, but an act of choice, more about the social processes of doing rather than the biological ones of being. This is supported by Carter's early realisation that the "social fiction of my 'femininity' was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing" (Carter, *Shaking a Leg* 38). By acknowledging human status as provisional rather than absolute, Carter erodes the absolute certainties of related binaries, and thus destabilises the systemic enactment of these binaries: the central tenets of capitalism, patriarchy, the species barrier, as well as class, cultural and racial hierarchies all come under fire. Toye notes that throughout the novel, Fevvers bursts "through cage after cage and institution after institution" (485). The novel thus represents both a collective coming to consciousness — heralded by Lizzie's political activism, and also by groups such as the chimpanzees and the panopticon prisoners — and the associated transformations wrought by changes to personal identity.

Learning to identify structures of oppression, or recognising female collusion in this process — a key aspect of Carter's practice (Dennis 119; Toye 481) — as foundational aspects of becoming self are also key themes of my novella. In her much cited "Cyborg Manifesto", Donna Haraway observes that "Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility" (*Manifestly Haraway* 6). Scheherazade uses stories and her skin narratives to evolve a more mature identity, symbolically moving through the socially sanctioned roles of daughter and wife to eventually claim a hybridised or in-process status — a becoming-free — that suggests greater autonomy. This reminds us not only of Dan McAdams comment that storytelling may be "*the* way through which human beings make sense of their own lives and the lives of others" (as cited in Loseke 661), but also of Donileen R. Loseke's observation that as part of this process, "symbolic codes in the Western world typically construct one identity in contrast to another… often as binary opposites" (666). Scheherazade finds a truer sense of self by collapsing the binaries — human/animal, male/female, mind/body, culture/nature — that function to deny her identity, and by extension, her capacity to exercise power. When she uses the word 'fur' to describe her pubic hair, as mentioned earlier, this also suggests she has mentally conflated the distinction between human and animal bodies, and that this is important to her identity. Writing on Carter's "The Tiger's Bride", Merja Makinen suggests that the final passage — where the protagonist appears to metamorphose into a tiger — be read as an expression of unbridled female libido: "beasts signify a sensuality that women have been taught might devour them, but which, when embraced, gives them power, strength and a new awareness of both self and other" (10). Carter engages with the traditional fairy tale trope of animal metamorphosis — specifically the Animal Bride or Groom tale types — and "writes across the species barrier, embracing the moment mind and body become one" (Hopcroft 217). Yet my novella considers the possibility of such a metamorphosis being impeded. In "the tiger bride", a woman is trapped in her human skin when her husband seeks to control her sexuality. In a pattern that recurs throughout my novella, this story explores the logical consequences if fairy tale tropes are taken literally; in this case, the scenario of an animal bride stripping off her human skin every night. Similarly, the indication that Scheherazade sees her body in animal terms suggests a sense of identity that is intertwined with sensory pleasure. As Carter observes, in a discussion of the story "How a Husband Weaned His Wife from Fairy Tales", pleasure itself

may be framed as a challenge to patriarchal authority: “as if pleasure itself threatened his authority. Which, of course, it did. It still does” (*Virago* xiii-xiv). Therefore, seeking pleasure implies not only agency, but a living entity who is navigating the Cartesian mind/body split by giving primacy to the body. The anarchic potential of this idea is celebrated by my novella.

By way of contrast with Scheherazade, in *Nights at the Circus* the journey of personal identity is most clearly exemplified by a male character. Right from the beginning of the novel, there is a clear sense of Walser as a de-centred subject, whose life experience appears disconnected from his nascent sense of identity.

> Yet there remained something a little unfinished about him, still. He was like a handsome house that has been let, furnished. There were scarcely any of those little, what you might call personal touches to his personality, as if his habit of suspending belief extended even unto his own being. (10)

(Intriguing, the grammar of these first two sentences suggest writing that is still in draft form, and not quite fully formed. Carter’s style thus heightens this sense of Walser as an unfinished construct, a human character seeking resolution). As a fairy-tale love interest, Walser resembles the Sultan from the *Arabian Nights*. Yet as an audience construct he also resembles the reader, trying to make sense of Fevvers’ tale, yet enthralled by its possibilities. Beyond this, he stands in for an account of the “genuine human self as essentially rational and as sharply discontinuous from the merely emotional, the merely bodily, and the merely animal elements” (Plumwood, “Nature, Self, and Gender” 5). And beyond even this, he perhaps signifies the Western psyche, disabled by its own rationality, yet instinctively seeking to heal a rift with nature and the animal other. From the moment Walser succumbs to Fevvers’ narrative enchantment, like the Sultan of the *Nights,* and joins the circus — literally the carnival in this case — he participates in the Bakhtinian possibility of reversal. Paradoxically, it is only when he abandons the certainties of rational anthropocentricism, and by implication the interconnected structures of patriarchy and capitalism, that he is finally able to embrace a more nuanced, authentic human identity. Carter observes that “he was as much himself again as he ever would be, and yet that ‘self’ would never be the same again”;

love has permanently expanded Walser's emotional spectrum, introducing him to fear "in its most violent form" (292) and through this anxiety, "the beginning of conscience" (293). In a sense, this is true to the spirit of the *Nights*, where the Sultan gradually learns to abandon the rigidity of thinking that has led to his madness. As Warner observes, under Scheherazade's influence Shahriyar is "tantalized into discovering more about the greater complexities and subtleties of human psychology" (*Stranger Magic* 2). While Fevvers remains a fairly static character, Walser's journey throughout the novel is transformative; he moves from a somewhat stereotypical depiction to a characterisation that is genuinely surprising. Late in the novel, he is able to step back and consider his life experience to date, concluding "all that seemed to happen to me in the third person as though, most of my life, I watched it but did not live it" (294). This dynamic is effectively reversed in my novella, with the Sultan something akin to a theatre prop wielded by Scheherazade during the performance of her coming to self. However, when the Sultan releases the finches, foreshadowing Scheherazade's coming freedom, it appears to indicate a belated realisation that other entities have the right to determine their own destiny; yet this is undercut by his assassination of the Grand Vizier and the maid. Through his actions, we see that he is able to relinquish control only so far as this does not directly challenge his authority. In contrast to Walser's, his is a partial transformation at best.

Nights at the Circus celebrates reversal and the associated dissolution of fixed boundaries and hierarchies. The Fevvers character represents a strong counterpoint to the *Arabian Nights'* representation of Scheherazade, and by extension, many of the characteristics traditionally associated with women. While Scheherazade's motivations and conduct are often framed in altruistic terms — Peter Caracciolo speaks of her valiant effort to win the Sultan back "to love and humanity" (xv) — Carter exaggerates her manipulative aspect. Thus, Carter frees the Scheherazade character from her literary cage, away from intrinsic satisfaction for the care of others, towards a strong focus on the self; this is reinforced by Fevvers' strong desire for material rewards and various forms of personal consumption. In addition, Carter foregrounds the corporeal as a strategy to oppose the conventional characterisation of Scheherazade. Warner observes this remarkable disconnect between mind-Scheherazade and body-Scheherazade, noting that she manages to produce three children "unnoticed by her groom" (*Stranger Magic* 5). Yet Carter's characters are never far removed from the corporeal realm; she gives her Scheherazade a body and an appetite,

sexual and otherwise. “No matter how metaphysically elevated her subject, she never forgets the primacy of the body and its appetites” (Dennis 117). This focus in turn “frustrates the traditional Western dichotomy between soul-self and body in which the body — and in turn the material world — is relegated to irrelevance and inferiority” (498) but also functions to ground utopian feminism (Michael, “Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*” 519). More importantly, it highlights power as expressed through the body — Sarah Sceats writes that “Food and eating in Angela Carter’s writing are thoroughly enmeshed with sex and power” (33) — a theme that my novella also explores. My representation of Scheherazade is firmly grounded in the corporeal realm, and she reverses many of the characteristics traditionally associated with women, such as modesty, altruism, denial, self-sacrifice and, at least in the West, the attenuation of sexual pleasure. Her meta-narrative is reinforced by the stories embedded in the text. For instance, “the woman who was sick of her husband” begins conventionally enough, reinforced by the utilisation of fairy tale tropes such as “there was once” (126). But the story quickly undermines standard depictions of female attractiveness — the story describes the protagonist’s grey hair “like snow falling over basalt in winter” (127) and “the rippled fat of her pearly thighs” (130) — to create a narrative of difference and inclusion for female bodies. Beyond this, the woman’s re-negotiation of the power dynamic within her marriage suggests Michèle Barrett’s point that familial structures influence female sexuality: “There can be no doubt that the familial and general ideological processes by which the categories of masculine and feminine are established and reproduced in our society lead, at the very least, to a disposition towards ‘appropriate’ forms of eroticism” (67). In the context of my narrative, “the woman who was sick of her husband” performs a number of other functions. It represents part of Scheherazade’s ‘softening up’ of the Sultan: effectively she is telling him, ‘look, this man let this woman be herself, and it turned out well for him. Why don’t you give it a try?’ In terms of familial relationships and female sexuality, it suggests to the reader that things do not have to be a certain way, that there is beauty in diversity and difference, and that while routes to empowerment are highly individual, many of them run through the body. By conflating sexual expression with self-expression, it suggests that both are pivotal to an authentic expression of female identity.

Consumption themes

In *Nights at the Circus*, Fevvers ostentatiously displays her appetites, notably for food and valuable commodities; this closely resembles my Scheherazade's overt performance of sexual desire. Margaret E. Toye regards Fevvers as "an important locus for developing Carter's interest in consumption" (483), as she consumes vast quantities of food, cash and jewelry largely as a demonstration of material, corporeal and sexual power. Throughout the novel, themes of consumption are thus interwoven with a performance of female empowerment; yet this critique resists gender absolutism, and may be seen as a plea for freedom that goes far beyond simple role reversal. As Margaret Atwood suggests of Carter's writing:

> society may slant things so that women appear to be better candidates for meathood than men and men better candidates for meat-eating, the nature of men is not fixed by Carter as inevitably predatory, with females as their "natural" prey. Lambhood and tigerishness may be found in either gender, and in the same individual at different times. (121-122)

Toye also underlines the crucial theme of consumption within Carter's practice, observing "her identification of the need to subvert and refigure economies of consumption as a central component for creating new economies of identity, aesthetics, ethics, and politics" (481). As well as powerfully expressing personal identity, by actively critiquing the socio-cultural structures that deliver economic and corporeal subjugation, consumption here becomes a form of protest. "The play of appetites is a constant in her complicated representations of power and desire and challenging of the *status quo*" (Sceats 12). This is particularly the case with food and eating, arguably foundational to all other forms of consumption, yet until recently somewhat overlooked as a subject of study. In *The Sociology of Food and Eating*, Julia Twigg argues that "seemingly trivial or mundane aspects of life, such as food and food patterns, touch at times on the most profound of issues" but we often fail to analyse some of these "most deeply embedded and fundamental patterns within a culture" (18). In contrast, Carter continually asks her readers to question: 'who is eating whom?' or more specifically, 'who has the power to eat whom?' Yet these questions possess a strong ethical dimension. We may interpret this intense interest in alimentary consumption as a critique of the food-chain — an idea at the heart of Singer's *Animal Liberation* — or perhaps a broader response to the heightened interest in Animal Rights that occurred during the last quarter of the

twentieth century. It may also be viewed as a relatively early, poignant macro-level plea against the destructive tendencies of Western consumerism and for sustainability principles. For example, Fevvers' appetite for cash and jewels leads her into two dangerous trysts — with Rosencreutz and the Grand Duke, respectively — from which she narrowly escapes with her life. Abigail Dennis therefore concludes that *Nights at the Circus* "advocates an ethics of appetite that allows for both satisfaction and restraint in order to maintain a balance between selfishness and self-determination" (126). As a bird-woman, Fevvers is ideally placed to deliver such a critique because she embodies the consequences of unbridled consumption, not only for humans but also animal populations.

Like Fevvers, the Scheherazade character in my novella explicitly performs her appetites for food, sex and material goods. It is significant that as she leaves the palace, and is on the point of achieving her longed-for freedom, she pauses to retrieve a diamond necklace. It is a choice that reveals much about her values and motivations. During her incarceration, Scheherazade offers detailed descriptions about the objects that surround her, particularly when they relate to international trade or commerce. For example, "A squadron of maids arrived with instructions to dress my hair up in tortoiseshell combs and adorn me in a blue silk dress, shining China cloth, the colour of a summer sky" (190). This not only reflects her awareness of herself as an object of consumption, but is akin to Rana Kabbani's observation about the crammed surfaces of Oriental painting resembling "a pictorial catalogue of the 'goods' of Empire" (41). In this way, Scheherazade may be read as the voice of the West, admiring yet restlessly acquisitive. The fact that her narrative is framed as a cultural artefact from the Victorian era connects to Said's critique, particularly his point that Orientalism was inextricably linked to the global expansion in empire and mercantile systems of the nineteenth century: "the period of immense advance in the institutions and content of Orientalism coincides exactly with the period of unparalleled European expansion" (41).

By connecting my depiction of Scheherazade with themes of consumption, I am endeavouring to make a number of points. First, Scheherazade's depiction as a consuming object is consistent with Orientalism's narrow lens, particularly in relation to nineteenth-century representations of women. For example, Said highlights how Gustave Flaubert's well-known passages describing his encounter with a prostitute objectified and sexualised representations of Eastern women. "Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she

never represented her emotions, presence, or history" (6). Using the industrial metaphors of the era, Flaubert framed the courtesan as a sexualised machine, incapable of human sensibility: "she makes no distinction between one man and another man" (Said 187). Said goes on to suggest that this uni-directional encounter between individuals runs parallel to macro-level discourses. "It fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled" (6). Extending Said's point about Western objectification of Eastern women, Rana Kabbani makes explicit the connection between female commodification and empire building, particularly during the Victorian era:

> All women were inferior to men; Eastern women were doubly inferior, being women *and* Easterners. They were an even more conspicuous commodity than their Western sisters. They were part of the goods of empire, the living rewards that white men could, if they wished to, reap. They were there to be used sexually, and if it could be suggested that they were inherently licentious, then they could be exploited with no qualms whatsoever. (51)

In my novella, Scheherazade is shown as consuming and consumed, an integral part of the object landscape of the Sultan's opulent palace — itself a hyper-version of Oriental literary tropes — and thus a prime target for acquisition or collection.

My second point is that Scheherazade specifically critiques her own objecthood via acts of consumption. Like Fevvers, her acquisition of material goods has a strong political dimension and, being indicative of subjective agency, often functions as an assertion of self. A specific example of this is the Sultan's gift of a diamond necklace:

> A diamond necklace blazes against my throat, its radiance greater than a midnight galaxy. Silver white stones linked by a fine gold chain, the jewels flashing blue-white, glittering silver, pulsing and strobing like mirror fragments. I am overcome. I stand there, looking in the mirror, mesmerised by the perfection of the thing. This necklace makes me more beautiful than I thought possible. (175)

Again, like the riches of the Sultan's palace, a diamond necklace — not just a single gem but a whole flawless string — represents the hyper-realisation of ideas about wealth and excess. This necklace functions on multiple levels. It may be read, superficially, as a marker of

entrapment — literally a collar, like that worn by an animal — an object that pushes Scheherazade's self-conception further towards objecthood. It reminds us of another necklace, a ruby choker, given by an earlier Carter anti-hero to his young bride. "He made me put on my choker… It was cold as ice and chilled me. He twined my hair into a rope and lifted it off my shoulders so that he could better kiss the downy furrows below my ears; that made me shudder" (*The Bloody Chamber* 17). In this context, the word downy suggests fur. From a Cartesian viewpoint, a choker creates a visual line between 'mind' and body, separating and thus reducing the power of each, that is a mindless body diminishes in status to meat, while mind is attenuated by the removal of its corporeal home. In either case, the choker signifies a loss of power.

Yet beyond this, Scheherazade's willing acceptance of the diamond necklace represents complicity in her own subjugation. She has, after all, expressed jealousy towards Olga, her "dead rival" (169), a Scandinavian woman previously murdered by the Sultan. This name recalls Carter's Olga, a prisoner of the panopticon, imprisoned for the murder of her brutal husband.

> Olga Alexandrovna acted out of the conviction that His eye was on the sparrow and therefore on even such weak, timorous and unworthy creature as herself, so that the life being beaten out of her was surely worth as much, in the general scheme of things, as the life of the man with the fists… (211)

It is possible to read the Sultan's act of violence — the consumption of one life by another — as an absolute expression of power, and Scheherazade's acceptance of the necklace as an internalisation of this paradigm. The flawless stones thus suggest their binary of corruption. More broadly, the passage above reveals a Scheherazade seduced by her own appearance, with ideas about female beauty forming the ultimate panopticon. (As we have seen, this idea is more explicitly considered in the story "the weight of beauty", intended to satirise fairy tale conventions around female beauty. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, "To be caught and trapped in a mirror… is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self". (37)). In *Nights at the Circus*, Toye suggests that Carter's use of the panopticon is "a metaphor for the condition of women in a patriarchal society" and — reflecting the structural condition of modern nuclear families — their placement in separate cells "makes

them work against each other" (485). In my novella, while Scheherazade is also isolated in her "cell" (136, 139), and trapped within the Sultan's palace, she also exhibits the characteristics of internal oppression. Her jealousy towards Olga, for example, is used by the Vizier to further undermine her self-esteem.

> "There have been many girls like you", he states. His voice is matter-of-fact, a casual observer could even describe the tone as kind: the combination is excruciating. "Just before you arrived there was an especially beautiful one, a blonde from the northern islands. (168)

Effectively, notions of female beauty function here as a cage within a cage. By locking Scheherazade into a doomed 'competition' with a dead woman, this symbolically deprives her of supportive connections with other women, even when these connections are psychic or imaginative in nature. This is indicated by Scheherazade's recurring dream, where Olga tries to tell her something but fails: "I can't hear you", I say in the dream, and again she tries, mouth opening and closing like a stranded fish. "I'm sorry, but I can't hear you…." (170). Like Fevvers, the emphasis placed on Olga's strong physique — "splendid breasts… strong thighs" (171) — and relative longevity — "she lasted five weeks" (169) — frame her as a potential source of strength, either from her perspective as a former victim of the Sultan's violence, or as a broader construct representing female knowledge and experience. Not only does jealousy cut Scheherazade off from other women, but it effectively severs her connection from herself. The dream suggests that emotion, instinct and the subconscious are potent sources of knowledge that Scheherazade is presently distancing herself from. It is only when illness forces her towards introspection, and she moves beyond insecurity, that she is able to regain her sense of self: "I regain the power I was born with, the power that we are all born with, but trade away, for lies and pretty things, like animals at the market" (174). 'Pretty things' suggests the necklace or material objects in particular, and consumer culture in general. While the necklace is a reward from the Sultan, ostensibly celebrating Scheherazade's return to good health, it actually expresses his pleasurable recognition of the extent of his control: this is evidenced by his question, "were you really so jealous of Olga that it made you sick?" (176). Thus, the diamond necklace, willingly 'consumed' by Scheherazade, functions as an index of male power and control. Interestingly, this conflating of diamonds

with danger suggests Erin Douglas' reading of Fevvers' initial lust for these jewels — "she wanted to *eat* diamonds" (Carter 182) — and how these precious stones nearly cause her undoing. Douglas writes that in this context, diamonds "come to signify the constraints and dangers of heteronormativity and imperialism" (18), structures that would deny the hybrid Fevvers — "never defined as a "real" woman, British citizen, or human" (19) — any claim to agency.

Conversely, in my novella the wearing of the necklace gradually changes to become an expression of Scheherazade's empowerment. It features at three pivotal points during the narrative: during her first visit to the harem; on the night of the storm, when she visits the Sultan in his chamber; and during the final sequence when she leaves the palace and escapes across the desert. At each of these points, the relationship between Scheherazade and the necklace changes. Read as a synecdoche of male power, the necklace indicates evolution in her relationship with the Sultan. The value of the necklace as a material item recalls Carter's point, in *The Sadeian Woman,* about the socially conditioned nature of gender relations: "relationships between the sexes are determined by history and by the historical fact of the economic dependence of women upon men" (6-7). During the harem visit, Scheherazade wears the necklace as a collar, and is rewarded by being shown the harem — a collection of humans — with herself as a privileged object within this collection. In a hall-of-mirrors kind of reductive logic, she is a privileged object wearing a privileged object. The Sultan's degree of control is indicated by her masturbation, a sexual act usually associated with individual pleasure, but here presented as a performance highly attuned to the male gaze. "Registering his intense concentration, I again lifted my breast to my mouth and tried to flick the erect nipple with my own tongue; an answering tongue darted out to moisten his lips" (179). This again recalls Nicholas Tromans' observation about the West imagining the harem, in its art, as a site of "unfettered masculine power" ("Harem and Home" 128). At this point, although she longs for escape, it appears that Scheherazade does not truly believe in the possibility of an independent life beyond the palace.

Later, on the night of the storm, Scheherazade rejects the Sultan's other gifts — and by implication his authority to control her self-presentation — but chooses to retain only one thing. "Finally I grab a cloth and wipe the carefully applied powder from my face. When I have finished, the only thing I wear is the Sultan's priceless diamond necklace" (191). That Scheherazade exercises an act of choice, and feels sufficiently confident to refuse both

material goods and control over her appearance, indicates her growing sense of agency; her decision to wear the necklace — a signifier for the Sultan himself — suggests that she brings attitudes of mutuality and reciprocity to their penultimate night. Indeed, this is the evening when he finally recognises her humanity- "Out of the darkness, I felt his eyes looking directly into my face, and I knew he was seeing me for the first time" (192)- and cedes power to her. The reference to darkness may be read literally, or metaphorically as insanity. Corporeally, she announces her freedom from his control through sexual positions that indicate both female power and pleasure. This reminds us of the last scenes of *Nights at the Circus* where, like Scheherazade, Fevvers finally surrenders her putative virginity: Walser "recalled how nature had equipped her only for the 'woman on top' position and rustled on his straw mattress" (292). This recalls the point made by Carter in *The Sadeian Woman*, that sexuality "is never expressed in a vacuum" (11) and that as it "is as much a social fact as it is a human one, it will change its nature according to changes in social conditions" (17). Thus, sexual behaviour indicates social conduct and relationships beyond the bedroom, and this is particularly marked when individual and/or collective shifts in power occur. The wearing of the necklace, in this circumstances, may even be read as an ironic gesture. Just as "Carter stresses the relationship between women's subjective sexuality and their objective role as property" (Makinen 10), my Scheherazade wears her 'collar' while exercising a subject's choice to pursue pleasure.

In the closing scenes of my novella, Scheherazade makes a conscious decision to take the diamond necklace with her on the night she leaves, and in fact delays her escape to do so. On one level, this may represent a decision of practical necessity — the necklace is valuable and light-weight, thus easy to carry and later sell. Yet it seems that she has finally worked her way through the multi-faceted and sometimes bewitching aspects of domination, and chosen instead to interact with male power on her own terms. The necklace has moved from collar, to costume, to something akin to a totem. The final sentence, in particular, suggests an equilibrium has been reached. "With a thousand and one stars shining in the night sky, the smooth beating of my mare's hooves between my legs, and a diamond necklace clasped around my neck, I ride out into the world" (198). On one level, this simply represents a characteristic fairy tale resolution. Marina Warner notes that fairy tales "typically offer hope of release from poverty, maltreatment, and subjection. A happy ending is one of their generic markers" (*Once upon a Time* xxii). But it also indicates that Scheherazade has moved beyond

the orbit of controlling external forces, and abandoned corrosive internal narratives linking female beauty to self-worth. As Sally Robinson notes, "In *Nights at the Circus*, Carter continues to explore male fictions of woman but, here, creates a counter-narrative that explodes these fictions from the outside, and implodes them from the inside" (78). My novella's ending suggests that Scheherazade is moving towards a sense of self that has internalised power as something to be lived, or an active, embodied process of becoming. This idea is beautifully expressed by the Fevvers character: "I only knew my body was the abode of limitless freedom" (41). As we will see, it is significant that the final sentence of the novella draws together themes of nature, material consumption and the body.

The consuming body

This idea of female power as a force inextricably linked with bodily processes, especially eating, underpins *Nights at the Circus*; in my novella, these appetites are primarily sexual. Carter "undoubtedly understood the social and political importance of food and appetite" (Dennis 119) so it is meaningful that Fevvers' alimentary consumption is foregrounded to such a remarkable degree, indeed "her appetite is boundless" (Toye 484). Yet these representations of food and appetite move beyond a simple understanding of consuming as ingestion, and towards eating as a demonstration of power. Throughout the novel, Fevvers gorges herself on a variety of foods, with her tastes ranging across the social spectrum from cheap, greasy fried foods associated with the London working class to menus and rarefied ingredients usually associated with the aristocracy. Margaret E. Toye pithily notes "her appetite undoes the boundary between high and low" (484). As a consequence, eating operates as a form of social protest on a number of levels. On a macro-level, Cockney Fevvers' catholic tastes highlight the socio-economic and gendered aspects of food consumption. As Carol Adams states, in an extract from *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*:

> People with power have always eaten meat. The aristocracy of Europe consumed large courses filled with every kind of meat while the laborer consumed the complex carbohydrates. Dietary habits proclaim class distinctions, but they proclaim patriarchal distinctions as well. (172)

By eating across the boundaries of class and gender, Fevvers effectively underlines food as a source of power and self-definition, as well as highlighting the complex limitations that often underpin its consumption, particularly for women; in contrast, "the importance of food to Fevvers' spiritual and moral as well as to her physical wellbeing is repeatedly highlighted" (Dennis 121). In terms of the fairy tale tradition, this focus on eating recalls Robert Darnton's point about how French peasants of the early modern period, locked in an impoverished cycle, tended to imagine happy endings that involved economic windfalls, such as ownership of cows, chickens or a horse, and food (33-40). Yet if fairy tales, as Marina Warner suggests, "express hopes" (xxiii), then Fevvers amplifies this convention to the point that it moves beyond simple wish fulfillment, and instead protests the social structures and conventions that first deny human desire. In this case, the female desire for food — largely inseparable in this text from the hunger for sex and material items — becomes a site to critique prevalent cultural narratives that link the performance of self-denial to female identity. Dennis observes that "appetite and eating have historically played a crucial role in the construction of appropriate models of femininity" and that "female appetite — or, more accurately, the demonstrable lack of it — has long functioned as a crucial signifier of adherence to a traditional ideology of femininity that contributes to women's voluntary self-attenuation" (120). Eating is thus framed as a political process, indicative of subjective agency, with women actively encouraged to renounce their appetites in order to achieve social acceptance. Here socially prescribed narratives about gender and appetite become akin to food itself, and the Fevvers character — embodying Carter's de-mythologising stance (*Shaking a Leg* 38) — devours both with great relish; I observe strong parallels with my novella's use of sex.

This protest is expressed not only by the type and amount of food Fevvers consumes, and the way she eats, but is concretely expressed by her physical presence. As a "big girl" (7), "more like a dray mare than an angel" (12) with "triumphant breasts and blue eyes the size of dinner plates" (Carter 291), Fevvers' body represents the "antithesis… of the delicate and sickly Victorian ideal" (Dennis 120). Performing this link between the material and the conceptual, she insists on subjecthood by literally taking up space. The novel's Victorian setting provides a vivid counterpoint to Fevvers' vigorous consumption, and makes clear the cultural specificity of the behaviour normally expected of women, particularly in relation to eating and sex. Indeed, Fevvers' "over parodying of Victorian dictates of femininity testifies to their residual cultural authority" (Dennis 129) and suggests that "1899 and the 1890s are

not worlds apart" (Michael, "Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*" 492). My novella, by utilising the tropes of Victorian literature to describe an unbridled female sexuality, endeavours to make a similar point. Carter's critique expands from external structures of oppression (capitalism, patriarchy et al), to internalised ones — such as hunger — made visible by the seemingly mundane, everyday act of eating. A possible clue to unpicking the multiple meanings of food in Carter's writing is that its abundance suggests a lack. To summarise: to be starved of food is to be starved of power, in all aspects of human life. When this starvation becomes voluntary, indeed actively pursued in the interests of conforming to hegemonic cultural preferences, then food itself becomes politicised.

In my novella, food functions to ground Scheherazade in the corporeal realm; it suggests that literary icons are human, too, and must eat. Again, this runs counter to the dictates of the Victorian era — prohibitions that continue to ghost through contemporary culture — such as "the Victorian habit of pretending that one does not, in fact, engage in the act of eating" (Dennis 121). The primacy of the body, while usually framed in sexual or animalistic terms, is reinforced by decorative descriptions of food. For example, "taking my seat, I quickly dispatch a plate of plump figs, stuffed with soft cheese and chopped walnuts, drizzled with honey and adorned with a creamy mountain of yoghurt" (149). The foregrounding of food appears to be a common trope among contemporary re-tellings of the *Arabian Nights.* Describing a feast hosted in Scheherazade's honour, Anthony O'Neil uses an abundance of sensory detail to suffocating affect:

> The evening banquet at al-Khuld was itself an ordeal. Cakes of bruised wheat, suckling lambs cooked in silver ovens, marinated pigeons, chickens stuffed with rose jam, towers of sweetmeats conveyed by slaves with shoulder-poles, pyramids of egg-apples on beds of gilly-flowers, even a pie the size of an ox filled with succulent beefsteak fried in pistachio oil. (77)

Eating here becomes an onerous activity connected with status, a visible and public demonstration of female power; yet power also implies a range of choice, made visible here by the extensive menu, but also a heightened degree of expectation. By way of contrast, in *Crescent* the main character is an Arab-American chef who uses cooking as a way to orient her sensory, spiritual, memory and emotive processes: "her mother's small lessons felt like

larger secrets when Sirine was a girl… instructions in the fine dicing of walnuts and the way to clarify butter were also meditations on hope and devotion" (60). In *Crescent* cooking, and particularly the sharing of food, signifies not only individual identity, but also the relationships between characters. Carol Fadda-Conrey reads Sirine and her cooking as operating as connective bridges between the different ethic communities that visit her restaurant: "food is another crucial medium that connects the novel's different ethnicities while highlighting the internal distinctions that exist within and between them" (199). But food also operates to bring bodies together. In a scene where Sirine and her love interest, Hanif El-Eyad, get to know one another, food becomes synonymous with intimacy and sexual desire: "while there are very few people who know how to cook and move with her in the kitchen — it seems that she and Han know how to make baklava together" (60).

This particular usage links to Carter's practice, where eating processes may often be read as an expression of sexual desire, and connects to a broader literary tradition. Sarah Sceats observes that the "use of food and eating as a deliberate sexual metonymy or metaphor is a long-established tradition, especially for suggesting human flesh and sexual intercourse" (31). In just two of the many passages where sexuality is explicitly linked to food, eating and appetite, Fevvers bites into a piece of cake and Walser feels "hungry eyes upon him and it seemed to him that her teeth closed on his flesh with the most voluptuous lack of harm" (204). Towards the end of the novel, as Walser watches Fevvers undress, he worries to himself "am I biting off more than I can chew?" (293). "Just as the sexual drive may experientially resemble the desire to satisfy a hunger," writes Abigail Dennis, "so the primary sexual dynamic of *Nights at the Circus* is coded as alimentary consumption" (122). Similarly, in my novella food and eating often cross borders with bodies and sex. The Sultan is depicted in comestible terms: Scheherazade speaks about squashing his penis "like a strawberry into the roof" of her mouth (125) and describes having "sucked, bitten and licked every inch of his body" (133). If human bodies are framed in terms of food, then the process of eating is also often sexualised:

> I wander over and choose a firm mango, bashing it against the table top as my mother once showed me, until the flesh has liquefied and the skin is tender thin with bruises.

> Taking a silver knife, I cut a tiny cross into one plump side, licking the sweet sap that oozes from the cut[14]. (131)

The use of the words 'skin' and 'flesh', while a technically correct usage, allow this passage to be read as a surrogate for sexual desire and the body. This language reminds us of the tension in Carter's practice between bodies as sites of pleasure or as objects of consumption — "if flesh plus skin equals sensuality, then flesh minus skin equals meat" (*The Sadeian Woman* 138). Merja Makinen notes that this "motif of skin and flesh as signifying pleasure, and of meat as signifying economic objectification" (10) recurs throughout *The Bloody Chamber.* For example, in "The Tiger's Bride" the heroine satisfies her end of the bargain with the Beast by stripping down to the "cold, white meat of contract" (*The Bloody Chamber* 66). Interestingly, in terms of gendered patterns of consumption, white meat is often considered feminine while red meat is masculine (Twigg 24). Thus, Carter's reference to white meat may be read literally, as the colour of the narrator's naked skin, or synonymously as a gendered consumable, an animal body usually associated with women. This idea has broad cultural resonances. After noting that "distinct parallels exist between the language of the meat system and a terminology that men use to describe women in pornographic and mainstream discourse" (148), Nick Fiddes tells us that "the entire system operates as if women are perceived by men to be analogous to hunter, or else farmed, meat" (151). Similarly, Carol Adams notes how women are connected with animals via the use of language such as 'bunnies', 'cows', 'beavers', 'pussies' and 'meat', and thus framed as exploitable commodities (Tiffin 39). Yet in both Carter's writing and my own, men and women are depicted as both consuming and consumed, predators and prey, meat and living flesh. This oscillation writes across cultural stereotypes, complicating the issue of power relationships, and further suggesting that gender may be constructed and co-constructed in a myriad of ways.

As well as operating in tandem, alimentary and sexual processes are framed as essential to Scheherazade's creativity and sense of self: "after I have eaten, and drunk from eggshell thin cups, but before I begin my nightly story, I sometimes turn the mirror on its side and watch myself masturbate. I have found that it aids the imagination" (125). In this passage, the

[14] Incidentally, this way of eating mangoes was shared with me by a Puerto-Rican artist living in London.

focus on Scheherazade's alimentary consumption and sexuality underscores the point that she represents a synthesis many of the lower binaries of Western thought: body, emotion, female, instinct and imagination. Not only do such passages remind us that the imagination is embodied — challenging the mind/body binary — but that corporeal processes intertwine and overlap. Thus, Scheherazade's eating is intended to indicate — like Fevvers' rapacious appetite — a challenge to both her disembodied status as a literary icon, and also contemporary cultural currents that firmly link denial — of sexual and alimentary appetites — to female identity. It implicitly asks the reader to consider the question: 'if you knew you were going to die, what would you eat/think/do/say?' Incarcerated for an uncertain duration, Scheherazade's unbridled eating reminds her of the possibly of freedom, celebrates her continued existence and allows her to exercise choice, albeit in a limited context. It reminds her that she is alive, and nourishes her capacity for resistance.

The intensity with which Carter describes eating implies a febrile coveting, a determined taking into the body, in which food becomes sexualised and akin to a fetish object. This recalls the surprising fact of Carter's own early battle with anorexia, as well as her food journalism (Dennis 119; Toye 481). Yet while consumption — as a central idea — helps us make sense of Carter's diverse practice (Toye 481), it is itself a multi-facted lens. As Toye points out, consumption is a polysemous term, with a spectrum of meanings that range from eating or ingesting through to consuming to the point of annihilation (481). One of the points that Carter seems to be making, via Fevvers' exaggerated consumption, is that you can consume to the point that you become overwhelmed by the thing you have consumed: in lusting after objects, you risk objecthood. For example, drawn by her intense desire for precious gems, Fevvers — a bird-woman who wants "to see the end of cages" (38) — risks becoming part of the Grand Duke's collection: "it contained a cage made out of gold wires with, inside, a little perch of rubies and of sapphires and of diamonds, the good old red, white and blue. The cage was empty. No bird stood on that perch, yet" (192). While Erin Douglas argues that *Nights at the Circus* uses jewels to "challenge normative ideas of gender, sexuality, and imperialism" (17), in a similar way I read the jewelled cage as signifying the sometimes bewitching cultural apparatus of false universals or archetypes. As Carter states in *The Sadeian Woman*:

> All archetypes are spurious but some are more spurious than others. There is the inarguable fact of sexual differentiation; but, separate from it and only partially derived

> from it, are the behavioural modes of masculine and feminine, which are culturally defined variables translated in the language of common usage to the status of universals. (6)

An archetype is, fundamentally, a category. Carter's cage may be read as representing an archetype, a fundamental cultural category that does not allow for individual variation or, in Jungian terms, a seemingly ancient image that permeates the bedrock of the collective unconscious. This reading of the cage aligns with Carter's point that archetypes are "consolatory nonsenses" (*The Sadeian Woman* 5) that correspond to relationships of power; thus, it becomes clear that — akin to Said's point about Orientalism — seemingly innate cultural phenomenon actually function as instruments of social exploitation and control. The "the notion of a universality of female experience is a clever confidence trick" (*The Sadeian Woman* 12), which Carter expresses via the jewelled cage analogy, reinforcing her point that such strictures may be seductive.

Significantly, cages of various sorts recur throughout my novella. Whether Scheherazade's cell, the harem, menagerie, aviary or a golden birdcage full of colourful finches, they all represent largely heterogeneous collections of animals or humans. The animals — domestic, wild, decorative — are grouped in way that underscores their function or use by humans, "an ideology that ontologizes animals as usable" (Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast* 15), while the harem occupants — considered, like the animals in the menagerie, "living treasures" (148) — revolve satellite-like around the Sultan's libido. "All kings are collectors", writes Githa Hariharan in her re-imagining of the *Nights*:

> Their whims and preferences may vary, but most are partial to filling up their treasure vaults — with gems and coins, books copied out by scribes in letters of gold, or stallions, slaves and subjects. But the prize collection is not stowed away in the same vault. It is hidden in the harem, or zenana, or a special palace, or bedchamber. These valuable items are women of all shapes, colours and sizes. (*When Dreams Travel* 90)

Resembling Carter's jeweled birdcage, and Hariharan's harem — a "world walled with the soft folds of women's flesh" (91) — the various enclosures within my novella are often represented as gorgeous, abundant spaces; it is not immediately apparent that they are also

traps. In particular, the golden cage of finches in Scheherazade's bedroom echoes the birds found in Beauty's bedroom in Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's story, on which Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's well known version of the Beauty and the Beast story was later based: "it is obvious that she is a "rare bird" and a prisoner herself; and the juxtaposition of the birds' room and the bedroom confirms that her bedchamber is as much a cage as theirs" (Swain 206). In my novella, this sense of identification with the caged is reinforced when Scheherazade refers to herself as a "pretty bird" (149). Yet while a cage is literally and metaphorically an enclosure that restricts an entity's agency, it is also an idea — like Orientalism — being a category of knowledge underpinned by a power relationship. When Scheherazade comments, "I had never realised that leaving a cage could hurt so much" (194), she is simultaneously referring to the palace itself, the dictates of an abusive relationship, the category of knowledge that has ascribed her a victim status, and the literary apparatus surrounding her representation.

Similarly, the prevalence of cages within my narrative suggests the intersectionality of oppressive forces; as Carol Adams notes, there is an intersection between "outwardly disparate forms of violence" such as domestic violence, racism and animal cruelty (*Neither Man nor Beast* 13). A particular example of this is that those who challenge the Sultan's rule are fed to the wild animals in the menagerie. This recalls Harriet Ritvo's point that "the discourse of popular zoology… presented a moral hierarchy in the animal kingdom based on the hierarchy of orders in human society" (5). Those deemed 'less than human' are symbolically positioned below wild animals, lower than these animals on the food chain, and thus may be consumed by them. Helen Tiffin indicates that this distinction is policed via language: "individuals within our societies whose behaviour we view as being 'beyond the pale' are described as animals even though such particular (human) acts are rarely or never perpetrated by any animal individual or group" (37). Returning to intersectionality, the point that I am trying to make here is that just as the various mechanisms of oppression intersect, so do the various facets of consumption. In Carter's practice, this web is made visible via a close focus on the pivotal indicators of human power: consumption of material items, food and sex. Fevvers' hyperbolic identity, gender and crossover human/animal status, as well as the exaggerated nature of her eating, throws the apparatus of oppression and consumption into strong contrast. In my writing, the sexualised characterisation of Scheherazade and the female protagonists within the embedded stories perform similar work. I will now briefly

focus on an interesting aspect of this dynamic, being the frequent use of animals and animal language — such as metaphor — to describe female sexuality or bodies.

Animals

My novella was written at a time when I was passionately interested in the emerging field of Animal Studies. I felt frustrated by the lack of empathy demonstrated towards many animals, particularly those within the factory farming context, and the environmental consequences of such food production. As David Brooks and Elizabeth McMahon comment, "we are addicted to the consumption of the flesh of other creatures, and addicted, also, to the denial of the suffering it causes" (7). I became intrigued by the idea of using fiction to attempt to bridge this gulf in understanding between people and animals, and to present uncomfortable ideas in an accessible storytelling mode. It seemed that a great imaginative leap was required to unsettle the deep fixity of the species barrier, and to encourage people to consider the ethical consequences of their choices. My thesis was that storytelling may help people, and perhaps animals, transcend violence and exploitation: that stories are destiny. By potentially challenging established worldviews, stories may open up a creative space where new ontologies take root. The *Nights*, with its central idea that art may change destinies, and cultural usage as a literary platform from which to critique power, seemed an ideal vehicle to explore the species barrier.

Helen Tiffin notes the capacity of fiction to reframe deeply embedded assumptions such as this line between human and animal. "Literary representation in particular, with its imaginative possibilities and its capacity to interrogate our unthinking assumptions, offers new potential for imagining human/animal relations (42). At the time I began writing the novella it seemed, with some notable exceptions, as if this potential was not being fully exploited. Cary Wolfe suggested that "the humanities are… now struggling to catch up with a radical revaluation of the status of nonhuman animals that has taken place in society at large", and which has "more or less permanently eroded the tidy divisions between human and nonhuman" (Introduction xi). Admittedly, the role of the humanities in reconceptualising the animal occurs within a remarkable context. As Tiffin suggests, there is an ethical 'time lag' between technology and its products and the psychological, moral and ethical issues that such developments trigger: "It is increasingly clear that our current legal frameworks and traditional moral guides are inadequate in dealing with developments over the twentieth and

twenty-first centuries" (36). Citing the work of J.M. Coetzee and Peter Goldsworthy, Tiffin sees works of imagination as offering a way forward in that they allow human thinking to reach "outside the box" (36). Yet if technology moves fast, imagination is faster still, and fiction may investigate new realities more expeditiously than social structures can respond to them.

Inspired by the discourses of Animal Studies, *The Bloody Chamber* and Tiffin's idea of creative leadership emerging from the humanities, one of my novella's aims was to explore the species barrier in the accessible format of fairy tale, using the 'smoke and mirrors' of pornography to disguise my intent. Through the seductive vehicle of erotic fiction — a kind of metaphorical eating of female flesh — my novella aims to point out just how closely woven animals and meat are in human lives or language. Indeed, "Anthropologist Nick Fiddes challenges us to get through a day — whether or not we are vegetarians or even vegans — without using an animal product, symbol or metaphor" (Tiffin 39). In doing so, it seeks to address something of a 'blind spot' in human consciousness, and to suggest that as animals are to humans, women are to humanity. As we have seen, there is significant crossover in the language used to describe both women and animals or meat; in a discussion of Carol Adam's ideas, Cary Wolfe suggests that there is a "symbolic economy that overdetermines the representation of women, by transcoding the *edible* bodies of animals and the *sexualised* bodies of women within an overarching "logic of domination"- all compressed in what Derrida's recent work calls "*carno*phallogocentrism" (*Animal Rites* 8). By integrating pornographic writing with narratives celebrating Scheherazade's inner life — her psychology, emotional responses, corporeality — it opposes the traditions of the medium by giving 'meat' a mind; as Steven Marcus notes, "psychology is the one mortal enemy of pornography" (22-23). The use of the Oriental frame comments on a legacy of colonial domination and recalls Keith Thomas' point that:

> Once perceived as beasts, people were liable to be treated accordingly. The ethic of human domination removed animals from the sphere of human concern. But it also legitimized the ill treatment of humans who were in a supposedly animal condition. In the colonies, slavery, with its markets, its brandings and its constant labour, was one way of dealing with men thought to be beastly. (44)

Yet the Oriental frame also distances this material, making it about 'other people, other times, other places'; this is a conscious strategy, used by many writers, when exploring the taboo or subjects which are uncomfortably close to home. For example, the novella contains a veiled reference to George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The scene where Scheherazade looks out her window and sees a donkey being whipped (151) recalls the event that reportedly inspired Orwell's novel — a child flogging a horse (Tiffin 41) — an image diametrically opposed to the idea of the peaceable kingdom.

> Orwell himself… stated that the genesis of the work was his sight of a child flogging a horse, and that, notwithstanding the (human) allegorical purpose of his novel, *Animal Farm* was also intended as a protest against the treatment of farm animals. (Tiffin 41).

Not only was I interested in inventing stories that explored human/animal relationships, but technically I wanted to create a piece of writing that was saturated with animal language and references. This exaggerated use of language was intended to underscore the idea that human reliance on animals permeates every aspect of our lives, including our language and thinking; I rely on Parker's point, in a discussion on femininity, that excess foregrounds constructedness (162). The point here is that fiction that foregrounds its own construction — a common postmodern strategy — reminds the reader of the artificiality of its construction and that this is inextricably bound to a particular worldview, and thus open to question. By eroding the pillars of 'truth' and 'fiction', we are forced to consider our own assumptions: meaningfully, we ask ourselves 'what else, that I have been taking for granted, is also a fiction'?

Animal Metaphors

My novella uses language, and specifically metaphor, as a strategy to problematise common assumptions about human-animal relationships. Metaphor is important, not only as a rhetorical device, but also to human — and possibly animal — cognition. Annabelle Sabloff writes that:

> Metaphor, that unstoppable faculty of the human mind to make associations, most often between an experienced and named domain of life and an apprehended but unnamed

> domain, is a fundamental mechanism for the patterning of cognitive and behavioural practice and emotional life. Far from being a mere decorative verbal trope, metaphor has long been recognized as a basic and pervasive mode of human cognition, and may be basic to animal cognition and behaviour as well. (23)

Similarly, "Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical" and (3) and "we all naturally think using hundreds of primary metaphors" (Lakoff and Johnson 47). In the *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, Mark Johnson observes that "over the past half century metaphor has moved from being a peripheral topic in the philosophy of art to the status of a major philosophical, linguistic, psychological, and scientific issue in the theory of cognition" (401). For more than two thousand years prior to this, metaphor was considered a rhetorical flourish or decorative literary device, with no substantial relationship to human cognition; "in sharp contrast, contemporary empirical research on language and cognition affords metaphor pride of place at the centre of abstract conceptualization and reasoning" (401). New technologies are likely to clarify our understanding of the relationship between metaphor and cognition; Johnson speculates that "as neural imagining technologies and methods continue to develop over the coming decades, we may well see remarkable progress in resolving some of the cognitive issues that currently surround metaphor" (412).

On the basis of one definition of narrative — "a representation of an event or a series of events" (Abbott 13) — I developed an understanding of metaphor as an extremely condensed representation where the representation is the event (the thing that happens); in literal terms, they are a representational event. When we hear a common metaphor, such as 'as brave as a lion', our thinking jumps from the abstract to the concrete, allowing us to make a connection between and understand both bravery and lions. It is this leap in thinking that I view as operating as akin to the 'event' that drives a story. Erica Fudge offers an intriguing perspective. She unpicks the phrase 'Peter's a pig', and concludes that "it brings both of the ideas — Peter and pig — and creates something that is more than just a mixture of the two. We do not have a crossbreed, if you like, but a new way of looking at an existing species" (11). I became interested in the technical use of the metaphor, curious about whether stretching its usage — into hyperbole, repetition and novel forms — may create — following Fudge's logic — something different than its constituent parts. My question was whether changing the language conventionally used to express metaphorical thinking — for example, 'as busy

as a bee' — may result in any tangible shift in how we view bees. Specifically, it is the ingrained, habitual nature of animal metaphors, repeated unthinkingly over and over again, with each usage scoring cultural assumptions into the brain until they seem innate, that I sought to destabilise; it asks 'if animal metaphors mirror human identity, what happens when you change the mirror?'

Although the novella is a relatively short piece of writing (34,321 words) it includes at least 331 primary references to approximately 63 different kinds of animals. These animals, animal products or referents are continuously interwoven with metaphor. At the time of writing, I was preoccupied with the philosophical issues underpinning contemporary Animal Law, and immersed in the creative problem of how to create an 'empathy bridge' between humans and animals. I sought to create a piece of writing which contained a relatively high number of animals and animal metaphors as a way of communicating how deeply intertwined animals – and animal products – are within human lives and language. I wanted to highlight how often animals disappear from the human gaze by actively exaggerating their presence within my writing. Again, it is up to the reader to decide the success or otherwise of this strategy. Arguably, one is not left with an impression of a polemical tract that locates animals within an exploitative human context. The material that directly alludes to the species barrier, such as the passage I highlighted earlier — "soon we arrive at the huge iron gates of the menagerie, the gates that separate man from beast, but in my heart, I know the division does not exist" (194) — does not necessarily communicate this idea, or the ethical or social consequences of this idea, to the reader. Interestingly, my attempt to use metaphor to critique the species barrier appears to merely heighten the erotic quality or physicality of the writing. For example, "I know he likes my skin best when it is wet, many nights we have slipped and slid against each other like playful seals" (132) and "I am reminded of bats, creatures of the night, or certain birds of prey, their lethal eyes concealed under rawhide hoods" (152) and "his stomach began to growl like an angry lion" (128). I would suggest that this linguistic absorption occurs primarily for two reasons: first, animal instrumentality is so deeply embedded in human consciousness, cognition and language that, despite the strategies of repetition and novelty employed by my text, animal metaphors are immediately assimilated as serving human purposes (in this case, the production or representation of desire). Effectively, like rogue satellites seeking to break their binary relationship with a dominant planet, they are forced back into orbit by the larger planet's gravitational pull. Second, it is

possible that the frequent use of animals and animal metaphors subliminally reminds the reader of their animality of their own body, and they process the text accordingly.

Scheherazade does identify with animals, particularly those brought and traded within the system of the market, and this is one of the realisations that allows her to become, to borrow Carter's words, "if not free, then more free than I had been" (*Shaking a Leg* 38). Through identification with domestic animals brought and sold at market, Scheherazade is able to move towards empowerment. In fact, her growing sense of agency pivots on this recognition of herself as property. Early in the novella she comments that "of all the thousands of lies told in a market, falsities more infinite than the stars above, most are told in the stench of the animal tents" (130). This comment was originally inspired by Anna Sewell's descriptions of Victorian horse markets in *Black Beauty* (1877). "No doubt a horse fair is a very amusing place to those who have nothing to lose... there were more lies told, and more trickery at that horse fair, than a clever man could give account of" (147-148). On the face of it, Scheherazade's observation communicates the point that within any market economy, those humans with the least economic or social power are subject to the worst treatment. When animals are the currency of the disempowered, this suggests that these animals — the "rancid goats and thin sheep" (130) — exist in an ethical vacuum. Again, this links to the descriptions of horse markets, as narrated by a horse:

> At this sale, of course, I found myself in company with old broken-down horses — some lame, some broken-winded, some old, and some that I am sure it would have been more merciful to shoot. The buyers and sellers too, many of them, looked not much better off than the poor beasts they were bargaining about. (229)

The markets in *Black Beauty* underscore human as well as animal hierarchies. In Beauty's narrative, he twice visits these markets and they represent significant turning points in his life; similarly, in my novella such transitions are marked by Scheherazade's two illnesses. She becomes febrile after being kidnapped from her parents' house, and overcome by a sense of futility, later sinks into depression: "it was as if the universe had been bled dry of colour, leaving this pallid void of grey despair, a washed up landscape populated by liars and thieves, all humans scavenging creatures of the lowest motive" (48). During this latter period, Scheherazade experiences an epiphany that allows her to reframe her life at the palace. This

is again mediated via recognition of an instrumentality shared with animals: “I regain the power I was born with, the power that we are all born with, but trade away, for lies and pretty things, like animals at the market” (174). While the fetishisation of illness is a Victorian trope, here recovery from illness may be read as akin to Carter’s ‘clearing of the haze’: a shift in thinking that allows for radically new insights to emerge.

Scheherazade also identifies with her golden cage of finches, and by implication reads her current status as being similar to that of a pet. But these finches, and this framing of her experience, function as the conceptual platform from which she is able to achieve greater freedom: “lying in bed, looking at the caged finches, I realised that I was born with everything I ever needed to navigate my own life” (173). The “pretty bird” sees herself in these creatures, finally appreciating that her own notions of female power, beauty and romantic love have helped keep her in stasis. Similarly, in Carter’s practice, animals frequently critique their own cages. In “The Tiger’s Bride”, ponies graze on the *trompe l’oeil* walls of the Beast’s desolate mansion: it appears meaningful that not only is there reversal — outside animals are inside — but these ponies are literally destroying an illusion, a painted representation of nature. Birdcage imagery also populates Carter’s *Nights at the Circus,* with the political metaphor made explicit when Lizzie comments: “‘does that seem strange to you? That the caged bird should want to see the end of cages, sir?’ queried Lizzie, with an edge of steel in her voice” (38). Scheherazade’s identification with these finches — symbolic of the many virgins before her — is such that, when the Sultan eventually frees these birds, this foreshadows her own release: “I had never realised that leaving a cage could hurt so much” (194). Paradoxically, by identifying with the trapped, she learns how to become free.

Conclusion: Lessons Wrapped in Fur

This exegesis has argued that there is a tradition of using the *Nights* — or the idea of the Orient as shaped by the collection — as a platform to critique power. The scope of this critique ranges from the societal to the corporeal, and occurs in a literary context where writers speak to each other across generations. In *Vathek* (1786), "the last notable oriental tale of the century, itself foreshadowing the coming work of scholars and poets" (Conant xvii), William Beckford draws on the *Nights* and other Oriental materials to create a piece of writing that explores the consequences of unrestrained power. His novel "drew on the forbidding aspects of the East, the violence of the arbitrary will released from any curb when this was looked at seriously instead of comically" (Kiernan 132). *Vathek* influenced Byron, whose *Turkish Tales* would later inform Charlotte's Brontë's complex vision of the Orient. References to the *Nights* pervade Charlotte Brontë's fiction: only one of her heroines does not reference the collection (Llewellyn 217). In Brontë's adult fiction, the Orient is often both the "site of both sexual perversion and allure", and synonymous with the imagination itself (Llewellyn 217), and thus may be read as a highly personal critique of female sexuality and creativity during the Victorian era. Similarly, Emily Brontë used the *Nights* as a way to draw attention to the financial drivers of the Industrial Revolution, slave trade, and in the nineteenth century to the "captive markets" of India and China (Caracciolo 25). Perhaps a common thread binding all these texts is that they all implicitly address the moral consequences of colonialism, or the domination of one entity by another. Certainly, this notion of the Orient as the epicentre of fear and desire — a place where new worlds may be dreamed — ties these texts together, and is central to my novella.

In the twentieth and current century, this tradition of using the *Nights* to critique power has adapted to changing social and cultural realities, in which postcolonial, feminist and ecological elements are emerging as strong literary tendencies. In *Nights at the Circus* (1984), Angela Carter gleefully undermines the Victorian trope of the angel in the house, offering a representation of the winged Fevvers that challenges species and gender boundaries. She directly targets Victorian restrictions around female consumption, particularly of food and sex. Gilbert and Gubar reminds us that in the nineteenth-century, female bodies were often subject to repressive, debilitating constraints. "Tight-lacing, fasting, vinegar-drinking, and similar dietary or cosmetic excesses were all parts of a physical regimen that helped women to either feign morbid weakness or actually to "decline" into real illness" (25). Fevvers,

however, is depicted as in usually buoyant good health, with food and eating framed as vital to her wellbeing (Dennis 121). Similarly, in my novella Scheherazade's unbridled libido parallels Fevvers' alimentary consumption, and comments upon culturally prevalent notions of female restraint and social acceptance. In both texts, the foregrounding of female appetites, both sexual and otherwise, is intended to be political; the characters' extravagant tastes throw into relief the seemingly inviolable — or sometimes almost invisible — cultural boundaries they have breached. As Abigail Dennis observes, "Fevvers's over parodying of Victorian dictates of femininity testifies to their residual cultural authority" (129). Notably, this lack of material restraint appears to reflect the women's inner landscapes. While there is little evidence of Fevvers or Scheherazade engaging in self-denial, the Victorian era appears to privilege a kind of psychological corsetry and the associated determination to attenuate the female ego. Gilbert and Gubar quote Mrs. Sarah Ellis, Victorian England's leading authority on female manners and deportment: "What shall I do to gratify myself or to be admired?" is not the question a lady asks on arising" (24). Conversely, these questions seem central to Fevvers' and Scheherazade's sense of self; they are tied to the latter's ability to be creative, particularly when this is mediated through the body. Scheherazade's skin narratives are generally ostentatious, confident, performative and sensual; they may be read as anarchic precisely because they cut across commonly accepted scripts of female behaviour. By appropriating sex as a form of self-expression, itself an increasing tendency in Western culture (Attwood xvi), Scheherazade undermines her own instrumentality.

While Carter uses elements of the *Nights* to critique the restrictions placed on female bodies, Naguib Mahfouz uses its stories as a framework to protest against political corruption and the misuse of power. In contrast with the archness of Fevvers, Mahfouz celebrates humility and the triumph of the humble. As a boy in 1919, Mahfouz saw people being killed during a popular uprising against the British in Cairo (El-Enany 3); his writing is marked by a strong moral compass, and a desire to bring nefarious conduct into the light. A character in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003) accurately describes Mahfouz: "'Said commented that Mahfouz is a 'Galsworthy, a Mann, a Zola, and a Jules Romains'… It's true — Mahfouz encompasses their social conscience, their attention to human suffering and sensuality as well as their devotion to philosophical reflection'" (97). While I greatly admire Mahfouz's writing, and his passion for social justice, I view my writing as operating within a wholly different set of assumptions. *Arabian Nights and Days* tends to present power as a

binary relationship, with opposing poles of good and evil, and the renunciation of status ultimately leads to redemption. Conversely, my Scheherazade moves from an egocentric and spoiled adolescence to greater psychological maturity, while the Sultan relinquishes only enough control to let her escape; thus, neither portrayal is undilutedly good or evil, it is the dialogue — not the contrast —between them that is significant. Mahfouz frames power as a corruptive force, but my novella examines its Janis-faced seductiveness, complexity and perversity; it positions power as debasing yet potentially transformative force. *Arabian Nights and Days* ends with the elevation of humble, honest working men to positions of civic power. Yet Scheherazade comments on such people, describing the carpenter who comes to fix her window shutter in the following terms:

> A good man: humble and uncomplicated, working hard, keeping his head down, patiently serving his master. In my village there were many such men and women, and although I respected them, we had nothing in common. There was always this sense that although we were using the same words, we spoke a different language, with a gulf in meaning too vast to be crossed; this both sorrowed and exalted me. (152)

In some ways, this comment underlines the fundamental differences that exists between these texts. A specific point of departure is my novella's strong focus on female sexuality and its connection to power. While Mahfouz's writing is sensual, and his depictions of female characters are sensitive, my novella complicates the issue of power and sexual attraction, observing how such dynamics play out in the intimate space of human relationships. This is in line with Angela Carter's observation that sexual relationships are shaped by their social context, and that any differences in social or economic power "inevitably colours the nature of the sexual expression of affection" (*The Sadeian Woman* 9). Thus, in my novella, sex critiques power by commenting on the social and cultural forces that shape female erotic responses; Scheherazade's exaggerated sexual performances are exposed as constructions formed in a climate of domination. By implication, this invites readers to consider how their own private behaviours may sit within the broader context of their life or society. The pornographic mirror of the text asks the reader to question their own personal freedoms.

A strong thread binding Carter's novel to Githa Hariharan's (1999) *When Dreams Travel* is that both reimagine fairy tale in ways that celebrate female plurality; in their narratives, power centres on female bodies and stories. Hariharan protests against restrictive narrative tropes that disempower women; her strategic adaptation of the *Nights* into a multi-vocal storytelling performances — echoed in the shared storytelling of Fevvers and Lizzie— stresses the corporeality of women's bodies. Connectedly, she seems to engage with ideas about the species barrier. For example, when a female character disguised as a man undresses, Hariharan writes "Now with her breasts unbound, her hair freed of grime and knots with a wet comb, her allegiance is to a lesser-known species" (35); and as Dunyazad embraces Shahriyar, "She can feel the weight of his head on her shoulders, his beard lying by her neck like a furry tail" (63). But Hariharan goes further than this, investing objects with a living presence; the Sultan's palace is represented as a living thing, with humans operating almost like cellular parts, or viruses, within this space. Dunyazad's "hands are sore from trailing across the different species of palace-skin, from the marble of the upper floors to the rough stone of the dungeon" (67). This kind of writing indicates a bio-centric worldview, which displaces the fixity of humans at the apex of the Great Chain of Being. It appears represent an emerging literary tendency to share narrative power with non-human characters and nature. For example, in a recent *Guardian* article, "We imagine how it feels to be a character, why can't we imagine how the land feels?" (2016), Paul Kingsnorth suggests that in the context of an ecological crisis, writers need to use their practice to reconnect with nature; Korean writer Han Kang's recent novel, *The Vegetarian*, winner of the 2016 Man Booker International Prize, describes trees as "stubborn and solemn yet alive as animals, bearing up the weight of their own massive bodies" (Kang 169-170). Interestingly, Hariharan's novel also connects to an emergent tradition in fairy tale:

> Read as wonder tales, fairy tales place us in a landscape where everything is living, and they envision a sustainable future that builds not on greed, but on interdependence. Thus, fairy tales are wonder tales that, while surely distinct from indigenous literatures and oratures, inhabit an affinity with their ways of knowing and being in the world, their interconnectedness of human bodies, land, nature, spirit, and art forms. Fairy tales when read as wonder tales have decolonial potential. (Bacchilega).

In Hariharan's writing and my own, this decolonial potential is most evident in relation to the female body, storytelling and animals. Like Hariharan, my novella uses the *Nights'* frame story, and fairy tale conventions, as a way of reimagining culturally prevalent stories about women and their bodies. The reader is encouraged to consider such narrative tropes as literary cages that function to restrict female identity and agency. For example, in "the weight of beauty" the princess — an exaggerated archetype of traditional fairy tale femininity — is confronted by a mirror reflection that shows her with animal ears: "once more she saw her lovely face reflected with pointed jackal ears" (145). Not only does this sight dislodge some conceptions of female beauty which have functioned to keep her in stasis, but at a more fundamental level it reminds her of the corporeality of her existence and of her connection to the natural world. Effectively, her reflection as an animal hybrid prompts the princess to privilege her own desires. This connects to a tradition, following Bettelheim's seminal work in this area (*The Uses of Enchantment)*, in which fairy tale animals are read metaphorically to indicate human sexuality and the subconscious. Makinen suggests of Carter's fairy tale animals that "beasts can easily stand for the projected desires, the drives for pleasure of women" (9). Yet in my story, the jackal ears not only dislodge conceptions of female propriety but also reframe her relationship with others. For the first time, she appears to sense herself as an embedded, connected entity rather than isolated within a competitive hierarchy of female appearance. As previously noted, Gilbert and Gubar read the mirror's voice as one of patriarchal control, observing that "female bonding is extraordinarily difficult in patriarchy: women almost inevitably turn against women because the voice of the looking glass sets them against each other" (38). The animal body makes clear this link between notions of female beauty and male control. Within the arc of the novella, this story reminds Scheherazade of her own passivity, and by underscoring the ephemeral nature of human existence functions as a call to action. The story highlights the ridiculous consequences of a literary convention if extrapolated into the 'real' world: a beautiful princess is so fixated on her own reflection that "she would remain in front of the mirror all day and night, fascinated and aloof, as cold and still as a lump of ice" (141). This is a pattern that recurs across my novella, most notable in my imagining of the psychological condition and physical bearing of a 'real' Scheherazade. Within the context of my novella, this is a key strategy: archetypes implode when invested with the weight of flesh, desire and mind.

The works cited above all seem to pose similar questions: how do entities become powerful? What are the consequences and obligations of power? What is the role of storytelling in empowerment? What happens when the body is the site of discourses about power? They remind us that Scheherazade tells the truth to power (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 22) and "knows perfectly well that narrating is never innocent, that telling a story can change a life" (Brooks 286). As Warner states, "the *Arabian Nights* present the supreme case for storytelling because Shahrazad wins her life through her art" (*Stranger Magic* 5). If the *Nights* may be reduced to a single idea, it is this premise that art is a vehicle for transformation. If we view the *Nights*, as a key text within Orientalist discourses of the nineteenth century — and one with enormous residual cultural potency — through the lens of critiques offered by Said and Kabbani, then it becomes apparent that it is a potentially important vehicle to explore relationships of power. For many writers, the history and nature of the text has offered an imaginative platform to explore inequitable discourses. I am reminded of Angela Carter's observation about writers who put "new wine in old bottles" (*Shaking a Leg* 42) as a way of exploring the consequences of colonial power. Yet patterns of domination replicate across colonial, species, social and gender contexts; and representation enacts these assumptions. Carol Adams reminds us that representation is key to the formation and maintenance of power relationships:

> A primary means of making a subject into an object— of objectifying a being— is through depictions, representations. Representation enables conceptualizations in which the subject-object dichotomy recurs: looking at representations provides the gazer with pleasure while simultaneously reinforcing the distance between subject and object as unbridgeable. (*Neither Man nor Beast* 41)

Thus, the *Nights* becomes an important vehicle to imagine other destinies, both for humans and other animals.

My novella has drawn a strong series of lyrical associations between women and animals. Arguably, this interrogation of the species barrier has a number of consequences. For example, at one point during "the woman who was sick of her husband", narrative license suddenly shifts to an owl who had been watching the human characters.

> The owl had only seen this woman briefly, when she bashed on the door, disturbing his evening nap, but she seemed much changed. Although it was still dark, he could have sworn that beneath her long robe, curvaceous hips were moving with the swaying curls of a desert python. (128)

This passage is intended to remind the reader that human characters operate within a natural world in which other species have their own needs and priorities: the sharing of narrative licence with animals suggests that the human story is not the only story. Once again, the animal metaphor suggests how deeply animals are woven into human lives and language, but also Carol Adam's point that women's bodies are often framed in terms of animals and animal products such as meat. This idea is neatly encapsulated by Nick Fiddes: **"**The entire system operates as if women are perceived by men to be analogous to hunted, or else farmed, meat" (151). In my novella, such passages invite the reader to consider the cultural consequences of such language and representations for both animals and women, and conversely, to look for greater freedoms in such cultural spaces. If one views representations of women as operating analogously to those of meat or animals, and perceives the ingrained nature of such cultural practices, this offers a significant challenge to dominant ontologies.

Yet as Carter reminds us, such representations may also liberate: "language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation" (*Shaking a Leg* 43). When Scheherazade walks in the palace gardens after the storm, in the liminal zone before her escape, she encounters a nocturnal bird singing during the day.

> We pass a solitary nightingale singing on a lemon tree, crying with the passion of an opera singer, its voice more human than bird. I wonder why this bird is awake during the day, deciding that the storm must have unsettled its mind. (194)

Not only is this an oblique reference to the opera singer in Carter's retelling of the 'Bluebeard' story in *The Bloody Chamber* — "With what white-hot passion had she burned from the stage! So that you could tell that she would die young" (10) — but it suggests that Scheherazade is pondering aspects of animal consciousness. Indeed, the bird's music has blurred her perception of the line between nature and culture. More importantly, given Scheherazade's identification with birds as metaphors for freedom, the sight of a night bird

singing during the day foreshadows an end to her own nocturnal existence. The reversal of a night bird during the day represents an important pivot point, indicating an emergent consciousness which allows her to redefine her own agency. As Lisa Kemmerer observes:

> Certain attributes are common in patriarchal societies, such as false dualisms, which provide a framework for domination and subordination, oppressor and oppressed, and support a social structure in which certain groups have power while others are comparatively powerless. (Introduction 11)

The nightingale reveals the false dualism of the species barrier, moving itself from object to subject through its artistry, thus allowing Scheherazade to see herself and her own situation afresh. This is one of many examples where Scheherazade is able to expand her sense of what is possible through her connections with other species. The implication is that learning to see the world in terms of relationships of power, as opposed to innate categories or hierarchies — such as human and animal — is transformative. Identifying that the same narratives replicate again and again across different contexts, and that lack of power is often framed in feminine or animal terms, is an epiphany that has the potential to extend beyond literature. Plumwood observes that "Western thought has given us a strong human/nature dualism which is part of the set of interrelated dualisms of mind/body, reason/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine and has important interconnected features with these other dualisms" ("Nature, Self, and Gender" 10). If we accept that the human/animal binary represented by the species barrier lies at the heart of this network of intersecting dualisms, then destabilising this binary has the potential to unsettle many, if not all, of the rest.

In the precise trajectory of a human life, trying to pinpoint the exact moments of metamorphosis — of transformation — is an ongoing fascination. I remain curious about the precise moment that an entity moves from object to subject, from disempowerment to empowerment, from being located beyond or outside their narrative to its centred subject. This exegesis has explored the idea that change, particularly for women, is situated across the cultural axes of body, imagination, storytelling, nature, animals and art. It has resisted prescriptive interpretations of change processes, instead focusing on an open-ended enquiry into transformation that spans numerous fields of human knowledge. While acknowledging the plurality of female paths to power, it presumes the intersection of different forms of

oppression, and therefore suggests an affinity with animals and nature may offer a way forward. Connecting these ideas, Marjorie Spiegel writes that "any oppression helps to prop up other forms of oppression" (24) and that "to deny our similarities to animals is to deny and undermine our own power" (25). When I say affinity, I mean shifting our worldview away from a narrow anthropocentric gaze, and towards one that sees humans as embedded in a rich, interdependent living web; specifically, it means viewing human bodies as animal bodies, and thus awakening from the "Cartesian dream of power" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 117). Lakoff and Johnson remind us that "there is no Cartesian dualistic person… the mind is inherently embodied, reason is shaped by the body" (5).

My novella's hyper-corporeality, and frequent depictions of sex, locate the body as central to discourses about power. Via the concept of Scheherazade's 'skin narratives', it has conflated body with story, storytelling with sexual intercourse. This is a connection explored by a number of contemporary writers working with the *Nights*, but in my novella this is made explicit. Connecting body to narrative does a number of things. It suggests that just as stories are told about bodies, so bodies may tell them; the 'thingness' of female corporality is replaced with a sensory, multi-dimensional view of bodies as the rich abode of experience, creativity, memory and desire. Flesh has a voice. In simple terms, material specificity counters archetypes. Additionally, the idea that woman write about their own physicality is culturally significant and politically charged, and part of a broader literary dynamic. As Carter suggests,

> it is enormously important for women to write fiction as women — it is part of the slow process of decolonialising our language and our basic habits of thought… it is to do with the creation of a means of expression for an infinitely greater variety of experience than has been possible heretofore, to say things for which no language previously existed. (*Shaking a Leg* 42)

Such narratives also hold out possibilities to other writers. As a young woman, located within a cultural environment that still stressed hyper-masculine literary role models, I remember encountering Carter's novels for the first time and thinking 'Thank God! I can write like a woman'. The eroticism of her language, and nuanced deconstruction of sexuality and gender roles, the "polymorphous potentialities of female desires" (Makinen 14), remain

compelling. As we have seen, Carter also seems to be a relatively early example of a gifted feminist voice engaging with ideas about the species barrier.

More broadly, representations of sex and bodies remind us of our animality and the materiality of our existence, that we are part of the natural world and not beyond or above it. This implicitly challenges both the "western hyperseperation from nature" (73) and associated "existential homelessness" of human identity (Plumwood, *Feminism* 71). Similarly, Carter speaks of the "final divorce from the land" (*Virago* xxi — xxii), Carl Safina notes "Modernity's self-imposed exile from the world" (179) and Carol Adams suggests that "human exceptionalism is a- or for some- *the* major problem of the twenty-first century" (*Sister Species* xi). This is not a trivial connection. As Donna Haraway writes:

> By the late twentieth century in U.S. scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. The last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks: language, tool use, social behavior, mental events- nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. And many people no longer feel the need for such a separation; indeed, many branches of feminist culture affirm the pleasure of connection of human and other living creatures. Movements for animal rights are not irrational denials of human uniqueness; they are a clear-sighted recognition of connection across the discredited breach of nature and culture. (*Manifestly Haraway* 10)

It is possible that such representations, focusing as they do on connectedness with the natural world, may have cultural significance in that they shift female corporeal ontologies away from instrumentality, aesthetics and anxiety, and towards a sensory appreciation of bodies as integral, functioning parts of the bio-sphere; we become embedded in a living family, not isolated as gods.

By connecting sex to storytelling, my novella effectively reframes female sexuality, and narratives about women, within cultural traditions that often stress bodily commodification, passivity, instrumentality and inertia. It represents a protest against the homogenisation of female representations. My Scheherazade, a figure who coalesces the lower binaries of Western ratio-centric philosophical traditions — female, body, animal, instinct, imagination, emotion, the Orient — becomes powerful through an inspired combination of storytelling and sex. In my novella, I have sought to write these invisibles into power. Finally, this focus on the

body is meaningful for two reasons. It identifies embodiment as the ultimate source of all culture and cognition, thus reversing a fundamental Western binary. And if stories emerge from bodies, and both are conceived as having liberatory potential, then storytelling is a type of imaginative becoming that invites agency into our material lives.

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