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**Let the Real Scheherazade Stand:
Literary Representations of Middle Eastern Women**

A thesis
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*To the man who taught me the meaning of freedom,
To my father.*

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the multiple and complex ways in which Arab and Middle Eastern women have been conceived in literature written by both Western and Arab male and female authors. It covers almost a millennium of literature, beginning with the eleventh century Crusades which represent the earliest encounters between the West and the East. From there, the discussion moves to examine representations of Middle Eastern women in Western literature and the influences that helped forge that image, such as the biblical stories of Salomé, *The Arabian Nights*, the *Mu'allaquat or the Seven Arabian Poems*, Al-Firdausi's poetic epic, *The Shahname*, and the travelogues of British explorers who travelled the Middle East. Finally, the thesis turns to the work of Arab authors writing about their own culture and identity.

The analysis of this material is structured chronologically and undertaken in three parts. The first part examines historical and contextual material to establish the ways in which Oriental images, narratives and landscape became imbedded in the Western psyche and influenced Western literature and how Near Eastern men and women were imagined. The second stage analyses late nineteenth and early twentieth century British texts which engage directly with or are influenced by Oriental themes and ideas. The third stage considers English translations of Arabic texts written by men and women and their depiction of Arab women, in addition to a comparison between Western views of the East and Arabic perceptions of the West. The discussion concludes with a discussion of diasporic literature written by Arab women which forms a dialogue and a bridge between the two cultures.

The diverse range of literary forms discussed in the thesis include: travelogues; epistolary writing; poetry; drama; novel; memoirs; biographies; social criticism; and art. All the material discussed here is available in English with the exception of two or three poems and some critical works.

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INTRODUCTION

REVOLT!

I love for you to revolt ...

Revolt against the East

That harbours all the female prisoners ...

Revolt against all its religious Monasteries ...

And the smell of burning incense ...

Revolt against History ...

Triumph over the Grand Illusion.

Fear no one,

For the Sun is the burial place of Eagles.

Revolt against the East

That only sees in you

A feast over (a man's) bed.

Nizar Qabbani, *Journal of an Indifferent Woman*¹

I am going to begin at the end of my thesis. I came across Heather Raffo's *Nine Parts of Desire* in 2009 when I came to New Zealand in the hope of writing a thesis on James Fenimore Cooper. The women in this play shed light on the bitter reality of life for women in Iraq and the Middle East more generally. I was born and raised in Iraq and witnessed three wars and a civil war. I got married and divorced when my ex-husband wanted to introduce a second wife. To do this I had to decline women's financial rights in order to get a speedy divorce and full custody of my baby daughter, in whom my ex-husband had no interest. However, coming to live amid Western culture, I found other women of Arabic culture as confined in the West as they are in the Middle East. In the twenty-first century, and as a well-educated Iraqi woman, I wondered how this could be. I had witnessed a gradual but rapid social change from secularism into religious extremism, and asked myself why and how, along with Umm Ghada, 'as the mother of tomorrow'² these things continue to occur, even in the West.

Living in the West, I wanted to know why Arab women continue to succumb to the social norms of the Middle East and, more importantly, why the West continues to associate Arab women of all sorts with stereotypes that should have long been abandoned by both East and West. To answer this central question I turned to the past. I wanted to examine the ways in which

Arab women have been perceived in the West and how stereotypes emerged that have held Arab women fast. In Heather Raffo's play *Nine Parts of Desire* Umm Ghada comments:

I am hard to understand,
Why I survive
And my children dead.
I ask to Allah why?³

The answer she requires could lie in her question.

The hostility towards women in the Middle East has fluctuated and varied from one place to another, but, in general, it manifests itself through both the religious and social norms of the Middle East where I grew up. I decided to approach my question with a broadly historical approach while keeping a relatively narrow thematic and authorial focus. I have chosen to deal with 'the Orient' as a trope rather than as a physical geo-political entity, and so concentrated on "moments in time" that added to the debate and provided impetus toward my own time. This approach has enabled me to maintain some balance between depth and breadth. I have included both male and female authors — both critical and literary — to create the breadth over the long time period needed to answer my question. To create depth, I chose not to develop an in-depth historical approach, but have instead focussed on "moments in time" that add, in some specific way to my thesis.

Nevertheless, and despite dealing with the 'Orient' as a trope, there was a physical geo-political space that demanded a terminology. It proved difficult to come up with a correct and consistent terminology in my thesis, because of the ethnic and geo-political issues of the region. I chose the term the "Near East" for the early chapters to describe the geographical proximity to Europe, but after World War I the term "Middle East" came into vogue and, for the purposes of my thesis, became more apposite in that it has come to embody the area in which the struggle and predicament of women takes place, as a result of the religious and political turmoil taking place.

Of course, the term "Middle East" is, in itself, challenging and problematic. The Middle East refers to a geo-political entity rather than an actual geographical location. Thus, I call the images of my thesis Middle Eastern rather than Arabic because the cause of these women affects not only Arab women but also other ethnicities including, but not limited to, Turks,

Kurds and Persians. My research covers the area from the African Sahara (Algeria) in the West to Iraq and Turkey to the East and goes south as far as Sudan and Somalia which are identified as such within the thesis. It covers people of different faiths including Islam, Christianity and Mendaism. In all of these places I was able to find examples of the systematic abuse of women which sees such behaviour as legal, socially acceptable, and even commended. This demonstrates the breadth of the problem throughout the scope of my thesis.

Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) the relationship between the East and the West and the concept of the Arab Other have received significant critical attention, but Said was criticised for ignoring both class and gender in his seminal work. He overlooked Western women's voices and did not pay attention to representations of Arab women in Western literature. Charlotte Weber maintains that Said 'presented orientalism as a male preserve, a discourse articulated exclusively by men that "feminized" the East by attributing to it qualities typically associated with Woman herself.'⁴ Reina Lewis and Sara Mills observe that Said's *Orientalism* 'included little attention to female agency and discussed very few female writers.'⁵ My research contributes to this ongoing dialogue and sheds light on the image of Arab women as conceived by Western male and Western female authors, as well as by Arab men and women themselves. This is of particular importance and relevance in an era when the Arab Other has evolved to become the '*Dangerous Other*'.⁶ This research provides a fresh and multi-faceted perspective on Orientalism by exploring not only the Western cultural and critical heritage, but also Arab views of the Occident as expressed in Arab literary creations, mainly available in translation. The publication of Richard Burton's *One Thousand and One Nights* meant that few people had not heard of Aladdin or Sinbad the Sailor despite the fact that these two stories were added by Galland in his French translation of the *Nights*. Middle Eastern culture has been the subject of imitation, fascination and fear from the time of the Crusades.

This thesis considers the ways in which the West has viewed Middle Eastern culture by its focus on women. An analysis of British and other literary fictions and non-fictions — such as travel narratives, letters, and

autobiographies — as well as the examination of some European Oriental paintings, reveals how Middle Eastern women are depicted in works written in English. Finally, the thesis explores how Middle Eastern women are able to find their own voices and express themselves both in the Middle East and abroad in diasporic literature. Inevitably issues of race and gender arise as some eight hundred years of literature is considered, but the focus of the thesis is a well-defined one. It illuminates the variety of ways in which Arab women have been portrayed in thought and literature by both Western and Arab, male and female authors. Its intention is to move beyond the stereotype and examine the associated ideology, while illuminating the gulf between the fantasy Arab world and the complexities that constitute reality.

The first “moment in time” explores the early encounters between the East and the West during the time of the Crusades that began in the eleventh century. Accounts of individual pilgrims — the annals, letters and *chansons de geste* — were popular in that era. In addition to military encounters of the Crusades there were also trade caravans and other commercial contacts. Although Near East Orientalism did not emerge in a recognisable Saidian form until the eighteenth century, the seeds of tension and discord were already sown in the eleventh century. Jill Claster contends that the early concept of otherness ‘harbors within it that religious zeal which ... can turn into cruelty against anyone seen as an enemy of the true faith. It was only a step away from persecution of the “other”’.⁷ These perceptions continued into the Renaissance and beyond, evident in works such as William Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1603).

Another “moment in time” examines the writings of female travellers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Julia Pardoe, Harriet Martineau and Lady Isabel Burton, to detect their attitudes towards the Near East in general and Eastern women in particular. Elisabeta Zelinka suggests that Oriental discourse by women writers is ‘much more objective, less imperialistic and superiority-tinged.’⁸ She claims that the female authors of the Victorian and Edwardian eras identified themselves with the ‘inferiorised Orient, controlled utterly by men.’⁹

Obviously, the various translations of the *Arabian Nights* and their influence on the Western imagination, especially the character of Scheherazade and her stories, play a significant part in forming Western ideas about the East

by the end of the nineteenth century. The first European translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*, also known as the *Arabian Nights*, was published in French in 1704. This first edition achieved such great success and popularity that it was quickly translated into English and other European languages, the most famous of which is *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night: A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments* (1885) by Sir Richard F. Burton. Burton's translation captured the imagination of its readers and it became a source of inspiration for British authors and artists. As Julian Franklyn states, '[t]o approach the *Nights* with an open mind is to learn why William Doughty, Richard Burton, T. E. Lawrence, have lost their hearts to the Arabs'.¹⁰ The *Arabian Nights* became one of the richest fiction sources of knowledge regarding the East; indeed the imaginative construction of the Orient in the text was often accepted as fact or reality by European audiences. In addition, Sir William Jones translated the Arabic *Mu'allaquat or the Seven Arabian Poems* and the Persian poetry of Firdausi's *Shahname* in the eighteenth century. All of these works utilised Near Eastern influences to create ideas of heroism and chivalry on the one hand and despotism and dissent on the other. Women were stereotyped as vicious motivators or helpless victims in the Romantic writings of Robert Southey, William Beckford, P. B. Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and George Gordon, Lord Byron. I will also trace the influence of the *Arabian Nights* on the works of Matthew Arnold and Alfred Lord Tennyson.

The sense of crisis and loss of identity associated with the latter part of the nineteenth century, and more particularly the Victorian Decadents of the 1890s exploited images of Salomé and were employed by symbolists and the *fin de siècle* movement in works such as Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* (1891), Heinrich Heine's *Atta Troll* (1841), Stéphane Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* (1867), and Gustave Flaubert's *Herodias* (1877). Graham Dawson comments that during the last three decades of the nineteenth century 'cultural contact with the East is variously imagined as *regenerating* a jaded European civilization or as the means whereby the West *revives* and *redeems* the dead world of the Orient'.¹¹ Emily Leider ascribes the colonial Western view to the mysteriousness of the female Arab: '[b]ehind the veil, beneath the scantily covered midriff and the

scarves she sheds as she twirls, the harem dancer's skin takes on a high voltage erotic charge because it is at once undulating and concealed, unknown.'¹²

Another "moment in time" is the emergence of the New Woman in the nineteenth century as she appears in the short story 'A Cross Line' (1894) by George Egerton. The New Woman also appears in the popular Desert Romances of Edith Hull. The Orientalist influence on the construction of Arab female characters that appeared in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century British literature have received critical attention by scholars such as Sally Ledger, Kerry Powell and Christopher Nassaar. Views of the Middle East in literature were also influenced by the conflicts occurring there. In literature the deserts of Sahara or Arabia formed the backdrop of the desert romances that became part of iconic pop-culture through the film adaptations of *The Sheik* (1921) and *The Son of the Sheik* (1926), starring Rudolph Valentino. Billie Melman classifies *The Sheik* as a 'rape-cum-redemption'¹³ story and believes that the novel received its infamous reputation because it initiated the discourse on women's desires and sexual autonomy and put it on the map of popular culture of the 1920s.¹⁴ Ann Ardis writes in the same strand, stating that *The Sheik* is significant in 'legitimizing the female adventure plot ... in the context of post-war efforts to redomesticate women'.¹⁵

What follows examines the travel narratives and memoirs of Gertrude Bell and Freya Stark, writing in the Edwardian and Modernist periods. This is an important "moment in time" that comes with Vita Sackville-West, Gertrude Bell, Agatha Christie and Freya Stark who question the circumstance of the Middle Eastern women. They look at labouring women in the fields who are considered "Free" and doubt 'if they have ever enjoyed the luxury of veiling their faces' (p.147) The presence of Western women in the Middle East sets them apart from local women. They own liberties only men can dream of in the Middle East, and local women do not relate to them as other women, but rather they become distinguished as a third sex. They simultaneously have access to the Harim and to the men's council. This is important because it seems to identify a rift between Western and Eastern women which persists even when both live together in the West.

Perceptions of the Middle East had changed and the Oriental influences on female authors, such as Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West together with

male writers, in particular T. E. Lawrence, James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence – explored sexual, social, and relationship values in the West using the Middle Eastern trope. This trope became a means by which the relationship between masculinity and femininity could be explored. Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) disturbs and blurs the binary opposites intrinsic to Western Expression, and gleefully crosses boundaries that should be crossed. D. H. Lawrence, on the other hand, clings to a biological essentialism in *The Plumed Serpent* (1925).

The emergence of Arabic feminism and its associated calls for social reform occurred in the late nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century. The call for emancipation and equality of women, mainly in Egypt, occurred through the works of Qasim Amin, in addition to the emerging voices of Arab women such as Aisha Taymur, Zainab Fawwaz, Huda Shaarawi, and Saiza Nabarawi. Their demands for equality, education and equal opportunities for work, as well as their contribution to the nationalistic movement in the first half of the twentieth century forms another “moment in time” and a switch in perspective, from an exploration of how the West represented Middle Eastern women to how Arab authors, both male and female, represented themselves.

Concepts of masculinity and femininity are likewise central to Chapter IX, which examines the rise of feminism in the Near East and the ways in which twentieth century Arab male authors have depicted Arab women. *The Cairo Trilogy* of Naguib Mahfouz is of particular note. I also consider how the Arabs looked back at the Occident in relation to Tayeb Salih's novel *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), where the Occidental Other becomes victim to the Orientalist imagining. The discussion then moves to the poetry of Nizar Qabbani, inciting rebellion amongst Arab women.

Finally, in Chapter X the attention shifts to the voices of Arab diasporic female writers dealing with loss and struggling to define their identity in their new Western countries. The words and journeys of Assia Djebar, Inaam Kachachi, May Witwit, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Fadia Faqir, and Heather Raffo resonate with particular poignancy for me, for many of their sentiments and experiences reflect my own.

My critical stance has been influenced by both feminist and post-colonial critics, while Bakhtin has proved useful in his definitions of the carnivalesque. All of these sources have been used insofar as they relate to women, gender

and Orientalism. Most critics agree with Margaret Sironval that Orientalism is ‘the sum of knowledge pertaining to the East’.¹⁶ Nevertheless Orientalism takes on different dimensions according to the political orientation of the authors; for example, C.C. Barfoot and Theo D’haen define Orientalism as ‘a prospect of the Orient in which the lure for the Western writer is the perception of an antithesis that allows one to celebrate one’s infinite [superiority]’.¹⁷ Ton Hoenselaars defines Orientalism as ‘the product of a combined ethnocentric and expansionist urge of the West to establish a politically reassuring identity-alterity construct[;] the image inevitably expressed more about the Occident than it did about the Orient.’¹⁸

In 1978 Edward Said published his groundbreaking study, *Orientalism*, which was considered the ‘founding text of post-colonial criticism’,¹⁹ not only because of its topic but also because it tackles the ‘hegemony of representation, about the role of discourse and cultural imagery in the formulation and perpetuation of power relationships’ on which many studies were built.²⁰ For Said, Orientalism is a discourse subjected to the historical, political and economic supremacy of the West, and a representation of the East reflecting and emphasising the inferiority of the East to justify its colonisation: ‘My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient seemed weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s difference with its weakness.’²¹ Said covers a wide range of writings — beginning with Dante, Chaucer and Shakespeare, and continuing on to examine British and French Oriental writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Lord Byron, W. M. Thackeray, Victor Hugo and Chateaubriand — to elucidate his point. In addition, he draws on historical and political commentary by distinguished figures such as Napoleon, A. J. Balfour, Benjamin Disraeli and Henry Kissinger. One of Said’s major aims is to question the legitimacy or validity of Orientalism as a method of representation:

How does one *represent* other cultures? What is *another* culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one’s own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the “other”)?²²

For Said, Orientalism ‘operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting’.²³ Traditional Orientalism reconstructs and reformulates the East (and Islam) to respond to ‘certain cultural, professional, national, political, and economic requirements’ of the West.²⁴ However he goes to extremes when he decides that ‘every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric’.²⁵

Said is considered the father of post-colonial criticism. Other critics who followed the tradition are Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri C. Spivak. In his work, Bhabha focuses on the language, or rather, the ‘silence around the colonial truth’.²⁶ He examines different Oriental writings to detect the non-sense of the critical moment of cultural encounter between the coloniser and the Other, considering them ‘hybrid signifiers’ marking ‘the intimations of a colonial Otherness’.²⁷ He traces the attempts of Western authors such as Joseph Conrad and E. M. Forster to depict the cultural identity of the colonised and to articulate the cultural differences between the colonised and the coloniser, relying on Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalysis and Jacques Derrida’s theory of dissemination, thus posing an important question: ‘What becomes of cultural identity – the ability to put the right word in the right place at the right time – when it crosses the colonial non-sense– neither the one-meaningful – nor the other – meaningless?’²⁸ According to Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan, the non-sense utterances of the moment of encounter for Bhabha are ‘the inscriptions of an uncertain colonial silence that mocks the social performance of language with their non-sense; that baffles the communicable verities of culture with their refusal to translate’.²⁹

Bhabha also discusses the normalising strategy of the coloniser and how it affects the colonised culture. Quoting authors such as Fitzjames Stephen and missionaries like A. Duff, he claims that meaninglessness in the writings of Western authors about the East is intended and often necessary in order to maintain the assumption of superiority of Western culture and to ‘reinforce the belligerence of British civilization’.³⁰

Gayatri C. Spivak, another post-colonial critic, admits the contradiction between being an elite esoteric intellectual and professor teaching in the United States and being, simultaneously, one of the marginalised Third World women.

Thus she relies on deconstruction as a means of interpreting and tracing imperialism in literature. She comments that:

When a cultural identity is thrust upon one because the center wants an unidentifiable margin, claims for marginality assure validation from the center. It should then be pointed out that what is being negotiated here is not even a race or a social type but an economic principle of identification through separation.³¹

Spivak disagrees with Timothy Mitchell that the typical Orientalist sees ‘the world as exhibition’ and that the new Orientalist views ‘the world as immigrant’, as this view undervalues the struggle of marginality.³² In her article ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ she emphasises the neo-colonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure; she also poses the ironic question as to whether the post-colonial critic could be an unconscious accomplice in that damaging process against the Other’s culture. Spivak also deals with gender issues. She is a feminist and her groundbreaking work ‘Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism’ reflects on the complexity and overlap between different critical approaches, mainly post-colonialism and feminism. She points out that *Jane Eyre* could be considered a new feminist ideal, but this happens at the cost of Bertha’s death (Rochester’s Creole wife); Bertha represents the colonial Other in this novel. Hence Spivak anticipates that ‘a feminist approach to theory perhaps precludes an understanding of the novel’s depiction of the “epistemic violence” (and in the case of Bertha, physical containment and pathologization) done upon imperial subjects’.³³

Anne McClintock, a feminist post-colonial critic, believes that race, gender and class are overlapping and cannot be examined in isolation from each other. She believes that gender is not about sexuality but rather ‘a question of subdued labor and imperial plunder’. In turn, imperialism and race are ‘fundamental aspects of Western, industrial modernity.’³⁴ It is significant that McClintock demonstrates that in an imperialistic culture the invention of race is ‘central not only to the self-definition of the middle class but also to the policing of the “dangerous classes”’.³⁵ This process is similar and analogous to the more recent political development of the Arab Other figure into the

Dangerous Other. McClintock agrees with Said that gendering, or rather feminising, the Orient to suit the coloniser's male fantasy results from sexuality being an 'abiding aspect of imperial power.'³⁶ She explores the different ways in which the Orient was feminised in art, photography and literature but she identifies the difference between the surface and interior values and goes further than Said, to prove that gender may metaphorically represent political and social powers that are not related to sexuality. In fact she criticises Said because he 'does not systematically explore the dynamics of gender as a critical aspect of the imperial project'.³⁷

Billie Melman and Reina Lewis are feminist critics who refute Said's *Orientalism* as being gender-blind. Instead they question whether women's Orientalism is different from men's Orientalism by examining the ways in which women have participated in the construction of Orientalism both as Westerners and natives. Melman argues in her *Women's Orient: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918, Sexuality, Religion and Work* that though Said uses examples of the construction of women in literature as descriptive illustrations of Orientalist discourses, he does not incorporate an analysis of gender into his conceptual approach.³⁸

Reina Lewis, on the other hand, points out in her book *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* that women's Orientalism, in contrast with Said's, was not 'either simply supportive or simply oppositional', it was also 'partial, fragmented and contradictory', and often produced less degrading forms of representation of the orientalised Other.³⁹ Studying writings of women travelers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and memoirs of Turkish women such as Zeyneb Hanim, Melek Hanim and the writings of Demetra Vaka Brown, Lewis realises that authors had to struggle against the prejudices of the West in order to shatter the 'Orientalist assumptions about the innate inferiority of the all-so-fascinatingly exotic East' and depict an image of the harem different from the exaggerated sexual one that dominates.⁴⁰ Melman agrees with this opinion and demonstrates that for female writers the harem is conceived in relation to the women's domestic and social arrangements and is no longer an oppressive voyeuristic prison.⁴¹

Frantz Fanon, author of *Black Skin, White Masks*, feminises the colonised Other. He conceives nationalism as cultural projection and considers the

military power of the occupier a ‘resurgence of the authority of the father’.⁴² He also gives the relationship between the coloniser and colonised a sado-masochist dimension, claiming that ‘colonial desire’ is not the same for men and women; being the master, the white man can have and seize many (Other) women whereas the white woman has a ‘giving’ relationship with a colonised man because she becomes romantically involved with him, which is quite rare.⁴³ Thus the coloniser becomes the masculine master in a sadomasochist relationship with a feminine colonised subject. Barfoot and D’haen’s definition of Orientalism fits Fanon’s Orientalism as ‘a prospect of the Orient in which the lure for the Western writer is the perception of an antithesis that allows one to celebrate one’s infinite [superiority]’,⁴⁴ when he states that ‘[t]here can be no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man.’⁴⁵

Amin Maalouf discusses the wide concept of identity in his book *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, including the personal, religious, ethnic, and national dimensions of identity. He argues that people tag others depending on one dimension of their identity, whether it is their nationality, race, religion or sect, creating enemies out of them and fanatics out of themselves. Maalouf also argues that people define their individual identities by the aspect which is under threat at a certain point of time. He suggests that, ‘[w]hen modernity bears the mark of “the Other” it is not surprising if some people confronting it brandish symbols of atavism to assert their difference’.⁴⁶ He compares the East and the West, giving examples of intolerance from both cultures throughout history, and argues against the oversimplified fanaticism against the Other.

Joanna Grant, in *Modernism’s Middle East*, provides a deep perspective into the topic. She examines the depiction of the Middle East and its denizens and the strong presence of both on the minds of authors and readers equally; whether these depictions are fiction or non-fiction, she justifies this presence as a reaction against ‘the presumed cultural, physical, and spiritual decline of Western civilization’.⁴⁷ She traces the image of both the Arab Other and the desert in works of authors such as Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, Lawrence Durrell and Paul Bowles – and critics such as Anne McClintock, Billie Melman, and Kathryn Tedrick – and echoes Graham Dawson’s

approach, implementing the Kleinian theory of introjection and identification in her analysis. Grant also focuses on the significance and influence of the image of Lawrence of Arabia, comparing different biographies by Lowell Thomas, Robert Graves and Richard Aldington, and drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu's 'theory of the cultural field and of the importance of the symbolic capital in the restricted subfield of production'.⁴⁸

Edward Said is the most prominent and memorable amongst Arab critics, but he is not the only one. In 1923, fifty-five years before the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, Omar Fakhouri published his book *Araá Gharbiya fi Masail Sharkiya* (Western Opinions in Oriental Issues) which was one of the earliest Arab attempts to resist the Orientalist movement and the adoption of Western ideologies. Motivated by the nationalist spirit of the age, Fakhouri identifies two types of Orientalism: in the first type Western Orientalists 'reject the Other' and recreate a 'ridiculous image' of Arab society.⁴⁹ The second type of Orientalism emphasises the 'image of the self' of the Arab, in other words the orientalist reflects the image that the Arab likes to see of himself in the Oriental narrative.⁵⁰ Khairi Mansour agrees with him and dedicates his book, *Al-Istishrak wa Al-Wai Al-Salib (Orientalism and Passive Consciousness)*, to criticise many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Arab literary figures who adopted the Oriental ideology, such as Taha Hussein and Jurgi Zaidan.

Other Arab critics take different approaches towards Orientalism. Leila Ahmed is a feminist who examined the image of Eastern women in Oriental works as well as the relationship of Eastern women to Islam. Ahmed is politically oriented like Said, and in her article entitled 'Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem' she denounces feminist Orientalists' stereotypes about the Middle East and their perception that Muslim women are:

overwhelmingly oppressed without being able to define the specific content of that oppression, in the same way that they 'know' that Muslims – Arabs, Iranians, or whatever – are ignorant, backward, irrational, and uncivilized.⁵¹

Ahmed goes further to examine and criticise the reality of women's life in the Middle East. In *Women and Gender in Islam* she expresses a unique view of Islam, criticising its tiers and identifying an official tier created by the clergy for the public consumption and submission of women.⁵²

Fatema Mernissi is another feminist who critiques the role of women in Islam. In *Scheherezade Goes West* she questions the predominant image of the harem which ‘Westerners associate with euphoria, with the absence of constraints’.⁵³ She seeks to redefine the harem and casts light on female agency in the East; thus she compares the paintings of the harem depicted by Ingres to the harems fantasised by Muslim and Arab artists, declaring Ingres’ harem women to be ‘idle, helplessly passive, and always pictured indoors’, whereas Muslim artists and authors have always imagined ‘self-assertive, strong-minded, uncontrollable, and mobile women’.⁵⁴ For Mernissi, it is this agency and uncontrollable sexual power that threatens to create havoc in the patriarchal Islamic social order; hence the necessity to impose the veil on Muslim/Middle Eastern women.

Tahar Labib is an Arab critic who examines the concept of Otherness extensively in his book *Imagining the Arab Other: How Arabs and Non-Arabs View Each Other*. Following Bhabha and Spivak, he focuses on Orientalism and the need to create the Other, but he goes further to investigate the Arab view of being the Other, and the Other in the Arab culture; more accurately, how Arabs and Turks and Iranians viewed each other. He believes that the creation of the Other reflects ‘a reality [...] of those who built it’.⁵⁵ Thus he studies a spectrum of Arab writers, beginning with the medieval era up to contemporary writers who focus on concepts of the ‘ego’ or the ‘self’ versus ‘the Other’. Moreover, he studies the shift from plural ‘Others’ into one ‘Other’, which transforms, in its turn, to become ‘the West’. Labib takes his research a step further by attempting to find answers as to why this ‘Other’ (the West) is conceived as a threat against the identity of Arab culture.⁵⁶

My discussion throughout is shaped by an engagement with a variety of theoretical approaches, in particular post-colonialism and feminism. My research provides a fresh and multi-faceted perspective on Orientalism by exploring not only the Western cultural critical heritage but also Arab views of the Occident as expressed in Arab literary creations available in translations. In my analysis of the shifting ways in which Arab women have been described and represented, a juxtaposition of rich and complex imagery is offered: the ways in which the West is looking at the East, and how the East is looking back. My position is unique because I was born and raised in the Middle East

but I had a Western Education (in English), so I am both an insider and an outsider. I am also a diasporic migrant who feels that I belong here much more than I ever did in Iraq, but is still considered an outsider by others.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

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² Heather Raffo, *9 Parts of Desire: A Play* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006), p. 31. All future references will be to this edition.

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⁵ Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (Eds), 'Introduction', in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 2.

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¹⁶ Yuriko Yamanaka and Tetsuo Nishio, *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2006), p. 238.

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¹⁸ Barfoot and D'haen, p. 9.

¹⁹ Joanna Grant, *Modernism's Middle East: Journeys to Barbary* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 3.

²⁰ Barfoot, p. 161.

²¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 204.

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CHAPTER I

THE NEAR EAST: EARLY CONTACTS AND INFLUENCES

Since the beginning of the fourth century – when Constantine declared Christianity [*sic*] *religio licita* (Edict of Milan 313) – Christians have visited the Holy Land in the footsteps of St. Helena (326). Jerusalem developed as a Christian Holy City through the building of the sanctuaries which were to become the final destination of the pilgrimage.

Guiseppe Perta, ‘The Image of Jerusalem through The Pilgrims’ Accounts’¹

The earliest encounters between what is now called the Near East and Europe appeared in literature in the form of accounts of individual pilgrimages that began in the fourth century. There were also trade caravans and other commercial contacts although Near East Orientalism would not emerge, in a recognisable form, until the late nineteenth century. However, a number of accounts were written to show ‘Jerusalem as it was during the Byzantine and, later, Muslim domination. Pilgrims wrote their account to enable Western readers know the Holy sites of Jerusalem, to know the relics they were able to see at each site, to show the route to find them.’² However, as Guiseppe Perta also points out in her article, ‘The Image of Jerusalem Through the Pilgrims’ Accounts (IV–XII C.): Recent Approaches of Medieval Studies’, much scholarship in relation to the Near East has begun with the study of the Crusades, and this chapter is no exception. Although, of course, the Crusades were fought largely by men, women feature in no small measure in the literature. The Crusades saw the first widespread dissemination of Near Eastern stories, which saw Near Eastern tales feature not only in oral literature, but by the time Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1343 – 1400) was writing *The Canterbury Tales* featured not only Chivalric values and tales, but also threads from the *One Thousand and One Nights*. By the time Shakespeare (1564-1616) was writing, he was able to incorporate a Near Eastern voice into his play *Othello*.

The call for a Crusade (in Arabic: *al-Huroub al-Salibiyya*, ‘Wars of the Cross’) was made by Pope Urban II on 27 November 1095.³ In his famous

speech at the Council of Clermont, he addressed the capture of Jerusalem by the Turks in 1071, the desecration of the holy churches and the massacre of Christians. Both Christians and Jews suffered persecution during the rule of Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (996-1021), the Muslim caliph of Egypt, as he ordered random arrests and executions of *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book; that is, Christians and Jews). Moreover, he ordered that *Ahl al-Kitab* be subjected to *ghiyar*, which was a certain dress code that distinguished Jews and Christians from Muslim citizens. Then, in 1009, he ordered that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre be demolished; this was ‘the most flagrant declaration of anti-Christian policy ever enunciated in the Holy Land’.⁴ On the other hand, the ideology of a Christian holy war was being developed by Pope Gregory VII (ca.1015-85), who coined the term *militia Christi*.⁵

The First Crusade saw some of the earliest widespread encounters between Europe and the Arab World; it began as a result of the call of Pope Urban II (ca.1042-99) to fight the ‘accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God’ and ‘Enter upon the road to the Holy Sepulchre; wrest the land from the wicked race and subject it to yourselves.’⁶ This call was answered by the masses who, in return for fighting the Muslims, were promised ‘remission of sins [and], the freedom from the punishment in purgatory that would, under other circumstances, await the guilty.’⁷ The religious ethos that dominated these wars was the cause of much misunderstanding and suspicion, as the Crusade, according to Jill N. Claster, ‘harbors within it that religious zeal which ... can turn into cruelty against anyone seen as an enemy of the true faith. It was only a step away from persecution of the “other”’.⁸ In return, the Muslims despised *al-Firinge* (the Franks or foreigners) and deemed them ‘culturally inferior semi-savages. [Their] men were characterized as brave and strong though sexually promiscuous’.⁹

Bravery and prowess, of course, may also be found in *Beowulf* (ca. eighth century-eleventh century). Together with notions of kingship being granted as a gift from God, the poem emphasises this combination of society, war, and the divine:

Then there was a son born to succeed him,
A boy for that house, given by God
As a comfort to the folk for all the wretchedness
He saw they had lived in from year to year

Of glory, gave the man worldly excelling,
Till his fame spread far, the fame of Beowulf.¹⁰

Beowulf also demonstrates clearly the notion of darkness and, as Morgan comments, the narrative and episodes are 'equally concerned with the workings of Providence (whether 'God' or wyrd) and with both the psychology and the morality of human actions.'¹¹ On the other hand:

Grendel the fiend's name: grim, infamous,
Wasteland-stalker, master of the moors
And the fen-fortress; the world of demonkind
Was for long the home of the unhappy creature
After his Creator had cast him out
With the kin of Cain, the everlasting Lord
Destining for the death of Abel killed;
A joyless feud, for he banished him far,
His maker for his crime, far from mankind.
Progenitor he was of the miscreations,
Kobolds and gogmagogs, lemurs¹² and zombies
And the brood of titans that battled with God.¹³

Here we can see that 'the world of demonkind' is clearly associated with Cain and other outcasts, and is therefore the enemy of society. This association of naming the 'other' with the sins of Cain continues. By the thirteenth century, it can be observed that Lazamon's *Brut* associates pagan Saxon¹⁴ idols with 'Mahomet'.¹⁵

The First Crusade of 1096-99 was marked by chaos as it was difficult to curb the numbers of non-combatant Crusaders, which included women, children, clerics and older people. Though the first group of Crusaders marched under the leadership of Bishop Adhemar of Monteil, it was hard to keep them unified and under the control of any leadership. Nonetheless, Crusaders returned to Christian Europe with tales of courage, and poems were composed in celebration of their heroism. Crusaders also brought home many relics from the Holy Land, in addition to their war booty. This encouraged people to join the later Crusades which, as on the First Crusade, were poorly organised and relied on pillage to provide for the warriors en route.¹⁶ Moreover, during the minor Crusade of 1101, Greek shrines were desecrated before reaching Constantinople, which enraged Emperor Alexius. That Crusade was also marked by cruelty and violence towards the innocent unarmed farmers who were trapped between the Crusade armies and the high walls of besieged towns

on the way to Jerusalem; Anselm of Ribemont mentions that when Crusaders killed Muslim villagers out of Nicaea they ‘fixed [their heads] upon spikes and spears, offer[ing] a spectacle joyful to the people of God.’¹⁷ The second Crusade took place under the rule of Baldwin II who formed the order of the Knights Templar in 1118 after the first order of the Knights Hospitaller was formed in 1113. Richard I led the third Crusade (1189-92) against Saladin with the intention of taking control of the coastal cities in the Holy Land, from Acre to Jerusalem. By this time the Crusades were generally considered a source of fascination and romance for those who stayed at home.

Stories about the Crusades abounded throughout Europe, and narratives of the Knights Hospitaller and the Knights Templar prevailed in Medieval Romances, where no distinction at all was made between reality and fiction, histories, and heroic epics. European historians have had contradictory opinions of the Crusades. On the one hand, Sir Steven Runciman believes that ‘[i]n the long sequence of the interaction and fusion between Orient and Occident out of which our civilization has grown, the Crusades were a tragic and destructive episode.’¹⁸ On the other hand, French historian Louis Brehier states that ‘[i]t would be unjust to condemn out of hand these five centuries of heroism ... which left behind in the consciences of modern peoples a certain ideal of generosity and a taste for sacrifice on behalf of noble causes which the harshest lessons of reality will never erase completely.’¹⁹

The heroic epics of the Crusaders combined elements to glorify the Crusading Ideal and to serve as propaganda to encourage aspiring males to join in the Holy enterprise, as may be seen in the literature of the Middle Ages. However, it is fair to say that few of the heroic epics have any place for women, except as victims. These poems break away from the tradition of praising the enemy’s courage and fortitude as a scale by which to measure the hero’s own bravery, found in earlier epics such as the *Iliad*. The Crusaders’ heroism lies in the romantic image of the knights, as they are shown in the annals, letters and *chansons de geste*. Later chansons of the thirteenth century highlight the heroism of one English hero: Richard the Lionheart – ‘the deuell of hell | That was come [the Saracens] to quell’²⁰ – for his horsemanship and bravery while moving towards Acre to ‘To assaute with many Sarezyn’:

Kyng Ry chard took leve and leep on stede,

And prykyd forth with hys felawsrede.
 He rod aboute the clos dyke,
 Toward Acres, sykyrlyke,
 Tyl he com to the hospytayle
 Off Seynt Thomas, as I fynd in tale.
 Ther leet he pyght hys pavyloun.
 And arerede hys Mate-Grylfon.
 It was off tree, castel ful fyn.
 To assaute with many Sarezyn.(Vol.II, L. 2870-80)²¹

These chansons romanticise the image of the knights and their code of chivalry. They selectively reflect nobility and self-sacrifice ignoring, at the same time, some of the cruel crimes committed against Muslim as well as Christian civilians. In the fourteenth century, ‘the author of *Arthur and Merlin* would term the Briton’s pagan enemies not Saxons but “Saracens”²² due to the ambivalent attitude towards the East. After the Crusades, as Michael Swanton comments, English authors perceived the Arab world as a ‘curious mixture of imaginative misunderstanding and authentic detail.’²³ The images depicted by these authors went to extremes; on the one hand, a Church-driven inexorable hatred that can be detected in Lazamon’s *Brut*, as a Christian’s mission to slaughter the ‘heathen hounds’,²⁴ and in romances such as *Richard the Lionheart*, where Richard prefers a fat Saracen as ‘a good substitute of pork ... [and] Richard is said to eat Saracen heads “all hot”.’²⁵ The animal imagery used here is coupled with ideas of the foreign, the outcast and the other. Another example of romantic chivalry is Godfrey of Bouillon who, when offered the throne of Jerusalem, is known to have said that ‘he would not wear a crown of gold in the city where his Savior had worn a crown of thorns’.²⁶ Godfrey of Bouillon is the protagonist of the *Chanson d'Antioche* (ca.1180), the *Chanson de Jérusalem* (ca. 1350-1425), and the *Chanson des Chétifs* (ca. 1350-1425), which form the core of the Crusade cycle of *chansons de geste*. Paul Rousset suggests that ‘[t]he Crusade could only have been undertaken and the famous *La Chanson de Roland* (ca.1040-1115) could only have been composed at a period when the Crusading ideal could be realized’.²⁷ Rousset also believes that epic poetry about Charlemagne made the Crusaders his ‘posthumous army’²⁸ and set the mood to accept Pope Urban II’s call.

The practice of glorifying the Crusaders continued well into the sixteenth century, when the Italian poet Torquato Tasso (1544-95) published his best-

known poem, *La Gerusalemme liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 1581). The poem depicts an heroic picture of the combat between Christians and Muslims during the First Crusade and the siege of Jerusalem. Tasso begins his poem in true epic fashion, with an invocation to his muse to join him in praising the efforts of Christian Crusaders to rid Jerusalem of Ottoman influence. He sees the mission in wholly heroic terms and no doubt pleases his patron with his suggestion that:

Thy name [August Alphonso] perchance my future theme
may be,
And the great deeds I tell, be told of thee.
For should at length the Christian pow'rs combine
To wrest his prey from savage Othman's line.²⁹

The poem is written in true heroic style and Hunt, the translator, seems to have believed that Tasso's poem was close to a true depiction of the events surrounding the Crusades. In a note about Robert, the eldest son of William the Conqueror (who was deprived of the English throne by a preference for his younger brother), Hunt comments that:

It is usual in heroic poetry to assign that success to the
personal strength and courage of the leaders, which is in fact
going into their discretion, no event in History could have
been chosen where the exaggerations of poetry are better
supported by historical facts than the Crusades.³⁰

Robert, Duke of Normandy, despite being one of the most distinguished Christian warriors, is not featured prominently in Tasso's poem. Despite his failure to glorify this hero of the Crusades, however, Tasso remained one of the most widely read poets in Europe until the beginning of the twentieth century.

La Chanson de Roland, also written in the mid-sixteenth century, is an epic poem and an example, together with the *Chanson de Cid*, of the *chanson de geste*, of a literary form that had flourished between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. *La Chanson de Roland* is an epic poem based on the Battle of Roncevaux in 778, during the reign of Charlemagne. The oldest surviving major work of French literature, *La Chanson de Roland* 'gives religious significance to secular acts'.³¹ This poem was written changing the historical identity of the enemy (the Basques) and blaming the defeat of the rearguard of Charlemagne's army on the Muslim army. According to Edward Said's theory of representation, this was done to depict the Orient as an anti-Occidental

theatre. He comments in *Culture and Imperialism* that in the great texts of Western literature may be seen ‘a standing interest in what was considered a lesser world populated with lesser people of colour, portrayed as open to the intervention of so many Robinson Crusoes.’³² Peter Haidu suggests that in the Middle Ages ‘human alterity could only be recognized as a negatively marked version of the self’.³³ Thus, in the *La Chanson de Roland*, ‘if Occidentals have positive value – and they do – Orientals have none.’³⁴ The main feature of heroism as it was constructed during the Crusades transforms an ordinary battle into a battle between good and evil; hence, the hero in such songs is ‘marked by the exclusive love of war’.³⁵ The Crusaders here represent the power of good and the army of the Christian God. In this poetry the Saracens or Muslims are, therefore, the dark army of evil. These poems, then, give moral and cultural superiority to the Crusaders. The *La Chanson de Roland* and other *chansons de geste* valorise the Crusaders as the soldiers of God and offer ‘no empathy for alterity’.³⁶ *Sowdone of Babylone* (ca. mid-fifteenth century) is usually classified as a romance rather than a chanson or epic. Ferumbras, the son of the Sultan, renounces his religion because, having lost the battle, he believes that his ‘goddis ben false’ to him:

His bare guttis men might see;
 The blode faste down ranne,
 “Hoo, Olyvere, I yelde me to the,
 And here I become thy man.
 I am so hurte, I may not stoned,
 I put me alle in thy grace.
 My goddis ben false by water and londe. (11351-57)³⁷

The poem celebrates the Saracen warriors, but only those who renounce their own God and convert to Christianity.

Arabic poetry had its own brand of heroism and epic qualities. Poetry of the twelfth century celebrates the heroism of Saladin according to the Islamic code of chivalry, which involves horsemanship, bravery, fearlessness and military prowess Ibn Al-Hamawi (1179–1229) mentions how Saladin led his Frank prisoners:

He led the horses to the Franks by land,
 And chased them in the sea with his ships,
 He filled these ships with female captives
 Swaying their bodies as the ships sway.³⁸

Ruthlessness, of course, exists in both poetic traditions. In his *Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered*, Hunt comments that 'these extraordinary instances of strength and valour would seem to be unquestionable because they are attested both by the Christian and Mahometan annalists, by friends and enemies',³⁹ but there is also generosity, tolerance and mercy in both traditions.

Ibn Shaddad (1145-1234), a contemporary biographer, is lavish in his praise for Saladin, but since much of his biography was written during his lifetime, it is no wonder that his celebration of Saladin's heroism and generosity are sometimes extravagant.⁴⁰ Carole Hillenbrand sees Ibn Jubayr as a more neutral source since he lived in Spain, yet he also 'describes the pious foundations established by Saladin in Alexandria – colleges, hostels, baths and a hospital – he sums up Saladin's achievements as follows "the memorable acts of the Sultan, his efforts for justice and his stands in defense of Islamic lands are too numerous to count."⁴¹ Tales of Saladin are used by many Arab poets, including Ali Ibn Al-Sa'ti, Al-Jilyani, Arkalah Al-Kalbi and Waheesh Al-Asadi. A 'white sword' – referring to Saladin's moral stand – is used by a number of Saladin's contemporary Arab poets, such as Usamah Ibn Al-Munqith, Abu Al-hasan Ibn Al-Sa'ati and Sa'adah Ibn Abd-Allah. It is used as 'a symbol of righteousness in that it apparently works against the blackness of the night, and metaphorically speaking, the evil of the Crusaders.'⁴² Other metaphors include the lion, king of the jungle – a recurrent metaphor in Arabic poetry to describe valour and dignity. However, Al-Asfahani, the famous Arab poet, extends the lion imagery by creating a dichotomy between the lion and the dog when he describes the Crusaders' defeat in Egypt:⁴³

Children of Humphrey got weak and fled
From Saladin like the dogs which escape from the lion.
Whereas dogs were howling
Lions were roaring.
Despite his escape,
Coward Philip was eventually caught.⁴⁴

The bestial imagery used to describe the Crusaders develops a constant image that is used throughout the literature to endow people with animal attributes. Men are raging bulls, sly as foxes, or snakes in the grass. Conversely, we find the bravery of lions: Richard the Lionheart, and Saladin the lion who sends the dogs packing. Similarly, Aiman Sanad Al-Garrallah quotes the Arab poet and

head of Saladin's chancery Al-Qadi Al-Fadil (1135-1200) who depicts Saladin as very virtuous and pious:

Saladin is like a huge mountain of serenity,
 His virtue glows like the sun.
 Since he always drinks from the sea of virtues,
 He becomes a sea of goodness.
 Its waters are wavy and have no coast.
 There are only seven seas on earth,
 Which your ten fingers surpass.
 [...]
 He drinks from the water of virtue,
 For he always desires doing good.⁴⁵

The two metaphors of water and light suggest that Saladin is not only brave in battle but kind, generous, pious and virtuous. This combination of combat and war with virtue also appears in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, when the King gives his promise, presumably to the Pontiff, and therefore to God that virtue is a given in the Holy Wars:

Needless our voice; yet will I thus make known
 My thoughts; — confide we in ourselves alone;
 If true it be that Virtue stands unharm'd
 'Mid seas of ill, with Virtue be we arm'd;
 Her let us call to aid us in the strife,
 Nor longer than she wills, regard our life.
 . . .
 Such pledge my King has giv'n, such promise made,
 'Twere worse than vain to doubt th'expected aid.⁴⁶

Thus the soldier is 'arm'd' with virtue; to doubt this is worse than vain, and 'expect'd aid' will come. Al-Garrallah sees Saladin's virtue as demonstrating a social and political good, whereas the Crusaders' piety seems to suggest that "God is on their side". From a literary point of view, this association of virtue with bravery brings with it a recognisable form of chivalry.

Notions of chivalry, however, did not go unchanged. Readers of *The Canterbury Tales* may notice changes in the heroism of the knight. 'The Knight's Tale' is the first of Chaucer's stories and the Knight seems an ideal and perfect hero who is subject to the code of chivalry, as may be read in the General Prologue:

A knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,
 That fro the tyme that he first bigan
 To riden out, he loved chivalrie,

Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.
 Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
 And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre,
 As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,
 And evere honoured for his worthynesse. (43-50).⁴⁷

The knight has fought in his lord's war both in Christendom and in heathen lands, holding fast to the principles of chivalry: 'Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie'. However, much of our introduction to the Knight is taken up with lists of the battles he has fought, and as Thomas J. Hatton suggests, this must invite interpretation and careful consideration.⁴⁸ Hatton lists the battles in three distinct categories:

1. Battles versus the Spanish Moors (Gernade, Algezir, Belmarye, and Tramysse)
2. Battles versus the Saracens (Alisaundre, Lyeys, and Satalye)
3. Those against Eastern European Pagans (Pruce, Lettow, and Ruce)

He argues that 'all of them have one obvious characteristic in common: they are all struggles between Christians and pagans. Those we know about with certainty are all among the few victories obtained by European chivalry over the heathen in the fourteenth century'.⁴⁹ It seems that Chaucer may have wanted to position the Knight as a worthy Christian Crusader, but Terry Jones disagrees. He argues that the portrait provided by Chaucer is a satirical one and asks how much Chaucer's contemporaries knew about the Crusades and the battles listed. Jones suggests that, for example, the siege at Algeciras was not a holy war, but a political struggle between the king of Granada and King Alfonso XI of Castille. Jones sees the siege of Alexandria as an example of the dangers of relying on mercenaries. He uses such examples to conclude that the Knight should be read as a cold-blooded mercenary, rather than an example of chivalric ideals. He suggests that Chaucer and his contemporaries would know this, and notes the looting and wide-spread destruction perpetrated by the Crusaders.⁵⁰ Jones brings into question each of the Knight's battles and his motives for joining them, criticising at one point the Knight's involvement in the Alexandrian crusade due to the intensely negative reception that crusade garnered across late medieval Europe. Based on this reception, Jones argues that the Knight is cast as a gold-seeking mercenary rather than a pious crusader. As Jones notes, even the Coptic churches of their fellow-Christians in

the East were looted by the crusaders. However, recent scholarship has reinstated Chaucer's Knight to some extent. John H. Pratt, for example, finds the Knight to be 'a realistic, though stylized, portrait of a battle-scarred veteran', and asks: 'Is it likely Chaucer would portray fourteenth-century knights as mere mercenaries when his patrons identified themselves so strongly with chivalric aims and military adventure?'⁵¹ Pratt sees Chaucer trying his best, especially in view of his own military career, to depict his knight 'in the best possible light in very difficult times.'⁵²

The Knight's experiences allow him to tell a tale which includes both women and fighting, but now for love rather than glory. Arcite and Palamon, two prisoners of King Theseus, both fall in love with Emelye, the king's sister-in-law. Hence, Palamon describes his love:

For paramour I loved hire first er thow.
 What wiltow seyn? Thou woost nat yet now
 Whether she be a woman or godesse!
 Thyn is affecciou of holinesse,
 And myn is love; as to a creature ('The Knight's Tale',
 1155-59)⁵³

Here Palamon claims that his love came first and he suggests that his rival, Arcite, does not distinguish between woman and goddess. He insists that Arcite's devotion to Emelye is, in part, an extension of his holiness, whereas the love of Palamon is more bodily, 'as to a creature'. Both fall in love with a distant figure whom neither can know. The feelings of these two causes enmity between them, and when, after some years, Arcite is released he returns to Athens in disguise and enters service in Emelye's household. Palamon eventually escapes and he too goes to find Emelye, where he finds Arcite singing about love and fortune. A duel ensues which, through the intervention of Theseus, becomes a battle fought to strict rules, which – as Mars had promised – Arcite eventually wins. However, through the intervention of Saturn, Arcite is wounded by his horse and dies before claiming his prize, and it is Palamon who marries. Emelye, who had appealed to Diana, is not granted her wish for chastity.

'The Knight's Tale' represents a shift in the themes of virtue and bravery, coupled together with a loss of interest in fighting for God. Arcite and Palamon fight for the love of a woman who is, at best, a distant figure, adored from afar,

and, at worst, someone whom neither of the combatants knows. When before the battle both Palamon and Arcite plead with their respective gods, Emelye pleads to Diana for chastity. Both men are given their wish; Mars does allow Arcite to win the battle, and Saturn does allow Palamon to marry Emelye. As he dies, Arcite realises that he was no fit husband for Emelye:

And Juppiter so wys my soule gye,
To speken of a servaunt properly,
With alle circumstances trewely –
That is to seyen, trouthe, honour, knyghthede,
Wysdom, humblesse, estaat, and heigh kynrede,
Freedom, and al that longeth to that art –
So Juppiter have of my soule part
(‘The Knight’s Tale’, 2786-92)⁵⁴

However, Emelye is allowed no control over her own destiny and it is clear that she is an unknown quantity to the men who think they have come to love her. Courtly love was also a vital influence, spreading through Europe and becoming the dominant form of much Medieval poetry. In Europe, it came to be adopted as part of the courtship ritual leading to marriage. It was the product of a number of factors, including social, erotic, religious and philosophical. Much of the poetry was adulterous, and usually required that women be unobtainable and often of a higher social rank. The male speakers of Courtly Love poetry are depicted as being driven by passion, and even dying for love while maintaining a chivalric respect for their ladies. The feelings of the women, however, remain unknown, and merely guessed at by their male admirers. Even William Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1603) is perhaps less about Othello’s inability to control either his passion or his jealousy, and more about Othello’s failure to really know Desdemona:

She lov’d me for the dangers I had pass’d;
And I lov’d her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have us’d.
(I.3.167-69)

He thinks her love for him stems only from his own valour or worthiness and, like earlier female characters, Desdemona is acted upon rather than acting — in the first instance, to Othello’s stories of battle.

Nevertheless, female protagonists do exist in the literature during the time of the Crusades, and even earlier. Women are present in the romanticised

accounts of female saints located in the Near East. For example, Saint Catherine of Alexandria and Saint Margaret of Antioch and others feature in accounts of medieval pilgrimage narratives which were written by pilgrims who visited their shrines and monasteries prior to the Crusades. However, their heroism did not require action, but rather a refusal to act and a willingness, therefore, to be cruelly acted upon. Saint Catherine of Alexandria may have died early in the fourth century and is one of the most popular early Christian martyrs and one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. Her historicity is doubtful and she goes unmentioned before the ninth century. According to her legend, she was an extremely learned young girl of noble birth who protested the persecution of Christians under the Roman emperor Maxentius. She converted his wife and several soldiers, and defeated the most eminent scholars summoned by Maxentius to oppose her. She was sentenced to be killed by the spiked wheel and afterwards beheaded. After her death angels, allegedly, took her body to Mount Sinai, where, according to legend, it was discovered about 800 AD. In the Middle Ages, when the story of her mystical marriage to Christ was widely circulated, she became one of the most popular saints, and the patron of philosophers and scholars. Joan of Arc – another woman stepping outside of her role – claimed that Catherine of Alexandria was among the heavenly voices that spoke to her.⁵⁵

The medieval pilgrim narratives are characterised by the dominant figure of a chaste, virtuous Christian maiden who goes through severe trials and tribulations, facing subjugation and torture which test her faith. This pattern of passive heroine characters can be found in some depictions of the virtuous Christian heroines in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, such as Canace of 'The Squire's Tale'. Canace hears the story of a female falcon grieving the betrayal of her tercelet partner. However, such is Chaucer's language and irony that we also see something of the world in which these virtuous women lived.

Literary techniques flowed from one world to another. For example, Chaucer's 'The Squire's Tale' seems to include certain techniques and allusions borrowed from the *Arabian Nights*, including the frame story technique, the story of the three magical gifts, the flying ebony horse, and the story of the talking falcon. Yet all of this simply renders the story of Canace more exotic, while keeping it accessible for Western audience of the tale and

making her indistinguishable from the pale and virginal heroines of Western Romance.

The story of Custance in ‘The Man of Law’s Tale’ is a good example of ‘hagiographical romances about female piety and suffering that emphasize the virtues of patience and fortitude.’⁵⁶ It also demonstrates a certain willingness for evil women to attack the chaste Christian heroine, and it reflects strong Near Eastern influences. Courtly Love poetry had been first introduced to Europe through Arabic poetry and philosophy, such as the *Treatise on Love* (Risala fi’l Ishq) by Avicenna (*Ibn Sina*) or *The Ring of the Dove* (*Tawq al-Hamamah*) written by Ibn Hazm, both composed in the eleventh century.⁵⁷ In the eighteenth century Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) travelled in the Near East with her husband, who was appointed ambassador to Turkey. She made an English prose translation of a Turkish Courtly Love poem: ‘Turkish Verses addressed to the Sultana, eldest daughter of Sultan Achmet III’. The unnamed speaker goes into the garden to admire the vines but it is the ‘sweetness of [her] charms’ that has ravished his soul. Her eyes, in a repeated line, are ‘wild and disdainful as those of a stag’.⁵⁸ Apparently he tells her, ‘One dart from your eyes has pierc’d thro’ my heart.’ The poem ends, ‘I rub my face against the earth; — I am drown’d in scalding tears —I rave! | Have you no compassion? Will you not turn to look upon me?’⁵⁹ Of course, the speaker’s request cannot and will not be answered since, as the daughter of a sultan, she cannot choose her suitor – as is demonstrated in Chaucer’s story of Canace. The Courtly Love poem is written to flatter the unobtainable woman while demonstrating the poet’s skill in expressing the anguish caused by this unobtainable woman.

The Prologue to ‘The Man of Law’s Tale’ sees the Man of Law praising Chaucer for his exaltation of women, as he lists the heroines of Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women* along many others who do not. However, the Man of Law comments that he ‘no word ne writeth he | of thilke wikke ensample of Canace, | That lov’d hir owene brother sinfully’ (77-79). He goes on to say that Chaucer would never tell such “cursed stories” as the tales of Canace and Machaire or of Appolonius of Tyre. These stories of incest appear in his friend John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, as does ‘The Man of Law’s Tale.’⁶⁰ Custance is a Christian princess from Rome and her story demonstrates the

power of goodness, patience and constancy. The first part of her story is set in the Near East, when Syrian merchants return home and relate to their Sultan stories of the beautiful and virtuous daughter of the Emperor of Rome, Custance. These stories capture the imagination of the Sultan who, in an extreme of passion, falls in love Custance without even seeing her. Not only that, but he agrees to convert to Christianity if she will accept his proposal of marriage, despite arguments from his court:

Bitwene hir bothe laws, that they sayn
 They trowe, "that no Cristen prince wolde fayn
 Wedden his child under oure lawe sweete
 That us was taught by Mahoun, oure prophete."

And he answerde, "Rather than I lese
 Custance, I wol be cristned, doutelees.
 I moot been hires, I may noon oother chese. (221-7)

The Sultan leaves for Rome, where he finds the Emperor willing to agree to the marriage despite his daughter's protests. Custance, for her part, must obey her father and she prays for forbearance:

So yeve me grace his heestes to fulfille!
 I, wrecche woman, no fors though I spille!
 Wommen are born to thraldom and penance,
 And to been under mannes governance. (284-7)

Forbearance does not come easily to Custance, and she protests the inequity of women's condition even as she prays that she submits to her father's wishes with a good heart. This being the case, it is no surprise to find the Sultan's mother enraged. Her son, by marrying, takes his mother's political, social, and economic power, and bestows it upon his new wife. Not only that, but he has determined to take a new faith. His mother arranges a massacre at a welcoming banquet by appealing to the Sultan's court and a sense of their own religion:

"For we reneyed Mahoun oure creance?
 But, lords, wol ye maken assurance,
 As I shal seys, assentyng to my loore,
 And I shal make us sauf for evermore?" (340-4)

At the welcoming banquet all are slain except Custance, and it is here that the reader begins to gain a sense of the special nature of Custance's virtue. Not only is she saved by 'No Wight but God, that he bar in his herte' (476), but when she is cast adrift in an open boat:

Soothly, the comandour of that was he
 That fro the tempest ay this womman kepte
 As wel whan she wook as whan she slepte. (495-7)

Custance serves as a true believer who is therefore saved by Christ. Her virtue shines forth throughout the story which, in a sense, re-enacts the prayer she made before leaving Rome:

“Allas! Unto the Barbre nacioun
 I moste anoon, syn that it is youre wille;
 But Crist, that starf for our redempcioun
 So yeve me grace his heestes to fulfille!” (281-84)

The story may be viewed as an exemplary tale of a Christian woman who survives through virtue and demonstrates the superiority of the Christian religion over that of Islam. However, as William C. Johnson, Jr. comments:

Chaucer’s language [...] communicates several interwoven perspectives: sympathy for a victimized woman; surprise and dismay at her victimizers; awareness of how blindly men like the Sultan operate; and the cleverness with which passion can rationalize its ends at the expense of innocent people.⁶¹

For example, when her drifting boat arrives in Northumbria she is taken in by a Constable and his wife and apparently has no trouble making herself understood: ‘A maner Latyn corrupt was hir speche, | But algates thereby was she understonde’ (519-20). The fact of Custance’s suffering is evident but as Johnson comments: ‘through oblique statement and hints of irony, Chaucer projects an implicit commentary on the world surrounding the heroine and perforce on her very suffering.’ Thus, while Custance persuades the Constable and his wife, Hermengild, to Christianity, nevertheless she again falls foul of men’s passion in the form of a false Knight who, thwarted in his passion for Custance, slays Hermengild and blames Custance for the deed. King Alla, the king of Northumbria, holds court to hear the Knight who swears on a ‘Britoun book, written with Evaungiles’ (666) whereupon he is struck dead, and Custance’s virtue is again paramount. By her ‘mediacioun, | The kyng – and many another in that place – | Converted was ...’ (684-6). Custance marries the king.

However, when we consider the world in which this hagiographic tale plays out, Custance’s suffering largely occurs through two jealous mothers –

the mother of the Sultan and now King Alla's mother, Donegild – who both act from the economic and political interests vested in their sons, and which they are likely to lose upon their sons' marriages. Custance is wholly lacking in power and must rely on men to save her, and – when they fail – on divine intervention, or simply good luck. King Alla, of course, commits matricide and has to go to Rome to do penance for his act, and is rewarded by discovering Custance and his son living there. A Roman senator, returning from a punitive expedition to Syria, comes upon Custance in her boat and brings her and her son to Rome.

Katherine Lynch observes that '[s]een through the eyes of the West, the East is notoriously a region of relativism rather than absolute value', and she goes on:

Closer to home, the Arabic world clearly had a reputation of a sexual exoticism; its scientific tradition launched numerous explorations of sexual hygiene in the Middle Ages, including perhaps as many as one hundred "arts of love" written between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries, though there is no proof that any scientific title was known in the West. Indeed, most information in the west about the nature of human sexuality and erotic behaviour originated in Arabic medicine, as Chaucer's Januarie certainly knows when he consults Constantine the African's *De coitu* for aphrodisiacs.

Januarie, of Chaucer's 'The Merchant's Tale', marries a much younger wife mostly for recreational sex and to produce an heir. Similarly, the Sultan's passion in 'The Man of Law's Tale' outweighs all other considerations, and is not far removed from the lust of the false Knight. The Near East, for all of these characters, is shown as a 'land of sexual excess'.⁶² Thus, while Arab women appear in crusading and medieval literature, they are expected to play well-worn roles. Lynch suggests that Chaucer employs Arabic techniques and allusions but, at the same time, she notes that he attenuates the effect by 'substituting highly courtly and Western motifs, especially where women and love are concerned'.⁶³ This appears to be a pattern, not only for the Courtly Love poetry, but also for the epic and heroic tales written in the earlier part of the period. Certainly influences seem to flow from the Arab world but are adapted to the West, as the Crusaders distanced themselves from cruelty and ruthlessness by fighting for a divine cause and adopting the chivalric values of

heroism, and, later on, embracing the traditions of Courtly Love in contrast to the perceived promiscuity of the Arab world. Custance in 'The Man of Law's Tale' is a good example of the pure Christian heroine who remains true and faithful to her religion and survives the ordeals triggered by contact with the Arab world, relying on her virtue. It is Chaucer's way of 'domesticating the exotic.'⁶⁴ Thus, it must be noted that both tales of heroes and heroines and the poetry of Courtly Love were, by and large, written by men at a time when the subjugation of women to men was considered the norm. However, it is fair to say that British views of the Near East remain fluid up to and during the early parts of the eighteenth century.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹ Guiseppe Perta, 'The Image of Jerusalem Through The Pilgrims' Accounts (IV – XII C.): Recent Approaches of Medieval Studies', *Medievalia Historica Bohemia*, 15 February 2012, p. 150.

<https://www.academia.edu/4172460/The_Image_of_Jerusalem_through_the_pilgrims_accounts_IV_XII_C._._Recent_approaches_of_medieval_studies> [accessed 19 January 2015].

² Perta, 'The Image of Jerusalem', p. 152.

³ See Jill N. Claster, *Sacred Violence: The European Crusades to the Middle East 1095-1396* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 17.

⁴ Claster, p. 17.

⁵ Claster, p. 37.

⁶ Claster, p. 27.

⁷ Claster, p. xvii.

⁸ Claster, p. xviii.

⁹ David Nicolle, *The Third Crusade 1191: Richard the Lionheart, Saladin and the Struggle for Jerusalem* (Illinois: Osprey Publishing, 2005), p. 8.

¹⁰ Edwin Morgan, *Beowulf: A Verse Translation into Modern English* (Aldington: The Hand and Flower Press, 1952), p. 1. Please note that a poetic translation has been chosen to maintain similarities with the themes of earlier works quoted.

¹¹ Morgan, *Beowulf*, p. xxxiv.

¹² Lemurs: shades of the departed so named because of the spectre-like suggestion of the face. (OED)

¹³ Morgan, *Beowulf*, p. 4.

¹⁴ The term Anglo-Saxon refers to settlers from the German regions of Angeln and Saxony, who made their way over to Britain after the fall of the Roman Empire around AD 410, the Anglo-Saxon settlers were effectively their own masters in a new land and did little to keep the legacy of the Romans alive. They also brought their own religious beliefs, but the arrival of Saint Augustine in 597 converted most of the country to Christianity. The Anglo-Saxon period lasted for 600 years, from 410 to 1066 and the arrival of William the Conqueror. See <

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/anglo_saxons/saxons.shtml>

¹⁵ Michael Swanton, *English Literature before Chaucer* (New York: Longman, 1987), p. 181.

¹⁶ See Anselm of Ribemont, 'To his reverend lord, Manasses', in August C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye Witnesses and Participants* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1921), p. 107.

¹⁷ August C. Krey, p. 107.

¹⁸ James A. Brundage, ed., *The Crusades: Motives and Achievements* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1964), p. xiv.

¹⁹ Brundage, p. xiv.

²⁰ 'Richard Coeur de Lion', quoted in Carol F. Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), p. 13.

²¹ 'Richard Coeur de Lion', in *Metrical Romances of the Thirteen, Fourteen and Fifteen Centuries: Published from Ancient Manuscripts with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary by Henry Weber, Esq.* (Edinburgh: Archibald, Constable & Co.; London: John Murray & Constable, Hunter, Park, & Hunter, 1810),

Digitised by the University of Ottawa, 2011. <https://archive.org/stream/metricalromance02webe/metricalromance02webe_djvu.txt> [accessed 9 April 2015].

²² Swanton, p. 181.

²³ Swanton, p. 215.

²⁴ Swanton, p. 182.

²⁵ Swanton, p. 215.

²⁶ J. J. Saunders, 'The Crusade as a Holy War', in Brundage, p. 58.

²⁷ Paul Rousset, 'Popular Response to the Crusade', in Brundage, p. 32.

²⁸ Paul Rousset, p. 32.

²⁹ Torquato Tasso, *Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered, An Heroic Poem: With Notes and Occasional Illustrations*, trans. by Rev. J. H. Hunt, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Samuel F. Bradford, 1822), p. 27. <<https://archive.org/details/tassosjerusalem01tass>> [accessed 19 January 2015].

³⁰ Tasso, p. 415.

³¹ Mark Dominik, 'Holy War in *The La Chanson de Roland*: The "Mythification" of History', *SURJ*, 9 (2010) <<http://surj.stanford.edu/archives/2003-04HolyWar.html>> [accessed 1 March 2011], n.p.

³² Edward Said, 'Introduction', in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books / Random House, 1994), p. xvi.

³³ Peter Haidu, *The Subject of Violence: The La Chanson de Roland and the Birth of the State* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 37.

³⁴ Dominik, n.p.

³⁵ Haidu, p. 3.

³⁶ Haidu, p. 37.

³⁷ 'The Sultan of Babylon' (1351-57) in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*, ed. by Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990) <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/lupack-three-middle-english-charlemagne-romances-sultan-of-babylon>> [accessed 9 April 2015].

³⁸ Ahmed Badawi, 'Salahiddin Alayoubi bain Shu'araa Asrih wa Kuttabih' *Saladin Al-Ayoubi amongst the Poets and Prose Writers of his Age* (Alexandria, Egypt: Al-Maktaba Al-thakafiya, 1960), p. 127-8. (translation by Leen Al-Hadban).

³⁹ Tasso, p. 415.

⁴⁰ See Baha' al-Din Ibn Shaddad, *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin or al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa'l-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya*, Translated with Introduction and Notes by D. S. Richards, *Crusade Texts in Translation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2001).

⁴¹ Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, published by arrangement with Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 182.

⁴² Aiman Sanad Al-Garrallah, 'Saladin's Chivalry in Arabic 12th Century Poetry', *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 6.4 (2010), 9-19 (pp. 12-13).

⁴³ See Al-Garrallah, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Al-Garrallah, p. 14.

⁴⁵ Al-Garrallah, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Tasso, p. 384.

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, ed. by V. A. Kolve (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1989), p. 4. All future references will be to this edition.

⁴⁸ See Leila K. Norako, 'The Canterbury Tales: General Prologue, The Knight', Robbins Library Digital Projects, Crusades Project, University of Rochester, < <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/crusades/text/canterbury-tales-prologue-knight#analysis> > [accessed 9 April 2015].

⁴⁹ Thomas J. Hatton, 'Chaucer's Crusading Knight, a Slanted Ideal', *The Chaucer Review*, 3.2 (1968), 77-87 (p. 80). < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25093077> > [accessed 9 April 2015].

⁵⁰ See Terry Jones, *Chaucer's Knight: The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).

⁵¹ John H. Pratt, 'Was Chaucer's Knight Really a Mercenary?', *The Chaucer Review*, 22.1 (1987), pp. 8-27 (p. 21). < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25094027> > [accessed 9 April 2015].

⁵² John H. Pratt, p.21.

⁵³ Chaucer, p. 30.

⁵⁴ Chaucer, p. 44.

⁵⁵ *Encyclopedia Britannica*,

<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/99687/Saint-Catherine-of-Alexandria>> [accessed 26 January 2015].

⁵⁶ Carol F. Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), p. 23.

⁵⁷ Given that practices similar to Courtly Love were already prevalent in Al-Andalus and elsewhere in the Islamic world, it is very likely that Islamic practices influenced the Christian Europeans. William of Aquitaine, for example, was involved in the First Crusade, and in the ongoing Reconquista in Spain, so that he would have come into contact with Muslim culture a great deal ... notions of 'love for love's sake' and the 'exaltation of the beloved lady' have been traced back to Arabic literature of the ninth and tenth centuries. The notion of the 'ennobling power' of love was developed in the early eleventh century by the Persian psychologist and philosopher, Ibn Sina ... The final element of Courtly Love, the concept of 'love as desire never to be fulfilled' was at times implicit in Arabic poetry, but was first developed into a doctrine in European literature, in which all four elements of Courtly Love were present. See *Love by Wikipedians* <

https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=Rtpak6zyOmYC&pg=PA19&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q=92&f=false>, pp.39-40 [accessed 26 January 2015]. For a more comprehensive discussion of this topic particularly in relation to the Spanish/Arabic influence see also Roger J. Steiner, "'The Origin and Development of Courtly Love,'" and my Bibliography.', < www.philadelphia.edu.jo/arts/13th/papers/Roger.doc>, Given as a paper at The Culture of Love and Hatred: Philadelphia's Thirteenth International Conference, Amman, Jordan, 27 October 2008 [accessed 26 January 2015].

⁵⁸ Lady Mary W. Montagu, *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. by Lord Wharncliffe, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 2nd ed., 1837), I, p. 388. The page adds a footnote which states that Sir William Jones, who translated *The Seven Golden Odes* of pre-Islamic poetry, objects, in the Preface to his *Persian Grammar* to Lady Montagu's translation, that: 'The expression is merely analogous to *βονωπις* of Homer'.

⁵⁹ Montagu, pp. 388-89.

⁶⁰ There is no trace of the theme of incest in the source on which both Chaucer and Gower drew for their tales of Constance. They used the same direct source, a story in Nicholas Trivet's Anglo-French *Chronicle*; see *The Riverside*

Chaucer, p. 857, and *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago, 1941; New York, 1958). A comparison of 'The Man of Law's Tale' and Gower's 'Tale of Constance' is thus especially revealing. See The Geoffrey Chaucer Page: 'The Man of Law's Tale', prepared and maintained by L. D. Benson <<http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/canttales/manolaw/>> [accessed 26 January 2015].

⁶¹ William C. Johnson, Jr., 'The "Man of Law's Tale": Aesthetics and Christianity in Chaucer', *The Chaucer Review*, 16.3 (1982), 201-221 (p. 203). <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25093792> [accessed 2 February 2015].



Fig. 1: Eugène Delacroix, *The Combat of the Giaour and Hassan*, 1826, Oil on Canvas, Art Institute of Chicago

CHAPTER II

WOMEN AND THE EXOTIC EAST

Here, from my window, I at once survey
 The crowded city and resounding sea;
 In distant views see Asian mountains rise;
 And lose their snowy summits in the skies;
 Above those mountains high Olympus towers,
 The parliamentary seat of heavenly powers!
 New to the sight, my ravished eyes admire
 Each gilded crescent and each antique spire,
 The marble mosques beneath whose ample domes
 Fierce warlike sultans sleep in peaceful tombs...

Lady Mary W. Montagu, 'Verses Written in the Chiosk
 of the British Palace at Pera'¹

We have seen, in Chapter I, that in Britain, knowledge of other cultures and religions was extremely limited, and that British views of the Near East remained changeable during the early parts of the eighteenth century. As Saree Makdisi comments, 'What was at stake amid such a diversity of thought was not merely the struggle between competing attitudes or points of view, but the status of imperial policy, and the nature of Britain's understanding of itself ...'² After the parliamentary union of England and Scotland in 1707, it is fair to say that Great Britain formally became a political unit.. However, contacts between Ottomans and Europeans were far more extensive than is often suggested: items of Ottoman dress and decoration were imported as early as the fifteenth century and it is well known that King Henry VIII was taken with Turkish dress. We know through his chronicler Edward Hall that Henry was dressed as a Turkish Sultan as part of a masquerade at the English court.³ Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* demonstrates the material culture emerging from the Near East in his description of Belinda's dressing table:

Th'inferior Priestess, at her Altar's side,
 Trembling, begins the sacred Rites of Pride.
 Unnumber'd Treasures ope at once, and here
 The various Off'rings of the World appear;
 From each she nicely culls with curious Toil,
 And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring Spoil.
 The Casket *India's* glowing Gems unlocks,

And all *Arabia* breathes from yonder Box.
 The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,
 Transform'd to *Combs*, the speckled and the White . . .
 (I, 127-36)

The sheer extent of the ‘unnumbered treasures’ indicate a growing sense among the British, of Great Britain as the centre of the world to which all these treasures somehow naturally belonged. With the treasures came the stories, although such tales that did emerge from the Near East were much embellished, and little attempt was made by the British to understand a culture not their own.

The first recognised translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* appeared in 1704 in French by Antoine Galland. The work included stories that were not in the original Arabic manuscript, including ‘Aladdin’s Lamp’ and ‘Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves’. These stories are not found in any of the original manuscripts and Galland suggests that the stories came from another source, which he called ‘Hanna Diab’. This was followed two years later by an English translation entitled *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment* (Grub St. Edition, 1706). *The Arabian Nights* was soon to be followed by other translations and imitations, in particular by Gustav Weil, Richard Gough, Reverend Forster and G. S. Beaumont. Translations were moderated for an English audience, as they had already been modified by the French. Knowledge about the Near East took second place to the work’s entertainment value. There was no claim to authenticity and what followed was a lot of quasi-Oriental tale-telling –an interest in finding more stories together, as well as re-writings of earlier tales available in English. An infatuation with Orientalism spread across Europe during the early years of the eighteenth century. As Saree Makdisi comments:

In fact the form of the frame-tale itself, as inherited by Chaucer from Boccaccio many centuries previously, was a much more genuine European derivation from Arabic literature, but by the early eighteenth century English readers had long since forgotten the original source of the frame-tale, which had been invisibly absorbed into their own literary tradition, and they were thus struck anew by the seeming novelty of its appearance in Galland.⁴

This novelty is somewhat undermined by the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), but these letters remained unpublished until 1763.

However, any sense of realism in relation to women of the Near East is overwhelmed as the Romantic writers such as Robert Southey (1774-1843), William Beckford (1760-1844), P. B. Shelley (1792–1822), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and George Gordon Lord Byron (1788-1824).

By 1721 Charles de Secondat, Baron de la Brede et de Montesquieu (1689-1755) had published *The Persian Letters*, which were an immediate success, and led to the publication of Samuel Johnson's (1709-84) *Rasselas*, originally *The Prince of Abissinia: A Tale* in 1759. Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* depicted France as seen by two imaginary Persians, while *Rasselas* consists of narratives bound together by a trip through Egypt in search of happiness. Both works are more concerned with European society than with cultures in the Near East. Johnson is openly didactic and moralizing, while Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* serves as a forerunner to his *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), which directed the focus of his work away from Europe to encompass all societies in the world and earned his place of influence in the social sciences.⁵ Near Eastern material played little part in such narratives but the general inaccuracy of these narratives may have encouraged the production of Lady Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763).⁶ These letters, available only to Montagu's close circle until their publication after her death, allowed the British public to read about the harem from a woman who, unlike male authors, had actually been inside. The view the modern reader gets from Lady Montagu's letters is much more authentic, but inevitably it is a view only of the women of the highest status in Turkey. These women are better dressed, better educated, and more privileged compared to the working classes and slaves, yet they are much more confined. Montagu's letters do follow the patterns of earlier works of orientalism but, as Srinivas Aravamudan comments, they also go some way toward defining 'the cultural and political challenge represented by Islam since late antiquity.'⁷

Lady Mary Pierrepont, later known as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, was born in 1689 and became a great friend of Alexander Pope. Lady Mary Pierrepont had a classical education and learned Greek, Latin and French and, unusually at the time, she worked under the same tutors as her brother. She later developed a friendship with Mrs. Anne Wortley, who was married to the Honourable Sidney Montagu, second son to the Earl of Sandwich, and Lady

Mary married her eldest son, Edward Wortley Montagu in 1712. Early in 1716, Edward Wortley Montagu had been appointed Ambassador at Istanbul and Lady Montagu had accompanied him to Vienna, and thence to Adrianople and Istanbul. He was recalled in 1717, but they remained at Istanbul until 1718. However, while on her journey and residing in the Levant, ‘Lady Mary amused herself, and delighted her friends by a regular correspondence, chiefly directed to her sister, the Countess of Mar, Lady Rich, and Mrs. Thistlethwaite, both ladies of the court, and to [Alexander] Mr. Pope.’⁸ Montagu did keep a journal of the events and her experiences in Turkey but this personal log was burned by her daughter. However, the letters she sent to her family and social circle during her time in Turkey are derived from that perished journal. In 1763, a year after Lady Montagu’s death, *The Turkish Embassy Letters* was published as a compilation of pseudo letters to named and nameless addressees, constructed in the fashion of an epistolary travel memoir, a popular genre during Montagu’s time.⁹ Although the letters that comprise this book were not those she sent home, the content was maintained.

Montagu tries to convey the novelty of her Turkish experience to her English reader, but at the same time endeavours to render her descriptions more accessible by comparison with familiar surroundings. She does try to unlock the mysteries with which she is surrounded. For example, she writes of her discovery of the language of flowers, as a secret means of communication. She makes a list of the flowers and their meanings and comments that there must be ‘a million verses designed for this use. There is no colour, no flower, no weed, no fruit, herb or pebble, or feather that has not a verse belonging to it: and you may quarrel, reproach, or send letters of passion, friendship or civility, or even of news without ever inking your fingers.’¹⁰ Throughout her letters, however, her main interest lies with the women’s lives, and she is quite capable of comparing her own life with that of the Turkish women she meets. She finds few differences between the confinement of the Turkish women and her own status as a woman. This is discussed in a letter to her future husband:

I never knew a lover that would not willingly secure his interest as well as his mistress; or if one must be abandoned, had not the prudence (among all his distractions) to consider, that a woman was but a woman, and money was a thing of more real merit than the whole sex put together.¹¹

Later, in another letter, she comments:

Let me beg you (which I do with the utmost sincerity) only to consider yourself in this affair; and, since I am so unfortunate to have nothing in my own disposal, do not think I have any hand in making settlements. People in my way are sold like slaves; and I cannot tell what price my master will put on me.¹²

It is evident here that Montagu is conscious of the status of women of her own class in Britain, so that her travels in Turkey inevitably describe not only the *hammam* that she observes, but also serve to define herself. Said comments that:

The interchange between the academic and the more or less imaginative meanings of Orientalism is a constant one, and since the late eighteenth century there has been a considerable, quite disciplined—perhaps even regulated—traffic between the two. Here I come to the third meaning of Orientalism, which is something more historically and materially defined than either of the other two. Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.¹³

However, the status of women in Montagu's letters seems to suggest women who lack autonomy in the shaping of their own lives, beyond, perhaps, the choosing of a husband – and even that decision is not altogether their own. Writing then, without the authority of the male voice, her views may reflect a kind of uncertainty about both self and other which does not appear altogether to fit with the colonising impulse. As Aravamudan comments:

Montagu is relatively unconcerned in her letters with the multiple constructions of masculinity, or with the long descriptions of Turkish street culture that some other authors provide. Rather, her desire for liminality impels her to describe the “secret” female interiors of the harem and the bathhouse. In the course of this levantinization, she will reiterate the following distinctive belief: “Upon the Whole I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the Empire.”¹⁴

In her letters Montagu describes the *hammam*, the Turkish women's bath. She finds some two hundred Turkish women, yet 'none of those disdainful smiles, and satirical whispers, that never fail in our assemblies.'¹⁵ Montagu also describes the furniture and setting: 'the first sofas were covered with cushions and rich carpets, on which sat the ladies ...'¹⁶ However, the Turkish women describe her to each other: '*Guzél, pék guzél*' or 'Charming, very charming'.¹⁷ All of this is done without commentary or frame, but then she comments that the ladies sat upon the first sofa while their slaves were behind them. However, there was no distinction of rank beyond this:

[A]ll being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed. Yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them. They walked and moved with the same majestic grace which Milton describes our general mother with. There were many amongst them as exactly proportioned as ever any goddess was drawn by the pencil of a Guido or Titian, – and most of their skins shingly white only adorned by their beautiful hair divided into many tresses, hanging on their shoulders, braided either with pearl or ribbon, perfectly representing the figures of the Graces.¹⁸

The Biblical and classical references here hint at a sexuality that is as inevitable as it is innocent. However, the nakedness of Eve is associated particularly with Adam's Fall:

My other half: with that thy gentle hand
 Seisd mine, I yielded, and from that time see
 How beauty is excelld by manly grace
 And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.
 So spake our general Mother, and with eyes
 Of conjugal attraction unreprov'd,
 And meek surrender, half imbracing leand
 On our first Father, half her swelling Breast
 Naked met his under the flowing Gold
 Of her loose tresses hid: he in delight
 Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms
 Smil'd with superior Love, as Jupiter
 On Juno smiles, when he impregns the Clouds.
 (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV, 488-98)

Similarly, Titian's beautiful voluptuous women have questionable 'Grace', with which her readership could hardly have been unacquainted. Montagu, in a

later letter, describes the exoticism in the Turkish harem by describing Sultana Hafitén's¹⁹ beauty and lavish costume:

That surprising harmony of features! that charming result of the whole! that exact proportion of the body! the unutterable enchantment of her smile! – But her eyes! – large and black, with all the soft languishment of the blue! Every turn of her face discovering some new grace.²⁰

While Montagu finds the women beautiful and, perhaps, objectifies them, she is nevertheless aware that her own gaze is privileged, and therefore she has 'wickedness enough to wish secretly that Mr. Jervas could have been there invisible. I fancy it would have very much improved his art.'²¹ However, Montagu's own gaze sees women doing, rather than merely being. They are in different postures; talking, working, drinking coffee or sherbet, as well as lying on their cushions: 'in short it is the women's coffee house where all the news of the town is told.'²²

Montagu, however, does not altogether relinquish her position as an observer, but her observations serve to define her English womanhood as much as that of the Turkish women. When asked to join the women in their bath she 'excused [her]self with some difficulty.'²³ Nevertheless, so earnest were the Turkish women in persuading her that she was eventually 'forced to open [her] shirt, and show them her stays':

I saw, they believed I was locked up in that machine, and that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband. – I was charmed with their civility and beauty, and should have been very glad to spend more time with them ...²⁴

The freedom enjoyed by the Turkish women and the respect in which they are held are not lost on Montagu:

Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire: the very divan pays respect to them; the Grand-Signior himself, when a pashá is executed, never violates the privileges of the harem (or women's apartment), which remains unsearched and entire to the widow. They are queens of their slaves, whom the husband has no permission so much as to look upon, except it be an old woman or two that his lady chooses. 'Tis true, their law permits them four wives; but there is no instance of a man of quality that makes use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer it.²⁵

The Turkish women's freedom which Montagu admires is the freedom to be held safe behind closed doors. In her admiration of this, Montagu remains an outsider, unaware of what happens behind closed doors. Though she goes inside the harem, Montagu is still a foreign observer who socialises only with selective women of rank and stature in the palace, and although slave girls are mentioned – like the house maids of Western fiction – they are scene-setters rather than characters and are defined by what they do rather than who they are. The Turkish women of rank and status have more in common with the readers of Montagu's letters than they have with Turkish women of the lower classes, who must obey their husbands as well as their *Khatoon*.²⁶ As Zora Neale Hurston remarks in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 'De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see.'²⁷

Montagu has something of a romantic view of her surroundings and relishes the exoticism of the Orient. She describes the lavishness of Sultana Hafitén's costume:

She was dressed in a caftan of gold brocade, flowered with silver, very well fitted to her shape, and shewing to admiration the beauty of her bosom, only shaded by the thin gauze of her shift. Her drawers were pale pink, her waistcoat green and silver, her slippers white satin, finely embroidered: her lovely arms adorned with bracelets of diamonds; upon her head a Turkish handkerchief of pink and silver, her own fine black hair hanging a great length in various tresses, and on one side of her head some bodkins of jewels.²⁸

Montagu appears to recognise that her loving descriptions of Sultana Hafitén may cause some comment among her readers, but defends herself:

The gravest writers have spoken with great warmth of some celebrated pictures and statues. The workmanship of Heaven certainly excels all our weak imitations, and, I think, has a much better claim to our praise. For my part, I am not ashamed to own I took more pleasure in looking on the beauteous Fatima, than the finest piece of sculpture could have given me.²⁹

When she considers art and in particular dance she does seem to recognise a certain eroticism within the culture and it may be that, within the Turkish culture, she was able to discover within herself a sexual being with both needs and desires of which it is improper to speak:

Nothing could be more artful, or more proper to raise *certain ideas* the tunes so soft! —the motions so languishing! — accompanied with pauses and dying eyes! half-falling back, and then recovering themselves in so artful a manner, that I am very positive the most rigid prude upon earth could not have looked upon them without thinking of something *not to be spoken of*.³⁰

The discovery of her own womanliness and sexuality was certainly not a thing to be written of, even some hundred years later, when Kate Chopin's (1850-1904) *The Awakening* was banned by Doubleday Books and kept out of print during her lifetime. Alexander Pope writes:

What may not we expect from a creature that went out the most perfect of this part of the world, and is every day improving by the sun in the other! If you do not now write and speak of the finest things imaginable, you must be content to be involved in the same imputation with the rest of the East, and be concluded to have abandoned yourself to extreme effeminacy, laziness, and lewdness of life.³¹

The fear of “going native” was a persistent theme of empire, the general sense being that warmer climates and the way of life associated with such weather would damage the moral centre of the weak. Women and working classes could be especially victim to the abandonment of which Pope speaks. Lady Montagu, then, is especially culpable and should restrict herself to writing only of the ‘finer things’.

Despite Lady Montagu's lavish description of Sultana Hafitén's costume and surroundings, Lady Montagu still emphasises difference:

[C]ould she be suddenly transported upon the most polite throne of Europe, nobody would think her other than born and bred to be a queen, though educated in a country we call barbarous.³²

Sultana Hafitén was ‘born and bred to be a queen’. She belonged to a noble family and she was trained with all the necessary etiquette required for a queen. The Turkish women in particular were very proud of their origin, breeding and heritage. However, it should be noted that Turkey, Egypt, Palestine, and *Maghreb* (Morocco) were the places most open to the European gaze. Roger Benjamin has pointed out that ‘Arabia and the Persian Gulf region were almost entirely closed to Europeans [by] the 19th and early 20th centuries, and virtually no painting was executed there (indeed, as recently as the 1970s a

fatwa issued at Mecca upheld the traditional condemnation of figurative representations, although it has since been lifted.³³ It is no surprise then to find Lady Montagu defending her somewhat romanticised view of what she sees to her sister:

This, you will say, is but too like the Arabian Tales: these embroidered napkins! And a jewel as large as a turkey's egg! – you forget, dear sister, those very tales were written by an author of this country, and (excepting the enchantments) are a real representation of the manners here. We travellers are in very hard circumstances: If we say nothing but what has been said before us, *we are dull and we have observed nothing*. If we tell anything new, we are laughed at as *fabulous and romantic* –³⁴

There was much less knowledge of the East in the mid-eighteenth century, but as Saree Makdisi comments: ‘there was also much less of a political and cultural investment in the sharp differentiation between East and West observed by Said, so that the East could therefore be turned to a sugar coating without too much qualification.’³⁵ Lady Montagu has no problem in delivering moral lessons from her Arabic sources, and continues to look for similarities between the two cultures, finding much to suggest that her own situation, as a woman, is not so unlike that of the women of the Near East. Ultimately, however, it is the differences that serve to define an imperialising Britain. That such differences may be more imagined than real is a result of the lack of real knowledge, especially of the lives of women. When a country is inaccessible to most, it is more appealing to the imagination, particularly in regard to the various aspects of Eastern womanhood and their relation to a manhood, which seems to offer so much more than their own society.

Of course the most famous English translation of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* is that of Richard Burton in 1885, although pseudo-Oriental tales had been popular in England since Galland's *Arabian Nights*. Even in the eighteenth century those writers creating the Near East had acquired a special interest. As a young boy, Robert Southey had, according to Bernhardt-Kabisch, read ‘Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* in Hoole's translation ... and read and reread Tasso's poem so often that he had large portions of it by heart.’³⁶ For Southey, however, the Near East stimulated a far different response from that of those male authors who eroticised the East. His *Thalaba the Destroyer*

(1801) is a long poem divided into twelve books and shows how an assembly of evil magicians work to destroy the Hodeirah family to prevent a prophecy of ruin. Thalaba is able to escape when the sorcerer who comes to kill him is defeated by a great storm. The sorcerer's magic ring is used by Thalaba to travel the East to discover the means of defeating the evil magicians. He remains true to Allah, is guided by Prophet Mohammed, and finally defeats the sorcerers. Southey comments in his Preface to the long poem that:

In the continuation of the Arabian Tales, the Domdaniel is mentioned; a Seminary for evil Magicians under the Roots of the Sea. From this seed the present Romance has grown. Let me not be supposed to prefer the metre in which it is written, abstractedly considered, to the regular blank verse; the noblest measure, in my judgement, of which our admirable language is capable. For the following Poem I have preferred it, because it suits the varied subject; it is the *Arabesque* ornament of an Arabian tale.³⁷

Southey saw *Thalaba the Destroyer* as 'the most original romance since *Orlando Furioso* and the *Faerie Queene* and as being to poetry what William Beckford's *Vathek* was in prose.'³⁸ However, the poem is a vehicle for moral and didactic messages about duty and perseverance, and was admired by Cardinal Newman who thought it the most "morally sublime" of English poems. It was also admired by Shelley and Keats, who both followed its lead in some of their narratives.³⁹ For the Romantic poets the East served them in many folds; it was not regarded merely as the 'exotic Other',⁴⁰ but also as a 'Utopian region, as vehicle for disguised political critique and cultural satire.'⁴¹

However, Nigel Leask suggests that European travellers 'temporalized'⁴² the Orient's antique lands by 'comparing them with more familiar classical, biblical, or medieval worlds ... as they incorporated them into a "universal" grid of geographical orientation based in Europe'.⁴³ Southey's real interest 'was in myth itself, in what he understood, however dimly, not as a mere literary convention but as the original symbolic expression of a people's peculiar way of apprehending and interpreting reality.'⁴⁴ P. B. Shelley may have been inspired to write 'Ozymandias'⁴⁵ (1818) by the discoveries made in the Near East in the wake of Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798. The archaeological treasures found and the power they demonstrated stimulated the European imagination. This once-great empire was now in ruins. He was also

familiar with the Roman-era historian Diodorus Siculus who once described a statue of Ozymandias (possibly Rameses II). Diodorus reports the inscription on the statue, as follows: ‘King of Kings Ozymandias am I. If any want to know how great I am and where I lie, let him outdo me in my work.’ Neither the statue nor its inscription survive, and were not seen by Shelley. His inspiration for ‘Ozymandias’ was verbal rather than visual.⁴⁶ The poem very much reflects this handing down of narrative. The speaker of the poem hears the story from a traveller who is then quoted as describing:

Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies ...
(2-4)

At this point, a third speaker is included and interpreted by the traveller:

... whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things.
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
(4-8)

Finally Ozymandias is allowed to speak for himself, but again interpreted by the traveller:

‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.
(10-14)

A Western reader is unlikely to have difficulty in understanding the message of the poem. The irony lies in the absence of power and grandeur which existed in the past. Surrounding the statue are the vast and endless sands of the desert, an immediately recognisable symbol of wilderness, and of course the Temptation of Christ. Peter Brown, in *The Body and Society*, demonstrates that a distinction exists in the Western mind between the ordered world of civilisation and the wild and desolate void of the desert:

The myth of the desert was one of the most abiding creations of late antiquity. It was, above all, a myth of liberating precision. It delimited the towering presence of “the world”, from which the Christian must be set free, by emphasizing a

clear ecological frontier. It identified the process of disengagement from the world with a move from one ecological zone to another, from the settled land of Egypt to the desert. It was a brutally clear boundary, already heavy with immemorial associations.⁴⁷

In Shelley's poem the desert has destroyed all evidence of Ozymandias's greatness and power, and the statue now shows only the truth of the sculptor's vision of a cruel and powerful king come to nothing – art is long and life is short. Ozymandias is brought, as with all worldly vanities, to nothing. However, Shelley has paraphrased the words on the pedestal of the statue as reported by Diodorus. If we take Diodorus's words, rather than those of Shelley, a challenge rings out across the desert: 'King of Kings Ozymandias am I. If any want to know how great I am and where I lie, let him outdo me in my work.' It is unknown what those works were beyond the reading of the statue.

The Romantic Poets had access to *The Arabian Nights* and other Oriental material, such as Sir William Jones' translation of the *Mu'allaquat or the Seven Arabian Poems*, and his translations of Persian poetry such as Firdausi's *Shahname* and the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. The East served them in many ways as a 'Utopian region, as vehicle for disguised political critique and cultural satire, and as allegory for discussing the position of women in British culture'.⁴⁸ In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem 'Kubla Khan' (1797), Kublai Khan (1215-94), the Mongol emperor, is credited with creating a stately pleasure dome. Coleridge's poem is unfinished because, in the summer of 1797, the author, then in ill health, had taken an anodyne and fallen asleep while reading Samuel Purchas's (ca. 1577-1626) *Purchas his Pilgrim or Microcosmus, or the Historie of Man. Relating the Wonders of his Generation, Vanities in his Degeneration, Necessities of his Regenerations*, published in 1617. It is said that Coleridge was 'reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance in "Purchas's Pilgrimage": "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall."''.⁴⁹ The actual quotation from the original reads:

In *Xaindu* did *Cublai Can* build a stately pallace,
encompassing sixteene miles of plaine ground with a wall,

wherein are fertile Meddowes, pleasant Springs, delightfull streames, and all sorts of beasts of chase and game, and in the midst thereof a sumptuous house of pleasure, which may be removed from place to place.⁵⁰

Coleridge, in a manuscript note, confesses that his supposed sleep was an opium-induced reverie.⁵¹ His own poem, therefore, remained unfinished when the immediate recollection of his dream was interrupted.

Coleridge creates a magical landscape, beginning with ‘Alph, the sacred river’⁵² or *Alef*, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, or, as is more commonly attributed, a compound of Alpha, the first letter of the Greek alphabet with its mythological speculations of the Garden of Eden where language began, was in Abyssinia. This may be further complicated by the Arab myth that Adam first descended to earth somewhere near Babylon in Iraq, but the ancient river of Alpheus of Latin origin ran underground, in Coleridge’s case, creating ‘twice five miles of fertile ground’ (6). The combination of Latin, Greek, Arabic and Judaic myth is a typically classical mixed list for the creation of Coleridge’s magical world. Within the poem the fertile ground is surrounded by walls and towers with ‘gardens bright with sinuous rills, | Where blossomed many an incense burning tree’ (8-9). This is not only reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, and, of course, the eighteenth-century walled garden, but also of the tale of ‘Alaeddin [sic] and the Wonderful Lamp’ in the *Arabian Nights* where Alaeddin climbs the high walls of the Sultan’s palace gardens to get a glimpse of the Sultan’s daughter playing with her maids.

Certainly, the world created in the next stanza is a fallen one. Coleridge’s enchanted world surrounded by the sacred river turns into a savage place where the ‘waning moon’ is haunted by a prophesy of war:

A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover! (14-16)

This is characterised by a wailing women beneath a waning moon. That the moon is waning suggests the loss of romantic love, and that she wails for her demon-lover is significant. The actions of the natural world seem to usurp the magical pleasure dome:

. . . from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,

A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
 Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
 Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
 Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
 And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
 It flung up momentarily the sacred river. (17-24)

The natural landscape taints Kubla Khan's dome of pleasure. This turmoil suggests a sexual act which is both destructive and creative. On the one hand the 'half-intermitted burst' creates huge uncontrolled fragments which must be worked upon –to separate the wheat from the chaff. It also, amid the 'dancing rocks', throws up the 'sacred river'. The river is a metaphor for the poem and the struggle by which it is created. However, the meandering river must eventually 'sink in tumult' into a 'lifeless ocean'.

Saree Makdisi, in his essay 'Literature, National Identity, and Empire', provides an inventory of some of the most prominent Orientalist works including Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. He comments:

Following Sir William Jones's translations from and imitations of poetry in Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit, a staggering variety of explicitly Orientalist works were published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including . . . Robert Bage's *Fair Syrian* (1787), Cornelia Knight's *Dinarbas* (1790), Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* (written 1798, published 1816), Richard Johnson's *Oriental Moralist*, Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806), Robert Southey's 'Curse of Kehama' (1810), most of the best work of Lord Byron, Percy Shelley's *Alastor* (1815), 'Ozymandias' (1817), *The Revolt of Islam* (1818), and Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822).

He goes on to suggest that Orientalism in general is much more than a mere thematic device, and argues that it helps to define political, social, and cultural practices, and cannot be separated from the highly charged discussions of individual rights, and the duties of the individual in the decades following the American War of Independence (1776), the French Revolution (1789) and a general sense of change. Thus Coleridge ends his poem with 'Ancestral voices prophesying war!' (30), leading to the loss of the pleasure dome, which in Purchas's account was always able to be moved from place to place, but which now floats 'midway on the waves' (37). The poet is left only with his now distant memory of an Abyssinian maid singing, his Oriental or dark muse

which, if only he could remember, and understand perhaps, her song, he would also be able to build that 'dome in air' (47). For Coleridge, such acts would irrevocably change the poet into something superhuman with entry into Paradise.

The later Romantic poets, particularly P. B. Shelley, are more circumspect and perhaps more politically charged. Dr F. W. Boreham comments that:

Two popular illusions are shattered by the life and work of Shelley. It generally assumed that politics and poetry have nothing in common. The political atmosphere is an atmosphere of tumult, of discord and of confused issues. The poet, it is thought, abhors such fevered elements.⁵³

Shelley in particular seeks a political solution even in his early poems, such as *Queen Mab* (1813), which attempts to replace the chaos and miseries of Britain's Industrial Revolution with a utopian vision of an ideal society. He writes in his Preface to *The Revolt of Islam*:

I have sought to enlist the harmony of ... all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality; and in the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind.⁵⁴

Mary Shelley notes of Shelley's poem, in an Afterword, that '[He] chose, therefore for his hero a youth nourished in dreams of liberty, some of whose actions are in direct opposition to the opinions of the world; but who is animated throughout by an ardent love of virtue, and a resolution to confer the boons of political and intellectual freedom on his fellow creatures.'⁵⁵ *The Revolt of Islam: A Poem in Twelve Cantoes* (1818) is an epic political poem dedicated to his wife, Mary Shelley. It was printed under the title *Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century*, and follows on from Shelley's earlier political poem *Queen Mab* (1813). In Shelley's *Revolt of Islam* Islam is used as a vehicle of Revolution rather than as a religion. Like William Blake's (1757-1827) 'Jerusalem' (1808), Shelley's ideal cannot be built through prayer alone, but he begins with his despair of humanity, when he reviews the outcome of the French Revolution (1789):

When the last hope of trampled France had failed
 Like a brief dream of unremaining glory,
 From visions of despair I rose, and scaled
 The peak of an aerial promontory,
 Whose caverned base with the vexed surge was hoary:
 And saw the golden dawn break forth, and waken ...
 (I.1.127-32)

Shelley's vision is a highly idealised and idiosyncratic version of the French Revolution. The poem begins with a re-telling of the Genesis story of Creation which brought evil to the world. It is composed in elaborate Spenserian stanzas, forming twelve Cantos. The origins of the story of Laon and Cythna might owe something to story of the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth nights of the *Arabian Nights*, which tells of the incestuous love between a prince and his sister which, upon discovery by their father, leads to them being burnt and turned into coals. Shelley, unlike Beckford in his use of the story in *Oriental Tales*,⁵⁶ chooses to draw a happier conclusion. A revolt is organised against Othman by Laon and Cythna, an orphan who lived with Laon and his parents as his sister. Laon describes Cythna as a kindred soul:

Thus, Cythna mourned with me the servitude
 In which the heart of humankind were mewed,
 Victims of lust and hate, the slaves of slaves:
 She mourned that grace and power were thrown as food
 To the hyena Lust ... (II.36.985-89)

Though awkward, diffuse and obsessive (there is much disguised autobiography), the poem contains a strong message of rebellion and of a world to be attained where men and women might be equal:

... Never will peace and human nature meet,
 Till free and equal man and woman greet,
 Domestic peace; and ere this power can make
 In human hearts its calm and holy seat,
 This slavery must be broken' (II.37.994-98)

Brother and sister revolt against the cruelties which the population endure, and win a short-lived victory. They establish an ideal community which they celebrate with incestuous lovemaking: 'And such is Nature's law, divine, that those | Who grow together cannot choose but love' (VI.40.2686-7). However, the ideal is short lived. By Canto X religious difference and perhaps a general

need to tyrannise bring foreign forces to invade the country to take control. There is an inevitability about the fighting, followed by more fighting:

And Oromaze, and Joshua[Christ],⁵⁷ and Mahomet,
Moses and Buddh, and Zerdusht, and Brahm, and Foh,
A tumult of strange names, which never met,
Before, as watchwords of a single woe,
Arose; each raging votary 'gan to throw
Aloft his armed hands, and each did howl,
'Our God alone is God!' (X.31.4063-69)

However, Cythna and Laon escape and sail, together with their illegitimate child, to a visionary Hesperides (XII).

Makdisi comments that, by the 1790s, the Orient would be recognised 'as the ultimate locus of the culture of excess – despotic, enthusiastic, sensual, exotic, erotic – that was the target of such radicalism.'⁵⁸ Women, on the whole, were cast in the exotic and erotic roles. Cythna, however, is credited with thoughts of equality, as expressed above (II.37.994-98), but these thoughts come mainly through the narrator, rather than being directly spoken. For Laon, she seems to remain 'that glorious child, | Even as these thoughts flushed o'er her' (II.37.991-22) The character of Cythna represents not only Laon's somewhat incestuous love interest, but also remains his inspiration and moral touchstone. Morally the couple seem to ally themselves with Christian ideals. When she is captured by the men of Othman who take Cythna to the harem, her concern is for Laon and she gives an essentially Christian message – 'Look not so, Laon – say farewell in hope' (III.9.1180). On her release, Cythna tells the story of her madness and the Sultan's fear of it. Consequently, she is imprisoned in a cave on a desolate island where her motherhood and nurturing of a child seem but a dream. The child is taken from her, but subsequently rescued by mariners. Motherhood and her love for Laon ultimately define her life, so that the part played in the revolution is entirely confined to traditional womanly Western roles – she has the moral strength to survive but does not engineer her own escape.

The despotic, enthusiastic, sensual, exotic, and erotic – now firmly associated with the Arab world – is nowhere more apparent than in William Beckford's *Vathek*. The title character is inspired by AL-Wathiq Ibn Al-Mutasim B'illah (842–847 AD), the ninth caliph of the Abbasid Dynasty. His

father, Al-Mutasim B'illah (833–842 AD), built the city of Samarra, north of Baghdad. Samarra is the setting for much of the novel's action. Vathek is much influenced by his mother, Carathis, and '[i]t was she who induced him, being a Greek herself, to adopt the sciences and systems of her country, which all good Mussulmans hold in such thorough abhorrence.'⁵⁹ Al-Wathiq's mother was also of Greek origin. Vathek combines elements of Doctor Faustus's thirst for knowledge with the stereotypical despotism of the fictional Arab rulers. His thirst for worldly pleasure is insatiable; he builds five palaces for the five senses where he can indulge in food, wine, music, rare artefacts, perfumes. One of these palaces is the Retreat of Mirth, which was 'frequented by troops of young females, beautiful as the Houris, and not less seducing; who never fail to receive, with caresses, all whom the Caliph allowed to approach ...'⁶⁰ The text here follows the Quranic promise that *Houris*, or young fair virgins, will receive devout Muslims in Paradise. Although the novel confirms Hedonism as Vathek's chosen path – 'for he did not think, with the Caliph Omar Ben Abdalaziz, that it was necessary to make a hell of this world to enjoy Paradise in the next'.⁶¹ Yet, as Vathek's journey progresses it embraces a set of Christian morals and values easily recognised by a Christian readership to the extent that, at one point, Prophet Mahomet assumes the role of Christ, in that the good Genii asks his permission to attempt the saving of Vathek:

The good Genii, who had not totally relinquished the superintendence of Vathek, repairing to Mahomet in the seventh heaven, said, 'Merciful Prophet! Stretch forth thy propitious arms towards thy vicegerent; who is ready to fall, irretrievably into the snare which his enemies, the dives, have prepared to destroy him. The Giaour is awaiting his arrival in the abominable palace of fire; where, if he once set his foot, his perdition will be inevitable.' Mahomet answered, with an air of indignation, 'He hath too well deserved to be resigned to himself; but I permit you to try if one effort more will be effectual to divert him from pursuing his ruin.'⁶²

Beckford has conflated the figure of the Genii with that of the Good Angel of the medieval morality plays. However in the Muslim faith the Genii, or rather *Jinn*, are creatures made of fire; the worst is the Devil himself, as opposed to the Angels who are made of light.

Vathek's journey begins when he becomes obsessed with the inscription on the magical swords given to him by the Giaour.⁶³ The inscription promises a place of unlimited knowledge and endless power where the talismans of Soliman confer their power to he that owns them. The Giaour promises him the golden key and the right of passage to that place if he completes a number of tasks. Thus Vathek's evil quest is in opposition to quests undertaken by knights and heroes in classical chivalric epics. In the first instance he demonstrates his thirst for power and god-like domination by building a tower dedicated to astrology and magic. Unlike the Tower of Babylon, Vathek's tower succeeds with help from the Prophet Mahomet, who says: 'Let us leave him to himself, let us see to what lengths his folly and impiety will carry him'.⁶⁴ Vathek chooses 'adore the terrestrial influences, and abjure Mahomet',⁶⁵ and follow the Giaour who promises him Soliman's talismans if he fulfils specific tasks which become increasingly cruel and difficult.

Vathek sacrifices fifty of the city's children by throwing them into the gulph, a yawning abyss opened by the Giaour. At the behest of Carathis, his mother, Vathek builds an enormous fire into which he throws all his rare artefacts as a sacrifice to the Giaour, and rids himself of his opposition among the people by throwing them into the fire too: 'no crimes should be thought too dear for such a reward',⁶⁶ comments the Giaour. Following his mother's instructions, Vathek leaves the city with his harem and army heading towards Istakhar. On his way, he insults the reverend Mollahs who brought him a besom used to sweep the sacred Cahaba⁶⁷ from Mecca. He also seduces Nouronihar, daughter of the Muslim Amir of the pious dwarfs, and attempts to kill the effeminate Gulchenrouz, her fiancé cousin, but the latter is saved by the good Genii – preventing Vathek from committing a new crime. Vathek further insults some Sheiks by ordering his chief eunuch, Bababalouk, to have them 'girded with double cords; and having well disciplined their asses with nettles behind, they all started, with a preternatural alertness, plunging, kicking, and running foul of one another, in the most ludicrous manner imaginable',⁶⁸ while he and Nouronihar enjoy the spectacle. He refrains from no atrocity to win the favour of the Giaour and his master Eblis, except the killing of Nouronihar with whom he has fallen in love. Otherwise, the text shows us a powerful Arab

man devoid of humanity and capable of any decadence and cruelty in order to attain his ends; but he is also a weak man.

Ultimately, it is not Vathek that the text blames, but rather Carathis, his mother. It is she who instigates his quest and urges him onward when he hesitates to follow the Giaour. She, herself, is an expert in astrology and magic, and when she fears losing, she hastens to the side of Morakanabad, the only Visir still loyal to Vathek. At her most extreme, she urges Vathek to kill his own brother:

Motavakel, thy brother, now reigns on the hill of Pied
Horses, and, had I not some slight resources in the tower,
would not be easily persuaded to abdicate. But, that time
may not be lost, I shall only add a few words ... if, on thy
march, thou canst signalize thyself by an additional crime,
all will still go well, and though shalt enter the palace of
Soliman in triumph.⁶⁹

Similarly, when Carathis joins her son in the Palace of the Subterranean Fire, in other words Hell, Vathek blames his mother for everything: ‘Execrable woman! ... [C]ursed be the day thou gavest me birth!’⁷⁰ He bids her to go to Soliman’s Hall and learn for herself not only what the place contains, but also how much Vathek ‘ought to abhor the impious knowledge thou has taught me.’⁷¹ Carathis has failed in her motherly duties to teach her son goodness and virtue. Clearly, Vathek feels betrayed by his mother who has taken on the masculine attributes of power and ambition, while yet retaining some nurturing aspects of motherhood which have led her to protect her son. However, both characteristics of Carathis’s motherhood are equally damaging. On the one hand her power and ambition have driven her son to comply with the outrageous requests of the Giaour; on the other hand, the softness that creates the maternal actually infantilises and disempowers the male.

Carathis also dislikes Nouronihar, and is threatened by her influence on Vathek. Thus she admonishes Vathek to kill her too:

Art thou not ashamed to be seen grasping this limber sapling,
in preference to the sceptre of the pre-Adamite sultans? Is it
then for this paltry doxy that thou hast violated the
conditions in the parchment of our Giaour? Is it on her thou
hast lavished thy precious moments? Is this the fruit of
knowledge I have taught thee? Is this the end of thy journey?

Tear thyself from the arms of this little simpleton; drown her
in the water before me, and instantly follow my guidance.⁷²

However, Nouronihar is not an altogether innocent victim of either Vathek or his mother. She was betrothed to her somewhat effeminate cousin, Gulchenrouz, and initially she ‘loved [him] more than her own beautiful eyes.’⁷³ She is easily seduced by Vathek who arranges for her to hear voices that whisper of the Caliph, the sovereign of the world: ‘he who is destined to enjoy the treasures of the pre-Adamite sultans, a Prince six feet high, and whose eyes pervade the inmost soul of a female, is inflamed with love for her’.⁷⁴ After that, Gulchenrouz is ‘but a bawble that bore no competition with the carbuncle of Giamschid’.⁷⁵ She elopes with Vathek and encourages him on his journey to the Palace of the Subterranean Fire. There, of course, their love for each other evaporates:

Their hearts immediately took fire, and they, at once, lost the
most precious gift of heaven – HOPE. . . . Vathek beheld in
the eyes of Nouronihar nothing but rage and vengeance; nor
could she discern aught in his but aversion and despair.⁷⁶

Vathek’s journey has followed that of an unholy pilgrim and is thoroughly ensconced in the Christian tradition. He is entirely unable to resist sensual satisfaction, and he renounces the Prophet Mohammed in favour of a Mephistopheles-like figure, the Giaour, who promises power and the Black Arts. However, unlike Faustus who begs to:

. . . live in Hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be saved. (9.168-70)⁷⁷

and who ultimately even promises to burn his books as ‘Ugly Hell’ gapes, Vathek never repents or takes responsibility for his own actions, but merely displays ‘aversion and despair.’⁷⁸ The Christian moral of the story, then, is left to the narrator:

Such was, and such should be, the punishment of
unrestrained passions and atrocious deeds! Such shall be the
chastisement of that blind curiosity, which would transgress
those bounds the wisdom of the Creator has prescribed to
human knowledge . . .⁷⁹

George Gordon Lord Byron (1788-1824) also wrote Oriental epics, including *The Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale* (1813), *The Bride of*

Abydos (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), *Lara* (1814), *The Siege of Corinth* (1816), and *Parisina* (1816). Peter Cochran suggests that Byron's concern, unlike that of Said, was one of "blurring the Eurocentric binarism of self and the other"; to see, as did Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, "English self in Asian otherness," and to employ what Said has no time for at all, "a comic reflexivity and relativity" reflecting ironically on both East *and* West.⁸⁰ Cochran goes on to suggest that '[P]art of the difficulty which Said shares with many when trying to read Byron's Orientalism is that he can draw no distinction between the "Orientalism" of Byron and the taste for "Exoticism".'⁸¹ *The Giaour*, for example, presents a story which centres on the love rivalry between the Giaour who has abandoned his Christian faith and Black Hassan, a Muslim, master of the harem. Leila, a woman of great beauty, runs away from the harem of 'Black Hassan'. From the beginning of the Giaour's story we never know Leila alive, so again, her story is told by a man, a Muslim Ottoman. The poem is structured as a series of flashbacks, from which we understand that Leila, 'Far beyond the Muslim's power | Had wrong'd him with the faithless Giaour' (*The Giaour*, 457–8).⁸² She escaped from the harem and is drowned as punishment for her illicit adulterous love. The Giaour avenges Leila's death by killing Hassan. Eric Mayer suggests that Byron's text reproduces the story of Napoleon's harem girl:

... in a narrative that hinges, finally on a moment of world-historical confrontation between the Giaour, as representative of the West in its assumed role of liberator of Eastern women, and Hassan, the figure of patriarchal power who stands for Oriental oppression in the thinly veiled political allegory of Byron's text.⁸³

Leila is distinguished by her rare and unique beauty, but more than that, she is possessed of the courage to escape the harem and follow her love for the Giaour, for which she knows that she risks death. The Ottoman narrator is driven to question this creed:

Which saith that woman is but dust,
A soulless toy for tyrant's lust? (489-90)

Leila's attempt to escape the harem is rewarded by honour killing. The Giaour avenges her death by killing Hassan in return. This outcome, as Mayer suggests, is as 'ideologically inevitable as was Napoleon's victory at Cairo'.⁸⁴

Throughout the heroic poems of the era we have seen a largely Christian morality valorised against a Muslim morality often seen by earlier Western writers as non-existent. The morality of the Giaour is actually more atheistic: he loves a woman, causes her death, then seeks a bloody vengeance, but he refuses the redemption offered by the monk. The women are largely seen with beautiful bodies and souls with variations of emphasis, but always with non-active parts to play in the drama. When they are active, like Carathis and Nouronihar, it is in seeking to seduce men into wrong action. Rarely do they act for themselves, but rather persuade others to act for them. Arab males, on the other hand, are seen as feminised, cruel and despotic. Makdiski suggests that similar rhetoric was used by the rising middle classes in Britain to describe the aristocracy; such was the influence of Orientalism and the comparisons made by those such as Lady Montagu. He cites Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) when opposing the upper classes as being:

‘ ... weak, artificial beings, raised above the common wants and affections of their race’ who ‘in premature unnatural manner, undermine the very foundation of virtue, and spread corruption through the whole mass of society’, but also, quite explicitly, to a discourse of the ‘seraglio’, and hence to all those Oriental despots supposedly indulging in the pleasures of their seraglios, to ‘Mahometanism’, to Eastern and Islamic culture in general – none of which, on the fact of it, ought to have anything to do with the question of women’s rights in England.⁸⁵

To be sure, one can recognise the rhetoric as that of Orientalism, but Orientalism may have more to do with women’s rights in England than is suggested here. For example, the existence of slavery in the USA led to similar comparisons being made by white women who compared their lot in life to that of the slaves, both male and female, of America. Many of these women were active in the Abolitionist movement and, when they were forbidden to attend a world conference on slavery, because they were women, it led to the Seneca Falls Declaration of Women’s Rights.⁸⁶ A reading of the literature of Romantic period, and its overt and covert Orientalism, leads one to suspect, as Meyer suggests, that the conflicting cultural and political interests of colonisation often came in the ‘guise of the liberation of women from patriarchal

oppression. Just as the British suppression of the practice of widow immolation (suttee) in India was in some ways liberating, but was another instance of conflicted cultural dominance.⁸⁷

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹ Lady Mary W. Montagu, 'Verses Written in the Chiosk of the British Palace, at Pera, Overlooking the City of Constantinople, Dec. 26, 1717', *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 59-61.

² Saree Makdisi, 'Literature, National Identity, and Empire', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1740-1830*, ed. by Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 62.

³ Edward Hall, *The Lives of the Kings: Henry VIII*, 2 vols, reprint of 1550 folio edition (London and Edinburgh, 1904), I, pp. 15-16.

⁴ Makdisi, p. 64.

⁵ See Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, Volume 1, trans. by John Ozell (Original from the University of Virginia, digitized 1 October 2007) < http://books.google.co.nz/books?id=-lkOAAAAYAAJ&oe=UTF-8&redir_esc=y > [accessed 16 February 2015].

⁶ See Makdisi, p. 64.

⁷ Srinivas Aravamudan, 'Lady Mary Montagu in the *Hamman*: Masquarade, Womanliness, and Levantinization', *ELH*, 62.1 (1995), 69-104 (p. 80).

⁸ Lord Wharncliffe, 'Introduction', in *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. by Lord Wharncliffe (London: Richard Bentley, 1837), p. xvi.

⁹ Halsband, *The Complete Letters*, pp. xiv-xv.

¹⁰ Lady Mary W. Montagu to Lady Rich, Pera, 16 March O.S. 1717, *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Vol 2, R. Bentley, 1837, digitized 5 January 2007

<https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=xxslAAAAMAAJ&dq=letters+and+works+of+lady+mary+wortley+montagu&source=gb_s_navlinks_s>

¹¹ Lady Mary W. Montagu, *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. by Lord Wharncliffe, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 2nd ed., 1837), Vol. I, p. 166. [Accessed 17 March 2014] . (Note: not all references to the letters of Lady Montagu will come from this edition. Other editions contain different material in some instances.)

¹² Montagu, pp. 174-5. (Note: not all references to the letters of Lady Montagu will come from this edition. Other editions contain different material in some instances.)

¹³ See Chapter 3 of Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, date).

¹⁴ Aravamudan, p. 79.

¹⁵ Montagu, I, p. 355.

¹⁶ Montagu, I, p. 355.

¹⁷ Montagu, I, p. 355.

¹⁸ Montagu, I, pp. 355-6.

¹⁹ Sultana Hafitén was the widow of Mustafa II (1664-1703), the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1695 to 1703. During his reign Hungary was lost through the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, an event which marked the beginning of the long decline of the Ottoman Empire.

²⁰ Montagu, II, p. 8.

²¹ Charles Jervas was a pupil of Sir Godfrey Kneller. Like Lady Montagu, he was a friend of Pope, and much celebrated for his portraits of females. Montagu, I, p. 356.

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- ²² Montagu, II, p. 357.
- ²³ Montagu, II, p. 357.
- ²⁴ Montagu, II, p. 357.
- ²⁵ Montagu, II, pp. 376-77.
- ²⁶ Khatoon is a female title of nobility and rank, referring to the mistress of the household.
- ²⁷ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. by Henry Luis Gates Jr. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 2004), p. 1069.
- ²⁸ Montagu, II, p. 9.
- ²⁹ Montagu, II, p. 9.
- ³⁰ Montagu, II, p. 10.
- ³¹ Montagu, I, p. 380.
- ³² Montagu, II, p. 8.
- ³³ Roger Benjamin, 'Post Colonial Taste: Non-Western Markets for Orientalist Art', in *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*, ed. by Roger Benjamin (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997), p. 37.
- ³⁴ Montagu, II, p. 51.
- ³⁵ Makdisi, p. 66.
- ³⁶ Makdisi, p. 17.
- ³⁷ Robert Southey, 'Preface' to *Thalaba the Destroyer, Vol.1* (London: Longman and O. Rees, 1801), p. vii, The Gutenberg Project, <www.gutenberg.org/files/39804/39804-h/39804-h.htm> [accessed 9 February 2015].
- ³⁸ Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch, *Robert Southey* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 85.
- ³⁹ See Chapter 4 of Bernhardt-Kabisch, pp. 81-108.
- ⁴⁰ Susan Taylor, 'Orientalism in the Romantic Era', *Literature Compass*, 1 (2004), 1-5 (p. 1).
- ⁴¹ Taylor, pp.1-2.
- ⁴² Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing 1770-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 2.
- ⁴³ Leask, p. 2.
- ⁴⁴ Bernhardt-Kabisch, p. 81.
- ⁴⁵ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ozymandias', in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. with textual notes by Thomas Hutchinson (London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. 546. All future reference to Shelley's poetry will be to this edition.
- ⁴⁶ J. Gwyn Griffiths, 'Shelley's "Ozymandias" and Diodorus Siculus: Miscellaneous Notes', *The Modern Language Review*, 43. 1 (1948), pp. 80-4 <[Modern Humanities Research Association http://www.jstor.org/stable/3717977](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3717977)> [accessed date].
- ⁴⁷ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 216.
- ⁴⁸ Taylor, pp. 1-2.
- ⁴⁹ Harold Bloom and Lionel Filling, eds, *Romantic Poetry and Prose* (New York, London, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 255.
- ⁵⁰ Purchas his pilgrimage. Or Relations of the vworld and the religions obserued in all ages and places discovered, from the Creation vnto this present In foure partes. This first containeth a theologicall and geographicall historie of Asia, Africa, and America, with the ilands adiacent. Declaring the ancient religions

before the Floud ... With briefe descriptions of the countries, nations, states, discoueries, priuate and publike customes, and the most remarkable rarities of nature, or humane industrie, in the same. By Samuel Purchas, minister at Estwood in Essex., Book I, 'Of the Arabians, Saracens, Tvrkes, and of the Ancient Inhabitants of Asia Minor, and of their Religions', Ch. XI, p. 350, (London:Printed by William Stansby for Henrie Fetherstone, and are to be sold at his shoppe in Pauls Church-yard at the signe of the Rose, 1613. Ann Arbor, MI and Oxford, UK: Text Creation Partnership, 2009-10 (EEBO-TCP Phase 1 <
<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A10228.0001.001>>)<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ebo/A10228.0001.001/1:10.11?firstpubl1=1470;firstpubl2=1700;rgn=div2;sort=occur;subview=detail;type=simple;view=fulltext;q1=Cublai+Can> [accessed 19 April 2015].

⁵¹ Romantic Poetry and Prose, p. 255.

⁵² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan', in *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, p. 256. All future references will be to this edition.

⁵³ Dr. F. W. Boreham, 'My Study Chair: A Glance Around my Shelves', *Australian Christian World* (31 October 1941), 3.

⁵⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, Preface to *The Revolt of Islam*, *Complete Works*, p.32.

⁵⁵ Mary Shelley, Afterward to *The Revolt of Islam*, *Complete Works*, pp. 153-4.

⁵⁶ James K. Folsom, 'Beckford's *Vathek* and the Tradition of Oriental Satire', *Criticism*, 6.1, Article 5 (1964), page range (p. 61).

⁵⁷ In some editions of *The Revolt of Islam*, including the one used, the word 'Christ' is replaced by the word 'Joshua'. Changes were thought to be done at the hands of Shelley and some friends. However, it has been reported in the *TLS* that '[i]t has long been known that Shelley's anti-Christian poem on an incest theme, *The Revolt of Islam*, had to be censored by the poet and his friends before being deemed safe for publication. But Stephen Allen discovered in an unsold auction lot a copy of the original pencil-marked copy in the reluctant censors' hands. Analysis of the marks suggests that the incest was at the time considered less dangerous for printer and publisher than the swipes at religion. The poem escaped prosecution for blasphemous libel but not a "first class slashing" for its author by the *Quarterly Review* which "was to haunt him for the rest of his life." See Nora Crook and Stephen Allen, *TLS* (20 February 2013).

⁵⁸ Makdisi, p. 73.

⁵⁹ William Beckford, *Vathek*, in *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. by Peter Fairclough with an Introductory Essay by Mario Praz (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 157. All future references will be to this edition.

⁶⁰ Beckford, p. 152.

⁶¹ Beckford, p. 151. Omar Ben Abdalaziz (682-720), an Arab Caliph from the Ummayyad Dynasty. He was renowned for his sense of justice and many reforms, spending no more than was needed upon his own family.

⁶² Beckford, p. 240. See also p. 153, where Mahomet commands the Genii to assist Vathek with the building of his tower.

⁶³ Giaor is derived from the Turkish word Gavir or the Arabic word Kafir, both of which mean infidel.

⁶⁴ Beckford, p. 153.

⁶⁵ Beckford, p. 169.

⁶⁶ Beckford, p. 176.

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- ⁶⁷ Cahaba or the Kaaba is the square stone building, built by Abraham at Mecca, which lies at the heart of the Muslim faith.
- ⁶⁸ Beckford, p.239.
- ⁶⁹ Beckford, pp. 236-7.
- ⁷⁰ Beckford, p. 252.
- ⁷¹ Beckford p. 252.
- ⁷² Beckford, p. 231.
- ⁷³ Beckford, p. 207.
- ⁷⁴ Beckford, p. 212.
- ⁷⁵ Beckford, p. 222.
- ⁷⁶ Beckford, p. 254.
- ⁷⁷ Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, ed. by John D. Jump, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962), p. 102. All future references will be to this edition.
- ⁷⁸ Beckford, p. 254.
- ⁷⁹ Beckford, p. 254.
- ⁸⁰ Peter Cochran, *Byron's Turkish Tales: An Introduction*, International Byron Society, updated August 2005 <https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/turkish_tales_introduction.pdf [accessed 3 March 2012 and 21 April 2015], p. 3.
- ⁸¹ Cochran, p. 3.
- ⁸² George Gordon, Lord Byron, *The Giaour*, in *Byron, The Oxford Authors*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). All future references will be to this edition.
- ⁸³ Eric Meyer, "'I Know Thee not, I Loathe Thy Race": Romantic Orientalism in the Eye of the Other', *ELH*, 58.3 (1991), 657-99 (p. 663) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2873460>> [accessed 21 April 2015].
- ⁸⁴ Meyer, p. 664.
- ⁸⁵ Makdisi, p. 73.
- ⁸⁶ The Seneca Falls Convention took place in New York in 1848.
- ⁸⁷ Meyer, p. 659.

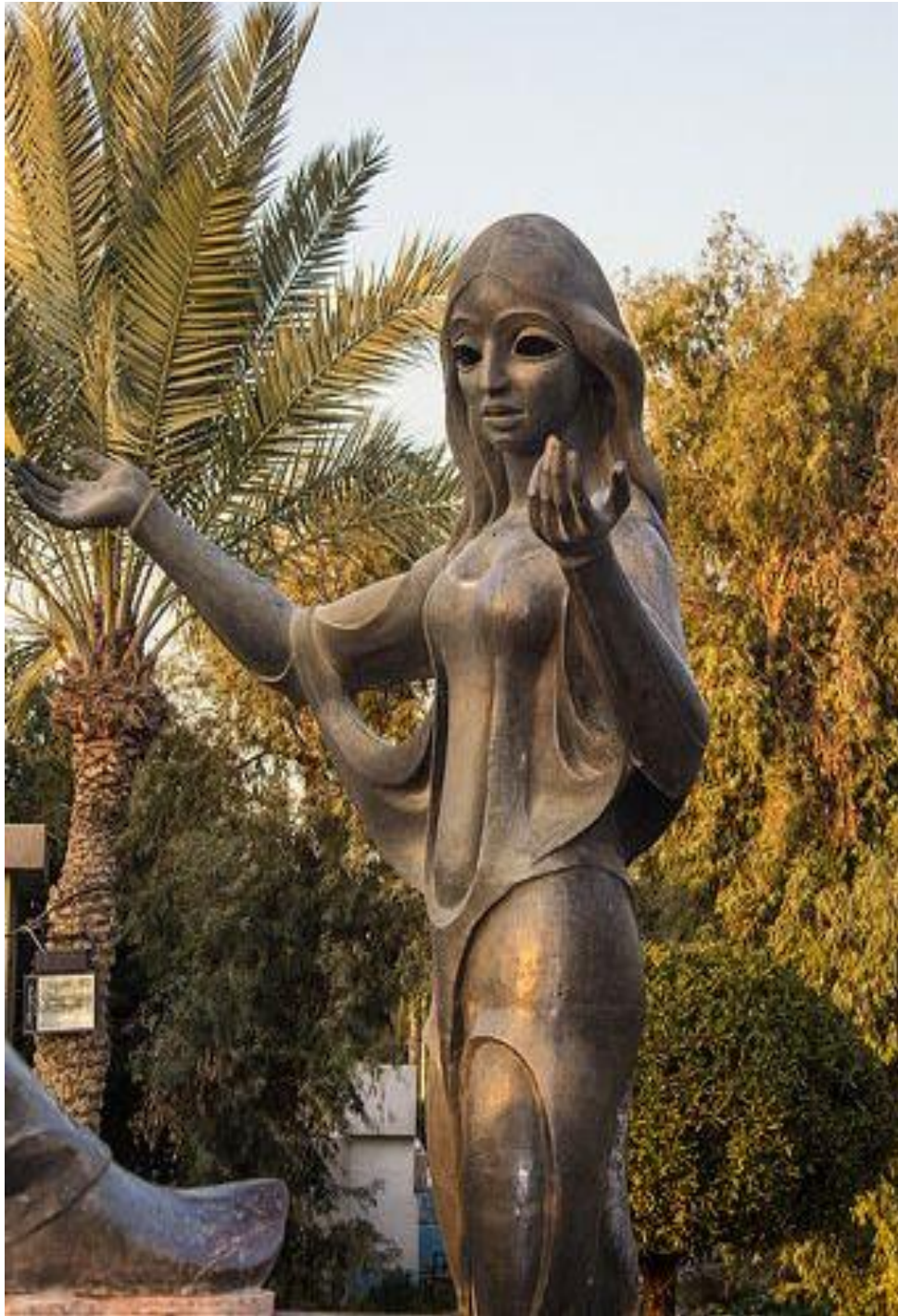


Fig. 2: Mohammed Ghani Hikmat, *Scheherazade and Shahryar*, 1972,
Bronze, Baghdad

CHAPTER III

THE *ARABIAN NIGHTS* AND SCHEHERAZADE

The Eastern adopts the instinctive, the Western prefers the rational method. The former jealously guards his treasure, surrounds it with all precautions, fends off from it all risks and if the treasure go astray, kills it. The latter, after placing it *en evidence* upon an eminence in ball dress with back and bosom bared to the gaze of society, a bundle of charms exposed to every possible seduction, allows it to take its own way, and if it be misled, he kills or tries to kill the misleader ... But the crucial question is whether Christian Europe has done wisely in offering such temptations.

Richard F. Burton, 'Terminal Essay'¹

As we have seen, the first recognisable translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* appeared in 1704 in French by Antoine Galland, followed after two years by an anonymous English translation titled *The Arabian Nights' Entertainment* (Grub St. Edition, 1706). This was followed by other translations by Richard Gough (1735-1809), Gustav Weil (1808-89), Reverend Edward Forster (1769-1828) and G. S. Beaumont: translations moderated for their English audiences having been previously modified by the French.² The effect of these *Nights* may be seen among the Romantic writers, in both poetry and prose, who utilised the *Nights* to create exotic stories that were, nevertheless, supportive of Christian moral values. In the phrase of George Grote applied to Greek myths, they are 'a past that has never been fully present – translations without originals.'³ Said comments:

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe, it is also the place of Europe's greatest, and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.⁴

If defining a European or Western 'national self' entails that an Other must also be defined in contrast. As we have seen, stereotypes of males occur; they are despotic, cruel and weak, while women are seductive, beautiful, and

sexually available for discussion, simultaneously desired and feared. These women follow the patterns of the *Eva* and *Ava* figures of Western literature but differ in important respects. The *Eva* figure is active in Western literature and is, therefore, to be feared, while the *Ava* figure is passive and to be adored. In *One Thousand and One Nights*, on the other hand, we find that Scheherazade is a heroic figure who sets out to save all women. She is very much an active figure and uses – in addition to her seductive qualities – her capacity to tell a good story for the good of all women. This chapter will explore the tensions between good and evil women in *The Arabian Nights*, and whether, in fact, such absolute terms actually apply in light of views of Eastern women in nineteenth-century writings, particularly in the most famous of all translations into English: Sir Richard Francis Burton's *One Thousand and One Nights*.

Richard Burton (1821-90), who saw himself as an Orientalist, compares Galland's translation of *One Thousand and One Nights* with those of others, stating that:

Without the name and fame won for the work by the brilliant paraphrase of the learned and single-minded Frenchman, Lane's curious hash and Latinized English, at once turgid and emasculated, would have found few readers. Mr. Payne's admirable version appeals to the Orientalist and the stylist, not to the many-headed; and mine to the anthropologist and student of Eastern manners and customs.⁵

Burton's first version of the *Nights* gave rise to a second, published in 1885. This was an unexpurgated and unabridged translation of *The Arabian Nights* and, as Said comments: 'Burton took the assertion of personal, authentic, sympathetic and humanistic knowledge of the Orient as far as it would go in its struggle with the archive of official European knowledge about the Orient.'⁶ As a result, in Western perceptions of the Arab world, *The Arabian Nights* became (if it was not already, as Lady Montagu suggests) an ethnographical source on the sexual customs and manners of the Near East, particularly in terms of its depictions of Eastern women and harems.

Burton annotated his translation of *The Arabian Nights* with copious notes regarding sexual manners and practice. However, his notes were unappreciated by a general audience. He comments in his Preface to the *The Arabian Nights*

that he gave his help to Dr James Hunt in founding the Anthropological Society, and became its first President in 1873. However, his intent was

To supply travellers with an organ which would rescue their observations from the outer darkness of manuscript, and print their curious information on social and sexual matters out of place in the popular book intended for the Nipptisch and indeed better kept from public view. But hardly had we begun when “Respectability,” that whited sepulchre full of all uncleanness, rose up against us. “Propriety” cried us down with her brazen blatant voice, and the weak-kneed brethren fell away. Yet the organ was much wanted and is wanted still.⁷

Believing in the need for such a work, his next effort was to set up a similar group in India, the Karma Shastra Society (1882) and to set about, with F. F. Arbuthnot, translating *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana* in 1883. Daud Ali suggests that Burton saw all of his scholarly endeavours in this regard as directed to ‘that small portion of the British public which takes enlightened interest in studying the manners and customs of the olden east’.⁸ Mary Roberts, in *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Literature*, suggests that *The Arabian Nights* was read by Victorians as ‘a complex mix of fact and fantasy[;] the tales were persistently interpreted as a record of the manners and customs of the East as well as a fictitious account of magic and the supernatural.’⁹

There were more complex views of the Arab world during the nineteenth century. For example, Matthew Arnold (1822-88), in ‘The Sick King in Bokhara’ (1849), uses a frame story to tell a story of a sick king who will see neither his merchant visitors nor his Vizier who, on hearing of the king’s illness, begs Hussein – a ‘teller of sweet tales, [his] own, | Ferdousi’s, and the others’ (11-12)¹⁰ – to take him to the king. Hussein leads the Vizier to the sick king, who simply says, ‘O Vizier, I may bury him?’ (21). The Vizier wants to know what has happened and asks Hussein to explain, with the king’s permission. The story Hussein tells, then, is framed by the merchants’ need to pay taxes and the Vizier’s wish to receive them in keeping with the law. Hussein tells of a *Moollah*, a Muslim cleric of the Mosque, who has, in his own view, committed a grievous sin against Allah, for which he should be stoned to death. In any view, his sin was a small matter of having cursed his mother and

others for having drunk all of the available water during a drought, which he himself had kept hidden when he was sick with fever.¹¹ The *Moollah*, however, seems bent on martyrdom. The king, for his part, refuses to hear the *Moollah's* confession in the hope of saving his life. The *Moollah*, however, returns twice more and with resonances of Peter's denial,¹² is heard on the third occasion. The king's wish to deny the power of the law is offset by the *Ulemas* (Muslim theologians) who 'doubted not; / But sentenced him, as the law is, / To die by stoning on the spot.' (109-11)

It is perhaps convenient for Arnold to use a fictionalised Islamic Kingdom with a fictionalised *Sharia* law as a tool to ponder the uncompromising nature of law as opposed to the human condition. The Victorian world of slavery, transportation and public hangings was one in which the crime in question was fairly trivial or at least could be put down to human frailty under extreme conditions – but the *Moollah* has a fanatical desire to be punished and receives the stones 'with a great joy upon his face'(119). The austere law creates an ambiguity between the King's sorrow, the Moolah's strict adherence to the *Sharia*, and the Vizier's more practical warning that 'the law stands. | It were not meet the balance swerved, | The sword were broken in thy hands.' (138-40) and, one assumes, anarchy, leading to greater suffering, will result. However, the Vizier has his eyes fixed firmly on this world rather than the next, and has learned that, in a broadening world, one simply cannot care for everyone:

Look, this is but one single place,
 Though it be great; all the earth round,
 If a man bear to have it so,
 Things which might vex him shall be found.

Upon the Russian frontier where,
 The watchers of two armies stand,

 And these all, labouring for a Lord,
 Eat not the fruit of their own hands;

 The Kaffirs also (whom God curse)
 Vex one another, night and day;
 There are the lepers, and all sick,

 Wilt thou have pity on all these?
 No, nor on this dead dog, O King!
 (161–80)

The Vizier is a practical man who sees law as necessary only for keeping the populace orderly and preserving the King's power; yet he recognises that evils do exist in the world and that law is all there in this world to prevent chaos and it is therefore the King's duty to uphold it. Nevertheless, the King takes a wider view: rather than responding with the idea that the mass of human suffering should prevent him from caring about individual suffering, he subscribes instead to a notion that all life should have meaning. As the supervisor of the mosque, the *Moollah* is similarly insistent on the need for retribution if his soul is to be saved. Confronted with these single-minded views, the law is adhered to, but the King remains compassionate, and insists upon giving the *Moollah* an honourable burial:

Bring water, nard, and linen rolls!
Wash off all blood, set smooth each limb!
Then say: 'He was not wholly vile,
Because a king shall bury him.' (229-31)

Arnold utilises the story of The Sick King to demonstrate his own thoughts on morality, as did the Romantic poets, but for Arnold, one should see '... life steadily, and [see] it whole.'¹³

Images of the Oriental harem, and consequently depictions of Near Eastern women, do not seem to benefit from Arnold's moral vision, but in fact seem polarised during the nineteenth century. For the eighteenth-century Lady Montagu, concentrating mainly on the upper classes, there were clear similarities between the Ottoman seraglio and the British upper classes, but by 1848, Harriet Martineau (1802-76)¹⁴ would see Eastern women as enslaved or worse:

I saw two Hareems [*sic*] in the East; and it would be wrong to pass them over in an account of my travels; though the subject is as little agreeable as any I can have to treat. I cannot now think of the two mornings thus employed without heaviness of heart greater than I have ever brought away from Deaf and Dumb Schools, Lunatic Asylums, or even Prisons. As such are my impressions of Hareems, of course I shall not say whose they were that I visited. Suffice that one was at Cairo and the other at Damascus.¹⁵

Elsewhere, she refers to Arab women in the *hammam* as worse than 'the lowest slave districts of the United States'.¹⁶ Despite her views on the harem,

Martineau worked for women's equality and was one of the first women to write about the "Woman Question", believing that women should have a right to equal education and career opportunities. She supported women's suffrage until her death. She travelled in Egypt, including Sinai at that time, Palestine which included modern day Jordan, and Syria. The product of these journeys was *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848). The work is a detailed, scrupulous survey of the origin and progression of three faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In true Victorian fashion she sees the grand march of human progress as it sought the very source of life:

I saw the march of the whole human race, past, present & to come, through existence, & their finding the Source of Life. Another time, I saw all the Idolatries of the earth coming up to worship at the ascending series of Life – fountains, while I discovered these to be all connected, – each flowing down unseen to fill the next, – so that all the worshippers were seen by me to be verily adoring the Source.¹⁷

Deborah Logan comments in the Introduction to *Harriet Martineau's Writing on the British Empire* that:

For its broader public audience, *Eastern Life* presents Christianity not as the ultimate truth but rather as a part of a historical context that includes Judaism and Islam, with all three descended from the religions of ancient Egypt. Martineau argues three primary points: first, that each successive world religion evolves out of earlier traditions, second, that each new religion preserves certain rituals and beliefs held by its predecessors; and third that each religion will eventually prove to be as susceptible to the corruption of its founding ideals as its predecessors.¹⁸

Martineau's views and her journey to the East saw her eventually turn from Unitarianism to agnosticism and finally to atheism in later life. She was against slavery in all its forms, of which she could have gained firsthand knowledge in Britain.

Martineau loathed the harem system of relations between men and women. She declared that polygamy resulted, in her view, in women losing their appetite for life:

The weariness of heart is, however, the worst part of it ... I saw no trace of mind in anyone ... All the younger ones were dull, soulless, brutish or peevish ... There cannot be a woman of them all who is not dwarfed and withered in mind

and soul by being kept wholly engrossed with that one interest, — detained at that stage in existence which, though most important in its place, is so as a means to ulterior ends. The ignorance is fearful enough: but the grossness is revolting.¹⁹

Martineau depicts a society of women whose sole source of power is sexual, and which can be used to influence a husband, a brother, a father. Indeed, the weaker the woman, the stronger the man. The women of the harem are so used to manipulating their own sexuality as a means of persuading men that these women have no other interest or outlet. When the father relinquishes control, then it is time for the husband to take over. The fact that he is allowed by law to have multiple sexual partners leaves the woman's sexual powers diminished and encourages women to pit themselves against each other — hence the peevishness that Martineau observes. Sexuality was the unspoken obsession of Europeans visiting the Near East. Men could moralise about it while simultaneously fantasising about the unrestricted licence granted to their Arabic counterparts and the heights of seduction women needed to exhibit to have men satisfy their desire.

There is no doubt that Martineau's views on the exploitation of women were formed through her travels in America, where she witnessed slavery first-hand in a Western world. She produced two books, *Society in America* (1836) and *Retrospect on Western Travel* (1837). Martineau was interested in America's Declaration of Independence, with its emphasis on human rights, individuality, equality and the right to choose political representation. However, she was less impressed by America's inability to live up to its own ideals. As Logan comments:

[Martineau's] American experiences early established the ideological basis for a body of work guided by her desire to eradicate slavery in its various forms; racial slavery, seen in her abolition themed writings; sexual slavery, illustrated by her focus on worldwide oppressions of women; and social slavery, demonstrated by her aim to educate the working classes about the forces creating and perpetuating their economic exploitation.²⁰

Martineau sees the women of the harem as sexual slaves, willing to do anything to procure security and some sort of power for themselves. Of course

not all men were owners of large harems, and throughout Martineau's travels we see men at work in various capacities, which is also not without its risks:

There must be some ground for the horror which impels a whole population to such practices as are seen every day to keep out of the reach and ken of government: — practices such as putting out an eye, pulling out the teeth necessary for biting cartridges and cutting off a forefinger, to incapacitate men for army service ... The fear of every other sort of conscription, besides that for the supply of the army ... Any misfortune is to be encountered, rather than that of entering the pasha's army, the pasha's manufactories, the pasha's schools. If questioned, they could at least point to the twenty-three thousand deaths which took place in six months, in the making of the Mahmoudiet Canal.²¹

It is true, however, that where men are badly off, women will be in a worse condition. The 23,000 deaths as a result of building the canal would have left a similar number of widows (if not more), many of whom would now have no means of supporting households or feeding their children – at least, not unless they could persuade another male to do their bidding. Prostitution was one of the few options for widows to sustain their families.

There were of course a number of other lady travellers, including Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), who shared Martineau's opinion of the harem:

In the large harems, there are 200 to 300 wives and 4 to 5 children; but she [the Egyptian woman] is not a wife, nor a mother; she cannot sit down in the presence of her son; her husband is her master and her only occupation is beautifying herself [...] She becomes his real wife only at his caprice, by a paper given to her, then she is satisfied to believe that she will stay at the gates of paradise [...] the woman [...] has more to suffer here than the man, both in heart, and in spirit, and in body.²²

For Julia Pardoe (1806-62), in *The City of the Sultan, and, Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1836* (1837), Turkish women are 'happiest, for they are the freest individuals in the Empire.'²³ Nevertheless, Pardoe comments on the almost total lack of education among Turkish women, their limited range of ideas which renders their happiness 'indolent'. They have none of the anxieties or doubts that may oppress Western women:

Give her shawls, and diamonds, a spacious mansion
Stamboul, and a sunny place on the Bosphorus, and a

Turkish wife is the very type of happiness ... a woman in person, but a child at heart.²⁴

The sister of the famous Orientalist Edward Lane Poole, Sophia Lane Poole (1804-91), appreciated the needle work, especially the embroidery that was done in the harem. She comments in *The English Woman in Egypt* (1845): 'It is very grievous that the women in general are merely instructed in handiwork. But I must not speak slightly of their embroidery; for it is extremely beautiful — as superior as it is unlike to any fancy-work practised in England.'²⁵

Lady Isabel Burton (1831-96), wife of Sir Richard Burton, travelled with her husband and produced *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine, and the Holy Land: From My Private Journal* (1875) and *Arabia, Egypt, India: A Narrative of Travel* (1879). Isabel Burton's writings on Oriental domestic life display more experimentation and cross-culturalism than many of her contemporaries. In *The Inner Life* she foregoes her English identity during a visit to the Turkish bath:

We will dress like natives . . . You will wear a pair of lemon – coloured slippers, pointed at the toes; white lined trousers . . . You will be covered with jewellery of all colours, sizes, shapes and sorts . . . your turban will be literally crusted and caked with it . . . I will also kohl a few stars and crescents on your face . . . We will then put on our izaris and mandils, and walk to the neighbouring harim.²⁶

Her willingness to adopt an Eastern mode of dress and persona is perhaps an indication of her greater sense of adventure than other women travellers in the region. Here she does not merely observe the exotic, but becomes part of it. However, she does not entirely give up her role as observer and spectator, but rather invites the reader to an exclusive (and voyeuristic) view of the *Hammam*. After describing the cleansing, the vigorous washing, scrubbing, and shampooing she goes on:

We now return to the hall where we first undressed, enveloped in silk and woollen clothes, and recline on divans. It is all strewn with flowers, incense is burned about us, cups of very hot, rather bitter coffee are handed to us, and narghi'les are placed in our mouths. A woman advances and kneads you like bread; you fall asleep during the process, which has almost the effect of mesmerism. When you awake

you will find music and dancing, the girls chasing one another, eating sweets, cracking nuts, and enjoying all sorts of fun.²⁷

Burton allows herself to succumb to the experience and even allows *narghi'les* to be placed in her mouth. This is a type of smoking pipe that combines tobacco and perfume but passes the smoke through water.

However, while Burton hints at undressing, her text, written for a Victorian readership, does not reveal whether or not the women were completely naked. She describes the bath itself and the process of lathering, scrubbing, shampooing, and then getting dressed, as in the above quotation. However, she does not mention nudity as such, or altogether free herself from her Victorian stays. Indeed, she finds the older women of the *Hammam* objectionable and ugly:

Those old women squatting on the floor, with about five hairs, dyed a bright orange colour, are really disagreeable. They have harsh voices, and they make an irritating noise. How thankful they ought to be for the veiling institution. I only wished you to come to-day, on the principle of seeing everything once, to know what the Hammám really is.²⁸

Burton has an unforgiving view of the old women. These women seem to have lost any potential to attract a male, in Burton's view, and consequently have lost their value – not only to the male of the harem, but to Burton as well. Their voices are loud, harsh and irritating, and she has only brought her reader to this site on the basis 'of seeing everything' and knowing 'what the Hammám really is.'²⁹ However, Burton thinks that they ought to be grateful for the veiling institution, insinuating that if these women fail as objects of desire, they have a place neither in the *Hammam* nor in public, whether Arabic or Victorian. Burton was not the only traveller to comment on the aging process in Eastern women; she did not agree with her husband that Eastern women wore the veil as a dress code, but saw it rather as an imposition proscribed by men. Nevertheless, she remains a Victorian observer of the habits and customs of the Near Eastern woman. Even when Burton herself indulges in smoking, bathing and cross-cultural dressing, she describes her experiences through a Victorian gaze. Certainly, in terms of her husband's record of the sexual habits of the

Near East and India she was not pleased, and after his death his works were heavily censored.

The publication of Richard Burton's plain and literal translation of the *Arabian Nights: An Entertainment* – which became *The Book of the Thousand Nights and A Night* – had an interesting publication record. The Obscene Publication Act was passed in 1857 specifically to suppress sexually explicit material, leaving Burton nervous about the possibility of prosecution. He modified his publication method to avoid this and his translation in ten volumes was printed for The Burton Club for private subscribers only. He also claimed that his work was intended exclusively for male readers, and male scholars of the Orient and anthropologists in particular. The translation was a financial success, however, and 'the first printing was sold to subscribers for the equivalent of [US] \$200 in today's currency. The books were financially successful, and Burton made a profit of 10,000 guineas'.³⁰ However, this did not prevent his being denounced in *The Edinburgh Review* as 'a man who knows thirty-five languages and dialects, especially that of pornography', and by another reviewer as an authority on 'Il that relates to the bestial element in man.'³¹ The book was made available in abridged form posthumously, but the unexpurgated version was not available to the public, and was banned by US Customs until 1931. After Richard Burton's death Isabel Burton 'destroyed all of his private papers, as well as the original notes and manuscript for *The Arabian Nights*. She also entrusted William Coote, secretary of the National Vigilance Association, to burn books and papers after her death to remove all remaining "indecentencies".'³²

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–92) wrote his 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights', probably having read an edition of the *Arabian Nights* more suitable for young readership. The poem appeared for the first time in the collection of 1830 with small alterations, and is part of his *Juvenalia*. Written in the first person, the narrator enters a magical landscape:

Adown the Tigris I was borne,
By Bagdat's shrines of fretted gold,
High-walled gardens green and old;
True Mussulman was I and sworn,
For it was in the golden prime
Of good Haroun Alraschid. (6-11)³³

The narrator remembers a more innocent time, when he imagined himself as a true Muslim sworn to ‘good Haroun Alraschid’³⁴ and took a journey through his land by boat. He sails past beautiful gardens until the nightingale’s song brings in a different note:

The living airs of middle night
Died round the bulbul as he sung;
Not he: but something which possess’d
The darkness of the world, delight,
Life, anguish, death, immortal love,
Ceasing not, mingled, unrepress’d,
Apart from place, withholding time (69-75)

As darkness descends life, anguish and death are balanced by an immortal love that does not cease and exists outside of place and time, yet mingles with the golden age of Haroun Alraschid. The night is beautiful and the boy is entranced by the place. The garden is lulled by the sound of a city at rest. The narrator remembers being drawn on through the garden and seeing a sorrowful mixture of myrrh thickets and tamarisks growing that, according to *The Quran*, Allah punished people of Saba ‘by converting their two garden (rows) into gardens producing bitter fruit and tamarisks’.³⁵ Thick ‘rosaries of scented thorn’ remind us of Christ on the Cross, while the ‘stately cedar’, and ‘obelisks’ are ‘Graven with the emblems of the time’ but now honour the good times under Haroun Alraschid (100-10). These darker images are counterbalanced by the domes of the mosques — ‘there seemed | Hundreds of crescents on the roof’ (128-9) of Baghdad. Tennyson, here, may be contrasting the doubts and fears of his own age with the joyful faith of this golden age. Finally, he gazes upon a Persian girl alone, ‘serene with argent lidded eyes | Amorous, and lashes like to rays | Of darkness’ (135-7). For a Christian audience, the girl must foreshadow Eve and death brought into the garden, but the narrator sees her as the sweetest lady of the time, | Well worthy of the golden prime | Of good Haroun Alraschid’ (141-3). This imaginative and gentle reflection on *The Arabian Nights* demonstrates a youthful vision, now passed:

Sole star of all that place and time,
I saw him – in his golden prime,
THE GOOD HAROUN ALRASCHID (152-4)

The narrator, now perhaps beset by doubt, insists upon the reality of his memory.

In Richard Burton's 'Terminal Essay' his Woman Chapter deals largely with the status of women in society and compares the cloistering of women with the European way of allowing other men to see their wives, and then fighting duels should competition for the lady's favour arise. He has little time for the work of Martineau and comments: 'Indeed, a learned lady, Miss Martineau, once visiting a harem went onto ecstasies of pity and sorrow because the poor things of — say trigonometry and the use of globes.'³⁶ He goes on to say that 'Women, all the world over, are what men make them . . .'³⁷ The comparisons that he makes are largely in favour of the Eastern way of doing things, saying that: '[t]he legal status of womankind in Al-Islam is exceptionally high, a fact of which Europe has often been assured, although the truth has not even yet penetrated into the popular brain.'³⁸ In *The Arabian Nights*, however, he suggests that views of women are exaggerated:

Women are mostly "Sectaries of the god Wünsch";³⁹ beings of impulse, blown about by every gust of passion; stable only in instability; constant only in inconstancy. The false ascetic, the perfidious and murderous crone and the old hag — procuress who pimps like Umm Kulsum,⁴⁰ for mere pleasure, in the luxury of sin, are drawn with an experienced and loving hand. '⁴¹

However, Burton assures us that we also find in the stories of *The Arabian Nights* the good daughter, the devoted wife, the nurturing mother, and the *univira*, the woman who marries only once. There are also the self-sacrificing heroic women. Of all these types of women, Scheherazade seems his favourite, and he quotes from the Hindu-Hindi class-book the *Toti-námeh* or Parrot volume, which states:

The perfect woman has seven qualities. She must not be always merry (1) nor sad (2); she must not always be talking (3) nor silently musing (4); she must not always be adorning herself (5) nor neglecting her person (6); and, (7) at all times she must be moderate and self-possessed.⁴²

Scheherazade, however, is by no means the perfect woman.

We first meet Scheherazade through the story of King Shahryar and his brother, Shah Zaman, which is narrated by the *Rawi*, the Arabic story-teller

who is part of the oral tradition. Despite the wealth and power of the two kings, neither man seems able to satisfy their wives' lust and consequently lose their interest. Shah Zaman discovers his wife and her slaves in his garden perpetuating an orgy:

They walked under the very lattice and advanced a little way into the garden until they came to a jetting fountain amidmost a great basin of water; then they stripped off their clothes and behold, ten of them were women, concubines of the King, and the other ten were white slaves. Then they all paired off, each with each —⁴³

Even more shocking was the behaviour of his Queen who, left alone, awaited her own lover:

[T]hen sprang with a drop-leap from one of the trees a big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight. . . . She embraced him. . . . then he kissed her . . . he threw her and enjoyed her. ⁴⁴

The horror felt by King Shah Zaman and other Arab men is explicated in Burton's notes. He says 'Debauched women prefer negroes on account of the size of their parts.'⁴⁵ This type of essentialising racism would see all Africans in relation to a fear that an excessive sexuality would somehow be inflicted on white women. Such fears lie at the heart of Southern racism in nineteenth-century USA, whereby the African male comes to signify all of the sexual white fears and phobias of the age.⁴⁶ When the black slave left he did not go through the door but quite literally 'swarmed up a tree'.⁴⁷ Not only is the slave black, he is also of a much lower social class. Within *The Arabian Nights* this theme appears in numerous stories that not only blame the female for infidelity, but also see her placing a black slave in the position of her master: she calls 'my Lord Saeed'. Sadly, King Shahryar's wife and queen behaves in an almost identical fashion. He discovers her with ten of her handmaids receiving lovers, the Queen calls out for her blackamoor, Saeed, who also drops from a tree. Shah Zaman – who has been sickened by his wife's infidelity, thus gaining readers' sympathy for the cuckolded husband – begins to recover health on finding that the King, his brother, also suffers.

Burton comments that in his time 'no honest Hindi Moslem [*sic*] would take his womenfolk to Zanzibar on account of the huge attractions and

enormous temptations there.’⁴⁸ It seems that in *The Arabian Nights* the Arab woman cannot resist temptation even on pain of death: ‘How could she do this deed by me? How could she work her own death?’ (‘The Story of King Shahryar and his Brother’ (6) asks Shah Zaman. The greater fear of males in the Western world, in comparison, is that the white woman will be taken by force; thus she retains the assumed moral superiority of the nineteenth-century gentlewoman. The blame for these sexual encounters lies wholly with the women, for the black slaves cannot be expected to do otherwise. This essential primitivism in the slaves is contrasted with Shah Zaman, who kills his wife and her lover. The two brothers then give up their kingships, take to wandering and seek refuge from women by staying with Allah. The curse of Allah is placed upon ‘one and all [women] and upon the fools who lean against them for support or who place the reins of conduct in their hands’ (‘The Story of King Shahryar and his Brother’, 8). Of course in Victorian Britain, following the example of Queen Victoria (1819-1901), who retreated into a life-long period of mourning following the death of Prince Albert (1819-61), women had generally been deemed to be more moral and sensitive than husbands who lived in the cut-throat world of business and who needed their gentle guidance. Indeed, the “Angel in the House” kept the ruthlessness of imperialising and industrial Britain at bay. As John Ruskin (1819-1900) wrote in *Of Queen’s Gardens* (1864), many Victorians believed in the ‘separate characters’ of men and women: ‘The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer ... his energy [is] for adventure, for war, and for conquest ... [b]ut the woman’s ... great function is Praise ... [b]y her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation.’⁴⁹

A second story within the tale of Scheherazade is that of the Jinni and his hostage mistress. This story reinforces the duplicity of womankind and tells of a Jinni discovered by the two kings. He has with him a white-skinned young lady, to whom the Jinni addresses the words, ‘choicest love of this heart of mine! O dame of noblest line, whom I snatched away on thy bride night’ (‘The Story of King Shahryar and his Brother’, 13). This story, despite the original innocence of the young bride, serves to reinforce the notion that all women are libidinous and unfaithful. When she is approached by the two kings who treat her as a lady, she responds that they should come to her or she will wake her

husband, the Ifrit, who will kill them. She not only wants company but insists upon sexual relations with both, and carries the signets of ‘five hundred and seventy men who have Futtered me upon the horns of this foul, this foolish, this filthy Ifrit ...’ (‘The Story of King Shahryar and his Brother’, p. 14). This demonstrates that even one as primitively and supernaturally strong enough to strike fear into the kings, can be brought low by the cunning of a woman:

“I have lain under as many of my kind as I please, and this wretched Jinni wotteth is not that Destiny may not be averted nor hindered by aught, that what so woman willeth the same she fulfilleth however man nilleth.” (‘The Story of King Shahryar and his Brother’, p.14)

It is after their experiences of the Jinni and his mistress that the two kings decide to return to their country and ‘never to intermarry with womankind’ (‘The Story of King Shahryar and his Brother’, p.15). On his return, King Shahryar demands his chief minister or Wazir to take his wife and kill her. However, Shahryar decides to punish not only his wife by death, but all women: ‘there never was nor is there one chaste woman upon the face of earth.’⁵⁰ He resolves to marry a virgin each night and have her killed the following morning.

Morality between the sexes is also questioned by British authors. In Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, protagonist Helen Huntingdon leaves her drunken husband and takes her child with her, putting her outside of the law. As a fugitive, she takes the name of Helen Graham and her full story is told through her journal. In Chapter Four the question of male freedoms, compared to women’s cloister virtues, is discussed in relation to male upbringing. It is thought that Helen will make a ‘milk sop’ of her son by protecting him from vice – which will render him unable to resist temptation. She replies as follows:

Well, but you affirm that virtue is only elicited by temptation; and you think that a woman cannot be too little exposed to temptation, or too little acquainted with vice, or anything connected therewith – it must be either, that you think she is essentially so vicious or so feeble-minded, that she *cannot* withstand temptation, – and though she may be pure and innocent as long she is kept in ignorance and restraint, yet, being destitute of *real* virtue, to teach her how to sin is at once to make her a sinner, and the greater her knowledge, the wider liberty, the deeper will be her depravity, – whereas, in the nobler sex, there is a natural

tendency to goodness, guarded by a superior fortitude,
 which, the more it is exercised by trials and dangers, is only
 the further developed –⁵¹

These views come to us through a double frame — the story is partly related by Gilbert Markham, and later by Helen, in her own voice. The long female dash at the end of the quote leaves readers to draw their own conclusions, thus marking a clear difference in morality. Women must be kept pure, while Victorian males must do their ‘grand tour’ to Italy and other such places where anything, in the nineteenth century, may be had at a price. How then, to judge Scheherazade?

It is Scheherazade’s story that creates the frame for *The Arabian Nights*. It is Scheherazade who narrates all of the stories. Despite the obscure origin of the *Arabian Nights* and its multitudinous origins and versions, most critics agree that these versions have one thing in common: the Scheherazade framework story. She is the daughter of the Wazir charged with killing Shahryar’s first wife, and later finding pure virgins for the king to marry and putting them to death the following morning. This continues for three years and the city inevitably is running out of pure maidens. Large numbers of the population have fled to avoid giving up their daughters to the king’s revenge on women. The Wazir has two daughters, and is now forced to consider them or face his own death. He comes home troubled and confides his dilemma to Scheherazade: ‘By Allah, O my father, how long shall the slaughter of women endure? Shall I tell thee what is in my mind in order to save both sides from destruction?’⁵² Her father wishes to hear what she has to say, and she goes on: ‘I wish thou wouldst give me in marriage to this King Shahryar; either I shall live or I shall be a ransom for the virgin daughters of Moslems and the cause of their deliverance from his hands and thine.’⁵³ An argument ensues, in which her father tells her the story of ‘The Ass and the Bull’. The story within the story tells us of a farmer who has been given to understand his animals’ speech as a gift from Allah. He has been warned that should he disclose this knowledge he will die. He hears his ass tell the bull how to do less work; the bull succeeds but the ass is taken in his stead to do the work. The ass then warns the bull that if he does not work the farmer will have no further use for

him, so the bull goes back to work as he should. Here, the Wazir stops the story to plead with his daughter:

O my daughter ... thou wilt die for lack of wits; therefore sit thee still and say naught and expose not thy life to such stress; for, by Allah, I offer thee the best advice, which cometh of my affection and kindly solicitude for thee.⁵⁴

Scheherazade remains adamant that she should continue her plan despite her father's entreaties. He warns her that if she does not obey him he'll do to her what the farmer did to his wife, and he carries on with the story. The farmer's wife wishes to know what has taken place and even when she has been told that this will mean the death of her husband, she insists. It saddens the farmer that his wife, whom he has loved, would risk his life to satisfy her curiosity. He overhears the rooster mocking him for being unable to control his wife:

Then by Allah – is our master a lack-wit and a man scanty of sense: if he cannot manage matters with a single wife, his life is not worth prolonging ... he hath but one wife yet knoweth not how to manage her ... He should arise forthright ... and give her a regular back-basting and rib-roasting till she cry: — I repent, O my lord! I shall never ask thee a question as long as I live!⁵⁵

The story demonstrates the depth of Scheherazade's defiance, in that she not only plans to save her father but is prepared to risk his wrath by disobeying him. She continues:

I will marry myself to him despite the nose of thee. And first I will go up to the king myself and alone and I will say to him: — "I prayed my father to wive me to thee, but he refused, being resolved to disappoint his lord, grudging the like of me to the like of thee."⁵⁶

Here, she is prepared to place her father in jeopardy and put all of her faith in her own abilities. 'The Ass and the Bull' story demonstrates not only the power of men over women but the lengths to which some women are willing to go in order to have their own way. The farmer's wife needs to be taken under control because she is unable to control herself, as with the other women we have met so far.

Whether the king or his Wazir are justified in extending this attribute to all women makes up the rest of Scheherazade's story. Even the King, upon

hearing that his Wazir has agreed to offer his own daughter in the absence of all others, is surprised, ‘for he had made especial exception of the Wazir’s daughter’:

O most faithful of Counsellors, how is this? Thou wottest that I have sworn by the Raiser of the Heavens that after I have gone in to her this night I shall say to thee on the morrow’s morning: — Take her and slay her! And, if thou slay her not, I will slay thee in her stead without fail.”
 “Allah guide thee to glory and lengthen thy life, O King of the age,” answered the Wazir, “it is she that hath determined: all this I have told her and more; but she will not hearken to me and she persisteth in passing this coming night with the King’s Majesty.”⁵⁷

The problem for these men, who would both save Scheherazade, is that they are unable to see a different way of doing things or to take back their oaths once they have been made. Like ‘The Sick King in Bokhara’, the Wazir must obey his oath to the king and the king must obey his oath to Allah. If Scheherazade is bent on martyrdom there is nothing within the law, Muslim or secular, that can save her. The King’s wish to save his Wazir’s daughters by avoidance resonates with Arnold’s king, whose wish to spare the Mullah is offset by the *Ulemas* who ‘doubted not; | But sentenced him, as the law is, | To die by stoning on the spot.’⁵⁸ They are tied by their faith, and the sense is – as with Arnold’s sick King – that if oaths are not kept then the law is weakened and chaos results. The King is not so upset at the taking of his Wazir’s daughter that he is unable to be flattered by the young maid’s determined martyrdom: ‘So Shahryar rejoiced greatly and said, “’Tis well; go get her ready and this night bring her to me.”’⁵⁹ Males are both the makers and the keepers of the law, and when one group holds all the power then the group with no power must be calculating, tricky, and cunning.

Scheherazade is an active agent and takes advantage of her capacity to tell stories to save her own life, and that of other women, by distracting the king each night with a story that never ends. She first saves Dunyazade, her sister, by insisting that she accompanies her in the King’s household. She predetermines, strategically, where to pause the tale every dawn to keep the King’s curiosity aroused. The number of the *Nights* (1001) symbolises eternity,

as they do not stop at one thousand and there is always the possibility of one more. Byatt observes that:

The ‘frame story,’ the tale of the angry king Shahriyar who avenged his first wife’s adultery by marrying virgins and beheading them the morning after their defloration, is a deeply satisfying image of the relations between life, death, and storytelling. The wise Scheherazade saves her own life, and those of the remaining virgins of the kingdom, by telling the king (and her sister Duniyazad) a thousand and one interwoven stories, which are always unfinished at dawn—so deferring the execution daily—and enchanting.⁶⁰

Scheherazade continues to narrate her stories each night for three years, although her interventions into the work are sporadic and formulaic, perhaps formed by the oral tradition. During the course of these three years, she bears Shahriyar three children and softens his heart so that he grows fond of her and spares her life.

The stories Scheherazade tells, however, as Katie Trumpener comments, change as the narratives continue:

Initially her stories offer tales of female infidelity as a character – and characteristically female – flaw. Yet, over time, the stories begin to show us the complex background to women’s – and men’s – apparent moments of immorality: how women come to be imprisoned, how men come to be sexually maimed.⁶¹

For example, Scheherazade tells the ‘Tale of the Ensorcelled Prince’. This story begins with an Ifrit who tries to kill a Fisherman who has set him free. Unable to outwit the Fisherman, the Ifrit promises him riches in exchange for freedom. Following the Ifrit’s directions, the Fisherman takes some colourful fish to the Sultan who discovers that the fish are spell-bound. Determined to uncover the fishes’ secret, he goes to the location where the fish are found and explores the area. There he finds an unhappy young Prince who tells him that his wife and cousin, whom he loved and adored, turned out to be an unfaithful wife and a sorceress:

[M]y fair cousin had gone in to a hideous negro slave with his upper lip like the cover of a pot, and his lower lip like an open pot; lips which might sweep up sand from the gravel-floor of the cot.⁶²

Again, insulted by the suggestion of his wife's infidelity, he attempts to slay the slave but leaves him paralysed. On discovering this the young Prince's wife casts a spell upon him which leaves him half-human and half-stone and unable to move. The city's population become colourful fish depending on their creed. The Sultan saves the young Prince and the city by tricking and killing both wife and slave. He takes the young Prince as his own son and the Fisherman's daughter as his wife.

The 'Tale of the Ensojcelled Prince' raises a number of questions, as do many of the other tales. Scheherazade, after all, is a young virgin, and yet is able to narrate stories of sexual deviance, trickery and cruelty on the part of womankind. She demonstrates a far greater sexual awareness than one might expect in a pure young maid. Burton, perhaps recognising the deeply sexual nature of many of the stories, decided that his unexpurgated version should be read only by men and in private. This, in turn, suggests that men may not be reading the tales for their artistic merit. One might consider which aspects of the tales hold Shahriyar's interest, for the stories have a listener as well as narrators: a *rawi* and Scheherazade. Scheherazade's framing presence to the story invites the comparison of her own subterfuge with that of the young Prince's wife and cousin. A further obvious comparison may be made between Shahriyar's first wife and even Shah Zaman's wife. The latter pair prefers lovers who shame their husbands, while Scheherazade's own subterfuge, although equally intended to deceive, is committed for noble ends. These comparisons may equally be made of the Prince of the story, the Sultan, and the listener of the story, King Shahriyar of the frame. Moral judgements are not easily made, although the law is clear.

Scheherazade is an active female protagonist who takes her own fate and that of others into her own hands. She has been compared with Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. Jane reads *The Arabian Nights* and a copy is available in Mrs. Reed's bookcase,⁶³ which Jane takes down after she has finally confronted Mrs. Reed and asked to be sent to school. Muhsin Jassim Ali comments that:

Jane's method of counteracting Rochester's imperiousness and sarcasm is basically the same as Scheherazade's. Whenever Rochester summons Jane to his presence she 'prepares an occupation for him,' telling him a story,

showing him a picture, or asking him to sing. Furthermore, Shahriar's appraisal of Scheherazade as "the deliverer of many damsels" seems to be in Jane's mind when she tells Rochester playfully that she will stir a mutiny in his seraglio and liberate the "harem inmates" ... She is bent upon "pampering that susceptible vanity of his," disarming him ... until he is divested of his Sultanic imperiousness.⁶⁴

Jane leaves Rochester even as she asks herself, 'who in the world cares for you?'; but the indomitable reply is, '*I care for myself ... I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man ... laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour ...*' (279). Jane follows a strict moral code, and is rewarded at the end of the work with a weakened Rochester who is, nevertheless, prepared to give Jane some sort of equality.

Scheherazade has fewer choices and faces death for herself and other women if she fails in her storytelling. For Alia Yunis, Scheherazade was a feminist before the concept occurred in the Western world:

While [Scheherazade] was hanging out in the Middle East and East, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Rapunzel were self-absorbedly waiting around to be rescued. Unlike Scheherazade, they were not smart, wise, brave, caring, sexy, and beautiful all at once. If they were caring and smart, they were sexless, like Mary Poppins. If they were beautiful, they were simpering. If they were wise, they were shrivelled.⁶⁵

Of course Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Rapunzel live in a world where morality – albeit passive morality – is rewarded, and where the bad people and the evil witches are punished. It is not until the nineteenth century that we find Jane Eyre living in a world similar to, but not the same, as that of fairy tales. In Jane's world ghosts turn out to be a Mulatto wife who has gone mad. Heroes are less heroic, as both Rochester and St. Claire demonstrate. Jane gains riches from her Uncle John, who had written to Mrs. Reed years before stating his intention to adopt Jane, so that while Mrs. Reed is a realistic character, she stands in well enough for the wicked stepmother of fairy tales. Jane admits on writing to Madeira that she would be able to 'better endure being kept by [Mr. Rochester] if [she] had but a prospect of one day bringing Mr. Rochester an accession of fortune' (236). Jane's resolution to leave him, then, is almost as much about a woman's financial independence as her adherence to a strict

moral code. Jane's morality is strong and realistic, but it is compromised by the fairy tale plotting of the novel. Jane saves Rochester after his wife has (conveniently) succumbed to a fire she herself had set. The fire leaves him injured, but it takes her life. Jane's happy ending, then, comes about in a manner bordering on the magical, when she hears Rochester calling.

Scheherazade exists amid a much more problematic and ambiguous moral code. Certainly the law is clear, but it is not hard to recognise that the makers of the law are fallible in its expression. In order to save herself, Scheherazade must keep the King entertained. He is both the maker and the keeper of the law which is absolute in a fallible world. In the Western fairy tale Shahriyar would be deemed wicked and suitably punished for the killing of hundreds of women merely to obtain revenge for himself and his brother. In *The Arabian Nights*, however, Shahriyar's actions are largely suppressed by long descriptions of the wrongs done to himself and his brother by women. As a consequence, Scheherazade's success is also the King's, who is finally persuaded to give up his mad serial killing in favour of settling down happily with his three sons and Scheherazade. His brother is equally pacified and rewarded by marrying Scheherazade's younger sister, Dunyazade. Her father is rewarded by having his two daughters marry into royalty, thus securing his position as Wazir.

Scheherazade's stories exist in a world of moral relativism where the good and the just are not always rewarded, but smartness and cunning are. However, cunning is also a gift. A Jinni tries to kill a fisherman who has released him from a jar sealed by Solomon eight hundred years before, because he has sworn to do so and must keep his word. However, the fisherman says to himself:

This is a Jinni; and I am a man to whom Allah hath given a passibly cunning wit, so I will now cast about to compass his destruction by my contrivance and by mine intelligence; even as he took council of his malice and forwardness.⁶⁶

The story reflects upon Scheherazade's own situation, for she must also use wit and cunning to save her own life and that of others. As she continues in tale after tale, her presence is felt and the reader is reminded of what is at stake. Her stories create a literature to save all the women in her community. As Salman Rushdie suggests:

The human being is a storytelling animal, or, actually, *the* story-telling animal, the only creature on Earth that tells itself stories in order to understand what sort of creature it is. Some of these stories are immense, the so-called “grand narratives” of nation, race, and faith, and others are small; family stories, and stories of elective affinities, of the friends we choose, the places we know, and the people we love; but we all live in and with and by stories, every day, wherever and wherever we are.⁶⁷

In one of Salman Rushdie’s novels, a character questions his father’s vocation as a story-teller: ‘What’s the point of it? *What’s the use of stories that aren’t even true?*’⁶⁸ For Scheherazade, the answer is simple: storytelling must save her life. Her story, as Byatt comments in her Introduction to *The Arabian Nights*, is

the human one of birth, sex, and the fear of death. But the genes, like the genies, are potentially immortal, and carry language and the imagination from generation to generation, like the infinitely renewed, metamorphosing life of the *Nights*, biology and language make stories.⁶⁹

The stories of Arab women, and perhaps all women, are, in a sense, all Scheherazade’s stories. They are stories of survival.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹ Richard F. Burton, 'Terminal Essay', in *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainment now Entitled The Book of the Thousand Nights and A Night: With Introduction Explanatory Notes on the Manners and Customs of Moslem Men and a Terminal Essay Upon the History of The Nights in 10 Vols.* (Printed by the Burton Club for Private Subscribers Only), vol 10, pp. 197-8. Digitised by the University of Toronto in 2006 <
<https://archive.org/stream/arabiantranslat01burtooft#page/14/mode/2up> >
 [accessed 21 May 2014].

² G. S. Beaumont translated Galland's work from the French into English in 1811. Dates of birth and death unobtainable.

³ Steven Connor, 'One's Thousand One Nightinesses', *London Review of Books*, Vol.34, No. 6, 22 Mar 2012, p.14.

⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 1-2.

⁵ Marie E. de Meester, *Oriental Influences in the English Literature of the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Swets u. Zeitlinger, 1967), p. 12.

⁶ Said, p. 197.

⁷ Richard F. Burton, 'Preface' to *The Arabian Nights: Tales from A Thousand and One Nights*, introduction by A. S. Byatt (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), p. xxxvi.

⁸ Daud Ali, 'Censured Sexual Acts and Early Medieval Society in India', in *Sexual Diversity in Asia c.600-1950*, ed. by Raquel A. G. Reyes and William G. Clarence-Smith (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2012), 47-66 (p. 47).

⁹ Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 63.

¹⁰ Matthew Arnold, 'The Sick King in Bokhara', in *Arnold: Poems Selected by Kenneth Allott* (London: Penguin Books, 1954), pp. 60-7. All future references will be to this edition.

¹¹ It is worth mentioning here that Islamic Law contains no such punishment as death by stoning for greed and deceit, even during a drought, nor for cursing a mother. Arnold's story is fictional.

¹² 'And Jesus Sayeth unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, *even* in this night, before the cock crows twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.' Mark 14:30. All four Gospels tell this story.

¹³ 'Matthew Arnold, 'To a Friend', in *The Essential Matthew Arnold*, ed. with intro. by Lionel Trilling (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), p. 51.

¹⁴ Harriet Martineau was an early sociologist writing on political issues, societies, religion and domestic matters from a woman's perspective. She was a close friend of Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65) and Charlotte Brontë (1816-55). The three women were professional writers and paid accordingly, but while Brontë and Gaskell wrote fiction, often containing social criticism in Gaskell's case, and some neo-feminist ideas in Brontë's, Martineau is known as the first female sociologist.

¹⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848), in *Harriet Martineau's Writing on the British Empire*, ed. Deborah Logan, 5 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto Ltd., 2004), Vol. II (1848), p. 252. All future references will be to this edition.

¹⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life, Present and Past*, (1848), *Harriet Martineau's Writing on the British Empire*, Vol. 3, p. 190.

¹⁷ Harriet Martineau to Richard Monckton Milnes, 22 February 1845, *Harriet Martineau: Selected Letters*, ed. by Valerie Sanders (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 108.

¹⁸ Deborah Logan, 'Introduction' to *Harriet Martineau's Writing on the British Empire*, pp. x-xi. Logan mentions in her notes that Martineau's commentary on the impermanence of Christianity 'participates in contemporary discourse on the topic that includes Charles Hennel's *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (London: Smallfield, 1838), Charles Bray's *Philosophy of Necessity* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1845), and George Eliot's translation of Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* (London: Chapman Brothers, 1846).

¹⁹ Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848), in Harriet Martineau's *Writing on the British Empire*, Vol. II, p. 256.

²⁰ Deborah Anne Logan, *Harriet Martineau's "Somewhat Remarkable" Life* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), pp. 78-9.

²¹ Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life, Present and Past*, (1848), in Harriet Martineau's *Writing on the British Empire*, Vol. II, p. 15.

²² Florence Nightingale, *Letters From Egypt: A Journey on the Nile 1849-1850*, selected and introduced by Anthony Sattin (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p. 28.

²³ Julia Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan, and, Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1836 (1837)*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1837), I, p. 96. <https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=zGEEAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&hl=en#v=onepage&q=%22individuals%20in%20the%20Empire%22&f=false> [accessed 14 May 2014].

²⁴ Pardoe, p. 98.

²⁵ See Sophia Lane Poole, *The English Woman in Egypt* (Philadelphia: G. B. Zeiber and Co., 1845), p. 142. <<https://archive.org/stream/englishwomanineg00pool#page/142/mode/2up/search/%22slightly+of+their+embroidery%22>> [accessed 13 May 2015].

²⁶ Lady Isabel Burton, *The Inner life of Syria, Palestine, and the Holy Land: From my Private Journal*, 2 vols (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1875), I, pp. 147-8. <<https://archive.org/details/innerlifeofsyria01burt>> [accessed 15 May 2014].

²⁷ Isabel Burton, I, p. 145.

²⁸ Isabel Burton, I, p. 150.

²⁹ Isabel Burton, I, p. 150.

³⁰ Dawn B. Sova, *Banned Books: Literature Suppressed on Sexual Grounds*, (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2006), p. 22.

³¹ Sova, p. 22.

³² Sova, p. 22.

³³ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, ed. by T. Herbert Warren (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 9-10. All future references will be to this edition.

³⁴ Haroun Alraschid (786-809 A.D.) of the Abbasid Dynasty and Caliph of the Islamic nation with Baghdad as its capital. A moderate ruler whose era proved a Golden Age with peace and flourishing arts and sciences.

³⁵ The *Quran* 34:16.

³⁶ Richard F. Burton, 'Terminal Essay', X, p. 196.

³⁷ Richard F. Burton, 'Terminal Essay', X, p. 193.

³⁸ Richard F. Burton, 'Terminal Essay', X, p. 195.

³⁹ The god Wünsch is the god of wishes. Burton is suggesting that women are driven by wishes rather than action.

⁴⁰ Richard Burton's note reads: 'This person was one of the *Amsál* or *Exempla* of the Arabs. For her first thirty years she whored; during the next three decades she pimped for friend and foe; and during the last third of her life, when bed-ridden by age and infirmities, she had a buck-goat and a nanny tied up in her room and solaced herself by contemplating their amorous conflicts.'

⁴¹ Richard F. Burton, 'Woman', in 'Terminal Essay', p. 194.

⁴² Richard F. Burton, 'Woman', in 'Terminal Essay', p. 195.

⁴³ Anonymous, 'The Story of King Shahryar and his Brother', in *The Arabian Nights: Tales from A Thousand and One Nights*, trans. with preface and notes by Sir Richard F. Burton, ed. by A. S. Byatt (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), p. 8. All future references to the stories of the *Arabian Nights* will be to this edition.

⁴⁴ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 8.

⁴⁵ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights: Tales from A Thousand and One Nights*, Notes to 'The Story of King Shahryar and his Brother', No. 7, p. 884.

⁴⁶ See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, c. 1988). <<http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=10465679>> [access date?]

⁴⁷ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, Notes to 'The Story of King Shahryar and his Brother', No. 7, p. 884.

⁴⁹ John Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens', *Sesame and Lilies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1909), p. 68.

⁵⁰ Richard Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, I, p. 14. (fix: online edition)

⁵¹ Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 56-7.

⁵² Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 17.

⁵³ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 17.

⁵⁴ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 21.

⁵⁵ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 25.

⁵⁷ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Matthew Arnold, 'The Sick King in Bokhara', lines 109-11, pp. 60-7.

⁵⁹ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 25.

⁶⁰ A. S. Byatt, 'Introduction' to *The Arabian Nights*, p. xiv.

⁶¹ Katie Trumpener, 'The Politics of Conversation: Denis Diderot, Elio Vittorini, Manuel Puig, Masaki Kobayashi, Vasily Grossman', in *Scheherazade's Children*, ed. by Philip F. Kennedy and Marina Warner (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013), 218-42, (p. 220).

⁶² Richard F. Burton, 'The Tale of the Ensorcelled Prince', *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 39.

⁶³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Criticism*, ed. Richard J. Dunn, 2nd ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1987), p. 32. All future references will be to this edition.

⁶⁴ Muhsin Jassim Ali, *Scheherazade in England: A Study of Nineteenth-Century English Criticism of the Arabian Nights* (Washington, DC: Three

Continents Press, 1981), pp.59-60. See also Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 238.

⁶⁵ Alia Yunis, 'Afterward', in *Scheherazade's Children: Global Encounters with 'The Arabian Nights'*, ed. by Philip F. Kennedy and Marina Warner (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013), p. 398.

⁶⁶ Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights*, Byatt, p. 34.

⁶⁷ Salman Rushdie, 'Introduction', in *The Best American Short Stories 2008* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), p. xvi.

⁶⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Granta Books / Penguin Books, 1991), p. 22.

⁶⁹ Byatt, 'Introduction' to *The Arabian Nights*, pp. xiv-v.



Fig. 3: Aubrey Beardsley, *John and Salomé*, 1894, Line Block print on Japanese Vellum,
Private Collection

CHAPTER IV

SALOME

The phenomenon is not to be disregarded. Books and works of art exercise a powerful suggestion on the masses. It is from these productions that an age derives its ideals of morality and beauty. If they are absurd and anti-social, they exert a disturbing and corrupting influence on the views of a whole generation.

Max Nordau, *Degeneration*¹

If Scheherazade used her intellectual capacity to trick and woe her husband, other Arab women in literature used their sexual capacity to offset their limited lives. In British literature gender, and sexuality were most associated with the Decadent movement, and the Aesthetes writing with a sense of *fin de siècle*. However, there were many other social movements as well as literary which saw social disintegration all around. Since the Depression of the 1880s the British Empire was seen to be crumbling; British wealth could no longer be taken for granted, and the cities were failing in their capacity to deal with the poor. Britain was in a state of flux, politically, economically, socially and culturally, and the literature of the period reflects and comments on these trends.

Charles Booth (1840-1916) published the two volumes of his *Life and Labour of the People* (1889-91), which provided an objective survey of the lives and occupations of the working classes of late nineteenth-century London. The work also stated a need for an objective language in which to talk of social issues. Lynne Hapgood, however, comments that: ‘the record of his observations is constrained by the poverty of a language that describes the poor as “thriftless”, “loafers”, and “scroungers”’.² The recognition of a need for more neutral and secular language for discussing the poor moves the ‘blame’ from the individual and toward society. Karl Marx (1818-83) had published the first volume of *Das Kapital* in 1867, but died before completing the manuscripts for volumes II and III. The Socialist and Communist ideas Marx espoused were met with resistance in Britain and most British Socialists were neither working class nor approving of unionism. Artist and interior designer

William Morris (1834-96) was the leader of the Socialist League and the Fabians, formed by Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) in 1884, which included such middle class intellectuals as George Bernard Shaw, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and Hubert Bland, and which had little contact with trade unionism. Politically, the Labour Party was born at the turn of the 20th century out of the frustration of working-class people who, at that time, could not field parliamentary candidates through the Liberal Party. In 1900 the Trades Union Congress (the national federation of British trade unions) cooperated with the Independent Labour Party (founded in 1893) to establish a Labour Representation Committee, which took the name Labour Party in 1906.³

As a result of shifts in both the expectations of the working classes and the language used to describe them, the established church became, as Hapgood suggests:

[A]nxious to maintain its power base in a society increasingly drifting towards secular notions of social analysis and latterly concerned with finding a scientific and objective mode of discourse. Influenced by a pervasive sense that society in the cities was breaking down and that the voice of civilization and morality was not being heard, it felt compelled to redefine its role. In this mood of urgency the Church committed itself to secularisation.⁴

Nor was this shift the only impetus for the sense that society and civilisation was breaking down. In addition to the New Woman, there was the New Psychology, the New Drama, and a New Subjectivity thrived among artists who responded to the New Representational opportunities offered by these advances. Henry James, in his Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, comments that the part of the work that most represents the whole is ‘a representation simply of her [Isabel Archer] motionlessly *seeing*, and an attempt withal to make the mere lucidity of her act as “interesting” as the surprise of a caravan or the identification of a pirate.’⁵ The changes persisted despite ‘attempts to condemn artists, such as Oscar Wilde, Ibsen, and the Impressionists, to the realms of the insane, atavistic, and criminal’.⁶ Photography had given impetus to the Art for Art’s Sake movement and Decadence was associated with the collapse of moral and social standards, shocking the more Conservative.

Max Nordau (1849-1923), although incensed by moral lapses in art and literature, thought the *fin de siècle* was not only a matter of degenerate art but a

whole range of social phenomena, such as industrialisation and the consequent rapid build-up of cities and perceived effects. Nordau attempts to conduct a “scientific” examination of his subject and what created the degeneration of society. He sees the artistic works associated with the *fin de siècle* as demonstrating a sort of deliberate rejection of the accepted moral boundaries that govern the world. Then, of course, there was Salomé who was seen as the archetype of moral decay, according to Brian Stableford in *Salome and Other Decadent Fantasies*:

When Salomé the enchantress danced, she stirred the fires of Hell in the hearts of those who watched; she made them willing slaves of her passion.⁷

Salomé, according to Christian tradition, was the young woman who demanded the head of John the Baptist in return for dancing before Herod. she has been a source of fascination in the West for over two thousand years. The obscure biblical image of Herodias’ daughter originates in the New Testament (Mark 6.17-29 and Matthew 14.3-11). The Gospels of Mark and Matthew mention ‘the daughter of Herodias’ but do not name Salomé. The text informs us that King Herod had imprisoned John the Baptist according to his wife Herodias’ wishes, for John the Baptist had denounced their marriage as incestuous.⁸ Herodias was daughter-in-law of Herod the Great, twice: once by marriage to his son, Herod II, and again by marriage to another son, Herod Antipas. Again, we see a Near Eastern woman using sexuality, wits and guile to gain power through a husband. On Herod’s birthday, at the urging of her mother, ‘the daughter of Herodias’ danced and pleased King Herod so much that he promised to give her whatever she asked. Hence, Salomé, prompted by her mother, asked for the head of John the Baptist. She was not a dangerous seductress but rather a tool in her mother’s hands, fulfilling her mother’s revenge.

Salomé’s name is first mentioned in *The Jewish Antiquities* of Flavius Josephus (37-100 C.E.) which tells us that:

Herodias was married to Herod [Philip], the son of Herod the Great. She was born of Mariamme, the daughter of Simon the high priest, who had a daughter, Salome; after whose birth Herodias took upon her to confound the laws of the country, and divorced herself from her husband while he was alive, and married Herod [Antipas], her husband’s brother by

the father's side who was tetrarch of Galilee. Her daughter Salomé was married to Philip, the son of Herod.⁹

However, the notorious story of the dance is not mentioned by Flavius Josephus; instead, Herod orders the execution of the Baptist because he 'feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion'.¹⁰ Stavros S. Karayanni suggests that:

Indeed, because of the dearth of detail in its biblical source, Salomé's legend has provided a perfectly empty slate to be carved with elaborate imperial motifs. The unnamed dancer and her unnarrated dance fledge into the metacolonial trope of a salacious and foreboding performance of racialized exotic femininity in the Western imaginary.¹¹

Later on, with the increased reverence for John the Baptist (around the third and fourth centuries AD), Salomé's image began to evolve from the 'innocent pawn of her mother's vengefulness'. She became 'increasingly immoral, and her image solidified as a dancing temptress and perpetrator of evil'.¹² She became the subject of morality plays and sermons. Helen Zagona believes that this coincided with the erection of a great church in Alexandria in honour of John the Baptist.¹³ Moreover, she became a popular subject for painters and sculptors when the city of Florence adopted John the Baptist as its patron saint in the third century AD.¹⁴ Henceforth she appeared in the art works of Andrea Pisano, Giotto di Bondone, Donatello, Benozzo Gozzoli and Titian. In these artworks Salomé moved gradually from the backstage of Giotto's and Donatello's artworks to become the central focal point of Gozzoli's and Titian's paintings.

Salomé lost her popularity for the next two centuries, only to occupy the imagination of artists again in the nineteenth century. Frederic St. Aubyn emphasises that 'during the Symbolist and Decadent period there were almost more Salomé's than there are in Biblical history.'¹⁵ By the early part of the nineteenth century Salomé had become an entirely different woman from the biblical pawn or the fourteenth-century evil seductress. She underwent so many changes that she was hardly comparable to the Biblical character. Rosina Neginsky states that '[i]f previously she danced for the sake of John the Baptist – for the sake of narrating his Passion – in the nineteenth century she began to dance for her own sake ... [s]he herself became an icon and a cult.'¹⁶ This is

evident in the works of nineteenth-century authors who wrote differing versions of Salomé's story. This is especially true of the French Symbolists, who called themselves Symbolists to avoid being confused with the Decadents.

In 1841 Christian Johann Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) published his long dramatic poem, *Atta Troll*, which is, in essence, a satiric poem full of social and political commentary. At one point Diana, Fey Abunda and Herodias appear as three hags condemned to ride until their final punishment day is come:

All the magic of the East
Lay within her glowing face,
And her dress brought memories
Of Scheherazadê's tales. (XIX)¹⁷

Herodias is blamed, not Salomé, for craving the Baptist's head:

For this crimson crime was she
Banned and cursed. Now in this chase
Must she ride, a wandering spook,
Till the dawn of Judgement Day. (XIX)¹⁸

She appears still hugging the head of John the Baptist, and she is so beautiful that the narrator wonders:

Whether devil this or saint
Know I not. With women, ah,
None can ever know where saint
Ends nor where the fiend begins. (XIX)¹⁹

After all, would a woman 'crave the head | Of a man she did not love?' The narrator comes to the conclusion that Herodias only asks for Jokanaan's head from unrequited love – not for lust or power:

Yet her blood-stained love lives on
Storied in her people's hearts.
... Would a woman crave the head
Of a man she did not love?
...
She perchance was slightly vexed
With her darling, and was moved
To behead him, but when she
On the trencher saw his head,
Then she wept and lost her wits,
Dying in love's madness straight.²⁰

Herodias may well have been ‘slightly vexed with her darling’ but taking off his head is somewhat extreme. She is seen tossing the head into the air and ‘cleverly catching it ‘like some idle rubber ball’. Despite this, the narrator contumaciously refuses to acknowledge her evil:

As she swept past me she bowed
Most coquettishly and looked
On me with her melting eyes,
So that all my heart was stirred. (XIX)²¹

He cannot help falling in love with her sensuality, so that Heine uses the Salomé story to express his contempt for the failing values of German society.

Another aging Salomé appears in Stéphane Mallarmé’s (1842-98) incomplete poem *Hérodiade*, written between the years 1864 and 1867. Mallarmé preferred the name *Hérodiade* over *Salomé* for its aesthetic and more musical qualities. In his poem, *Hérodiade* becomes the essence of beauty and poetry and the antagonism between her and Saint John becomes the poet’s struggle between the search for poetry as an ultimate value on the one hand and a fading religious faith on the other. Thus, Mallarmé uses the story of *Salomé* to express his ideas about the essence of poetry ‘to paint, not the thing itself but the effects produced.’²² Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49), a significant influence on the French Symbolist Movement, states that:

I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*. Its sole arbiter is Taste
That pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful.²³

Similarly, Mallarmé aims to transcend history by the contemplation of the beautiful, and at one point in his poem we find *Hérodiade* addressing her mirror:

Mirror, cold water frozen in your frame
Through ennui, how many times I came,
Desolate from dreams and seeking memories
Like leaves beneath your chill profundities,
A far-off shadow to appear in you:
But, oh! Some evenings in your austere pool,
I’ve glimpsed the Ideal in all its nakedness!²⁴

In a letter written to the French Egyptologist Eugène Lefébure (February 1865), Mallarmé states that '[t]he most beautiful page of my work will be that which contains only the divine word *Hérodiade* ... I want to make of her purely a creature of dream, with absolutely no link with history.'²⁵ Here, we find Hérodiade seeking something ideal which in the past she has found in her mirror. It is an older Hérodiade who now seeks 'the Ideal', where once she came only through ennui and desolation. The mirror's profundities are cold, and the far off shadow she seeks fails to appear, but rapture is remembered; that is, the evening when she 'glimpsed the Ideal in all its nakedness'. Presumably, the Ideal seen by Hérodiade was that of her own naked body. A later conversation with a Nurse sees the Nurse asking Hérodiade: 'for whom | Devoured by anguish, do you keep the unknown | Splendour and mystery of your being?' Hérodiade replies: 'For none | But myself.'²⁶ This indicates that Hérodiade's pure beauty is self-sufficient. For Mallarmé beauty is the ultimate value that has, within itself, its own reason for being.

Gustave Flaubert (1821-80) wrote his novella *Herodias* (1877) after visiting the Near East and being inspired by its atmosphere. He depicts yet another image of Salomé, this time as a lisping young girl. William Berg suggests that Flaubert uses metonymy to highlight the power of Iaokanann's voice. Iaokanann stands for the spiritual while Salomé epitomises the sensual, and Berg further comments that Flaubert employs synecdoche to describe parts of Salomé's body and to emphasise her sensuality.²⁷ This is true especially during the dance:

Her rounded arms seemed to be beckoning someone who was forever fleeing from her ... [w]ith her eyes half-closed, she twisted her body backwards and forwards, making her belly rise and fall and her breasts quiver, while her face remained expressionless and her feet never stopped moving.²⁸

Flaubert based Salomé's dance on his own observations of Egyptian belly dancers such as Azizeh and Kuchuk Hanem,²⁹ whom he encountered during his travels in the Near East.³⁰ The similarity between Flaubert's Salomé and his description of the belly dance of Kuchuk Hanem is striking:

She rises first on one foot, then on the other – marvellous movement: when one foot is on the ground, the other moves up and across in front of the shin-bone – the whole thing with a light bound.³¹

On the other hand, Azizeh's dance and the way she slides her neck and moves her head sideways remind Flaubert of the 'terrifying effect of decapitation.'³²

Maxime du Camp (1822-94), Flaubert's travel companion, takes this a step further and compares Azizeh to Salomé:

[Azizeh] held out her two long arms, black and glistening, shaking them from shoulder to wrist with an imperceptible quivering, moving them apart with soft and quick motions like those of the wings of a hovering eagle. Sometimes she bent completely over backwards, supporting herself on her hands in the position of the dancing Salomé.³³

Moreover, Flaubert describes Kuchuk Hanem's 'Dance of the Bee',³⁴ which may have inflamed Wilde's imagination and inspired his Salomé's 'Dance of the Seven Veils':

Kuchuk dances the Bee ... Kuchuk shed her clothing as she danced. Finally she was naked except for a fichu which she held in her hands and behind which she pretended to hide, and at the end she threw down the fichu. That was the Bee.³⁵

Critics such as Marianna Mustacchi and Victor Brombert agree that Flaubert created his Salomé based on his memories of the dance rendition of those two belly dancers. Both Aimée Israel-Pelletier and Adrienne Tooke argue that in Flaubert's *Herodias* Salomé's dance wins the battle between 'image' and 'word'; the dance silences Iakob's words.³⁶

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, a new era of beginnings and endings was marked by new and different Salomé figures. New artistic movements, new calls for better working conditions, new political movements and a new intellectual environment emerged. These new beginnings, taking place at the *fin de siècle*, are most often marked by the extent to which they developed away from their nineteenth-century roots. One might consider Lucy Gray's description, in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), of what is probably Defieffe's "Cleopatra":

She lay half-reclined on a couch: why, it would be difficult to say; broad daylight blazed around her: she appeared in hearty health ... she ought to have been standing or at least

sitting bolt upright. She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments ... out of abundance of material — seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery — she managed to make inefficient raiment ... Pots and pans — perhaps I ought to say vases and goblets — were rolled here and there on the foreground; a perfect rubbish of flowers was mixed amongst them, and an absurd and disorderly mass of curtain upholstery smothered the couch ...³⁷

This painting is not considered “proper” for young ladies to view, and Monsieur Paul is anxious to hurry her away to look at something more suitable, ‘La Vie d’Une Femme’. The stages of a woman’s life seem to consist, in the four paintings, as: the young girl, the bride, the young mother and, interestingly, the widow. The general feeling of the day was that ‘normal women’³⁸ only sexualised male/female relations through a desire for motherhood. Charlotte Brontë is perhaps more concerned in *Villette*, as she was in *Jane Eyre*, with women’s economic survival, although Lucy’s sexual interest, while present in her relationship with Monsieur Paul, is of secondary importance. Women’s sexuality is depicted through carefully wrought conversations between Lucy and Monsieur Paul, so that some conversations, – particularly regarding female education – crackle with unspoken sexual tension. This silence continues even as a new type of woman emerges.

The paintings viewed by Lucy may be compared with the *fin de siècle* painting of Salomé (Fig.4) by Ella Ferris Pell (1846-1922).³⁹ It may be seen that Pell’s ‘Salomé’ differs markedly from earlier and most often male depictions of Salomé, or indeed other Near Eastern dancers, and differs even from male *fin de siècle* versions. This portrait of Salomé is neither romanticised nor demonised, nor particularly orientalised. Rather she is a healthy young white woman gazing downward with a controlled determination. Her long flowing hair is unbound save for a small insignificant tiara, as she stands in *contrapposto* holding a platter; the painting seems to capture a moment before the dance when she will request the head of John the Baptist.



Fig. 4: Ella Ferris Pell, *Salomé*, 1890, Oil on Canvas, Private Collection

Blood is entirely absent from Pell's version. Salomé stands before a darkened background, and the vivid reds, animal skins, lush Oriental fabrics and carpets are likewise absent. She is dressed in a simple white chemise with a brownish skirt tied just under the waist and slit at the side. This is typically worn off the waist by belly-dancers to accentuate the belly's movements. This skirt does not expose Salomé's body. One breast, however, is left exposed, suggesting that innocence is already compromised, and the breast is rendered a pale white by the light cast upon it. Her feet are not pictured, hence she is not endowed with the dancer's pause with arched feet. She lacks the lush sexual significance of other portraits of Salomé such as Salomé (1870) of Henri Regnault (1843-1871) or the one Pierre Bonnard (1865-1930) painted in 1900. The horror of the painting lies entirely with the platter, and our knowledge of what it will soon carry. Bram Dijkstra comments on the obsession with the figure of Salomé as a bloodthirsty virgin:

In the turn-of-the-century imagination, the figure of Salome epitomized the inherent perversity of women: their eternal circularity and their ability to destroy the male's soul even while they remained nominally chaste in body.⁴⁰

Salomé, of course, is a young girl and, as Pell's painting suggests, almost certainly chaste at the time she performs her famous dance for Herod.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) wrote his *Salomé* in 1891. Critics have suggested that Wilde was inspired by Heine's *Atta Troll*, the French Symbolists, Flaubert's *Herodias*, Mallarmé's *Herodiade*, and Gustave Moreau's (1826-98) paintings of Salomé (1876) – or, at least, by the description of Moreau's *Salomé* paintings in the novel *A Rébours* (1884). The author, J. K. Huysmans (1848-1907), later became associated with the Decadent Movement after the publication of this novel. The original version of Wilde's *Salomé* was written in French, and first published in 1893. The following year a performance of the play was staged in Paris by Sarah Bernhardt and the English translation, with illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley, appeared that same year. A licence to perform the play in Britain was not granted until 1931, on the grounds that it violated the law specifying that plays on biblical subjects were not allowed. However, it was performed in Britain in 1905. For the most part, however, the published version of the play, illustrated

by Aubrey Beardsley, was all that was available to the British public during the early part of the twentieth century. Yelena Primorac suggests that the play was banned on English stage because of:

[T]he overt sexual passion permeating the work and Wilde's portrayal of woman in extreme opposition to the traditional notion of virtuous, pure, clean and asexual womanhood the Victorians felt comfortable living with.⁴¹

Given notions that general opinion saw women as lacking desire, and participating in the sexual act only to bear children, it is hard to know what audiences prior to 1931 would have made of Salomé's sexual appetite. By the 1880s and 1890s issues pertaining to women and, it is fair to say, the "Woman Question", had come to absorb, if not dominate, writers and artists. Yet Sally Ledger comments that 'many of the fictional writers of the time had no qualms about constructing the New Woman as a voracious sexual subject.'⁴² Women's desire and sexuality lay at the heart of the *fin de siècle*.

Wilde's Salomé shattered the Victorian image of the pure, meek, powerless, graceful, devoted and self-sacrificing woman. Wilde presents Salomé as an Oriental femme fatale whose dance leads to the decapitation of a Christian saint. Wilde depicts Salomé as an Arab woman aware of her sexuality and it is difficult to know, as Said observes, '[w]hy the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies.'⁴³ The soldiers in Wilde's *Salomé* discuss Herodias' first husband and brother to King Herod Antipas, who had been imprisoned in an old cistern: 'It did not kill him. At the end of twelve years he had to be strangled' (*Salomé*, p. 539). The soldiers speak the language of Wilde's earlier plays where deaths of parents, handbags, and the need for a cup of tea are all delivered in the same flat social tone. In this sense one can read in Wilde a modified satiric voice, not unlike that of Jonathan Swift in, for instance, 'A Modest Proposal'.⁴⁴ However, *Salomé* is no satire. There is no moral touchstone in Wilde's play, no normative set of values, and even those that lie within the characters are constantly under question. King Herod's shallow expression of sorrow for the death of the Young Syrian is quickly usurped by the inconvenience of his dead body lying

about. Suicides are a matter for humour and death is taken for granted. No one is really surprised that someone dares to kill a king:

The Cappadocian: Yet it is a terrible thing to strangle a king.
First Soldier: Why? Kings have but one neck, like other folk.
The Cappadocian: I think it terrible.⁴⁵

Religious uncertainties, too, were present, since theories of evolution had begun to gain credence during the course of the nineteenth century. Christopher Nassaar, in his 'Wilde's *Salomé* and the Victorian Religious Landscape', suggests that Wilde presents 'Christianity as a religion of sexual repression'.⁴⁶ Prior to Wilde writing *Salomé*, Britain had seen an upsurge of new churches, including the Methodists, the Baptists, the Salvation Army and other non-conformist groups. In his analysis, Nassaar begins with the atheists: Nietzsche's fame had spread by the time Wilde was writing *Salomé*. Nassaar, then, quotes from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* which begins with a famous and central passage:

Zarathustra went down the mountain alone, no one meeting him. When he entered the forest, however, there suddenly stood before him an old man, who had left his holy cot to seek roots ...
 When Zarathustra was alone, however, he said to his heart:
 "Could it be possible! This old saint in the forest hath not yet heard of it, that God is dead!" (pp. 4-6)⁴⁷

Nassaar points to the atheistic rationalism which was supported by new scientific discoveries and a strong intellectual current in Victorian England. It included such prominent figures as John Stuart Mill (1808-73), Karl Marx and Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). Nassaar goes on to suggest that this movement:

At its most extreme, [...] not only dismissed religion but mocked and attacked it, as in the case of the Decadents. Pater's atheism and his quiet irritation with Christianity for its supposed suppression of the human spirit is quite apparent in *The Renaissance*, for instance, as when he writes in praise of Winckelmann.⁴⁸

Pater writes of Winckelmann's reproduction of the early sentiments of the Renaissance:

On a sudden the imagination feels itself free. How facile and direct, it seems to say, is this life of the senses and the understanding, when once we have apprehended it! Here,

surely, is that more liberal mode of life we have been seeking so long, so near to us all the while. How mistaken and round-about have been our efforts to reach it by mystic passion, and the monastic reverie; how they have deflowered the flesh; how little have they really emancipated us!⁴⁹

Nassaar goes on to demonstrate a similar religious disarray in Wilde's *Salomé*.

The play opens with the soldiers in the banqueting hall noticing an uproar:

First Soldier: ... Who are those wild beasts howling!

Second Soldier: The Jews. They are always like that. They are disputing about their religion.

First Soldier: Why do they dispute about their religion?

Second Soldier: I cannot tell. They are always doing it. The Pharisees, for instance, say that there are angels, and the Sadducees declare that angels do not exist. (*Salomé*, p. 537)

Other religions emerge with the Nubian who says that the gods in his country are very fond of blood: 'Twice in the year we sacrifice to them young men and maidens: fifty young men and a hundred maidens' (p. 538). The Cappadocian strongly echoes this sense of variety among religious believers when he says:

In my country there are no gods left. The Romans have driven them out. There are some who say that they have hidden themselves in the mountains, but I do not believe it. Three nights I have been on the mountains seeking them everywhere. I did not find them. And at last I called them by their names, but they did not come. I think they are dead. (p. 538)

Nassaar argues that 'Nietzsche's central statement on God is thus distanced, exoticized and injected into *Salomé*.'⁵⁰ *Salomé* is, then, not only a character caught up in political dissidence but is also afflicted and surrounded by religious controversy, in which Christianity plays no small part. She is both of Wilde's *fin de siècle* and her own, as described by Josephus Flavius.

On a symbolic level, critics like Bram Dijkstra and Richard Ellmann agree that *Salomé* symbolises Decadence itself, while Jokanaan represents Victorian Christianity.⁵¹ *Salomé*'s dance 'can realize a metamorphosis that allows for possibilities indispensable to the decadent imagination'.⁵² Wilde was against the Victorian feminist purity movement and Kerry Powell points to the fact that his 1890s plays 'began as expressions of Wilde's adamant hostility to the gender ethics of "purity" feminism'.⁵³ Dijkstra describes the *fin de siècle*

depiction of Salomé as ‘the evil woman’ or the ‘favourite scapegoat’ representing ‘the source of all wrongs [men] thought were being done to them.’ Hence her death became the triumph of the Victorian male over sexual temptation.⁵⁴ According to Powell, Wilde’s Salomé shifted from these depictions, and he goes on to emphasise that *Salomé* is ‘the only play by Wilde that stands in virtually unmediated conflict with the purity feminism of the fin-de-siècle.’⁵⁵

The character of Salomé in Wilde’s play differs significantly from both the biblical image and that depicted by many earlier authors. From the beginning of the play Salomé is projected as an object of beauty and desire and subject of the male gaze. Her beauty is the first thing we hear about: the Young Syrian declares ‘How beautiful is the Princess Salomé to-night!’ (Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 537), but her beauty is conflated by the language of the play with that of the moon as the Page of Herodias says ‘Look at the moon!’ (p. 537):

The Page of Herodias: ... How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. You would fancy she was looking for dead things.

The Young Syrian: She has a strange look. She is like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver. She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. You would fancy she was dancing.

The Page of Herodias: She is like a woman who is dead. She moves very slowly. (p. 537)

Grammatically, it is almost impossible to determine whether the Page and the Young Syrian are referring to Salomé or the moon. There is a discreet reference to Diana, the virgin goddess of virtue, hunting and the moon. Diana curses Actaeon after he gazes at her nakedness and turns him into a deer to be pursued and torn apart by his own hounds. Thus the moon imagery is associated with male gazing and subsequent death. The Young Syrian gazes at Salomé extensively, despite repeated warnings given by the Page of Herodias, not to look at her: ‘Why do you look at her? You must not look at her ... [s]omething terrible may happen (p. 539). The terrible thing that may happen is reiterated, but never specified. The Young Syrian continues to gaze and as Matthew Lewsadder suggests:

In their artistic ruminations, the Page and Young Syrian (Narraboth) are positioned as the authors of Salomé and

arbiters of her meaning. At the same time, their verbal portraits and aesthetic interpretations retain an indeterminacy of object choice ...⁵⁶

The Young Syrian, however, is infatuated:

The Young Syrian: The princess rises! She is leaving the table! She looks very troubled. Ah, she is coming this way. Yes, she is coming towards us. How pale she is! Never have I seen her so pale, ... [s]he is like a dove that has strayed ... [s]he is like a narcissus trembling in the wind ... [s]he is like a silver flower. (pp. 539-40)

Her paleness here associates her again with the moon, and of course death, but we see Salome only through those who would gaze upon her, or those who would not, through fear. She has no agency of her own, other than that 'invoked by the masculine gaze and circumscribed by its invocation.'⁵⁷

Herod too gazes upon Salomé, much to her distress:

Salomé: I will not stay. I cannot stay. Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his mole's eyes under his shaking eyelids? It is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that. I know not what it means. In truth, yes I know it. (Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 540)

Moles' eyes are, of course, blind, and the shaking eyelids suggest sexual tension. King Herod's gaze is incestuous, as he is both her uncle and her stepfather. Salomé comments on the strangeness of his looking, and professes not to know what it means, but in truth she does know. Knowing, however, does not endow her with power, except that circumscribed by his need and gazing. Like the Young Syrian, Herod is also warned that he should not gaze upon Salomé. Herodias warns him, 'You must not look at her! You are always looking at her!' (p. 546). Again, the moon makes an appearance, and is again associated with women, although given previous associations specifically with Salomé the inference must be drawn:

Herod: She is like a mad woman, a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked, too. She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to clothe her nakedness, but she will not let them. She shows herself naked in the sky. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman ... I am sure she is looking for lovers ... [s]he is a mad woman, is she not? (p. 546)

Herodias discounts these fantastical notions with simple pragmatism: ‘the moon is like the moon, that is all’ (p. 546).

At this point in the play, Herod learns that the Young Syrian has killed himself, which he finds ridiculous. Tigellinus agrees: ‘Everybody at Rome laughs at them’ (p. 546). Nevertheless, Herod is sorry ‘for he was fair to look upon’ (p. 546). Presumably, he could have laughed with the Roman satires had the Young Syrian been ugly, especially since he had noted that the Young Syrian ‘looked languorously at Salomé’ (p. 547). But then, there are others who look too much at Salomé, as Herodias notes. King Herod is quick to respond with the part played by Herodias in his demise:

Herod: His father was a king. I drove him from his kingdom.
And you made a slave of his mother, who was a queen,
Herodias. So he was here as my guest as it were, and for that
reason I made him my captain. I am sorry he is dead ... (p.
547)

The Young Syrian is also an inconvenience, now that he is dead: ‘Ho! Why have you left the body here? I will not look at it’ (p. 547). King Herod is made uncomfortable by the Young Syrian’s death and at this point feels a wind blowing. Herodias lacks the imagination to consider portents. She neither hears nor feels the wind, and the quarrels that ensue demonstrate the political disarray that lies at the very heart of the kingdom. When Salomé enters, she also shows disrespect for the king as he tries to coax her into eating fruit and drinking wine with him. The family quarrels are disrupted by the voice of Jokanaan, who says ‘the time has come!’ (p. 547). Herodias, however, does not believe in prophets.

Salomé’s treatment of the king has been practiced on the Young Syrian, for she has noted his gazes and recognised that they endow her with a certain power that she can use. She exploits his infatuation to feed her own. She has heard the voice of Jokanaan and wishes to see him. She wants the Young Syrian to get Jokanaan out of the cistern, and promises to reward him with a gaze, with more to come:

Salomé: You will do this thing for me, Narraboth, and to-morrow when I pass in my litter beneath the gateway of the idol-sellers I will let fall for you a little flower, a little green flower ... You will do this thing for me, Narraboth. You know that you will do this thing for me. And to-morrow

when I pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at you through the muslin veils, I will look at you, Narraboth, it maybe I will smile at you. Look at me, Narraboth, look at me. Ah! you know that you will do what I ask of you. You know it well. ... I know that you will do this thing. (p. 542)

The Young Syrian capitulates, even as the Page of Herodias comments again on the strangeness of the moon; this time it is seen as ‘the hand of a dead woman who is seeking to cover herself with a shroud’ (p. 542). For the Young Syrian she remains like a little princess – she is smiling. As Jokanaan emerges from his cistern his mind remains fixed upon the sins of King Herod and Herodias who, he insists, ‘gave herself up unto the lust of her eyes’ (p. 542). Women, it seems, may also gaze but not without punishment, for Jokanaan prophesies that ‘the fan of the Lord is in his hand’ (p. 543).

Salomé knows that Jokanaan speaks of her mother and is terrified. ‘But he is terrible, he is terrible!’ (p. 543) she cries. Above all, it is Jokanaan’s eyes that she finds most terrible: ‘[I]like the black caverns of Egypt where the dragons make their lairs. They are like black lakes troubled by fantastic moons’ (p. 543). Now it is Jokanaan who is compared to the moon:

Salomé: ... I am sure he is chaste as the moon is. He is like a moonbeam, like a shaft of silver. His flesh must be cool like ivory. I would look closer at him. (p. 543)

It is now Salomé who is told not to look, while Jokanaan demands to know who she is:

Jokanaan: Who is this woman who is looking at me? I will not have her look at me. Wherefore doth she look at me with her golden eyes, under her gilded eyelids? ... I do not wish to know who she is. (p. 543)

He calls her a daughter of Babylon and tells her that she cannot approach ‘the chosen of the Lord’ (p. 543). It is a curiously Puritan moral that Jokanaan preaches, whereby the sins of the parents are visited upon the children. Salomé, however, is entranced by his voice, and ripe for conversation in this meaningless world in which she lives:

Salomé: Speak again! Speak again Jokanaan, and tell me what I must do.

Jokanaan: Daughter of Sodom, come not near me! But cover thyself with a veil and scatter ashes upon thine head and get thee to the desert and seek out the Son of Man. (p. 543)

At this point, Jokanaan's speech is reminiscent of Christ's language when he undergoes temptation by the devil: 'Get thee behind me, Satan' (Matthew 16.23). Jokanaan sees Salomé as both a temptation and a defilement. Nassaar suggests that:

Jokanaan uses Christianity as a shield against sexual contact, which he nonetheless unconsciously longs for. As Rodney Shewan has pointed out, Wilde's most famous critic, Richard Strauss, viewed Jokanaan negatively. Shewan has also argued that Jokanaan's "self-esteem is unattractive, almost blasphemous ... [w]ith his bombast, his priggish-ness, and his prurient anatomization of Herodias, he can hardly be taken seriously as the voice of the new spiritual kingdom."⁵⁸

Shewan divides the characters into two camps: the cynics and the dreamers. Herodias and the soldiers belong among the cynics, while Salomé, the Page of Herodias and the Young Syrian belong amid the dreamers. Their dreams are sustained by the constant invocation not to look and not to hear. Nassaar goes on to suggest that Wilde presents Jokanaan as not only Ruskinian, but also as the 'presentation of Christianity as a religion of sexual repression.'⁵⁹

Salomé moves from idolising Jokanaan to describing him as an 'ivory statue ... chaste as the moon is' (Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 543). However, she begs, despite his chastity, to let her touch his white body. It resembles 'the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed' and 'the snows that lie on the mountains of Judaea' (p. 543). She wants to touch his black hair 'like the great cedars of Lebanon that give their shade to the lions' (p. 544) and, finally, kiss his mouth that is 'redder than the feet of the doves that haunt the temples and are fed by the priests' (p. 544). Lewsladder suggests that Salome 'expresses her sexual desire by appropriating the masculine gaze and rhetoric of desire, feminizing his religious insistence upon chastity.'⁶⁰ Jokanaan retreats by a constant insistence that Salomé 'get behind him'. He renders her everywoman: 'By woman came evil into the world ... I will not listen to thee' (Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 544). Jokanaan may protest too much, and he appears fearful that Salomé may force him from his chosen path. As Lewsadder comments:

Salomé's figuration of Jokanaan as a chaste, feminine object vis-à-vis her subject position as the one who ascribes meaning to the looked-upon allows her, within a gendered binary, to cultivate a "masculine" sexual agency. For Jokanaan, Salomé's sexual desire is incongruous with her female body, leading him to reject her desire as unnatural.⁶¹

Salomé's observations become ever more pressing: 'It is thy mouth that I desire Jokanaan ... [i]t is like the bow of the King of Persians, that is painted with vermillion, and is tipped with coral. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth ... [l]et me kiss thy mouth' (p. 544). The Young Syrian cannot bear it. At this point Salomé has objectified Jokanaan's body so completely that she is able to discuss what she would like to do with it. She has moved beyond gazing to an insistence on touching and kissing. Then, faced with his objections; 'Never, daughter of Babylon! ... Never', Salomé can say 'I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. I will kiss thy mouth' (p. 544). It is at this point that the Young Syrian, unable to control Salomé in this world turned upside-down, kills himself.

Interestingly, Aubrey Beardsley's (1872-98) illustrations of Wilde's play capture the transgender implications of this scene. He depicts Salomé and Jokanaan staring at each other, but both carry feminine and masculine attributes. We know who is the female by the bared breasts and decorated detail of dress. Nevertheless, Salomé seems the more powerful figure. She has an aggressive stance and jutting chin, while Jokanaan possesses curving shoulders and long hair. The juxtaposition of the two figures shows gazes exchanged as if through a mirror – two variations of the same figure. Salomé, having practiced her power over the Young Syrian, realises its potency when Herod begs her to dance. Her mother in Wilde's play is not the instigator of the dance but, nevertheless, still wants the head of Jokanaan. Herod is so besotted and determined that Salomé should dance that he promises anything: 'even unto the half of [his] kingdom' (p. 553). Salomé becomes an active female agent. She dances to obtain her own ends. Salomé acts on her desire for possession of Jokanaan.⁶² The manipulation of men by powerless women has been seen throughout in depictions of Arab women, but what is changed here is Salomé's appropriation of male desire. As Herod desires her, so she desires Jokanaan and is prepared to kill him to appease that desire.

Wilde went into great detail in his direction and presentation of the *Dance of the Seven Veils* on stage. He desired the background to be oriental and rich and wanted incense diffusers to be part of the sensual experience for the audience.⁶³ For the theatre audience, the dance may be seen as one of spectacle, and furthermore, one entirely associated with the exotic East. Travel narratives and the European gaze have imposed patterns on representations of Near Eastern dancers, together with the biblical Salomé's story, so that sexuality and ethnicity, together with excessive desire, must surely infiltrate the gaze of the audience, regardless of Wilde's directions. Throughout the play the audience members viewing it see numerous characters told not to look upon Salomé, and yet both they and the play's audience have continued to gaze. The audience becomes a part of the onstage audience and, as a Victorian audience, must consider whether to watch. Throughout the play they have heard and seen Salomé's great beauty and must struggle now with their own desire.

The dance itself is also iconic. Toni Bentley,⁶⁴ Shireen Malik,⁶⁵ and Udo Kultermann⁶⁶ all suggest that the origin of the *Dance of the Seven Veils* could go back to the Babylonian myth Ishtar's descent to the underworld, which has been dated back to the third millennium B.C., and that Wilde could have been aware of the myth as it was interpreted from Babylonian cuneiform tablets and published in the *London Daily Telegraph*.⁶⁷ The myth describes the goddess Ishtar who goes on a quest to the underworld to restore her lover Tammuz's spirit. She removes her clothes and jewellery to pay a toll at each of the seven gates of the underworld. By the seventh gate she is naked:

He let her in through the seventh door, but stripped off (and)
took away the proud garment of her body.
'Gatekeeper, why have you taken away the proud garment of
my body?'
'Go in, my lady. Such are the rites of the Mistress of
Earth.'⁶⁸

The Babylonian myth reflects a more spiritual approach than the sensual one depicted by Wilde. The original myth has Ishtar shed her divinity, as a goddess, together with her pride to kneel before Ereshkigal, her sister and goddess of the underworld, to restore her lover's life. Bentley believes that Wilde 'assigned this symbolic descent to the underworld ... a ceremony that equates stripping naked to being in a state of truth.'⁶⁹ Symbolically, even the necrophilic kiss at

the end of the play represents not only Salomé's uncontrolled desire but also her (the artist's) 'thirst for the ideal beauty'⁷⁰ that she sees in Jokanaan.

For Salomé, the *Dance of the Seven Veils* is a means to an end: she demands to obtain 'in a silver charger ... the head of Jokanaan.' (Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 555). Herod, bound by his word, grants Salomé her wish. The executioner presents Jokanaan's head and Salomé expresses her fury:

'Thou didst reject me. Thou didst speak evil words against me. Thou didst treat me as a harlot, as a wanton, me, Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa! Well, Jokanaan, I still live, but thou, thou art dead, and thy head belongs to me.' (p. 559)

However, Bentley states that Salomé is 'driven more by the pain of unrequited love than by revenge.'⁷¹ She is also the product of a world without value and mocks Jokanaan's dead eyes: 'Open thine eyes! Lift up thine eyelids, Jokanaan! Wherefore dost thou not look at me? Art thou afraid of me, Jokanaan, that thou wilt not look at me?' (p. 558). Salomé, impatient with the gaze of others who would possess her, has been unable to command the gaze of one whom she would possess. Salomé's answer to mystery is to insist that love is all that should be considered, but love for Salomé has become sexual hunger. She blames him: 'Thou didst put upon thine eyes the cover of him who would see his God.' (p. 559). She taunts him: 'Well, thou has seen thy God, Jokanaan, but me, me, thou didst never see' (p. 559). Her appropriation of male sexual desire, however, is not unmixed with a genuine longing for meaning, which Jokanaan may have found:

Ah, Jokanaan, Jokanaan, thou wert the only man that I have loved. All other men are hateful to me. But thou, thou wert beautiful! ... [t]hy voice was a censor that scattered strange perfumes, and when I looked on thee I heard a strange music. Ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me, Jokanaan? (p. 559)

There is longing in Salomé's cry, 'But thou, thou wert beautiful!', but it is not Jokanaan's beauty that she needs, for she emphasises the voice that seemed a censor, that could have provided boundaries, and even joy. Jokanaan, she imagines, could have saved her but chose not to.

It is hard not to consider, with Salomé, why Jokanaan refuses. Nassaar suggests:

Jokanaan has a hidden lust for Salomé that betrays itself in the language he uses, which often has an unconscious sexual meaning. He refuses to look at her, and voluntarily returns to his symbolic dark underground cistern rather than accept her advances ... the idea of sexual contact with her horrifies him.⁷²

There is some validity to Nassaar's argument here; Salomé is a virgin, but is blamed by Jokanaan for her mother's sins, and is called the 'Daughter of Sodom'. She is blamed because '[b]y woman came evil into the world' (Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 544). As the "everywoman" of the male imagining, Salomé is told to seek out Jesus and ask for forgiveness. Salomé's plea goes unheard, and her appropriation of male sexual desire is mixed with a desire for order or the 'censoring voice' Jokanaan represents someone who might assuage the surge of chaos he provokes within her. Without him, she is at a loss:

What shall I do now, Jokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great waters can quench my passion. I was a princess, and thou didst scorn me. I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire ... Ah! ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me, Jokanaan? If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me. Well I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death. Love only should one consider. (p. 559)

Salomé's necrophilic kiss of Jokanaan's head is horrifying. Left only with her own desires, yet in many ways more moral than those with whom she is surrounded, her speech is reminiscent of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein's monster, in that she turns to the one thing, that through her beauty she can control, when passion and desire go unanswered. When Shelley's monster realises that, due to his ugliness, he is left without hope he responds with the one thing he can do: 'I too can create desolation; my enemy is not invulnerable; this death will carry despair to him ...'⁷³ In many ways, of course, Frankenstein's monstrous creation is more moral than he; so too with Salomé, who is not grown so cynical that she cannot imagine an ideal.

King Herod, the great cynic of the play and who is complicit in the murder of Jokanaan, is so repulsed by Salomé's kiss that he orders her execution. Wilde's Salomé should be regarded as a strong female agent, not a biblical whore, since Wilde gave her what her literary predecessors did not: a will of

her own. Bentley suggests that Wilde's Salomé achieves 'her emancipation by embracing her own exploitation.'⁷⁴ She is depicted as an active female agent who uses her sexuality in ways that defy the traditional biblical story of a young girl persuaded by her mother to dance for Herod to serve her mother's ends. She even differs from the literary character depicted by other authors of the age, such as Flaubert's Salomé, who 'is so thoroughly reduced to her body, and thus her sensuality, that she can barely speak.'⁷⁵ Through her artistry, Salomé's *Dance of the Seven Veils* captures the aestheticism sought by the Decadent artist in motion; it is the peak of action that breaks through the intended monotony and repetition of the play, or, as Karayanni calls it, 'the exposition of an exoticism and an eroticism that are made possible through kinaesthetic movement.'⁷⁶ Dance is a subjective form of art whereby the artist becomes one with her art. The audience, too, is participatory. Karayanni suggests that while watching the dance:

[T]he gaze cannot remain passive or complacent in its assumed superiority. In scopic indulgence, the eye consumes the dancer and the dance, ingests the spectacle, and assimilates it in a manner that interrogates any notion of purity in an imperial subject's sovereign constitution.⁷⁷

Both King Herod and the audience become an active part of the dance, and therefore complicit in the death it achieves. For Salomé, in asserting a female sexual desire and assuaging it through her own actions, she bends the patriarchal world to her own will. The patriarchal world was unprepared, decadent and corrupt. Its only answer was to put her to death.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

- ¹ Max Nordau, 'Dedication', in *Degeneration* (London: William Heinemann, 1895), < <https://archive.org/details/degeneration035137mbp> > [accessed 2 June 2015], p. viii.
- ² Lynne Hapgood, 'Urban Utopias: Socialism, Religion and the City, 1880 to 1900', in *Cultural Politics of the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 184.
- ³ See *Encyclopaedia Britannica* < <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Labour-Party-political-party> >
- ⁴ Hapgood, p. 185.
- ⁵ Henry James, 'Preface', *The Portrait of a Lady* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, (1908) 1936), p. xxi.
- ⁶ Gail Marshal, 'Introduction', *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 5.
- ⁷ Brian Stableford, *Salome and Other Decadent Fantasies* (Pennsylvania: Cosmos Books, 2004), p. 11.
- ⁸ Herodias was formerly married to Herod's own brother and was daughter-in-law of Herod the Great, twice: once by marriage to his son, Herod II, and again by marriage to another son, Herod Antipas.
- ⁹ See *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. by William Whiston [1737], Antiquities of the Jews, Book XVIII, Chapter 5 (4), Containing the Interval of Thirty-Two Years: From the Banishment of Archelus to the Departure from Babylon. <<http://sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/ant-18.htm>>.
- ¹⁰ Josephus.
- ¹¹ Stavros S. Karayanni, *Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality, and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), p. 106.
- ¹² Shireen Malik, "'She freed and floated on the air": Salome and her Dance of the Seven Veils', in *Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. by Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 142.
- ¹³ Helen G. Zagona, *The Legend of Salomé and the Principles of Art for Art's Sake* (Paris: Librairie Minard, 1960), p. 20.
- ¹⁴ Frederic Chase St. Aubyn, *Stéphane Mallarmé* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 50.
- ¹⁵ St. Aubyn, p. 51.
- ¹⁶ Rosina Neginsky, 'The Image of Salome in Art in the 19th and 20th Centuries as a Symbol of Social Ideology', Paper prepared for the Euro Academia International Conference, Vienna, 8-10 December 2011 <http://euroacademia.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/papers/december/Rosina_Neginsky-The_Image_of_Salome_in_Art_in_the_19th_and_20th_Centuries_as_a_Symbol_of_Social_Ideology.pdf> [accessed 15 March 2012], p. 2.
- ¹⁷ Heinrich Heine, 'Atta Troll', XIX, p. 113 <http://www.archive.org/stream/attatrollfromger00heini/attatrollfromger00heini_djvu.txt>.
- ¹⁸ Heine, XIX, p. 114.
- ¹⁹ Heine, XIX, p. 113.
- ²⁰ Heine, XIX, pp. 114-15.

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- ²¹ Heine, XIX, p. 116.
- ²² Henry Weinfield, *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 169.
- ²³ Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Poetic Principle', in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, by arrangement with Random House, 1984), pp. 894-5.
- ²⁴ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems*, ed. by Henry Weinfield (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 30-1.
- ²⁵ Rosemary Lloyd (ed.), *Selected Letters of Stéphane Mallarmé*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 47.
- ²⁶ Mallarmé, p. 32.
- ²⁷ William J. Berg, *Imagery and Ideology: Fiction and Painting in Nineteenth-Century France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), pp. 151-2.
- ²⁸ Gustave Flaubert, 'Herodias' in *Three Tales*, trans. by Robert Baldick (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 120-1.
- ²⁹ Kuchuk Hanem was a famous belly dancer who entertained such Western authors as George William Curtis, Gustave Flaubert, Maxime du Camp and Louis Bouilhet.
- ³⁰ Karayanni, p. 59.
- ³¹ Francis Steegmüller, *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour: A Narrative Drawn from Gustave Flaubert's Travel Notes and Letters* (London: Bodley Head, 1972), p. 115.
- ³² Steegmüller, p. 121.
- ³³ Steegmüller, pp. 154-5.
- ³⁴ In the dance of the Bee the dancer pretends that there is a bee between the layers of her clothes and she starts to shed her clothes layer after the other until she stands (almost) naked.
- ³⁵ Steegmüller, p. 117.
- ³⁶ Berg, p. 155.
- ³⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, Introduction, with Notes, by Gilbert Phelps (London and Sydney: Pan Books, 1972), p. 192. Phelps notes that *Cleopatra*, a painting by the Belgium artist Defiefve, was on exhibition at the Salon in Brussels when Charlotte Brontë was there.
- ³⁸ Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism', in *Cultural Politics of the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 32.
- ³⁹ Pell, an American sculptor and illustrator, was born in St. Louis, Missouri. She studied with William Rimmer at the Design School for Women at Cooper Union in New York City, graduating in 1870. In 1872 she took a five-and-a-half-year tour to Europe, North Africa and the Near East. On her return to the United States she exhibited paintings done during her travels, such as "La Annunziata" and "Water Vendor, Cairo, Egypt" at the National Academy of Design. During the 1880s Pell attended the *Académie des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, and studied with Jean Paul Laurens (1838-1931). She studied religious painting with Jacques-Fernand Humbert, and portrait and genre painting with Gaston Casimir Saint-Pierre. The Paris Salon of 1890 accepted her "Portrait of Mm T." and the "Salome" painting pictured here. Pell was painting in Europe during the 1890s, a time generally designated as the *fin de siècle* which lasted from 1890 to the beginning of the World War I, insofar as dates and movements can ever be strictly defined.

See: Jules Heller and Nancy G. Heller, 'Ella Ferris Pell, 1846-1922', in *North American Women Artists of the Twentieth Century: A Biographical Dictionary* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 433 <<https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=AYxmAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA433&lpg=PA433&dq=ella+ferris+pell+1846+1922&source=bl&ots=QyDrTnW0gB&sig=TJ3dzMVyrIzyVly25TdVcSZBRVI&hl=en&sa=X&ei=nURuVbigFMmD8gXE0IGAAQ&ved=0CEcQ6AEwDA#v=onepage&q=ella%20ferris%20pell%201846%201922&f=false>> [accessed 3 June 2015].

⁴⁰ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 384.

⁴¹ Yelena Primorac, 'Illustrating Wilde: An Examination of Aubrey Beardsley's Interpretation of Salome' <<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/beardsley/primorac.html>> [accessed 5 April 2012].

⁴² Ledger, p. 30.

⁴³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 188.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Swift, 'A Modest Proposal', in *The Oxford Authors: Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Angus Ross and David Woolley (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 492-99.

⁴⁵ Oscar Wilde, 'Salomé', in *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by G. F. Maine (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1952), p. 537. All future references will be to this edition.

⁴⁶ Christopher Nassaar, 'Wilde's Salomé and the Victorian Religious Landscape', from *The Victorian Web* <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/nassaar2.html>> [accessed 12 June 2015].

⁴⁷ See Nassaar; see also Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. by Thomas Common. Project Gutenberg, digitized (2008, 2012) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1998/1998-h/1998-h.htm#link2H_4_0002> [accessed 12 June 2015].

⁴⁸ Nassaar.

⁴⁹ Walter Pater, 'Winckelmann', in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, The 1893 Text, Edited with Textual and Explanatory Notes by Donald L. Hill (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1980), p. 146.

⁵⁰ Nassaar.

⁵¹ Nassaar.

⁵² Karayanni, p. 100.

⁵³ Kerry Powell, *Acting Wilde: Victorian Sexuality, Theatre, and Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 41.

⁵⁴ Dijkstra, p. 398.

⁵⁵ Powell, p. 41.

⁵⁶ Matthew Lewsadder, 'Removing the Veils: Censorship, Female Sexuality, and Oscar Wilde's *Salome*', *Modern Drama*, 45.4 (2002), 519-44 (p. 521).

⁵⁷ Lewsadder, p. 521.

⁵⁸ See Nassaar; see also Rodney Shewan, *Oscar Wilde: Art and Egotism* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 136.

⁵⁹ Nassaar sees Wilde as depicting John Ruskin's view that art could not be art without some moral faculty. Ruskin distinguishes between 'aesthesis, the mere sensuous pleasure one takes in art, and *theoria*, the response to beauty of one's total moral being.' See: John Ruskin, 'Of the Naturalist Ideal' and 'The Theoretic Faculty', in 'Introduction' to 'Art', *The Genius of John Ruskin*, Ed.

With Intro. John D. Rosenberg (Boston, London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 21.

⁶⁰ Lewsadder, p. 522.

⁶¹ Lewsadder, p. 522.

⁶² See, for example, in ‘Ma’aruf the Cobbler and his Wife Fatimah’ (from *The Arabian Nights*) sees Princess Dunya spying on her husband: ‘Princess Dunya rose to him and took him under the armpit and wheedled him with winsomest wheedling (and all – sufficient are woman’s wiles whenas she would aught of men), and she ceased not to caress him and beguile him with speech sweeter than the honey till she stole his reason ...’ (Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights: Tales from A Thousand and One Nights*, Introduction by A. S. Byatt (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), p. 844).

⁶³ Karayanni, pp. 111-12.

⁶⁴ Toni Bentley, *Sisters of Salome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p.v32.

⁶⁵ Shireen Malik, p. 148.

⁶⁶ Udo Kultermann, ‘The ‘Dance of the Seven Veils’: Salome and Erotic Culture around 1900’, *Artibuset Historiae*, 27.53 (2006), p. 211.

⁶⁷ See ‘“The Past”: What May Be Found in Assyria – Expected Results of Renewed Excavations’, *London Daily Telegraph* (12 January 1873). In

⁶⁸ Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 156-7.

⁶⁹ Bentley, p. 32.

⁷⁰ Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome’s Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 43.

⁷¹ Bentley, p. 28.

⁷² Nassaar.

⁷³ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Three Gothic Novels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 410.

⁷⁴ Bentley, p. 30.

⁷⁵ Berg, p. 154.

⁷⁶ Karayanni, p. 101.

⁷⁷ Karayanni, p. 99.



Fig. 5: John Murray: *Freya Stark in Arab Dress*, Syria, 1928

CHAPTER V

THE THIRD SEX IN THE NEAR EAST

‘The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.’

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*¹

This chapter examines two markedly different attitudes by British women to the Arab world. The New Woman and those associated with Oscar Wilde’s Decadents defined themselves against the prevalent sexual ideology of Victorian Britain. Although feminism and Oscar Wilde shared little common ground, and, as Sally Ledger informs us:

Wilde had one or two feminist credentials, and a sympathetic feminist reading of Wilde and his work could plausibly set him up both as the most radical inhabitant of the discursive space prised open by the erethism surrounding sexuality in the fin de siècle, and as a key figure in the perceived connection between late-Victorian feminism and decadence.²

Wilde was responsible, as editor, for the changing of *Lady’s World* into *Woman’s World* and he commissioned items on women’s suffrage. He did not, however, enjoy the support of the feminist press. The fall of Oscar Wilde was covered by a columnist of the *Women’s Signal* who said that it ‘must hearten every mother who, in the love of God, is training her sons to habits of purity and manliness’.³ As Ledger comments, ‘[t]he mainstream women’s movement was anxious to distance itself from Oscar Wilde and his followers.’⁴ Yet the emergence of a ‘Third Sex’ among those visiting the Arab world is demonstrated by women who represent, in their interaction with Arab men something of the independent thinking of a Scheherazade or even a Salomé. Thus, in this chapter, the fiction of George Egerton (1859-1945) explores female sexuality, as do the Desert Romances of Edith M. Hull (1880-1947) which dominated popular culture during the 1920s and 1930s. However, this chapter also focuses on two women’s travel narratives: the Middle East of Gertrude Bell (1868-1926), and Freya Stark (1893-1993) – both of whom

represent, in their interaction with Arab men and women, a ‘Third Sex’ in terms of their adventurous nature and the sheer scope of their travels.

Nevertheless, George Egerton, the pen name for Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright, ‘one of the few fiction writers to explore female sexuality in an affirmative way’. Some New Women liked Salomé.⁵ Egerton seems to recognise Salomé’s use of sexuality to control the men surrounding her and gain power over them. In ‘A Cross Line’ (1894) the nameless female protagonist tries, with erotic fantasies, to overcome a tedious marriage: ‘She fancies herself in Arabia on the back of a swift steed; flashing eyes set in dark faces surround her.’⁶ Her sexual fantasies are located in Arabia, where all sexual liberties reside in the Victorian imagination. However, it should be noted that here the woman imagines herself as an active agent; this may be compared to Tennyson’s ‘Fatima’, which appeared in *The Lady of Shalott and Other Poems* (1833-42):

Before he mounts the hill, I know
He cometh quickly: from below
Sweet gales, as from deep gardens, blow
Before him, striking on my brow
 In my dry brain my spirit soon,
 Down deepening from swoon to swoon,
 Faints like a dazzled morning moon. (22-28)⁷

By the time Egerton was writing, the name Fatima had become a generic name for all belly dancers. Tennyson’s poem has his Fatima full of desire and she expresses it, but it is her lover who rides the desert to reach a waiting and swooning Fatima. The protagonist of Egerton’s ‘A Cross Line’ is prepared to seek satisfaction through action and dance to ensure that males will desire her. She imagines herself onstage in an ancient theatre. Amphitheatres were to be found throughout the seats of the ancient Roman Empire: in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Tunisia. The Salomé-like protagonist:

is gauze-clad in a cobweb garment of wondrous tissue; her arms are clasped by jewelled snakes, and one with quivering diamond fangs coils around her hips; her hair floated loosely, and her feet are sandal-clad, ... [s]he bounds forward and dances, bends her lissom waist, and curves her slender arms, and gives to the soul of each man what he craves, be it good or evil. And she can feel now ... the grand intoxicating power of swaying all these human souls to wonder and applause.

The dance functions not only to assuage female desire and to give each man what she knows he craves, but also to gain the 'grand intoxicating power' of knowing that her audience is in her hands:

She can see herself ... a dancing devil in each glowing eye,
sway voluptuously to the wild music that rises, now slow,
now fast, now deliriously wild, seductive, intoxicating, with
a human note of passion in its strain.⁸

Her fantasy has little effect upon her husband, who calls her a 'gypsy'. Throughout the story he sees his wife as 'a real good chum' and wishes he could understand her.⁹ She laughs at his devotion to the 'female idea he has created which blinds him ... to her own complex nature.'¹⁰ She thinks of all the other women: the maids, the factory workers, the housewives, the good and bad women: 'Have they, too, this thirst for excitement, for change, this restless craving for sun and love and motion?'¹¹

Edith Hull's (1880-1947) novels also encourage female sexual fantasies, but they have little or no feminist value beyond persuading poor and badly educated women to believe that they, too, might be rescued from their dreary existence by a Valentino-like man who will look after them. Hull sets her Desert Romances, *The Sheik* (1919) and *The Sons of the Sheik* (1925), in the Sahara of Algeria. In *The Sheik* Diana Mayo, the arrogant English virginal tomboy, decides to go on a trip in the Algerian desert on her own with no companion other than an Arab caravan guide and his assistants. Lady Conway reacts to this plan with an explicitly imperial attitude, considering Diana's trip with 'no chaperon or attendant of her own sex, with only native camel drivers and servants ... a slur not only on her own reputation, but also on the prestige of her country'.¹² This imperialistic attitude is reflected in Diana's brother who refers to Arabs as 'damned niggers' (p. 22). Diana, the new twentieth-century feminist who regards marriage as captivity, considers the difference between Western and Arab women, condescendingly sympathising with the latter:

She wondered what [Arab women's] lives were like, if they ever rebelled against the drudgery and restrictions that were imposed upon them, if they ever longed for the freedom that she was revelling in, or if custom and usage were so strong

that they had no thoughts beyond the narrow life they led.
The thought of those lives filled her with aversion. (p. 30)

Arab women are not discussed in *The Sheik*, probably because the novel focuses on Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan, the *homme fatale* who charms the readers with what Emily Leider calls his ‘desert-lover’s cruel but enticing otherness’.¹³ However, Diana, like Lady Montagu before her, is treated differently from the Arab women; she stands as a separate sex in that Sheik Ahmed and his men treat her with an attitude that renders her superior to Arab women. She does not have to cook, clean or do the laundry. She mingles with men, rides a horse for leisure, and, most importantly, owns her own desires.

Diana carries a romantic image of Sheik Ahmed, who is described to be of magnificent physique:

tall and broad-shouldered, dressed in white flowing robes, a waistcloth embroidered in black and silver wound several times about him, and from the top of which showed a revolver that was thrust into the folds... [He had] fierce burning eyes ... [with a] passionate stare ... brown, clean-shaven face, surmounted by crisp, close-cut brown hair. It was the handsomest and cruellest face that she had ever seen.
(p. 48)

He stands in contrast to Sheik Ibraheim Omair, an Arab Sheik of another nomadic tribe, who is the villain, and the enemy of Sheik Ahmed. He has a swollen evil face, ‘full, sensual lips’ with ‘broken, blackened teeth’. He is ‘slovenly’, with ‘stained and tumbled’ robes and his hands are ‘engrained with dirt’ (p. 184). His tent is small and barren, without any signs of comfort or richness. It reeks of a ‘*native*’ ‘pungent smell’ (p. 178). His tribe lives by thieving and raiding and Omair bears ‘every mark of vice’ and ‘bestial evilness’ (p. 184). For Diana, Sheik Omair is ‘the Arab of [her] imaginings’ (p. 184) and probably those of the Western world.

Diana distinguishes Sheik Ahmed from other Arabs. He is, nevertheless, depicted with that edge of cruelty that has remained a common feature of Arab males in Western Literature since early times. His Arabic origins are tempered by his European lineage, and even though this is unknown at the beginning of the novel, his distinctive demeanour separates him from other Arab males, as do his spotless robes, fastidiously clean hands and well-kept nails (p. 53). His tent is huge and luxurious and combines ‘Oriental luxury and European

comfort' (p. 52). The European comfort enjoyed by Sheik Ahmed distinguishes him from '[a] man of different race and colour, a native; [that Diana's brother] would indiscriminately class ... as a damned nigger' (p. 134).

Elizabeth Gargano comments that Hull's 'numerous novels of the desert are haunted by the fear of miscegenation, and she subjects her plots to considerable strain in order to "guard" her heroines from interracial marriage.'¹⁴ With an ironic, and not-so-surprising turn of events, Diana comes to know that Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan is actually European. His hand 'is so big for an Arab's' (p. 320). He is, in fact, the only son of the Earl of Glencaryll and his noble Spanish wife. Sheik Ahmed was adopted by Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan, Senior after Ahmed's Spanish mother escaped his father's cruelty and went into the desert to give birth at his camp. Hence, European identity overcomes racial and imperial problems that would eventuate for a novel that allowed the sexual fantasy of an empowered woman traveling into the desert alone to find romantic love with an Arab. But as Gargano comments: "the sexual freedom" ... was dearly bought, since it entailed accepting disabling definitions of femininity and masculinity, subject and ruler, and East and West'.¹⁵

Sheik Ahmed is the one who manages to inflame Diana with passion and awaken her dormant sexuality. He teaches her fear, obedience and submissiveness:

Terror, agonising, soul-shaking terror such as she had never imagined, took hold of her. The flaming light of desire burning in his eyes turned her sick and faint. Her body throbbed with the consciousness of a knowledge that appalled her. She understood his purpose with a horror that made each separate nerve in her system shrink against the understanding that had come to her under the consuming fire of his ardent gaze. (p. 58)

Even as Diana's female sexual desire awakens, she is not in control of it. It is under the influence of the 'Sheik's vivid masculinity and compelling personality' that Diana's 'womanly instincts' had 'risen to the surface with startling completeness' (p. 161). She is both afraid of the Sheik and desiring of consummation with him, and is 'appalled'. He, on the other hand, seems to have chosen Diana because of her defiant character over which he decides to

take control. By way of punishment for her “transgressions” Diana is abducted by Sheik Ahmed and, in the language of abduction, lie suggestions of rape:

She had no tears left. They had all been expended when she had grovelled at his feet imploring the mercy he had not accorded her. She had fought until the unequal struggle had left her exhausted and helpless in his arms, until her whole body was one agonised ache from the brutal hands that forced her to compliance, until her courageous spirit was crushed by the realisation of her own powerlessness (p. 52).

Months pass by with Diana feeling nothing but disdain and hatred towards Sheik Ahmed. She sees him as a cruel dominator who enforces his will above all others.

Diana is especially horrified when she observes him taming a wild colt:

It was a punishment of which the untamed animal was never to lose remembrance. The savagery and determination of man against the mad determination of the horse. It was a hideous exhibition of brute strength and merciless cruelty. (p. 86)

Diana’s adventurous independence is threatened by her recognition and identification with the colt. That morning it had thrown its rider and trampled him so that it must be tamed, but as a woman she cannot understand the male necessity to tame horses with violence. She identifies with the horse but does not see herself giving up her dignity and selfhood: “‘You had better kill me,’” she said drearily’ (p. 96). However, this is not a choice. Sheik Ahmed will not admit defeat: ‘I can tame you and I will. But it is for you to choose ... if you will obey me willingly or if I must make you’ (p. 96). Predictably, when Ahmed foils Diana’s plan to escape and saves her from dying of dehydration in the desert she realises that she loves him: ‘He was a brute, but she loved him, loved him for his very brutality and superb animal strength. And he was an Arab! ... [s]he did not care’ (p. 134).

At this point, all semblance of Diana’s own identity as an English woman of imperial Britain disappears amid her passion. She melodramatically attempts to commit suicide when Ahmed offers to send her back to Europe. Oddly, the freedom from European social norms that the desert offers, as the faraway and distant place of romance where new ways of being can be explored, are curtailed by Ahmed. He objects to her cross-dressing and tells her that she

‘make[s] a very charming boy’ (p. 69), but that it was her feminine appearance that charmed him when he saw her in Biskra. Yet both characters, deep in the desert away from Biskra, enact a masquerade. Diana disguises herself as a male to enjoy the experiences of travel, while Ahmed, a European, dresses in Arab robes and pretends to be an Arab. Certainly, as Karen Chow suggests:

The Sheik pushes limits as an erotic thriller that represents an English woman of ‘bon sang’ enjoying extra marital, non-procreative sex with an exotic, ‘native’ desert lover without a care for the consequences.¹⁶

The story concludes with Diana’s decision to decline Sheik Ahmed’s offer of sending her back home and choosing to live with him as an obedient wife. Hull endorses Diana’s decision to stay with Sheik Ahmed saying, ‘I am old fashioned enough to believe that a woman’s best love is given to the man ... she chooses as her master’.¹⁷ Hsu-Ming Teo states that for Western readers after the publication of Hull’s novel the term ‘Sheik’ acquired ‘new connotations of irresistible, ruthless, masterful, and over-sexualized masculinity’.¹⁸ These qualities were very appealing for Western women in the 1920s, and they contributed to the sensational success of the film adaptation of *The Sheik* (1921) and *The Son of the Sheik* (1926), which starred Rudolph Valentino (1895-1926) as both father and son.

Edith Hull’s colonial sentiments are more apparent in *The Sons of the Sheik* (1925). The novel is a sequel to *The Sheik* and narrates the story of Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan, Diana and their two sons, some twenty years after their first encounter. Sheik Ahmed, the descendant of a British peer, and his English wife, Diana, rule over the strongest Arab tribe in the Sahara by both force and love. Caryl, their elder son and the new Earl of Glencaryl, described as ‘English to the backbone’,¹⁹ expresses disgust with a local Algerian town, Touggourt, finding it to be ‘revolting’, ‘damnable’, and a ‘God-forsaken little hole’ (p. 47). He blames his father’s association with the Arabs for their reputation as ‘the queer Carylls’ (p. 48). When Caryl questions his father’s choice to be an ‘Oriental potentate and rule a rabble of unwashed, unsavoury, thieving scum’ (p. 49), Raoul, the French family friend, steps in to explain Sheik Ahmed’s undertaking of the white man’s burden and reign over the tribe as an Arab, stating that the tribe consists of ‘a headstrong, fighting people, and

it takes a man to rule them' (p. 51). However, according to Raoul, Diana manages with love what her husband cannot control with fear.

Diana has worked indefatigably to better the state of the women and children, and improve the conditions under which they live, taking on the typical colonial/missionary wife's role. For example, it is entirely due to her that ophthalmia has almost been wiped out among the tribe. This is an interesting reversal of Lady Montagu's situation, who learned much from the Turks about the control and prevention of smallpox. Raoul represents a colonial voice when he justifies Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan's cruelty towards his fellow tribesmen:

Here it is only the strong hand that rules. Equity and justice have to be interpreted according to the needs of the various classes of society, and the justice your father administers is the justice that is recognized and understood by the people he governs ... necessity compels him to adhere to methods that have always prevailed, and will continue to prevail until civilization sweeps away ancient usages and clears a way for modern thought and improvement. (p. 101)

This colonial sentiment evolves due to the Eurocentric colonial struggle and conflicting political interests in North Africa on the eve of World War I. It is the French Algerian conflict that forms a backdrop to the novel.

The underground instigation of the Algerian tribes to mutiny against the French domination in the region, and later German attempts to gain access and obtain the support of Arab tribes, is mentioned by Sheik Ahmed, who does not support the argument for national independence. He mentions that there were calls for '*jahad*', propagating that 'all foreigners, and all sympathizing with foreigners, are to go, and it is to be Algeria for the Algerians – not French Algerians' (p. 42), but he refutes the possibility that these calls originated from nationalist Algerians. Instead he believes them to have come from propagandists of a foreign country. We discover later that there are German spies creating mischief. Obviously, the novel differentiates between different types of colonialism. The British form is helpful and forward-thinking for the benefit of the colonised. The French and German colonies, on the other hand, must expect trouble since they are clearly unsuited to govern. Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) expresses similar sentiments in *Heart of Darkness* (1899):

[O]n one end a large shining map, marked with all the colours of a rainbow. There was a vast amount of red — good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there ...²⁰

Ironically it is Yasmin, the French/Moroccan girl, who speaks in favour of freedom from French domination. When the man she calls father abducts Ahmed, the younger son of Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan, he demands that Yasmin tell him of her “father’s” hideout, but she refuses: ‘But for the English blood in him, he would have beaten the truth out of her’ (p. 80). He wants to know why these men are in Algeria and whether their purpose is seditious, but Yasmin confronts him: ‘What dost thou know of freedom whose neck is under the heel of France – may Allah destroy her who would enslave us as she has enslaved thee! But in Morocco we are free’ (p. 80).

Again, as Gargano comments, we find female freedom being ‘dearly bought’ since again it entails ‘accepting disabling definitions of femininity and masculinity, subject and ruler, and East and West’.²¹ It is also through the character of Yasmin that the reader is introduced to the issue of Arab women and fear of interracial marriage. Yasmin is not an Arab snake charmer but a French girl who was abducted and raised by a villainous Moor. The young Ahmed falls in love with her, but his father expresses his abhorrence by giving voice to his concerns about the possibility of any further relationship with Yasmin. Sheik Ahmed’s elder son, Caryll, admires Yasmin but thinks there can be no further contact because she is an Arab. As the elder son, he could not choose a wife ‘from the vicious atmosphere of a *café maure*, or the unsavoury streets of an Arab town’ (p. 86). Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan’s antagonism to even his younger son’s feelings towards Yasmin is not surprising. He objects to the possibility of their marriage stating that ‘[s]he is a native. And much as I love my people I do not choose to be succeeded by a half-caste’ (p. 125).

The story ends when young Ahmed thinks that Yasmin betrayed him to the provocateurs who, in league with her “father”, abduct and torture him. He is rescued by Caryll, his older brother, but the resulting story is an odd mixture of love, sexuality, colonialism and its supporters. However, to the twenty-first-century reader one is less confident as to where one’s sympathies should lie. Young Ahmed treats Yasmin, the snake-charmer, horribly till he discovers that she is of French lineage, only then does he start to treat her like a lady. The

readers may hate the Moor because of his vices but inevitably in a romance, Yasmin realises that the Moor is the villain who killed her parents and abducted her. She also accepts Ahmed's love despite his earlier cruelty. Unable to be independent, she can be saved only through a man's love.

The Desert Romances were immensely popular and it is well known that the novel and the later release of the film, *The Sheik* – produced by Famous Players-Lasky in 1921, directed by George Melford and starring Rudolph Valentino, Agnes Ayres, and Adolphe Menjou – created turmoil in the Western world. The book went through fifty printings in 1921 and as Hsu-Ming Teo comments:

[I]t was the first novel to appear on the best-sellers list for two consecutive years ... The *New York Telegraph* estimated that over 125,000 people had seen *The Sheik* within weeks of the film opening ... it screened for six months in Sydney, Australia, and ran for a record 42 weeks in France. The word "sheik", originally a term of respect referring to a Muslim religious leader or an elder of a community or a family, suddenly took on new connotations of irresistible, ruthless, masterful, and over-sexualised masculinity in the West.²²

The sequel, *The Son of the Sheik* (1926), directed by George Fitzmaurice (as Geo. Fitzmaurice), again starred Rudolph Valentino and Agnes Ayres, this time with Vilma Bánky and George Fawcett. The film differs from the novel, as the Sheik has only one son instead of two and Valentino again takes up the role of the father but also plays the son who falls in love with the local dancer, Yasmin. Their love is obstructed by Gahbah, who has been promised Yasmin's hand in marriage. It is interesting that the word *gahbah* means prostitute in Arabic, driving one to wonder how Hull decided to use this name for Yasmin's father and why the screenwriters continued the error. It seems not to be deliberate. Gahbah kidnaps Ahmed and Yasmin is thought to be complicit in the kidnapping. When Ahmed is rescued by his friends, he vows revenge upon Yasmin whom he assumes to be the Eva figure of Western literature. Visually, the viewer knows otherwise, since when Yasmin is sent across the desert she rides upon a donkey and modestly covers her head. For a Western audience, the association is wholly with Mary going toward Bethlehem to bear her son: the association is with the Ava figure. She too is kidnapped and held by

Gahbah, and while in his custody is returned to the Eva figure as a dancer until rescued by Ahmed and his father.

The dancer is seen as being conscious of her seductive powers, and using them for financial gain. This is how Ahmed sees Yasmin again, after he has learned of her innocence. The situation of the dancer, like that of the prostitute, is an ambiguous one and she develops a number of strategies to demonstrate to herself and others that the sin does not lie with her. Fatna A. Sabbah in *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* argues that:

Muslim culture has a built-in ideological blindness to the economic dimension of women, who are ordinarily perceived, conceived and defined as exclusively sexual objects. The female body has traditionally been the object of an enormous erotic investment, which has clouded (if not totally hidden) woman's economic dimensions.²³

This concept is not exclusive to the East, but, on the contrary, in the figure of the femme fatale is a source of fear for Western males. Karin Van Nieuwkerk comments that: '[i]n the view of female entertainers, men are weak regarding female beauty and seduction, and at the same time threatening and aggressive. They regard women as powerful and tempting but as weak when it comes to physical violence.'²⁴ Bram Stoker's (1847-1912) gothic novel, *Dracula* (1897), explored these concepts. As the nineteenth century progressed fantasy literatures became linked with the feminising of men and the masculinisation of women. In point of fact women are the victims in *Dracula*, but Lucy Westenra has a playful flirtation with the idea of a New Womanhood. Alexandra Warwick comments that when Lucy expresses her desire to marry 'as many as want her'²⁵ this does not necessarily indicate sexual independence, but:

[H]er desire seems to be more confused than this would suggest, as it embodies only a willingness to be possessed by those that want her, her wish is still shaped by passivity. There is a correlation too, between the guilty women and their punishments, both Carmilla and Lucy are staked in ritual fashion; Dracula is simply stabbed in the heart. They are wandering women, 'free lances' ...²⁶

Warwick goes on to press the term 'free lance', referring to it as an independent phallus. She suggests that it would seem 'from the fictional texts,

that one of the manifestations of vampirism in women is freedom of movement, connected with the inability of men to restrain them.’²⁷

Ahmed, the son of the Sheik, suffers no such problem, and is prepared to restrain Yasmin with violence if necessary. The connection between sexuality and violence is emphasised in the novel and more especially in the film, in a variety of ways, including the time spent in Ahmed’s tent as his captive. Female entertainers and prostitutes do devise a number of ways in which to offset their own sense of sin and shame. Yasmin is no exception in that; at the beginning of the film she is forced to dance to feed her aging father, and later, at the end of the film, to support herself. Van Nieuwkerk comments of Muslim belly dancers:

Most female performers ... resign themselves to their fate of doing things against Islam. They admit that women seduce, that the profession is *haram* and that they are sinners. That does not mean however, that they perceive their activities as shameful, *`eb*. They regard themselves as perfectly respectable people forced to earn a living in this way. ²⁸

Thus, Yasmin is no Salomé, but rather one forced to work through simple necessity. In terms of popular romance, she deserves a happy ending, and finds it with the very man who has been the source of her pain, Ahmed.

Both the film and the novel demonstrate a shifting of gender discourse. Ideally, the sexes may be seen as complementary, with males recognising the nature of female desire. However, the ‘erotic discourse is an extension of the implicit theory and deals with female desire as mirrored in men’s thought.’²⁹ With their superior strength, men serve as women’s protectors and providers. Women, on the other hand, in exchange for their husbands’ support, should serve obediently. They strive to become wives and should protect their virginity and chastity and be completely loyal and dedicated to their husbands’ wellbeing. However:

Male desire is conceived as strong and capricious. Yet, it must be gratified in the legal context of marriage lest *zina*, illicit intercourse, takes place (Mernissi 1975: 17). Classic Islam defines the wifely duties in terms of women’s obligation to provide sex over and above their obligation to reproduce and mother. Women cannot refuse to perform the conjugal duty (Naamane-Guessous 1990: 194). They should

fulfil this duty so as to prevent men from committing illicit intercourse.³⁰

Under Islam women must perform this duty to keep men from sin and, more practically, to prevent them from taking more wives. In the West sexuality becomes a marital duty: women should “lay back and think of England” and for very similar reasons: ‘Hee for God only, shee for God in him’.³¹ However, women have the potential to invert male power if they set out to trap and seduce men. Thus, both Western and Eastern males must remain watchful in that their first duty is to God, from which they may be so easily diverted. That Yasmin is, in essence, an Ava figure is signified in the film by her robes and the donkey she rides. This is sharply contrasted with her belly-dancing costume, and she cannot prevent Ahmed from distrusting her. Neither audience nor readers seem to have blamed him, given the potential danger she could have represented. These romances and escapist literature in general have little to do with reality but these works have everything to do with perceptions current at the time. It seems that despite a nod in the direction of the New Woman, that comes in the shape of Diana’s and Yasmin’s adventurous natures — Diana sets off on her own into the desert, and even Yasmin follows her own desire by meeting with Ahmed — little has changed in the popular mind, and popular culture is always of its time and place.

Travel writing was also a popular genre at this time, as it has continued to be. John Murray, responding to the popularity of tourism in the nineteenth century, had published his own *Handbook for Travellers on the Continent* in 1836. His *Handbook* promises, in the Preface, to confine himself to what ought to be seen and ‘matter-of-fact’ descriptions.³² As Lori Brister comments, ‘[m]any female travel writers ...respond[ed] to these guidebooks, rejecting the idea of an authentic “truth” that can be found by tourists.’³³ Gertrude Bell’s (1868-1926) work could also demonstrate a romantic cast of mind when it came to the Near East and its people. She describes Teheran (1892) as the ‘Garden of Eden’³⁴ and refers to the beauty of Persian women: ‘the women lift the veil of Raphael Madonna to look at you as you pass’.³⁵ Bell’s intent when writing was to cast light upon the “real” Near East which by now was forming as a political entity to be known as the Middle East. She learned Arabic and Farsi, and could read the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* and the poetry of the

Persian poet Hafiz in Farsi.³⁶ However, Bell was not simply an observer, but deeply involved with the political scene, albeit from a colonial standpoint. She had a successful political career in Iraq and became King Faisal's trusted political advisor in Baghdad in 1921.

Bell's travels took her to Sham (today's Syria and Lebanon), Mesopotamia (today's Iraq), Asia Minor, and Arabia (the rest of the Arabian Peninsula). Along with T. E. Lawrence, Bell helped to establish the Hashemite dynasties in what is today Jordan, as well as in Iraq. She served as a political officer, administrator, archaeologist, and was the first woman officer (known as "Major Miss Bell") ever to be employed by British military intelligence. She explored, mapped, and influenced British imperial policy-making due to her knowledge and contacts. She writes proudly of the role of Britain in the region in a tone that reminds the reader of the white man's burden:

Truly we are a remarkable people. We save from destruction remnants of oppressed nations, laboriously and expensively giving them sanitary accommodation, teaching their children, respecting their faiths, but all the time cursing at the trouble they are giving us – and they're cursing us, not infrequently, for the trouble we are giving them with our meticulous regulations.³⁷

Bell comments on how best to govern the Arab world in general, and Iraq in particular, in the twentieth century, in 'The Basis of Government in Turkish Arabia':

Nor can they be hastened. Whether that which we have to teach them will add to the sum of their happiness, or whether the learning of inevitable lessons will bring them the proverbial attitude of wisdom, the schooling must, if it is to be valuable, be long and slow.³⁸

These views are entirely in keeping with the government's views on how the colonies should progress during the first part of the twentieth century. As Julia Emberley suggests: '[f]or Bell, the Orient was like an unruly child whose maturity depended upon the enlightened education offered by British civil institutions.'³⁹

During her time in the Near East, Bell was concerned with the emancipation of Iraqi women. During her political career in Iraq she pushed the British Administration to open a small women's hospital and open new

schools especially for women, as she put great emphasis on equal opportunities for Iraqi women to obtain an education. She even addressed the Iraqi women in Arabic to advise them about ‘how the school was to be run and what benefits their daughters would gain from it.’⁴⁰ In a letter dated 15 May 1921 she wonders how long the veil would persist but acknowledges at the same time that Iraqi women should fight for their own rights: ‘[t]hey must work out their own salvation and it wouldn't help them to be actively backed by an infidel’.⁴¹

Gertrude Bell comments on her initial attempts to meet the leaders of the Shiah sect. The religious leaders refuse to meet her unveiled and on 15 May 1921 she writes to H. B., or Hugh Bell (1878-1926), her half-brother:

I wonder how long the fast will hold Islam – like the veiling of women it might disappear, as a universal institution, pretty fast. The women who have come back from Syria or Constantinople find the Bagdad social observances very trying. They have been accustomed to much greater freedom. As soon as we get our local institutions firmly established they will be bolder. They and their husbands are afraid that any steps taken now would set all the prejudiced old tongues wagging and jeopardise their future.⁴²

Women’s lives in Iraq and the Middle East in general were cloistered and Bell’s efforts directed toward education and health could not always be successful, since Middle Eastern women were not allowed to meet even with foreign women. This sheds light on how Western women were conceived by the Arabs. They were treated as a ‘third sex’ almost equal to men and superior to local women.⁴³

Bell’s capacity to advise male leaders, such as King Faisal of Iraq, sets her apart from Arab women and she herself admits this in a letter to F. B. or Florence Bell (1880-1971), her half-sister and playwright and author of children’s stories, as well as the author of a study of Bell factory workers:

Until quite recently I’ve been wholly cut off from them because their tenets forbid them to look upon an unveiled woman and my tenets don’t permit me to veil – I think I’m right there, for it would be a tacit admission of inferiority which would put our intercourse from the first out of focus. Nor is it any good trying to make friends through the women ... if the women were allowed to see me they would veil before me as if I were a man. So you see I appear to be too female for one sex and too male for the other.⁴⁴

It is interesting that, unlike Lady Montagu, Bell feels that her identity as a British, and therefore superior, woman would be compromised if she dressed as an Arab woman in an Arab world. Not for her the “when in Rome do as the Romans”; rather, she clings to her otherness and expects the Arab to change. This is clear when she speaks of the upper class Arabs and, in particular, Naqib, who is not fasting for reasons of health. This is another Muslim practice, like that of the veiling of women, that she expects to change.

Bell comments on the conservatism of Baghdad in comparison to Damascus or Constantinople, and anticipates that these practices will disappear at the population’s own hand ‘[a]s soon as we get our local institutions firmly established.’⁴⁵ It seems that she has no concept of practices in the Arab world nor how deeply they are rooted, even though elsewhere she comments on the Shiah sect leaders whom she met in Khadimia, the ‘holy town’ she refers to here:

It’s a problem here how to get into touch with the Shiahs, not the tribal people in the country; we’re on intimate terms with all of them, but the grimly devout citizens of the holy towns and more especially the leaders of religious opinion, the Mujtahids, who can loose and bind with a word by authority which rests on an intimate acquaintance with accumulated knowledge entirely irrelevant to human affairs and worthless in any branch of human activity.⁴⁶

Khadimia – in Bell’s time eight miles from Baghdad, and now at the heart of the city – is in fact centred around the Holy Shrine of Imam Khadim, the seventh holy Imam in Shiite hierarchy. She seems unaware of the strength of religious belief and treats it as a superstition. However, it should also be recognised that the leaders of the Shiite sect are the natural enemies of the Hashemite Dynasty and particularly King Faisal of Iraq whom she advises. Bell refers to the Iraqi men who have come back from Syria and Turkey as “new men”, since their wives are allowed to go out with their husbands and are finding life in Baghdad tiresome:

Nevertheless these new men bring their wives to see me, which is an unexpected departure from Bagdad customs according to which a man would never go about with his wife, I welcome everything that tends in this direction, but, again one can do so little but give sympathetic welcome to

the women. They must work out their own salvation and it wouldn't help them to be actively backed by an infidel, even if the infidel were I who am permitted many things here.⁴⁷

Her inability to help women in regard to their advancement is a source of frustration and ultimately she throws up her hands, suggesting that they find their own 'salvation'.

Despite her weaknesses, however, it must be considered that Bell is much remembered for her adventurous nature and for her political and social achievements, which were many. In a Preface to her biography *Daughter of the Desert: A Life of Gertrude Bell*, Lieutenant General John Glubb comments on Bell's courage and highlights her sense of adventure, which pushed her to mountain-climbing feats in Switzerland as well as exploring the deserts of Arabia:

In these circumstances, only five or six dauntless Englishmen had faced the rigours of desert travel during the hundred years preceding Miss Bell's journey. Lady Anne Blunt had indeed preceded her to Hayil but only in the company of her husband. For an Englishwoman in 1913 to face these wild desert tribes alone, was a feat of supreme courage.⁴⁸

A new work by Georgina Howell emphasises just how much of Bell's life was spent ensuring that Britain kept its promises to the Arab world. After all, if Winston Churchill had not committed the Allies to Gallipoli, and in so doing sacrificed an enormous number of allied lives to the triumphant Turks, the Middle East may have evolved differently. Churchill would not have encouraged an Arab revolt against the Turks. Churchill as a Post War Colonial Secretary was forced to make economies and find Arab leaders to whom Britain could surrender responsibility, and in so doing created the modern state of Iraq. As Georgina Howell puts it, the idealistic Arab sympathisers of Britain's hastily-formed Arab Bureau, especially Gertrude Bell and T. E. Lawrence, 'knew that in their efforts to raise a revolt they would be living a half-lie.'⁴⁹ They knew that the promises given to the Arab tribes — self-determination at war's end if you join us against the Turks — were made in order to be broken. It was Gertrude Bell, determined that some part of the promise be kept, who helped change Mesopotamia's name to Iraq.⁵⁰

There is by now a tradition of Western women travellers to the Middle East that includes such figures as Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839) – who led what was considered to be the first modern archaeological excavation of the Holy Land – Lady Montagu, Gertrude Bell, and of course, Freya Stark. These intrepid English women explored the Arabian Peninsula, crossing conventions as well as borders and, since most grants for exploration were reserved for men, many had to write for their livings. Freya Stark's (1893- 1993) views of the Middle East were written in a number of retrospective narratives: *Letters from Syria*, written in 1927-28 and published in 1942; *Baghdad Sketches*, dealing with her visit of 1929, published by E. P. Dutton & Co. in New York in 1938; and her *Traveller's Prelude: Autobiography*, covering the years from 1927 to 1937, which was not published by Murray until 1950. However, in an interview published in *Saudi Aramco World* in 1977, she comments:

Well, my feelings haven't changed. I remember my first sight of the Rawallah camels south of Damascus. I had never seen camels loose before outside a zoo, and suddenly the whole earth seemed full of these creatures, browsing along, apparently going very slowly. But really although I was young then, I could hardly keep up with them as I rushed to take photographs. That was my first vision, and I've never forgotten it. It was in 1927 just 50 years ago.⁵¹

Her passion for the East started at an early age, when she read *One Thousand and One Nights* which she had received as a gift for her ninth birthday. Her first journey to the Middle East was to Syria and Lebanon in 1927. She comments: 'I never imagined that my first sight of the desert would come with such a shock of beauty and enslave me right away.'⁵² Not satisfied with following the well-trodden paths of former travellers, she ventured into the isolated fortresses of the Assassins in Syria and the deep south of the Arabian Peninsula to reach the valley of Hadhramaut, where few travellers had been before. According to Betty P. Greene, Stark 'never sentimentalizes the lives and lands that so obviously fascinate her. She is willing to admit frustration and discomfort, and to express affection, amusement and irritation ... without a trace of condescension.'⁵³ However, her sympathy with the Arabs is easily recognised and Stark was against the colonial policies of the British in the Middle East: 'The fact of the matter is that your colonial officer has the task of a parent multiplied a hundredfold — the task of an *adoptive*

parent who has no family likeness to help him. Adoption in the first place may or may not have been justified ...⁵⁴ She was interested in the people, rather than the land and its strategic or monetary value. So closely did she identify with the Arabs that she often dressed as an Arab herself, which ‘shocked the British community’.⁵⁵ It was the eternal fear of the Colonialist, that of “going native”.

Cross-dressing and cultural cross-dressing allowed travellers to take on an ambiguous identity in their travelogues, and to become both the observer and the observed. In a sense, it allowed a sort of blending, but it was hardly a practical necessity for European travellers. Ironically, Stark seems to have frequently reversed the role. In Malise Ruthven’s Obituary of Freya Stark, she insists:

It is as the writer of beautifully measured prose, rather than as a traveller or as an exotic ‘character’ who wore Dior in the wilder reaches of Asia and Arabian dresses in London, that Freya Stark will ultimately be remembered.⁵⁶

This may be true, but it is also true that in Stark’s attempt to understand women’s lives under Islam, she went to the extent of wearing the veil herself:

It was a weird feeling to know that really one’s life depended on not being recognized; and still weirder to see people looking straight at one and to remind oneself that they couldn’t possibly see through the black veil.⁵⁷

Stark did not criticise the Muslim separation of the genders, but rather echoed Lady Montagu and Lady Elizabeth Craven, who believed that the harem and the veil guaranteed women freedom from the gaze of strangers.⁵⁸ In an interview published in *Saudi Aramco World* in 1977 Stark stated, ‘I like Arab women. And, of course, I feel women are just as influential when they are shut up as when they are let loose. I think we run the world wherever we happen to be.’⁵⁹ Stark gives voice to the counter opinion of Muslim women who insisted ‘that the veil gave them freedom ... concealed in the anonymous veil, they could go about their business in privacy.’⁶⁰ However, Scheherazade and Salomé notwithstanding, it is difficult to imagine Arab women as autonomous beings, while restricted by the veil and the seclusion of the *Haremlek*: the only power Arab women have comes through their capacity to persuade men.

Stark narrates an example of an Iraqi woman's cunning to maintain the attention of her husband who got himself a second wife:

When she saw that her husband would pay no attention to her, she used to put pepper every night into the baby's eyes, and its wailing filled the house so that it became a nuisance even in the new wife's lodging in the next court. At last it grew so impossible that the husband himself came to her apartment to see what was the matter; and when another baby was born in the course of time, she insisted on calling it "Pepper".⁶¹

Furthermore, Stark admits that 'a careless husband, they seem to think, is not so trying as a bad digestion ... [b]oth are dispensations of providence, over which they have not much control.'⁶² Stark recognises the pre-ordained nature of Arabic life and the fatalistic creed of the Middle East both secular and religious: things are as they are! This is not true for all women, however: when it comes to Western women, Arab Bedouins treated them as if they were a 'third sex',⁶³ honouring them in the main tent with the company of Arab Sheiks, the best food and slaves tending to their needs, but sending them to the women's tents to spend the night there, and Stark was no exception.

Like Bell, Stark recognises that things are changing in the Middle East under Western influence. She detects the change in young Iraqi men who had received a Western education, who are wearing suits and working for the British civil service:

It may be asked why, in all these centuries of Oriental sleep, the young Effendi should only now awaken, like a mass-produced version of the Sleeping Beauty? Who has kissed him? Like a modern beauty who is rarely content to be awakened by one Prince only, I should say that the Effendi has responded to at least three: the internal combustion engine, the (mostly) American educator, and the British Government.⁶⁴

Stark refers to the influence of Western education obtained by Arab men under the British Mandate. The Arabs are also reacting to their internal living conditions, and the Nationalistic Movement was ignited by an educated Arab population who knew more of the Western world than they once did.

British women travel writers wrote about the Middle East in their memoirs, letters, travelogues and novels. The majority were familiar with

Richard Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights* (known as *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*) and Edward FitzGerald's translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, as well as the letters of Lady Montagu and earlier explorers to the East, so that some expressed discontent and disillusionment when writing about places such as Mesopotamia or Persia. Others used the desert to build on the romantic image already established. Freya Stark and Gertrude Bell sought to highlight the differences between the East and the West, sometimes romanticising the East and condoning the colonial policies in the region, but nevertheless Bell especially recognised the potential and particularly worked to ensure that the British kept their promises.

Hull and Egerton, as well as Bell and Stark, use the Near East in their writing to experiment with ideas about gender and female sexuality. The former take up a Salomé-type figure who, in the case of Hull, becomes a French woman given licence to explore her passion and sexuality, and eventually conforms to a Western-style marriage. In the case of Egerton, Salomé is used to allow a thoroughly British woman to fantasise about her sexuality and female desire. The women travel writers examined in this chapter are less interested in the harem — Bell in particular notes that Arab women's fate is in their hands — and more interested in the expression of their own female freedoms. This may take the form of adventuring into the desert or travelling inwards to their own deepest desires. The Middle East becomes a metaphor for both of these journeys.

Through the writings of these four women it is, as Barbara Hodgson declares, 'difficult to come to any broad conclusions about Western women's prejudices or preconceptions about harems.'⁶⁵ These women were exploring themselves. The majority wrote within a colonial discourse tradition with preconceived ideas and a belief in of the superiority of the West. Judy Mabro confirms that Western '[f]emale observers ... have been as ambiguous, as hostile and as Eurocentric as men in this respect, if for different reasons'.⁶⁶ Similarly, Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel confirm this by stating that the study of the white woman's role and contribution in colonial history proves 'complicated by our desire to find resistance when, often, we actually face complicity.'⁶⁷

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

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- ³ 'Death of a Decadent', *Women's Signal*, 3 (1895), p. 289. Quoted in Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism', p. 29.
- ⁴ Ledger, 'The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism', p. 29.
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- ⁷ Alfred Lord Tennyson, 'Fatima', in *The Lady of Shalott and Other Poems*, in *Tennyson: Poems and Plays*, ed. T. Herbert Warren, Revis. Frederic Page, (London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 37.
- ⁸ George Egerton, pp. 27-8.
- ⁹ Egerton, p. 24.
- ¹⁰ Egerton, p. 29.
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- ¹⁴ Elizabeth Gargano, "'English Sheiks" and Arab Stereotypes: E. M. Hull, T. E. Lawrence and the Imperial Masquerade', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 48.2 (2006), 171-86 (p. 171).
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- ²² Teo .
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- ²⁶ Alexandra Warwick, 'Vampires and the Empire', in *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 205.
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- ²⁹ Quoted in Van Nieuwkerk.
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- ⁵⁷ Jane F. Geniesse, *Freya Stark: Passionate Nomad* (London: Pimlico, 2000), p. 96.
- ⁵⁸ Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work* (London, Macmillan, 1992), p. 85. See also Barbara Hodgson, *Dreaming of East: Western Women and the Exotic Allure of the Orient* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2005), p. 113.
- ⁵⁹ Greene, pp. 16-19.
- ⁶⁰ Geniesse, p. 103.
- ⁶¹ Freya Stark, 'Baghdad Sketches', in *The Journey's Echo: Selections from Freya Stark*, ed. by John Murray (London: Cox & Wyman, 1963), p. 20.
- ⁶² Stark, 'Baghdad Sketches', p. 19.
- ⁶³ Geniesse, p. 100.
- ⁶⁴ John Murray, ed. *The Journey's Echo: Selections from Freya Stark* (London: Cox & Wyman Ltd., 1963), p. 125.
- ⁶⁵ Hodgson, p. 111.
- ⁶⁶ Judy Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths: Western Travellers' Perceptions of Middle Eastern Women* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 1996), p. 2.
- ⁶⁷ Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 4.

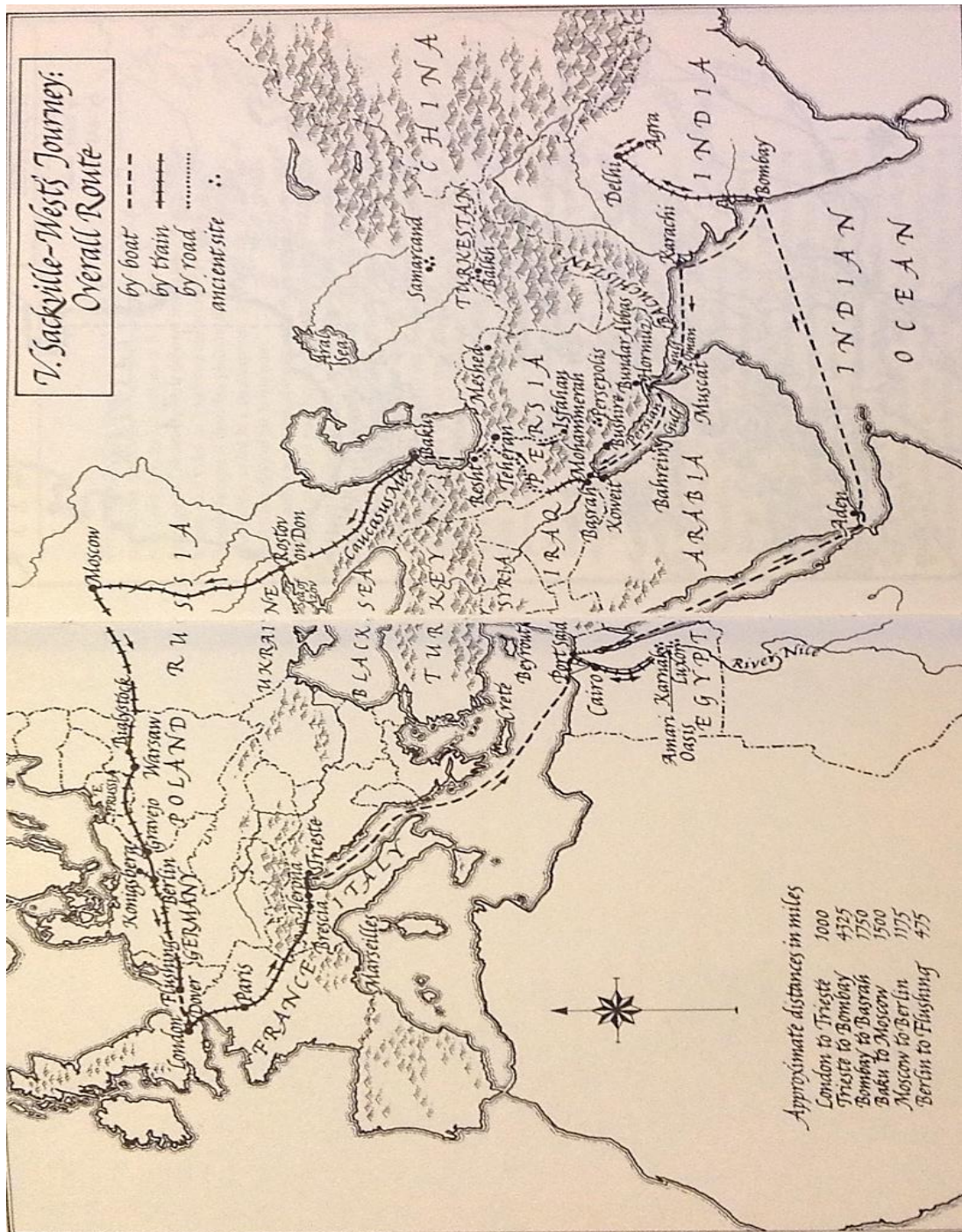


Fig. 6: Vita Sackville West Journey Route, *Passenger to Teheran* (New York: I. B. Tauris and Co., 2007), pp. 14-15

CHAPTER VI

THE HORROR! THE HORROR!

And the riches of the regions will be ours from land to land,
Falling as a willing booty under our marauding hand,
Rugs from Persia, gods from China, emeralds from
Samarcand!

And the old forgotten empires, which have faded turn by
turn,
From the shades emerging slowly to their ancient sway
return,
And to their imperial manhood rise the ashes from the urn.
Vita Sackville-West, 'Nomads', 3 & 4¹

The association of the New Woman with Decadence and the trial of Oscar Wilde meant that not only were these sexually progressive women who demanded recognition of their own sexual desires unpopular, but they were also stigmatised. Caricatures appearing in *Punch* showed women smoking, aggressive and masculinised. Writers such as Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) and, more especially, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) in *Orlando* (1928), take on the already blurred distinctions between men and women. However, Negativity was also demonstrated against women who demanded a place at the ballot box, and more equal working relations between men and women. Women were now being employed in a variety of roles, including office jobs. Ivy Low (1889-1977), friend of D. H. Lawrence and Catherine Carswell, was one such. On one occasion, she writes to Viola Meynell (1885-1956), daughter of the poet Alice Meynell (1847-1922):

I wondered if you would meet me after 5 on any day and
have tea. You take the tube to Chancery Lane and wait at the
corner of Brooke Street Holborn, while four or five hundred
damsels issue forth from the Prudential Assurance Co. Ltd.
You will know me because I don't wear spectacles.²

The women became the subject of Ivy Low's controversial second novel, *The Questing Beast* (1914).³ That novel deals with the lives of women working for the Prudential Assurance Co. Ltd. each day. It chronicles their need to work and the poor wages of £55 per year which were further depleted by miserable fines for lateness. The Prudential Company was among the first to employ

women in their offices and Low describes both the friendship and the spite amongst the women. Controversy arose about her novel because of the seduction of one of the two heroines by an artiled clerk. These office women also became the subject of an Arthur Wallis Mills cartoon (1931) in *Punch* which sees the woman as boss. She is smoking, perky, and standing over her male secretary, persuasively stroking his chin. The cartoon depicts not only the danger to manhood, but also hints at the danger to the wife at home.

Of course, not all wives stayed at home. The well-known crime writer, Agatha Christie (1890-1976), was born Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller and had first-hand experience of the Middle East. She lived in Cairo before World War I with her mother, Clara. They spent three months in the Gezirah Palace Hotel, and Christie had the opportunity to visit the Great Pyramid of Giza. Back in Britain, she met Archibald Christie, an army officer and son of a judge in the Indian Civil Service. The two married in 1914 but, in 1926, Archie asked Agatha for a divorce to which she agreed.⁴ After the divorce in 1928 Agatha kept the Christie name for her writing. Two years later she married Max Mallowan (1904-78) whom she met during an archaeological dig. Their travels to archeological sites in Iraq, Syria and Egypt influenced her novels and provided the setting for several: *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) – which was written in the Pera Palace Hotel in Istanbul, Turkey, the southern terminus of the railway – *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936) and *Death on the Nile* (1937).

In her memoirs *Come, Tell Me How You Live* (1946) Christie points to the difficulty of defining the location of archaeological sites in the Middle East and demonstrates how little is actually known about the region and its people:

[E]xplaining the places where we dig to people is always fraught with a good deal of difficulty. My first answer is usually one word — “Syria.”
 “Oh!” says the average inquirer, already slightly taken aback. A frown forms on his or her forehead. “Yes, of course — Syria ...” Biblical memories stir. “Let me see, that’s Palestine, isn’t it?”
 “It’s next to Palestine,” I say encouragingly. “You know — further up the coast.”⁵

This lack of knowledge about the Middle East may have made it easier for all sorts of people to imagine all sorts of things about it. Christie’s own detective novels tend to show Europeans in the Middle East as an isolated group, often

behaving outside of society and social norms. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, for example, the passengers constitute a jury of twelve who take revenge on a fellow passenger whom they think is the murderer of Daisy Armstrong. In *Death on the Nile* the working class and poor Jacqueline de Bellefort and Simon Doyle join forces to kill Linnet Ridgeway, a wealthy heiress, whom Simon has married. All members of the party appear to be guilty of theft and deceit in a variety of ways, but the magnificent scenery of the Nile forms an exotic backdrop to European greed.

The novels of Agatha Christie do partake of the fantasy and the fantastic Middle East. Christie's works written about the archaeological digs, however, were inspired by her experiences with her second husband Max Mallowan. In these works she does attempt to know something of the people and the place. For example, during a train trip to Istanbul Christie registers an American woman's comment at seeing working women in the fields:

“Poor souls! ... I wonder if they realise that they are free!”

“Free?” I am slightly at a loss.

“Why, certainly; they don't wear the veil any longer.

Mustapha Kemal has done away with all that. They're free now.”

I look thoughtfully at the laboring women. It does not seem to me that the point would have any significance for them.

Their day is a ceaseless round of toil, and I doubt very much if they have ever enjoyed the luxury of veiling their faces.

None of our local workmen's wives do.⁶

Here Christie is correct; as mentioned earlier, working class women seldom wore the veil and were not constricted by the Purdah separation of the sexes. In short, whereas middle and upper class women demanded the right to work, working class women have always worked, both in Britain and the Middle East. The Arab women working in the fields were under the control of their male relations and worked for no pay beyond their keep. The practice was almost an incentive for men and even for women to acquiesce to polygamy, since more wives and children meant more labourers in the fields, and for the women a possibility of increased status as the first wife and of sharing the workload. However, it also meant the sharing of food and housing while continuing to face the miseries of being on the bottom of the social construct.

Virginia Woolf expresses her opinion of the oriental veil in her memoirs *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals, 1897-1909*, in which she talks about her trip to Constantinople in 1906:

Were we not told for instance, that the female sex was held of such small account in Constantinople – or rather it was so strictly guarded – that a European lady walking unveiled might have her boldness rudely chastised? But the streets are full of single European ladies, who pass unmarked; and that veil which we heard so much of – because it was typical of a different stage of civilization and so on is a very frail symbol. Many native women walk bare faced; and the veil when worn is worn casually, and cast aside if the wearer happens to be curious. But it does have so much virtue in it as to suggest that it hides something rare and spotless, so that you gaze all the more at a forbidden face.⁷

In this statement, Woolf admits to the power and mystery of the veil, although she underrates its significance. She acknowledges the issue of a third sex, whereby European women enjoy much more freedom than their Oriental sisters of similar rank. They can walk the streets ‘unmarked’. Agatha Christie, like many women travellers to the Middle East, was also regarded as a third sex by local workmen who worked at her husband’s dig for archaeological artifacts. The local workmen interacted directly and respectfully toward her and she had little contact with their wives. Back in Britain, however, and because of Christie’s travelling and working with her husband as well as a capacity to earn her own living, she does represent one of the number of middle class women who managed to have a marriage and a working life, albeit in an “allowable” occupation.

Christie, in her detective novels, champions those other women who have always worked, the spinsters. After World War I spinsters and widows in Britain were numerous:

More than 700,000 British men were killed during World War One. This tragic loss of life affected the lives of young women in 1920s Britain ... The middle classes were especially affected with a higher proportion of officers killed than those in lower ranks. The 700,000 deaths resulted in a particularly large gap between the male and female populations of people aged 25 to 34 with 1,158,000 unmarried women and 919,000 unmarried men, according to the 1921 census.⁸

The spinsters of World War I became a repository for society's trauma over the loss of a generation of men:

In the 1920s spinsters were broadly viewed as a disruptive and sexually disturbing influence on every part of society. Equally, because many had entered the workplace, willingly or not, they were blamed for male unemployment or viewed as a drain on family resources.⁹

Up until this point spinsters in literary texts have had an unenviable life. They have been seen as companions, housekeepers, nannies, and always as a burden. In Charlotte Brontë's eponymous novel, for example, Jane Eyre works as a governess rather than a companion, nor does she wish to care for others' children. She manages eventually to marry into a situation which is now, more or less, based on some sort of equality, but Mr. Rochester has become partially blind and crippled in order to achieve this equality. Lucy Grey in *Villette* does manage to achieve a working life and to marry M. Paul but he is fortuitously lost at sea which allows Lucy to own her own school. In short, the spinster was seen as superfluous and useless.

The image of the spinster as lonely, sexually frustrated, and a burden upon others is changed by Christie. Kathy Mezei comments that the image: 'is exposed [by Agatha Christie] and to some extent undone in the characters of Miss Marple [and] Miss Mole.'¹⁰ While the spinster characters in Christie's novels appear to be regulated by those with greater economic strength and who, therefore, possess a superior place and moral authority in the family, this is not always the case. Miss Marple, for example, is always a 'visitor' and often much loved, but in the first instance she is hardly taken seriously. Nevertheless, she is, as Mezei suggests:

[U]niquely situated as an instrument of surveillance precisely because of her marginal and indeterminate position. Her narrative function, in representing the dialectic between seeing and being seen, omniscience and invisibility, often mirrors the ambiguous and hidden role of the author/narrator in relation to his/her characters.¹¹

This focus on the spinster endows her with power and control and, as Mezei suggests, she does become a stand-in for the author, rendering Christie a modernist writer. Even the spinster's apparent invisibility within society gives her a perfect opportunity for surveillance, eavesdropping, and overhearing

conversations. In this way the spinster in a difficult economy becomes an altogether more pro-active figure, and may be seen as ‘a potentially radical transgressive figure’ who might move beyond social convention and morals, and, more importantly, the normalising concepts of home and heterosexual families.¹²

As the New Woman sparked fears in parts of the population, associations with this concept were firmly those of Middle Eastern women. William B. Yeats’ (1865-1939) poem *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*, published in 1928, reflects on the Irish War of Independence that began in 1919 when the IRA shot dead two Irish policemen in county Tipperary. This act saw the Catholic Church and the Black (uniformed policemen) and Tans (the colour worn by the army) fight an undisciplined war, until the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 which created something of a truce. The narrator of Yeats’ poem contemplates the many ‘lovely things’ that are gone: not only ‘Phidias’ famous ivories’ are gone but also the things of nature, ‘the golden grasshoppers and bees’. Now he contemplates an Ireland ‘dragon-ridden’ with drunken soldiers murdering mothers, and while the plan to bring ‘the world under a rule’ has been destroyed, yet ‘Man is in love and loves what vanishes’. The bleak picture which comes in Part I of the poem is awash with hopelessness but by Part IV bitterness and cynicism have appeared:

We who seven years ago
Talked of honour and of truth,
Shriek with pleasure if we show
The weasel’s twist, the weasel’s tooth.

It is at this point that the narrator uses the dance of Herodias’ daughters to imply the havoc in Ireland:

All break and vanish, and evil gathers head:
Herodias’ daughters have returned again,
A sudden blast of dusty wind and after
Thunder of feet, tumult of images,
Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind;
And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter
All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries,
According to the wind, for all are blind.¹³

The fact that Yeats uses classical mythology to demonstrate what has been lost, but uses the dusty desert winds and Herodias' daughters to signify the chaos that has superseded the loss, suggests a supernatural female force at work.

In Part I of the poem, the 'ingenious lovely things' were once 'Protected from the circle of the moon | That pitches common things about.' The moon, as well as being associated with madness, is also a female image. Wilde too associated Salomé with the moon. That moon was associated with chastity, purity, beauty, but was also associated with lust and madness. However, in Wilde's play *Salomé* is portrayed as a victim of a *fin de siècle* chaotic and meaningless world, until driven to create a chaos of her own. Here, Herodias' daughters have multiplied and are blind. Their cries are both amorous and angry:

And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter
All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries,
According to the wind, for all are blind.¹⁴

Kerry Powell suggests that Wilde's *Salomé*, as a play, belongs to the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd.¹⁵ In this sense, *Salomé* becomes a figure of action in a world which has rendered action obsolete. Powell comments:

Wilde gives us a heroine who lusts after and murders John the Baptist for an erotic frisson, and who traverses both sides of the customary borders of gender, a beautiful and "pure" young woman who also claims possession of masculine power and authority.¹⁶

This type of heroine leaves her impression on the women travellers to the Middle East during this period, but they have little to say about their Middle Eastern counterparts and the Middle East remains home to a fantastical world in which a transgressive western heroine may play out her fictions – a world in which anything is possible.

The Hon. Victoria Mary Sackville-West, Lady Nicolson, or Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962), was a successful and prolific novelist, poet, journalist, and garden designer. She married Sir Harold George Nicolson KCVO CMG (1886-1968) in 1913. The two had an open marriage and various sexual partners. Sir Harold was a British diplomat delegated to Constantinople in 1912 where the two lived until returning home in 1914. In 1925 Sir Harold was posted to Teheran for two years, so that, again, Sackville-West travelled to

Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, and Persia while visiting her husband. An interpretive and personal account of Sackville-West's travels to the Near East may be found in *Poems of West and East* (1917), a collection of her early poetry. Her travelogues *Passenger to Teheran* (1926) and *Twelve Days in Persia: An Account of a Journey Across the Bakhtiari Mountains of South-Western Persia* (1927) describe Egypt, India, Iraq and Persia in a more disinterested manner, with minimal personal commentary. However, she shares with Gertrude Bell a colonialist discourse that, in many ways, reduces the Arab world to a juvenile community in need of control and help. Brianna E. Hyslop suggests that Sackville-West engages, in an 'almost unconscious'¹⁷ manner, in a latent Orientalist discourse depicting 'the East as a place of arrested development' and the Oriental individual as a 'backward, not fully developed human being'.¹⁸ David Spurr in *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* comments that the obsession with maintaining the 'European standards of civility'¹⁹ and the debasement of the 'Other' arise 'not simply from fear and the recognition of difference but also, on another level, from a desire for and identification with the Other which must be resisted'.²⁰

Passenger to Teheran follows Sackville-West's journey from London, through France and Italy, to Egypt's Port Said, and from there to Cairo, from which she takes a short trip to Luxor before returning to Port Said via Cairo. Then, travelling across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean via Aden, she arrives at Mumbai (then Bombay) and tours Delhi, Agra and Jaipur before returning to Mumbai and sailing to Karachi. A ship takes her into the Persian Gulf, arriving at Basrah in Iraq. A train takes her to Baghdad, where she meets Gertrude Bell (1868-1926) before travelling to Teheran, in Persia, to meet her husband. It seems that her encounters with Arabs and indeed Indians are all too brief: 'What were Arabs to me or I to them, as we thus briefly crossed one another? They in their robes, noble and squalid, of impenetrable life; and I a traveller, making for the station?'²¹ Then, when her Persian guide, Seyed, shows her his two houses with two different women, she refrains from asking him about the second woman; '[t]hese were things which I could never know, however much they interested me; secrets which I must leave ... to the sacred village and the Persian merchant.'²² Pan Arabic is by now well established in the West, and

differentiation between the different peoples of the Middle East does not occur. India also seems a closed book to her. In a letter to Virginia Woolf of 20 February 1926, she seems to equate Indians with animals, telling Woolf that she saw ‘faces of animals and of men; buffaloes and Hindus, horned or turbaned’.²³ India, the land itself, is described as ‘uninhabited’ despite its contemporaneous population of 320 million who are ‘the same colour as the earth, so they don’t show up’.²⁴

However, *Passenger to Teheran* is no ordinary travelogue. It begins by stating that ‘[t]ravel is the most private of pleasures. There is no greater bore than the travel bore.’²⁵ In her work, Sackville-West does not offer a conventional travelogue with descriptions of countryside, peoples, cultures, and habits, awash with historical and political information. In ‘To Egypt’ she quotes Kinglake (1809-91),²⁶ in his Preface to *Eothen Eothen; Or Traces of Travel Brought Home from the East* (1844), who declares himself free of all details of geography, antiquity, history, science, statistics, politics ‘and all good moral reflections’.²⁷ Sackville-West hopes that she will be able to say the same. In *Twelve Days in Persia: Across the Mountains with the Bakhtiari Tribe* her journey takes her, as Christopher de Bellaigue comments:

[A]mong some of the wildest inhabitants of Persia, the Bakhtiari tribe – whose origins, lost in antiquity, remained (and remain) the subject of romantic speculation. And if, after getting home, she is ‘loath to let the whole thing go unrecorded’, it is less that she has valuable new information to impart than that she sees her own life as a necklace of epiphanies, each one important, each one asking for recognition. She will ‘clap the net over the butterfly of the moment’.²⁸

What we discover from reading *Passenger to Teheran* and *Twelve Days in Persia* is not so much about the places visited, but how those places made Sackville-West, and sometimes others, feel. Sackville-West does not hesitate to register her disgust with the primitiveness and filth of some of the areas she visited. She describes Aden as ‘the most repulsive corner of the world [Rimbaud] could find’²⁹ and refers to India as a ‘loathsome place, without one shred of any quality, and I never want to go there again’.³⁰

Sackville-West expresses her disillusionment with the Orient in both her letters and her travel books. In *Passenger to Teheran* she rebuts the Middle

East's romantic appeal, describing Teheran as a 'squalid city',³¹ and she refutes Baghdad as the setting of the Arabian Nights, 'for anyone who goes to Baghdad in search of romance will be disappointed':³²

Baghdad is a dusty jumble of mean buildings connected by atrocious streets, quagmires of mud in rainy weather, and in dry weather a series of pits and holes over which an English farmer might well hesitate to drive a waggon.³³

Similarly, she informs Woolf that Baghdad has nothing to do with the Oriental setting of *Hassan*,³⁴ a play they both watched in 1923, but is rather 'a merry muddle of donkeys, motors, Arabs, dogs, mud, cabs, and camels'.³⁵ She considers Persians 'childish', suffering from 'ignorance and lack of imagination'³⁶ and describes Iran as 'one of the few countries where the intervening, that is to say the nineteenth century, conveniences of civilization will perhaps never be known.'³⁷

Sackville-West is the external observer who has no interest in changing the external circumstances of the Middle East, but is more interested in the effects upon herself. She criticises the Eurocentric and the British expectation that 'everything should be the same, even in Central Asia, as it is in England',³⁸ and the European inclination to 'pretend that they are living in Europe'.³⁹ She refers to Persia 'in a tone of grievance, as though the speaker were a martyr condemned for his sins to endure a term of punishment.'⁴⁰ Nevertheless, she cannot resist comparing Persia to England when it comes to the use of roads and transportation:

[Persians] treat a motor exactly as though it were a pack-animal. For generations they have been accustomed to heap their camels and their donkeys with various merchandise ... You meet upon the road objects which the average English chauffeur would scarcely recognize as motorcars. The poor little Fords almost disappear under the huge bales that swell out over the mud-guards.⁴¹

She establishes a contrast between the 'childish' Persian who treats a car like a donkey or a camel, and an English driver who considers this a form of abuse toward the 'poor little Fords'.

However, not all Persians of the Middle East live in squalor. In a postscript to a letter addressed to Woolf on 8 April 1926, she eulogises the treasury of the Crown jewels of Reza Shah Pahlavi:

I am blind. Blinded by diamonds.
 I have been in Aladdin's cave.
 Sacks of emerald were emptied out before our eyes. Sacks of
 pearls. *Literally*.
 We came away shaking the pearls out of our shoes. Ropes of
 uncut emeralds. Scabbards encrusted with precious stones.
 Great hieratic crowns.
 All this in a squalid room, with grubby Persians drinking
 little cups of tea.
 I can't write about it now. It was simply the Arabian Nights,
 with décor by the Sitwells. Pure fantasy. Oh, *why* weren't
 you there?⁴²

Here Sackville-West describes a veritable Aladdin's cave which to British eyes fulfils all of the excesses and fantasies of the Middle East. She herself played a part in setting the stage for this fantasy by arranging the Palace for the Coronation.⁴³ It is, however, on those occasions to which she refers as 'pure fantasy' that she most misses Virginia Woolf: 'Oh, *why* weren't you there?'

The letters to Woolf, in comparison with *Passenger to Teheran*, adopt a flirtatious tone and like the flirtations of Mr. Rochester and Jane Eyre, the words crackle with sexuality and passion. In an earlier letter to Woolf, Sackville West remarks:

Will you ever play truant to Bloomsbury and culture, I wonder and come travelling with me? No, of course you won't. I told you once I would rather go to Spain with you than with anyone, and you looked confused, and I felt I had made a gaffe, – been too personal, in fact, – but still the statement remains a true one, and I shan't be really satisfied till I have enticed you away.⁴⁴

Sackville-West associates travel and movement with boundary crossings, both literal and figurative. Kirstie Blair comments on the correlation of gypsy references and lesbianism in the letters of Sackville-West:

When Vita Sackville-West tries to persuade Virginia Woolf to run away with the "zingaros", Spanish gypsies, she alludes to a discourse evident both in her earlier relationships with women and in her novels *Challenge* and *Heritage*, where gypsies represent liberation, excitement, and the free expression of sexuality. Sackville-West's fantasy of homelessness among the gypsies provides the imagined means for two women lovers to value their estrangement from familiar and familial settings, to make it a virtue, part of their true selves.⁴⁵

The underlying passion and frustration of Sackville-West's feelings for Virginia Woolf form a subtext to much of *Passenger to Teheran*. Clearly the work serves as a memoir of the passenger herself rather than a travelogue to the places visited. One notes for instance in the earlier quotation, that Arab lives are 'impenetrable', they meet only briefly, and she a 'traveller, making for the station?'⁴⁶ The emphasis lies with movement, rather than knowing.

When Sackville-West does write of her surroundings, her descriptions are spontaneous and lacking in commentary. In a sense, none is necessary if one takes photographs. Her descriptions work like an impressionist painting:

Persian snow mountains in the distance, on the rim of the plain, blue and white, foothills nearer at hand, like North-Country Fells, tawny in the curious, intense light, tawny through every shade of brown, from yellow through ochre to burnt umber.⁴⁷

Sackville-West takes few photos of Near Eastern women and it does seem that she did not interact with many. In a letter to Virginia Woolf she mentions a tea party with Persian women whom she describes as '[r]avishing women; almond eyes, red lips, babbling like little birds, pulling their veils about them whenever they heard a noise.'⁴⁸ This seems a masculine gaze that sees 'only the surface'⁴⁹ and renders the women sexual objects. There is nothing of intellect or depth to these women, they merely babble, like little birds. She obscures the presence of tradition, issues, and the very life of the women in the Middle East, although she is sometimes aware of what is missed:

Strange, harsh faces pass by; and women secreted behind the eternal veil; women chaffering for bread; but these people ... have their life, their beliefs, their creed, their fanaticism.⁵⁰

She does endow these 'unknown' women with fanaticism, whereas her experience is not dissimilar to that of Ezra Pound (1885-1972) in the poem 'In a Station at the Metro' (1926):

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Middle Eastern women are enclosed within a concept of the "unknowable" no effort is made to "know".

It may be that Sackville-West was travelling inside herself, searching for a true self rather than a true "Other", and she chooses the travelogue as a vehicle for

this search. Yet she had little faith in the capacity of the travel book, or even her letters, to communicate what she really needed to say and found:

[An] incapacity to communicate to one another the simplest experience of our factual and emotional life. Who amongst us could boast that, transplanted into the mind of another person, even though that person be his nearest, he would not find himself in a strange country.⁵¹

Nevertheless, travel to new lands and distant places is a romantic notion, but that romance seems an irrational concept, based on material things – ‘geography ... is concrete and finite.’⁵² However, the empirical world of the Arab is pulled into an Arabic world that allows the transgressive female to transcribe a self. As Kelly Joyce suggests:

Travel to remote regions was especially transgressive for many Western women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who sought both escape and pleasure abroad. These women, themselves “Other” to masculine concepts of biology, thought, emotion, and sexuality, found the authority they were denied at home by becoming experts of an exotic area. The Otherness they found served as a vehicle for inscribing something new, even something unspoken about themselves.⁵³

Sackville-West mingles with men in the Middle East, such as her Persian guide Saeed, and enjoys the privileges of the ‘third sex’ that is accorded quite different treatment by Arab and Persian males if compared to the treatment rendered to local women. Sackville-West’s son, Nigel Nicolson, records Virginia Woolf’s comment when reading the typescript of *Passenger to Teheran*. She wrote to Vita, ‘[i]t’s awfully good ... I didn’t know the extent of your subtleties ... not the sly, brooding, thinking, evading Vita. The whole book is full of nooks and crannies, the very intimate things one says in print.’⁵⁴

Both Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West have viewed the Middle East, not as a geographical space, but as an erotic fantasy space into which they can, in effect, project transgressive, cross-cultural and cross-gender versions of themselves. In their letters, both women play with the idea of androgyny and even when cross-dressing is a necessity, because of the cold, it takes on a flirtatious air:

Well, I have been stuck in a river, crawled between ramparts of snow ... been backed and frozen alternately, travelled alone with ten men (all strangers), slept in odd places ... [w]orn a silk dress one day, and a sheepskin and fur cap the next.⁵⁵

Here the cross-dressing enforced by physical circumstance is brought into line with the silk dress worn on another day, suggesting that the two are interchangeable, but without indicating which might be 'real' or which 'fantasy', while the oddity of the contrasts gives travelling alone with ten strange men, the sleeping in odd places, and the occasional wearing of a silk dress an air of single sexual fantasy. Joanna Grant comments that:

[t]he power of the shared fantasy creates an alternate reality, one in which these two married Englishwomen can escape their husbands' last names and the weight of the social system.⁵⁶

It is well known that the young Virginia Woolf took part in the Dreadnought Hoax of 1910,⁵⁷ which caused general amusement when it reached the pages of the *Daily Mirror*, but her pleasure in this incident was no doubt enhanced by the fact that she also transgressed by wearing male Eastern attire. There seems something transformative about the fascination with desert life, and Sackville-West's adventures are at least partly driven by the emptiness and general attempt in Britain after World War I to return women to their former roles.

Woolf writes a sad letter about the social rounds:

Three old men, round about 60, have discovered that Vanessa is living in sin with Duncan Grant, and that I have written *Mrs. Dalloway* – which equals living in sin. Their method of showing their loathing is to come to call, to ask Vanessa if she ever sells a picture, and me if I've been in a lunatic asylum lately.⁵⁸

For her part, Sackville-West suggests that ever since she left England, she has been 'like a person in an advanced stage of intoxication. Cocktails made not of gin and vermouth, but of thrill and misery, adventure and homesickness.'⁵⁹ In other words, her escape enabled her to actually feel again. On 28 January 1927 Sackville-West left London for her second visit to Persia and in 1928 Virginia Woolf wrote *Orlando: A Biography*.

Woolf's *Orlando* has been described by Leila Jamili as a narrative of 'boundary crossings of space, gender and sex as well as the reflection of

Woolf's telescopic view of the East.⁶⁰ Woolf depicts, in her biography of Orlando, a rich colourful Oriental Constantinople that becomes the location for the metamorphosis of her eponymous protagonist from male colonist to a female traveller. By the 1920s, as Meyda Yeğençlü comments, 'latent Orientalism reflects the site of the unconscious, where dreams, images, desires, fantasies and fears reside'.⁶¹ Others have commented that Woolf attaches to the image of the Orient, an 'unclear, mystery and omen-loaded sexuality'.⁶² From the very beginning Woolf casts a shadow over Orlando's sexual identity by confirming his maleness so emphatically in capital letters: 'FOR THERE COULD BE NO DOUBT of his sex'.⁶³ Orlando is a descendant of a noble family in England who, mysteriously, never grows old.

The narrator/biographer begins with a description of the colonising Orlando 'in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters' (p. 5) in a mock-heroic style. The head belongs to 'a vast Pagan who had started up under the moon in the barbarian fields of Africa' (p. 5). Thus the young male protagonist exhibits a sixteenth-century imperial conquering attitude as an integral part of his masculine identity: he dreams of lunging and plunging the '[p]agan[s]' in Africa as his forefathers did before him. Kathy Phillips points to this imperial attitude, calling it 'Orlando's acquired definition of masculinity as aggression, enacted against ... Moors'.⁶⁴ However, the issue of ambiguous sexuality continues as Orlando, who is described as a boy, falls in love with the androgynous Muscovite Princess Marousha Stanilovska Dagmar Natasha Iliana Romanovitch:

Legs, hands, carriage, were a boy's, but no boy ever had a mouth like that; no boy had those breasts; no boy had eyes which looked as if they had been fished from the bottom of the sea. (p. 17)

He calls her Sasha and falls in love with her despite the fact that '[t]he Lady Margaret O'Brien O'Dare O'Reilly Tyrconnel (for that was the proper name of Euphrosyne of the Sonnets) wore Orlando's splendid sapphire ...' (p. 19). He plans to elope with Sasha, and his horses are left at the inn, near Blackfriars, while he waits for Sasha to join him in this enterprise. However, Sasha seems to have joined her sailor on the ship of the Muscovite Embassy, which was 'standing out to sea.' (p. 30). Orlando was bereft and became a forsaken lover

– ‘and gave himself up to a life of extreme solitude’ (p. 32). At this point in the novel our narrator/biographer makes it clear that the reader must bear some responsibility for the tale. She writes for the sort of reader who can know: ‘often when we say nothing about it, exactly what he looks like; know without a word ... precisely what he thought — and it is for readers such as these that we write ...’ (p. 35). The acknowledgement that the reader must bear some, if not most, of the responsibility for such an unpredictable text creates that feeling of unease most associated with satire.

The fantastic setting and plot of *Orlando* renders the biography difficult to follow; even at this early point in the novel our narrator is troubled with the direction the work is taking and admits that:

The biographer is now faced with difficulty which it is better to confess than to gloss over. Up to this point in telling the story of Orlando’s life, documents both private and historical, have made it possible to fulfil the first duty of a biographer, which is to plod, without looking right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth ... till we fall plump into the grave and write *finis* on the tombstone above our heads. (p. 31)

Our narrator is correct; the plot of biography does depend somewhat upon the character of its protagonist being clearly defined and with some sense of unity between past and present. The social and geographical world in which the character finds him- or herself must similarly be consistent with itself, and where possible, objectified and true. Orlando fails to correspond with this expectation, however hard he tries to attach himself to one of life’s ordinary plots. His attempts to foster great poetry in a man he believes capable of the same, come to nothing: ‘Tell me, he wanted to say, everything in the whole world ... but how to speak to a man who sees ogres, satyrs, perhaps the depth of the sea instead’ (p. 9). His attempts to fall hopelessly in love have likewise come to nothing, and the author admits that the Elizabethan setting for Orlando’s adventures may not have helped:

Their morals were not ours, nor their poets, nor their climate, nor their vegetables even ... [s]unsets were redder and more intense, dawns were whiter and more auroral ... [t]he rain fell vehemently, or not at all ... [t]ranslating this to the spiritual

reason as their wont is, the poets sang beautifully how roses fade and petals fall. The moment is brief, they sang; the moment is over ... [t]he withered intricacies and ambiguities of our more gradual and doubtful age were unknown to them. (p. 12)

The narrator paints a picture of a world in which people were still capable of great feeling and certainty about their world, but as Orlando moves from one fantastic event to the next the reader comes to understand that Orlando is not the protagonist of a *bildungsroman*, but rather an adventure story; as an adventurer he is unrestricted by the fetters of time and space, and can change sex, location, and opinion as the need arises.

Bakhtin, referring to the novels of Dostoevsky, remarks:

As regards the adventure hero also, it is impossible to say who he is. He has no firm socially typical or individually characterological qualities out of which a stable image of his character, type, or temperament might be composed ... [t]o the adventure hero anything can happen, he can become anything. He too is not a substance, but a pure function of adventures and escapades. The adventure hero is ... not finalized and not predetermined by his image.⁶⁵ (p. 101)

The circle of connections that heroes might establish, the circle of events through which they move are not limited to, nor by, their character, nor in fact by any social or geographical world in which they find themselves. Nothing is excluded for the adventure hero and if, at this point in the text, our narrator/biographer has despaired of her biography, then transportation into the world of adventure may give expression to something else:

[T]he impulse to introduce the extraordinary into the very thick of the commonplace, to fuse into one, according to Romantic principles, the sublime with the grotesque, and by an imperceptible process of conversion to push images and phenomena of everyday reality to the limits of the fantastic.⁶⁶

Numerous critics have commented on the satiric aspects of Woolf's *Orlando* but the work also demonstrates something of the carnivalesque. When Orlando decides to leave England he learns that love 'has two faces; one white, the other black; one smooth the other hairy ... and each the exact opposite of the other ... Yet so strictly are they joined together that you cannot separate them.' Unable to cope with this ambiguity, Orlando takes on a role as ambassador to Constantinople during the reign of King Charles (p. 57). It is here that his

adventures become more fantastic and more transgressive, demonstrating yet again that setting a novel or a poem in the Middle East allows the author a space in which anything is possible and the search for (biographical) truth becomes dialogic as binary opposites are tested against each other.

Orlando, once in the Middle East, is not subject to gender boundaries or even time itself and shows every sign of living forever. He leaves behind the murderous persona who sliced at Moor's head, brought home by his father, and excels in carrying out the duties of ambassador. He pleases King Charles who confers the Star of the Order of the Bath along with the title of a Duke upon him. The fragmented description of the ceremony in Constantinople at which Orlando's dukedom is conferred is reminiscent of discussions of Constantinople that took place with Vita Sackville-West's husband, Harold Nicolson.⁶⁷ There is also Vita Sackville-West's description of Shah Reza's birthday dinner party which took place in the Foreign Office in Teheran on 15 March 1926. Sackville-West's 'derisive'⁶⁸ attitude towards the Shah's birthday party is apparent. Before drinking to the health of the eleven states represented,

[T]heir national anthems must be played; and, glass in hand, we endure God Save the King, the Brabaçonne, (I feel the Belgian minister stiffen to attention,) the International Soviet Hymn, the Marseillaise, the Wacht am Rhein, and six unidentifiable minor powers.⁶⁹

Here the sarcasm mocks the solemnity of Europe's colonisation of the Middle East and the pretence of order that accompanies it. In Woolf's novel the imitation of British practices, albeit accompanied by Turkish rugs and a Turkish-speaking ambassador in Orlando's conferment ceremony, becomes wholly carnivalesque:

From the *Gazette* of the time, we gather that "As the clock struck twelve, the Ambassador appeared on the centre Balcony which was hung with priceless rugs. Six Turks of the Imperial Body Guard, each over six foot in height, held torches to his right and left. Rockets rose into the air at his appearance, and a great shout went up from the people ... (p. 63)

The ceremony takes place at the magical moment of midnight, and despite its elegance the Turkish people seem disappointed: '[e]ither the people had

expected a miracle — some say a shower of gold was prophesied to fall from the skies — which did not happen, or this was the signal chosen for the attack to begin ... (p. 63). In either event, Orlando falls into a deep sleep for more than a week and, upon waking, finds that he has become a woman.

In the first instance, Woolf employs the sexual transformation of Orlando to reveal a difference between male and female approaches, both to the East, and to the relationship between East and West. The male Orlando began his journey as ambassador as of 'English root and fibre' (p. 59), and as a true representative of British imperial/colonial dominance in the Orient. He maintains masculine traits and the formalities of his position as long as he is a man. He observes, from his balcony, the city 'beneath him' (p. 58) which was wholly unlike the counties of Surrey and Kent, filled as it was with the 'very breath of the strident multi-coloured and barbaric population (p. 58). Later, from the same balcony he unlocked boxes of highest importance with his 'golden key' (p. 59) and pretended to be smoking hookah with dignitaries of state (p. 60). Of these boxes nothing is known, so secret were they, but what with his 'waxes and seals' and his 'various coloured ribbons' he was kept busy until lunch time. As Said observes, 'the Orientalist surveys the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama before him — culture, religion, mind, history, society.'⁷⁰ Woolf seems similarly unimpressed by the enterprise.

However, this masculine/colonial attitude, rife with phallic symbols, changes when Orlando turns into a woman. He awakens, and like Rip Van Winkle, having missed the native's rebellion, is now a woman: 'the Ambassador of Great Britain at the Court of the Sultan' leaves Constantinople on a donkey, attended by a dog, in company of a gypsy. Instead the remote observer who gazed at the Eastern landscape from the distance of his balcony, the female Orlando dresses as a gypsy and travels among Turkish gypsies into the mountains that, as a man she 'had looked at from her balcony at the Embassy[and] often had longed to be there' (p. 68). As a man, she had even wondered whether, during the Crusades, an ancestor had taken up with a Circassian peasant woman and, thinking it possible, had 'fancied a certain darkness [of] complexion.' (p. 59). The Arabs, however, refer to Circassian people as having a fair complexion,⁷¹ rendering Orlando's 'certain darkness

[of] complexion' perhaps more imagined than real. Nevertheless, this hint of darkness and his wish to be among the gypsies in the mountains is realised when he is a female.

Orlando dresses in Turkish unisex clothes that neither confirm nor deny her gender, but she is treated as a working woman:

She milked the goats; she collected brushwood; she stole a hen's egg now and then ... she herded cattle; she stripped the vines; she trod the grape; she filled the goat-skin and drank from it; and when she remembered how, at this time of day, she should have been making the motions of drinking and smoking ... she laughed out loud, ... and begged for a puff from old Rustum's pipe, filled though it was with cow dung. (p. 69)

This is hardly a natural idyll, and although it does offer fewer constraints it is not the place of absolute freedom to be oneself, as envisaged by Sackville-West. The work is hard and luxuries are few. Woolf goes on to suggest that:

[H]er dark hair and dark complexion bore out the belief that she was, by birth, one of them and had been snatched by an English Duke from a nut tree when she was a baby and taken to that barbarous land where people live in houses because they are too feeble and diseased to stand in the open air. (p. 69)

This is such a reversal of the Desert Romance, in which women marry Sheiks and other upper echelons of the Arabic world, as to render such tales ridiculous. *The Sheikh* and *The Sons of the Sheikh* were both supportive of the more paternal aspects of British colonialism. Orlando, through these contrasting images of opulence and poverty, does exactly the opposite, suggesting that people in the brick-bound world of Britain have become weak and feeble.

The gypsy episode in *Orlando* draws something from the form of Bakhtin's notions of Menippean Satire, which features experimental fantasy and sharp changes to the scale of what is described, in this case British colonial superiority. Alternate selves and a disruption of accepted codes are such a marked feature of *Orlando* in the Constantinople episode as to constitute a satiric attack on British colonial attitudes to the Middle East. However, as an adventure hero, Orlando's fantastic world functions like those of Menippean satire in which, Bahktin suggests:

[t]he fantastic ...serves not for the positive embodiment of truth, but as a mode for searching after truth, provoking it, and, the most important, testing it. To this end the heroes of Menippean satire ascend into heaven, descend into the nether world, wander through unknown and fantastic lands, are placed in extraordinary life situations.⁷²

It has already been suggested that the work is dialogic, both in terms of its interrogation of British colonialism and sexual identity, and D. A. Boxwell comments on Woolf's performative style and sensibility:

The work plainly and simply purports to be a biography in its subtitle, yet it soon becomes apparent that *Orlando* fulfils the author's intention, as she expressed it in her diary, to write "half in a mock style very clear and plain" (3:162). Unashamedly thieving from a multitude of genres, *Orlando* functions subversively and comically as mock biography, burlesque literary history, spoof *bildungsroman*, parodic *Künstlerroman* fantastic picaresque, and chic *roman à clef*.⁷³

Boxwell identifies the style of Woolf's novel as 'camp', and goes on to suggest that: '[i]n Foucauldian terms, it is possible to see that camp, in the modern era, has been a means of "disseminating and implanting polymorphous sexualities"', as a way of 'transforming same-sex desire into discourse.'⁷⁴ It is certainly fair to say that at the point in the novel when Orlando becomes a woman, powerless and poor, the novel has already become dialogic on a number of levels by the time the narrator/biographer has thrown up her hands. From that instant, differing points of view of the Arab world, of colonialism, of sexuality are juxtaposed in a search for 'the indelible footprints of truth' (*Orlando*, p. 31). The tragedy of World War I had destroyed any simple belief in social or spiritual systems. Freud and the new physics had propounded very different theories of human nature and its relation to the world. At the same time writers, artists and musicians dismantled traditional forms and challenged existing value systems and assumptions. In the words of Ezra Pound:

The age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace
Something for the modern stage,
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace
(“Hugh Selwyn Mauberley”, Part 2.1-4)

Of course, it is the effort of language to impose order on our world. It is, however, a symbolic order often taking the form of relativity and polar

opposites: male/female, black/white, light/dark, right/wrong. These polar opposites are not equal terms, nor do they cope with the ambiguities of the human condition, but it is perhaps human nature to try to create absolutes. The feminist critic Julia Kristeva follows on from Bakhtin, for whom the dialogic construction renders meaning relative, in that two voices, distant from each other, cause them to interrogate each other's truth. Kristeva considers this in relation to her own interrogation of the symbolic:

In fact, this "transgression" of linguistic, logical and social codes within the carnivalesque only exists and succeeds, of course, because it accepts another law. Dialogism is not 'freedom to say everything', it is a dramatic 'banter' ... nor has it anything to do with the architectonics of dialogism which implies a categorical tearing from the norm and a relationship of non-exclusive opposites.⁷⁵

Kristeva also argues that '[w]riting is upheld not by the subject of understanding but by a divided subject, even a pluralised subject, that occupies permutable, multiple and even mobile places.'⁷⁶ For Orlando, this means that love, indeed, has two faces (*Orlando*, p. 57) and possibly many more.

The carnivalesque has been used to describe the female self that remained undefined by a masculine symbolic. However, the fantastic carnivalesque elements of *Orlando* fade as Turkey is left behind. Orlando has become unpopular among the gypsies by disrupting their pragmatic language with aesthetics:

Orlando had contracted in England some of the customs or diseases (whatever you choose to consider them) which cannot, it seems, be expelled. One evening when they were all sitting round the camp fire and the sunset was blazing over the Thessalian Hills, Orlando exclaimed: 'How good to eat!' (The gypsies have no word for beautiful. This is the nearest.)' (*Orlando*, p. 69)

The trope of the Middle Eastern fantastic world cannot wholly exist as truth, nor does it entirely exist as a fantasy imposed upon the Middle East. Woolf's Middle Eastern fantasy, similar to that of Sackville-West, is undermined by the realism of the author pointing to the filth of the locals and the shabbiness of the gypsies, their lack of European culture and an absence of an aesthetic dimension. Orlando imagines that her Romantic nature belongs to

England, her homeland: ‘the English disease, a love of Nature, was inborn in her’ (p. 70). Then,

With some of the guineas left from the sale of the tenth pearl of her string, Orlando had bought herself a complete outfit of such clothes as women then wore, and it was in the dress of a young English woman of rank that she now sat on the deck of the *Enamoured Lady*. (p. 75)

However, on the voyage over she contemplates the very social constructs of male and female:

‘[O]nce I set foot on English soil ... I shall never be able to crack a man over the head ... All I can do is pour out tea and ask my Lords how they like it ... ‘Heavens!’ she thought ‘what fools they make of us – what fools we are!’ (*Orlando*, p. 77)

At this point the narrator steps in:

And here it would seem from some ambiguity in her terms that she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither ... she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each. (*Orlando*, p. 77)

Orlando’s gender and cross-dressing issues follow her back to eighteenth-century England, where she dresses as a man to accompany female prostitutes. She also, like Lady Mary Montagu, socialises with Alexander Pope, who had disapproved of Montagu and of the things of which she wrote.⁷⁷ The nineteenth century draws her into a world of wedding rings, and Orlando decides to marry Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, an explorer who sails around Cape Horn: ‘Whether, then, Orlando was a most man or woman, it is difficult to say ...’ (*Orlando*, p. 93). Orlando eventually confirms that she is female, and gives birth to a son, but even this does not solve the dilemma:

It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman’s dress and of a woman’s sex. And perhaps in this she was only expressing rather more openly than usual ... something that happens to most people without being thus plainly expressed ... For here again we come to a dilemma. Different though the sexes are, they intermix ... and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what is above ... but here we leave the general question and note only the odd effect ... (*Orlando*, pp. 92-3)

Neither Agatha Christie nor Vita Sackville-West necessarily abide by the social codes of the day in terms of their writing. Christie does create single women with a rich life and Sackville-West distances herself from Middle Eastern women and enjoys the privileges of the 'third sex'. However, we do not find in the works of the women authors of this chapter anything that encourages change. Woolf's style in *Orlando*, with its satiric attack, may lay claim to some political transformative power in women, but if only clothing differentiates male from female, if – 'it is the clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues' (*Orlando*, p. 92) then, as Mary Jacobus comments:

Can we say the same of language – that words speak to us and not we them – and hence of reading too? What would it mean if the object of our reading (woman as text) and the reading subject (reader as already read) were gendered only as a result of the reading process? What if there were no gender identity except as constituted by clothes or by language – just as there is no literal meaning to oppose to metaphor, but only metaphors of literalness?⁷⁸

As Jacobus goes on to state, it may be that what *Orlando* does is expose the dilemma without offering a solution. Similar things might be said of ethnicity, so that when Orlando steps out of doors in Oxford Street and says: 'I taste ... [l]ittle herbs. I hear goat bells. I see mountains. Turkey? India? Persia?' (*Orlando*, p. 151), the tears that she sheds may well be those of longing for that which she cannot know. The women of this chapter have used the Middle East and its peoples as an exotic and sometimes fantastic backdrop to their work, and occasionally speak favourably of its peoples, but like Vita Sackville-West they must ultimately admit: 'What were Arabs to me or I to them, as we thus briefly crossed one another? They in their robes, noble and squalid, of impenetrable life; and I a traveller, making for the station?'⁷⁹

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

- ¹ Vita Sackville-West, 'Nomads', *Poems from West and East*, Project Gutenberg <<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/30842/pg30842-images.html>> [accessed 16 September 2015].
- ² Ivy Low, quoted from John Carswell, *The Exile: A Life of Ivy Litvinov* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 43.
- ³ Ivy Low, *The Questing Beast* (London: Martin Secker, 1914).
- ⁴ This led to the incident of Christie's disappearance on 3 December 1926: after a quarrel with her husband, Christie disappeared from her home and could not be found for ten days, until 14 December 1926, when she was found at the Swan Hydropathic Hotel in Harrogate, Yorkshire, registered under a false name.
- ⁵ Agatha Christie Mallowan, *Come, Tell Me How You Live* (London: Collins, 1975), pp. 38-9.
- ⁶ Mallowan, p. 106.
- ⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals, 1897-1909*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), pp. 351-2.
- ⁸ Rosemary Wall, 'Surplus Women: A Legacy of World War One?', in *World War I Centenary: Continuations and Beginnings*, University of Oxford/JISC, <<http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/?p=2345>> [accessed 8 September 2015].
- ⁹ Maroula Joannou, *The History of British Women's Writing: 1920-1945*, Vol. 8, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 188.
- ¹⁰ Kathy Mezei, 'Spinsters, Surveillance, and Speech: The Case of Miss Marple, Miss Mole, and Miss Jekyll', *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 30.2 (2007), pp. 103-20 (p. 104) < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4619330> > [accessed 8 September 2015].
- ¹¹ Mezei, p. 104.
- ¹² See Laura Doan, 'Introduction'. in *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 6.
- ¹³ William B. Yeats, 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', in *The Poems*, ed. by Daniel Albright (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1990), p. 256.
- ¹⁴ Yeats, p. 256.
- ¹⁵ Kerry Powell, *Acting Wilde: Victorian Sexuality, Theatre, and Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 60.
- ¹⁶ Powell, p. 61.
- ¹⁷ Brianna E. Hyslop, *Travel Literature Reconstructed: Mobility and Subjectivity in Passenger to Teheran* (Austin: University of Texas, 2011), p. 16.
- ¹⁸ Hyslop, p. 16.
- ¹⁹ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 80.
- ²⁰ Spurr, p. 80.
- ²¹ Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran* (New York: I. B. Tauris and Co., 2007), p. 62.
- ²² Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 122.

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- ²³ Louise De Salvo and Mitchell A. Leaska (eds), *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1984), p. 114.
- ²⁴ De Salvo and Leaska, p. 114.
- ²⁵ Vita Sackville-West, 'Introductory', *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 25.
- ²⁶ Alexander William Kinglake (1809-91) was an English travel writer and historian.
- ²⁷ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 30.
- ²⁸ Christopher de Bellaigue, 'A Bride for a Jackass', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 32.6, (25 March 2010), p.35.
- ²⁹ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 49.
- ³⁰ De Salvo and Leaska, p. 115.
- ³¹ Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 77.
- ³² Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 58.
- ³³ Sackville West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 59.
- ³⁴ By James E. Flecker, *Hassan* was performed on the theatre in 1923.
- ³⁵ De Salvo and Leaska, p. 119.
- ³⁶ Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 80.
- ³⁷ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 80.
- ³⁸ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 84.
- ³⁹ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 91.
- ⁴⁰ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 91.
- ⁴¹ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 98.
- ⁴² Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 8 April 1926, De Salvo and Leaska, p. 133.
- ⁴³ See Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 15 March 1926; Teheran, pp. 126-7.
- ⁴⁴ Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 16 July 1924, p. 54.
- ⁴⁵ Kirstie Blair, 'Gypsies and Lesbian Desire: Vita Sackville-West, Violet Trefusis, and Virginia Woolf', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 50.2 (2004), pp. 141-66.
- ⁴⁶ Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 62.
- ⁴⁷ Vita Sackville-West, 'Introductory', *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 71-2.
- ⁴⁸ De Salvo and Leaska, p. 135.
- ⁴⁹ Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 94.
- ⁵⁰ Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 93.
- ⁵¹ Vita Sackville-West, 'Introductory', *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 28.
- ⁵² Vita Sackville-West, 'Introductory', *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 29.
- ⁵³ Kelley Joyce, 'Increasingly "Imaginative Geographies": Excursions into Otherness, Fantasy, and Modernism in Early Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writing', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 35.3 (2005), pp. 357-72 < <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jnt/summary/v035/35.3kelley.html> > [accessed 15 August 2015].
- ⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, quoted in Nigel Nicolson, 'New Introduction'; Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 22.
- ⁵⁵ Vita Sackville to Virginia Woolf, Teheran, 9 March 1926, De Salvo and Leaska, p. 124.
- ⁵⁶ Joanna Grant, *Modernism's Middle East: Journeys to Barbary* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 62.
- ⁵⁷ In the Dreadnought Hoax the Royal Navy was duped into believing that Virginia Stevens, her brother and his friends were foreign dignitaries from the Near East, playing into Western conceptions of the Eastern Other. The group sent a group photograph with a letter to *The Daily Mirror* demonstrating how

the authorities were fooled by a mixture of “black face”, greasepaint, and a mixture of Swahili and Latin, to the embarrassment of all.

⁵⁸ Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville, Tavistock Square, 17 February March 1926, De Salvo and Leaska, p. 105.

⁵⁹ Vita Sackville to Virginia Woolf, In the Red Sea, 4 February 1926, De Salvo and Leaska, p. 124.

⁶⁰ Leila B. Jamili, *Virginia Woolf: Travelling, Travel Writing and Travel Fictions* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Berlin, 2006), p. 200 <http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000002243>.

⁶¹ Meyda Yeğençlü, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 23.

⁶² Elisabeta Zelinka, ‘Virginia Woolf’s Oriental Discourse in *Orlando* (1928)’, *Gender Studies* 07 (2008), p. 61.

⁶³ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (Kent: Wordsworth, 1995), p. 5. All future references will be to this edition.

⁶⁴ Kathy J. Phillips, *Virginia Woolf Against Empire* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), p. 186.

⁶⁵ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 101. <<http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/reader.action?docID=10151133>> [accessed 4 September 2015].

⁶⁶ Leonid Grossman, *Poetika Dostoevskogo* [The Poetics of Dostoevsky] (Gakhn, 1925), pp. 61, 62. Quoted in Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, p. 103.

⁶⁷ See Phillips, p. 192.

⁶⁸ De Salvo and Leaska, p. 126.

⁶⁹ De Salvo and Leaska, p. 126.

⁷⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 239.

⁷¹ In Naguib Mahfouz’s novel *Palace Walk*, Kamal and Khadija keep referring to Zaynab, Yasin’s Circassian wife, as having fair complexion. See Naguib Mahfouz, *Palace Walk*, trans. by William M. Hutchins and Olive E. Kenny (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), pp. 297, 302.

⁷² See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, p. 114.

⁷³ D. A. Boxwell, ‘(Dis)orienting Spectacle: The Politics of *Orlando*’s Sapphic Camp’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 44.3 (1998), pp. 306-27 (p. 307) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/441812>> [accessed 30 July 2015].

⁷⁴ Boxwell, p. 309.

⁷⁵ Julia Kristeva, ‘Word, Dialogue and Novel’, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 41-2.

⁷⁶ Julia Kristeva, ‘Desire in Language’, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) p. 111.

⁷⁷ Orlando decides that not only is Pope small and ugly, but he is no more special than any other man – a physical rather than a literary assessment. The way she derides him brings to mind William Frith’s painting of Lady Montagu mocking Alexander Pope (1852). See William Frith, *Pope Makes Love to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* [oil on canvas]. Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (1852) <<http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/the-collection/browse-artwork/4191/pope-makes-love-to-lady-mary-wortley-montagu>> [accessed 31 July 2015].

⁷⁸ Mary Jacobus, 'Reading Women (Reading)' in *Reading Women: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Mary Jacobus (London: Methuen & Co./Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 3.

⁷⁹ Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 62.

CHAPTER VII

WOMEN, MASCULINITIES AND ORIENTALISM

And so I cross into another world
shyly and in homage linger for an invitation
from this unknown that I would trespass on ...

And whosoever the unknown people of this unknown world
may be
they will never understand my weeping for joy
to be adventuring among them
because it will still be a gesture of the old world I am making
which they will not understand, because it is quite,
quite foreign to them.

D. H. Lawrence, 'New Heaven and Earth' I.4¹

As distinctions between the two sexes became unclear, some male writers such as D. H. Lawrence took refuge in the clarity offered by perceptions of the Orient, which suggested firmly held traditional roles for men and women. James Joyce demonstrates the sterility of these stereotypes again by reference to the Orient. In contrast to both these authors, T. S. Lawrence had actually been to the Middle East and interacted with the people there, but this did not prevent a thriving movie industry from creating a traditional hero story of his life in action there. In *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* Graham Dawson examines Western concepts of masculinity and heroism and investigates 'the cultural conditions in which adventure narratives were produced and consumed, and their heroes constituted and used as figures of identification.'² He also considers how the images of these heroes reflect masculine subjectivity and affected the British national spirit. Popular war heroes of the Victorian period, such as Sir Henry Havelock (1795-1857), who was a British general and most associated with India and the recapture of Cawnpore from rebels during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Dawson argues that while soldiers and their heroic actions in remote parts of the Empire during the nineteenth century were described as 'the very epitome of manhood',³ a change had taken place by the 1920s and 1930s. Such figures as Henry Havelock reflected the ideology of the British nation during a time of

threat against the Empire, when the Christian soldier became a popular image of a morally guided hero fighting against an unenlightened 'Other'.

The hero image shifted during World War I, and Dawson demonstrates this shift through an examination of the life of T. E. Lawrence (1888-1935), also known as Lawrence of Arabia. He comments, 'Lawrence's fractured subjectivity is made into a symptom of a wider culture in crisis, not least because of the loss of Empire.'⁴ Amid the shift in what constituted masculinity one finds that there is little consideration of what constitutes the Arab female, even within works that use an Arabic setting and its accompanying fantasy world. Even outside of a fantasy world, T. E. Lawrence comments:

When looked at from this torrid East, our British conception of woman seemed to partake of the northern climate which had also contracted our faith. In the Mediterranean, woman's influence and supposed purpose were made cogent by an understanding in which she was accorded the physical world in simplicity, unchallenged, like the poor in spirit. Yet this same agreement, by denying equality of sex, made love, companionship and friendliness impossible between man and woman. Woman became a machine for muscular exercise, while man's psychic side could be slaked only amongst his peers. Whence arose these partnerships of man and man, to supply human nature with more than the contact of flesh with flesh.⁵

Lawrence here reiterates an argument consistently put forward by the Women's Movement about women in the West. Margaret Fuller (1810-50), in *The Great Lawsuit* (1943), comments: 'Did he believe women capable of friendship, would he, by rash haste lose the chance of finding a friend in the person who might, probably, live half a century by his side?''⁶

T. E. Lawrence was a little-known lieutenant colonel who had served in the Arabian Peninsula during World War I. The Arabic struggle against the Ottomans had seemed of little importance to the British. By 1918 T. E. Lawrence had coordinated the Arab Tribes and taken street war into a more organised revolt against the Ottoman Empire. He served as a secret agent for the British and met Arab dignitaries and Hashemite Sherifs from what is now known as Saudi Arabia. His military endeavours were matched by the political contributions of Gertrude Bell, with whom he sympathised. He helped with the formation of the Arab Bureau, although, as mentioned earlier in Chapter V, it

was Bell who ensured that some part of British promises be kept, and she who helped to change Mesopotamia's name to Iraq.⁷ The contributions of Bell and Lawrence to the modern history of Iraq are substantial.

Lawrence died in 1935; his autobiography, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), together with his fame, seem to have survived. Numerous biographies, including one by Richard Aldington, *Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Enquiry* (1955) have sought to undermine his reputation. J. T. Laird comments that Aldington's book 'presented Lawrence largely as a charlatan and dismissed his books on the Arab Revolt as sham history.'⁸ Films featuring T. E. Lawrence's life include *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), directed by David Lean; a TV version of his life, *T. E. Lawrence 1888-1935* (1962), directed by Malcolm Brown and Philip Donnellan; *A Dangerous Man: Lawrence After Arabia* (1992), directed by Christopher Menaul; and a TV mini-series *Apocalypse: World War I* (2014), written by Daniel McLion and directed by Isabelle Clarke and Daniel Costelle. This last is historical footage of World War I featuring, for example, Flanders and French battles, and less well-known battles which included those in the Ottoman Empire. T. E. Lawrence features as himself. However, 'Lawrence of Arabia' was an invention of the American journalist Lowell Thomas (1892-1981). The legend of Lawrence, as developed by Thomas, was created in 1919:

The publicity medium Thomas employed was the "illustrated travelogue" or "film lecture". The title of the lecture was *With Allenby in Palestine* but the star of the show was Lawrence. With the aid of spectacular motion pictures and still photographs 'full of sweeping cavalry, Arabs, veiled women, [and] Holy cities' Lowell Thomas enthralled his huge audiences in New York and later in many other parts of the world. His commentary appears to have been eloquent and picturesque, even if little hampered by the requirements of truth.⁹

This picture show formed the foundation of the Lawrence legend, and encouraged other films, books and articles until, during his lifetime, T. E. Lawrence himself was driven to write his own account of his experiences in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

Lawrence himself was a different kind of hero. As a somewhat passive individual, critics were led to describe him as feminine or effeminate. He was

also said to lack discipline and respect for military insignia and bureaucracy. Yet Lawrence exhibited the personal traits of courage, endurance and initiative; qualities highly appreciated in the desert guerrilla warfare then being conducted. Lawrence's ability to associate himself with Arabs, becoming 'the blond *Bedouin*', ensured that his heroism was wholly attached to his interaction with the Arabs. Dawson suggests that 'Lawrence represented himself in terms of an alternative tradition that increased in imaginative power towards and after the turn of the century',¹⁰ of the sort found in Joseph Conrad's (1857-1924) *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Undermined by the colonial encounter, this hero figure, like Marlow, is divested of the trappings of the fictional 'adventurer' who generally would win against all odds. As Dawson suggests, '[t]he omnipotent imperial masculinity fragments into its obverse ... a masculinity torn and split by psychic conflict, and divided against itself.'¹¹

Lawrence used to wear Arab garments and recommends, in his pamphlet published in the *Arab Bulletin*, to '[w]ear an Arab headcloth when with a tribe ... [i]f you wear Arab things, wear the best ... [d]ress like a Sherif ...'¹² However, not everyone agreed and Mousa comments that his decision to wear Arab dress at the Peace Conference in Paris of 1919¹³ was ridiculous:

His wearing of Arab clothes among the Arabs can be explained and accepted. But what explanation is there for his parading in Arab apparel in the streets of Cairo and Jerusalem during the war and in the streets of Paris and London after it?¹⁴

Cross-dressing and cultural cross-dressing does allow the cross-dresser to assume different personas, and creates a mobile and ambiguous identity. Dunlaith Bird comments in *Travelling in Different Skins* that: 'the recurring motifs for cross dressing and cross-cultural dressing ... suggest that, although by 1850 neither practice was seen as a practical necessity for European travellers they remained central to literary constructions of gender identity.'¹⁵ In the case of T. E. Lawrence, the literary construction of his gender identity led to accusations of effeminacy and homosexuality, at a time when the practice was criminalised. Kaja Silverman studies the case of T. E. Lawrence in her book *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, following a psychoanalytical approach. For Silverman, Lawrence's Arab dress is an expression of an

‘inverse desire’¹⁶ to identify with the Arabs; furthermore, she suggests that this identification is partly due to a homosexual nature:

If the Lawrence of *Seven Pillars* is able to participate psychologically in Arab nationalism, that is in large part because his particular homosexuality promotes an erotic identification with its leaders and its servants.¹⁷

It seems that the then considered transgressive sexuality is again associated with the aura of the fantastic that surrounds the Middle East. This is not to suggest that evidence for transgressive sexuality cannot be found in the real world.

In the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence narrates the incident of his torture by Turkish officers. He had gone on an espionage mission to Deraa, Syria, with two Arab companions, Halim and Faris:

[H]ardly one day in Arabia passed without a physical ache to increase the corroding sense of my accessory deceitfulness towards the Arabs, and the legitimate fatigue of responsible command.¹⁸

Pretending to be a Circassian, Lawrence was taken to the Turkish Governor of the region. The latter:

... began to fawn on [Lawrence], saying how white and fresh [he] was, how fine [his] hands and feet, and how he would let [him] off drills and duties, make [him] his orderly, even pay [him] wages, if [Lawrence] would love him.¹⁹

As Lawrence refused and fought back he was subjected to severe beating and torture that brought him nearly to his death. After entirely breaking his spirit and coercing him into ‘retching and sobbing for mercy’,²⁰ the Turkish officers took him back to the Governor, Nahi Bey, but the latter dismissed him as ‘a thing too torn and bloody for his bed, blaming their excess of zeal which had spoilt me.’²¹ In a letter to Charlotte Shaw dated 26 March, 1924, Lawrence insinuates that the Turkish officers raped him but that he could not put it down in his book. He writes:

For instance my night in Deraa. Well, I’m always afraid of being hurt: and to me, while I live, the force of that night will lie in the agony which broke me, and made me surrender ... About that night, I shouldn’t tell you, because decent men don’t talk about such things. I wanted to put it

plain in the book, and wrestled for days with my self-respect.²²

In another letter to E. M. Forster dated 21 December 1927, Lawrence writes ‘The Turks, as you probably know (or have guessed, through the reticences of the *Seven Pillars*) did it to me, by force.’²³ Such an admission might have brought forward accusations of homosexuality and complicity in the rape. There is no convincing evidence to prove that Lawrence was a homosexual or that he was not. There are, however, a lot of suspicions and speculation for both positions. Oddly, similar accusations were made against Rudolph Valentino, the star of *The Sheik* and *The Son of the Sheik*, which were completely without foundation.

The separation of Lawrence the legend and Lawrence the man has proved impossible. Both are associated, for good or ill, with imaginings of the Middle East, its romance and its cruelty. Lowell Thomas comments: ‘I had come to the conclusion that Lawrence was the product only of the Western Imagination overheated by exuberant contact with the East.’²⁴ However, if Lawrence could become Arab then the reverse was impossible, and Lawrence’s associations with the Middle East left him living partly in a fantastic world in which he played a traditional hero; he was also partly a conflicted human being and ultimately, not always a reliable historian. The *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* begins:

Some of the evil of my tale may have been inherent in our circumstances. For years we lived anyhow with one another in the naked desert, under the indifferent heaven. . . . We were a self-centred army without parade or gesture, devoted to freedom, the second of man’s creeds, a purpose so ravenous that it devoured all our strength, a hope so transcendent that our earlier ambitions faded in its glare.²⁵

In all of his roles, the Middle East plays its part.

A contradictory attitude toward the Orient and, particularly, toward female characters who take on the characteristics of the Orient, is a feature of early twentieth-century Western male writers. Orientalism has come to describe such tropes as the “Dark Other” and the imagined far away and distant place of the Desert Romance, where society’s norms and codes might be tested. In this regard, attitudes to Orientalism overlap with the perceptions of the Western female writers considered in Chapter VI. Both male and female authors

conflate Western imaginings with Middle Eastern realities. The Middle East has become a trope not only for sexual indulgence and the search for an alternative to the Western way of life, but also for nationalism and national freedom.

In 1944, thirty-four years before the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Mallikarjun Mansoor published *The Story of Irish Orientalism*,²⁶ which highlighted the connections between Ireland and the Levant on one hand, and Ireland and the Far East on the other. Mansoor argues that the roots of scholarly work on the Orient lie in Ireland's academic history. He comments that 'Oriental studies in the proper sense'²⁷ began when Trinity College in Dublin was established in 1591, and the Ussher brothers contributed to the field in the sixteenth century with their lectures on Arabic and Hebrew, in addition to manuscripts they had collected in the Middle East. James Joyce (1882-1941) maintains a complex attitude toward the Middle East. One of the techniques that he employs in his stream of consciousness to evoke the Orient is to make lists of items associated with the Orient that are rich in imagery. This is evident in Bloom's aforementioned fantasy of the Oriental woman, as he lists items of Oriental clothing and jewellery. He also adds a camel, a silk ladder of rugs and date-palms to the clichéd scenery which seems to have been inspired by the Arabian Nights. Another example is his fantasy during the time he spends with Zoe. This list comprises items that appeal to the senses: the 'leaping gazelles' (which is the typical Arabic metaphor for beautiful women with big eyes) and 'cedargroves', hinting at the eye-capturing scenery of Lebanon. The rising 'aroma' and the 'resin' evoke the Arabian habit of incense burning, while the 'murmurs' of the 'fountain' appeals to the ear and finally, the 'scarlet winegrapes' provoke the taste buds of the reader.²⁸

Then, as an Irish nationalist, Joyce gives voice to his belief that the Irish language originated from Phoenicia (today's Lebanon) and emphasised that Ireland had provided the earliest translations of Eastern texts which introduced 'the transcendental philosophy of the Orient, which had as much influence on the course of European thought as later the translations of Plato.'²⁹ Carol L. Shloss ascribes what she calls 'Joyce's Orientalist strategy' to his desire to 'exploit the similarities of Ireland and the East as part of the claim that Irish civilization was more ancient and more distinguished than its contemporary

demeaned position within the British Commonwealth would indicate.’³⁰ Joyce cited Charles Vallancey in his attempt to trace some Irish roots in the Phoenician language and civilisation, in a lecture entitled ‘Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages’ he gave at the Università Popolare in Trieste on 27 April 1907.³¹ Although Joyce turns to the East in his attempt to create a national identity deeply rooted in history and to replace the identity of the colonised, his writings are rife with stereotypical Oriental clichés and images. Critics such as Shloss and Malcolm Sen argue that Joyce employs the Orient as a topos rather than as a geographical place.³² In Joyce’s short story ‘Araby’ the Dubliners dream of an exotic Orient, but their dreams are expressions of a displaced culture and have no connection with the reality of the Middle East.

‘Araby’³³ appears in Joyce’s collection *Dubliners* (1914), wherein the first stories all carry an Eastern trend – an attempt to make the dream a reality. The unifying themes of the collection consider the moral history of Ireland, the progression from childhood to maturity, and the journey from the private to the public sphere. The structural unity depends upon the human struggle for survival and the conditions of deprivation. As in Yeats’ later poem, *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen* (1928), the soul of the people has been weakened by a degenerate and disabled environment. The narrator of ‘Araby’ is an adolescent boy who adores ‘Mangan’s sister.’ Mangan, his friend, is named for the Irish Orientalist poet James Clarence Mangan (1803-49),³⁴ whose *Dark Rosaleen* was a translation of *Róisín Dubh* by the Irish language poet Antoine Ó Raifteiri (1779-1835). Mangan’s sister seems more mature than the protagonist and wants to go to the Araby Bazaar, but there would be ‘a retreat that week in her convent’ (*Dark Rosaleen*, p. 23). Deeply in love, he says, ‘I will bring you something’ (p. 23). The Araby bazaar was not an imaginary place. It ran in Dublin in May 1894 to support the Jervis Street Hospital and was officially named the ‘Grand Oriental Fête.’³⁵ It was attended by vendors dressed as gypsies, Arabs, and Moors, in addition to a number of odd costumes.³⁶ Suddenly, the idea of the Araby Bazaar fires his imagination, attached as it is to the protagonist’s unrealistic idolisation of Mangan’s sister: ‘The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me.’ (p. 23). As Joyce comments of James Clarence Mangan: ‘East and West meet in that

personality ... images interweave [their] soft, luminous scarves and words ring like brilliant mail, and whether the song is of Ireland or of Istanbul it has the same refrain, a prayer that peace may come again to her who has lost peace, the moonwhite pearl of his soul, Ameen.³⁷

The imaginary exoticism of the bazaar merges with the protagonist's love of Mangan's sister. The need to get to the bazaar to reward the object of an intense young love becomes all-consuming. Not so for his uncle, who knows that the boy wants to go to the Bazaar but has no conception of how much he needs to go. This intensity is trapped downstairs but 'the high cold empty gloomy rooms' (p. 24) liberated him to gaze at her house, 'seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by [his] imagination' (p. 24). Downstairs, he must endure the pawnbroker's widow 'who collected used stamps for some pious purpose' (p. 24). At eight o'clock Mrs. Mercer leaves and his aunt suggests to the boy: 'you may put off your bazaar for this night of Our Lord' (p. 24). At nine o'clock his uncle finally returns; he had forgotten. However, he believes that '[a]ll work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' (p. 24), and when he is told for the second time of the boy's wish to go to the Araby Bazaar he asks if he knows 'The Arab's Farewell to His Steed'.

Joyce wrote of the poet Mangan that he 'wrote with no native literary tradition to guide him and for a public which cared for matters of the day, and for poetry only so far as it might illustrate these ...'³⁸ The boy's uncle is clearly one such member of that public. The boy runs fearfully to the Bazaar where his shilling is taken by a 'weary looking man' (p. 25). Before a curtain, two men are counting money and he remembers only with difficulty why he had come. He examines porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets to the sound of English accents and inane conversations. Finally, the young woman asks if he wishes to buy something. The boy does not: 'Gazing up into the darkness, I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger' (p. 26).

Joyce's Oriental fantasy is embedded in a theme of disillusionment in 'Araby'. It too partakes of the paralysis and spiritual malaise that characterises the collection. Even the Araby Bazaar has degenerated into a weary, unexciting, dark experience, and its occupants are interested only in money.

Sexuality is represented by the female stall holder's interaction with the two English gentlemen. Even the language has a pantomime feel:

- O, I never said such a thing!
- O, but you did!
- O, but I didn't!
- Didn't she say that?
- Yes. I heard her.
- O, there's a ... fib! (pp. 25-6)

The stall-holder is no Salome, and the English are too dull to be *Fursan* (knights). Oriental fantasies cannot survive in an Ireland where James Clarence Mangan's poems, like so '[m]any ingenious lovely things are gone'³⁹ and where even a young boy in love cannot bring himself to buy a present for Mangan's sister. Ireland has overwhelmed him.

If the exotic dream of the East is spent in Ireland, the Dubliners who appear in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) continue to dream. In *Ulysses* 'the cords of all link back'.⁴⁰ In the Proteus section the protagonist and narrator, Stephen Daedalus, recalls 'Haroun Al Raschid' (786-809 A.D.)⁴¹ (p. 43) when he is woken by a mangy dog. Struggling to recall where he is, he remembers Haroun Al-Raschid of the famous harem before recalling 'the street of harlots' or red-light district, the red of which turns into a red carpet spread (p. 43). Haroun Al-Raschid is a common cliché in Western literature and the red carpet easily becomes the magical carpet of the *Arabian Nights*. The fantasy appears to have travelled unchanged into *Ulysses*, but its uses are more radical, and it stands outside of the repressive "moral code" and the sterile lives of the Dubliners. Fantasy in the Circe section of *Ulysses* takes place in a brothel. Stephen's travelling companion, the Jewish Leopold (Poldy) Bloom, imagines his wife, Molly, wearing 'red slippers' and 'a pair of Turkey trunks' (p. 359). She becomes a Middle Eastern woman dressed for the harem and distinguished by her '[o]pulent curves.' The woman's face is covered with a 'white yashmak', from her forehead a coin gleams, and her feet are embellished with 'toerings' and a 'fetterchain' (pp. 395-6). Bloom evokes an image of both lust and servitude; a sex slave alternating between sexual agency and passivity.

While Joyce never travelled to the Middle East, critics such as Shloss and R. Brandon Kershner are right to emphasise that this is not of crucial significance. Kershner stresses that these Oriental imaginings are not private,

nor exclusive, to Joyce, rather, they are ‘*public fantasies*’⁴² derived from translations of the *Arabian Nights* and the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* and, of course, from Joyce’s Oriental predecessors such as Byron, Goethe, Flaubert, Mallarmé, Heine and Wilde. There were also popular pantomimes and of course the Desert Romances. Kershner, quoting V. G. Kiernan, suggests that ‘[a]ll these exemplars of high and popular culture contributed to ...Europe’s collective day-dream of the Orient, a fantasy-project in which Bloom and Stephen participate.’⁴³ However, they participate knowingly. On the other hand, Bloom also imagines the East as part attractive idyll, and part a lotus-eating stasis:

The garden of the world, big lazy leaves to float about on,
cactuses, flowery meads, ...[t]hose Cinghalese lobbing
about in the sun in *dolce far niente*, not doing a hand’s turn
all day. Sleep six months out of twelve. Too hot to quarrel.
Influence of the climate. Lethargy. Flowers of idleness. (p.
63)

The critic, John Mackenzie, describes this kind of enervating, drugged relaxation as a recurring Oriental archetype of ‘languid fatalism’. He goes on to suggest that: ‘[v]isions of the Orient were highly selective, creating oriental archetypes through which the “Otherness” of eastern peoples could be readily identified ... [and] offered a justification for imperial rule and a programme for its reforming zeal.’⁴⁴ It is this reforming zeal to which Joyce objects. Later in the text Al-Raschid must travel incognito and run before an outraged mob and a ‘pack of bloodhounds led by Hornblower of Trinity brandishing a dogwhip in a tallyho cap’ (*Ulysses*, p. 504).

Joyce employs the imaginary Orient first and foremost to ignite the erotic imagination: Leopold Bloom gazes at two erotic Oriental photocards which seem to suggest ‘the possibility of exercising virile power of fascination in the most immediate future’ (p. 626). Bloom also fantasises about going to the *hammam* and having a bath like a sultan, being massaged while surrounded by the ‘fleshpots of Egypt’ (p. 76) while his wife, Molly – the sultana – is ‘not up yet. Queen was in her bedroom’ (p. 66). Bloom is aware that these are fantasies, ‘not a bit like it really’ (p. 50). He deliberately yields to the West’s highly sexualised dream of the Orient. For Leopold Bloom, the East is configured as woman; the Holy Land who ‘bore the oldest, the first race’

became ‘[d]ead: an old woman’s: the grey sunken cunt of the world’ (p. 54). Here, the sensual overload of previous passages is undercut by a very different Orient. Woman is now past her sexual prime, no longer able to bring forth life. By extension, in spite of its hypnotic allure, the Orient itself is configured as an exhausted, overcharged culture whose glory lies the past. Nor is this wholly an Orientalist point of view. The Arab poet Nizar Qabbani wonders why ‘Arabia looks like a widow?’⁴⁵

D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) is another who uses the Oriental to illustrate themes of disillusionment, but he does seek answers to religious and cultural indifference, and particularly in terms of relationships between men and women. He does not use direct references to the Orient, but rather employs elements of myth, primitivism and comparative religion in his works in the hope that:

[A]n alternative to the West can be found ... [where] the Western subject can escape the frameworks which shape his or her existence and enter into any kind of dialogue with the alternative.⁴⁶

One such framework that shapes existence is religion, another is culture, patriotism and so on. As Joanna Grant comments, ‘many modernists reveled in the idea that a molten core of passion, vitality, and drive lay just under civilization’s scabby crust.’⁴⁷ Lawrence’s search for a way of life, both spiritually and artistically, includes the notion that, behind the mask of convention, is movement, perception, and a vitality which must be fostered if it is to survive. This search is demonstrated throughout his works. For Lawrence, ‘we only become truly human, truly civilized when we leave the “human” and the “civilized” behind.’ As Grant argues, however, ‘there are right and wrong ways of becoming inhuman.’⁴⁸

Lawrence does not suggest that we should all become barbarians, but rather should rise above such concepts. Joyce looked to the East to reassure himself of his own Irish national identity, as an ancient source of heritage that might supersede English culture, and give power to Joyce’s contemporary Ireland over British rule. Lawrence, on the other hand, held a positive opinion of an imagined Orient and depicts it as an answer to his quest for better, alternative, and more satisfying relationships with civilisation and with each

other. While many writers describe the *fin de siècle*, Lawrence seeks for answers. Lawrence uses the Orient literally, as a setting for his short novella 'The Man Who Died' (1930), also published as 'The Escaped Cock'. In *The Plumed Serpent* (1925) he uses the trope indirectly, as a cluster of Oriental metaphors as a part of the collage which he superimposes on the Mexican setting of his novel.

In *The Plumed Serpent*, the Irish Kate, a widow of forty, expresses her dissatisfaction with the 'mechanical widdershins contacts'⁴⁹ of the Western world. She escapes to Mexico but even there she is driven to areas of ever-increasing isolation in her search for a different way of being. In this she carries the characteristics of the New Woman both sexually and intellectually, but she is seen, from the very beginning of the novel, to be in need of the protection of men. Lawrence presents the crisis of Western civilisation with a *bildungsroman* of Kate who, with half her life gone, is dissatisfied with the 'sterility of nothingness' (*The Plumed Serpent*, p. 103). She goes to Mexico and, while horrified by the degeneration and cruelty she perceives there, she becomes engulfed by the mysticism and fatalism of the native people. Kate is already tired of British colonialism and superiority. Being brought up with the 'English, Germanic idea of the *intrinsic* superiority of the hereditary aristocrat,' Kate believed that she 'belonged to the ruling races, the clever ones' (p. 416), but this knowledge has ceased to satisfy. She begins her journey by expressing a desire to give the natives hope because: '[i]f they had hope, they wouldn't be so sad, and they would be cleaner, and not have vermin' (p. 39).

Lawrence's Mexico bears the imprint of Orientalism, and the search for an alternative relationship between men and women in this novel co-opts many metaphors of the harem and the sultan. The novel demonstrates just how deeply ingrained Orientalism was in the Western imagination:

She resented being made so conscious of his physical presence, his full, male body inside his thin white clothes, the strong, yet soft shoulders, the full, rich male thighs. It was as if she herself, also, being in the presence of this Sultan, should succumb as part of the harem. (p. 398)

In a Saidian reading of the text a critic might accuse Lawrence of using a wide-stroke brush to delineate all indigenous 'Others' in the same way, conflating Mexicans with Middle Eastern Arabs and other races and cultural beliefs.

There is a certain element of truth in this, certainly in terms of the religion he creates, but a closer look reveals that Lawrence's attitude towards the imagined Orient is largely positive. Indeed he draws on Oriental tropes and stereotypes, both to critique the British, and more broadly to denounce Western, pallid and unrewarding relationships. Judy Ruderman suggests that:

[f]or all its sociological and political trappings, this novel is concerned in the main with male-female relationship. The postures that men and women must take in the church ... and assume in their marriage ceremony require the woman to stoop and kneel, the man to stand erect.⁵⁰

Lawrence wrote *The Plumed Serpent* in 1925 when he was touring Mexico. His wife, Frieda, commenting on the novel, said 'All of Lawrence is in that book. Two years he spent writing it, one winter in Chapala and the next winter in Oaxaca'.⁵¹ David Ayers considers the novel to be 'Lawrence's response to the crisis of the West and the search for an alternative beyond the frame of colonialism.'⁵²

Kate evolves and matures when her fellow travellers, who are American, go home, leaving Kate on her own. She meets the scholar and political leader Don Ramón. Then, when General Cipriano, a purebred Indian of raw sexual energy, rescues her from a bullfight which has sickened and nauseated her, her story becomes intertwined with these two men. The aim of them both is to rid Mexico of Christianity and revive the Aztec Religion. Don Ramón will represent Quezalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent, while Cipriano will become the god of war, Huitzilopochtli. He is a military leader and prompts her to question Western notions of freedom and feminism; he tells her that Westerners are '*compelled*' to have a Western mode of thinking:

You have not as much choice as a slave. As the peons must eat tortillas, tortillas, tortillas, because there is nothing else, you must think these U.S.A. thoughts, about being a woman and being free.' (*The Plumed Serpent*, p. 205)

Both Don Ramón and Don Cipriano expect Kate to give up her Western, feminist ideas to become the incarnation of the native goddess Malintzi. She is expected to join the pantheon of the Mesoamerican deities along with Quetzalcoatl (Don Ramón), and be the bride to Huitzilopochtli (Don Cipriano).

Kate perceives this as the loss of her individuality and she initially refuses to become ‘the answer to [Cipriano’s] call, the sheath for his blade, the cloud to his lightning, the earth to his rain, the fuel to his fire’ (p. 388). She resists the surrender to Ramón and Cipriano’s new ideology because ‘it meant the death of her individual self. It meant abandoning so much, even her own very foundations’ (p. 390). She considers the proposed relationship with suspicion because it is hard for her to imagine that a woman and a man must lose their individuality to find their ‘Morning Star’ (p. 390). Kate wonders about the male/female relations and the sacrifice that must be offered to gain the togetherness that she craves. Prizing her own individuality, Kate derides Teresa, Don Ramón’s Mexican wife.

Kate resents Teresa’s ability to dissolve her own being into his, considering her the ‘harem type’ (p. 397) who performs ‘Harem tricks’ (p. 398) with Ramón:

This little bit of a black-eyed woman had an almost uncanny power to make Ramón great and gorgeous in the flesh, whilst she herself became inconspicuous, almost invisible, save for her great black eyes. Like a sultan, he was, like a full golden fruit in the sun, with a strange and magnificent presence, glamour. And then, by some mysterious power in her dark little body, the skinny Teresa held him most completely. (p. 398)

When Kate refers to Teresa as using ‘Harem tricks’ it reflects her inability to understand the power taken by the Orientalised Teresa. She cannot conceive how a woman can dissolve her identity into her partner’s identity, feeding his ego and thriving through him at the same time, but as the Oriental woman becomes apparently ‘inconspicuous, almost *invisible*’ (p. 398), in reality she gains power and influence over her partner. Kate’s derision and resentment represent a Western fear and misunderstanding of the Orient, Oriental women and Oriental life style. She echoes Harriet Martineau when she wonders whether Teresa’s style of dealing with Ramón was ‘degrading for a woman? And didn’t it make the man either soft and sensuous, or else hatefully autocratic?’ (p. 399). However, Lawrence makes it clear, not only for Kate, but also for the reader, that his Oriental-styled woman ‘was neither insignificant nor humble. Under that soft brown skin, and in that stooping female spine was

a strange old power to call up the blood in a man, and glorify it, and, in some way, keep it for herself' (p. 401).

In turn, Teresa despises Kate. The colonial discourse may be read clearly in Teresa's attitude towards Kate; the misunderstanding and condescension on Kate's side and the anger and defiance on Teresa's side; it is the way the colonising and the colonised feel toward each other:

Teresa felt a little repugnance ... for the foreign white woman who talked as cleverly as a man and who never gave her soul: who did not believe in giving her soul. All these well-dressed, beautiful women from America or England, Europe, they all kept their souls for themselves, in a sort of purse, as it were. (p. 411)

Teresa was determined that Kate should stop treating her 'very, very indefinitely, as an inferior. It was how all the foreign women treated the Mexican women. Because the foreign women were their own mistresses!' (p. 411). The colonised voice of Teresa expresses her mistrust of white Western women and their condescending attitude.

This colonial discourse shifts further into the Oriental discourse when Kate's lust for Ramón is described. She looks at Ramón's 'soft, quiescent, cream-brown shoulders' (p. 182) and envisions a knife stuck between his 'pure, male shoulders' (p. 182). Her sexual desire culminates in an act of aggression to conquer the dark other and destroy his 'far-off and intangible' (p. 182) nature. The knife stands for an imaginary vindictive rape 'if only to break the arrogance of [Ramón's] remoteness' (p. 182). Furthermore, Kate compares herself to Salomé and, in common with other New Women, identifies with her: 'This was how Salome had looked at John' (p. 182). She compares Ramón to John the Baptist, as the first was 'horribly handsome ... [a] pure sensuality, with a powerful purity of its own, hostile to her sort of purity' (p. 184). John the Baptist too had 'his terrible, aloof beauty, inaccessible yet so potent' (p. 184).

Kate ponders at the power of her voyeuristic gaze. This female gaze is not only found in *The Plumed Serpent*, but in other works by Lawrence, such as *The Virgin and the Gypsy* (1926) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). Kate, however, seems to know that she should be watching these men with an inward eye, rather than lusting for their bodies: 'Let me close my eyes to him, and

open only my soul. Let me close my prying, SEEING eyes, and sit in dark stillness along with these two men' (p. 184). She acknowledges that these men have the greater power, and that her own looking is prurient, and gets in the way of her development. She takes on the 'curse of Eve' as belonging to everywoman:

They have got more than I, they have a richness that I haven't got. They have got rid of that itching of the eye, and the desire that works through the eye. The itching, prurient, KNOWING, imagining eye, I am cursed with it, I am hampered up in it. It is my curse of curses, the curse of Eve. The curse of Eve is upon me, my eyes are like hooks, my knowledge is like a fish-hook through my gills, pulling me in spasmodic desire. (p. 184)

Aware of her predatory sexual characteristics, she lurks in the dark to gaze at Ramón and Cipriano, 'prying' in 'stillness' and shaking with 'spasmodic desire', as did Wilde's Salomé. Her gaze is not only 'prurient' and lustful, but she is also 'imagining' what she cannot see. Finally she asks: 'Oh, who will free me from the grappling of my eyes, from the impurity of sharp sight! Daughter of Eve, of greedy vision, why don't these men save me from the sharpness of my own eyes!' (p. 184). Indeed, one can almost, once again, hear Milton's voice: 'Hee for God only, shee for God in him'.⁵³

Lawrence uses his direct and indirect Oriental metaphors to depict the new religion in wholly masculine terms. Don Cipriano is distinguished by his overflowing 'energy', 'barbarian conceit' and 'magnetic power' (pp. 81-2), while Don Ramón emanates confidence, strength and a 'powerful will' (p. 169) which influences Kate like a 'narcotic' (p. 184). Kate, on the other hand, reflects the Ireland and the Catholic religion that is 'dizzy' at the sight of the 'pure *sensuality*' (p. 182) of the Other. Finally, herself colonised by the English, the Irish Kate succumbs to the sexual power of Don Cipriano and becomes his wife. However, if she was expecting any sort of satisfaction as a goddess, it was not to be. She acquiesces to Cipriano's sexual method, which demands complete submission and passivity on her side so that he may see the 'Morning Star' (pp. 422-3). Apparently, it is all right for a woman to have sexual desire, but she certainly should not enjoy it. It is not that she must 'lie back and think of England', but she must certainly think of Quetzalcoatl.

Kate and Don Cipriano consummate their marriage before the statues of the pagan gods Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli inside the temple. This mystic ritual of love-making before the pagan gods is considered by critics, such as Kimberley Van Hoosier-Carey and Gerald Doherty, who ascribe the description of Kate's and Cipriano's mystic sexual encounter to Lawrence's fantasy of Oriental sex.⁵⁴ The woman takes a passive role while the man plays the role of mentor and leader, teaching her the 'worthlessness of foam-effervescence' (p. 422). At the end of the novel, however, Kate is not wholly convinced and Lawrence uses hunting metaphors met with in any romance as a woman seeks a man. Kate sees herself as a 'great cat':

They played with love and intimacy as a cat with a mouse. In the end they quickly ate up the love-mouse, then trotted off with a full belly and a voluptuous sense of power. (p. 438)

This does not seem a view that Lawrence might wish to promulgate, and Kate goes on:

Only sometimes the love-mouse refused to be digested, and there was life-long dyspepsia. Or, like Cipriano, turned into a sort of serpent, that reared and looked at her with glittering eyes, then slid away into the void, leaving her blank, the sense of power gone out of her. (p. 438)

Kate also notes that she is not getting any younger and does not wish to become a grimalkin, 'prowling around looking for prey that became scarcer and scarcer' (p. 438) and it is enough to 'look at the modern women of fifty and fifty-five . . . to fill one with pity or with repulsion' (p. 438). However, such is the dialogic nature of this work that Kate's conclusion does not seem wholly convincing, and it seems that she chooses the lesser of two evils: "No" she said to herself, "My ego and my individuality are not worth *that* ghastly price. I'd better abandon some of my ego and sink some of my individuality, rather than go like that" (p. 439).

The Oriental metaphors in *The Plumed Serpent* illustrate Lawrence's search for the right sort of woman, taking him to an imagined Middle East to render ideas of female emancipation and individuality wrong, if they are to have fulfilling relationships. Read through a post-colonial, Saidian lens, it seems that Lawrence conflates a number of reductive stereotypes of the ethnic 'Other' in his encomium to Oriental sexuality. As a metaphorical construct, the

Orient represents an almost utopian vision. His clichéd but genuine approval of the possibilities the Orient offers to transcend ordinary life and casual sex into a mystic orgasmic union of souls is to be admired, but even Kate recognises the fraud: ‘What a fraud I am! I know all the time it is I who don’t altogether want them. I want myself to myself. But I can fool them so that they shan’t find out’ (p. 443). Kate has travelled from Salomé to Scheherazade.

Lawrence continues his interrogation of alternative lives and relations between men and women in an imaginary Middle East: a trope in which myth, symbolism and cross-religious emblems of Abrahamic religion and pagan religion are conflated. Like *The Plumed Serpent*, a number of D. H. Lawrence’s works reflect his belief that Christianity, as it was practiced in the early part of the twentieth century, was abstract and sterile — an ideal that ignored human feeling, and particularly the sexual urge. ‘The Man Who Died’ (1930), originally published as ‘The Escaped Cock’ (1929), is no exception. The novella takes place in the Jerusalem and Sidon⁵⁵ of Lawrence’s geographical imaginary. The story begins with a peasant and his gamecock that is happy with the large number of hens at his disposal:

The young cock grew to a certain splendour ... he was a dandy rooster, in that dirty little yard with three patchy hens ... [b]ut there was a special fiery colour to his crow, and the distant calling of other cocks roused him to unexpected outbursts.⁵⁶

The bird serves as a metaphor for the man who died. The cock has been tied up to prevent its escape yet he manages to do so, demonstrating that his vitality is undiminished. He flies to the top of the wall and crows loudly. It is the crowing of the cock that awakens the man who died.

The magical awakening of the man at the beginning of this story serves to heighten its mystical aspects:

At the same time, at the same hour before dawn, on the same morning, a man awoke from a long sleep in which he was tied up. He woke numb and cold, inside a carved hole in the rock. Through all the long sleep his body had been full of hurt, and it was still full of hurt. (p. 124)

In classical mythology the cock was dedicated to Apollo because it signals the rising of the sun. The man the cock has awakened remains unnamed

throughout, but he is undoubtedly Jesus. He has found himself in a tomb wrapped in bandages and is now sore and distressed. He says that his executioners put him in the tomb too soon, for he was not dead. By leaving his protagonist nameless, Lawrence gives the character more freedom to deviate from the usual Christian interpretations of his story,⁵⁷ and from Jesus' specific historical context. Lying in the courtyard, the man slowly regains vitality. Watching the cock and his three hens, the he recognises life in its persistence and brilliance.

The man visits his tomb three times and encounters two women during this period. These women, with their differences and contradictions, represent different layers of the alternate woman in her individual, allegorical, historical and mythical existence. They also demonstrate the change that has taken place within the man. The first woman is the peasant's wife who is a simple, unsophisticated, pretty young peasant who lusts for the man, but her desire goes unreciprocated. This woman represents a colourless version of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*: she is not strikingly beautiful but she is 'not unpleasant' (p. 135). The man knows she desires him, and like Wilde's *Salomé*, 'she wished he would desire her ... [s]he wanted the embrace of his body' (p. 135). Lawrence uses the language of Wilde's *Jokanaan*; here, the man who died is repelled by her 'crouching' body, her 'little greed' and the hardness of her 'little soul' (p. 135). There is no holiness in the peasant's wife and this "*Salomé*" is rejected because of her sexual 'greed' (p. 135).

He meets Madeleine, another of the three women, during one of his visits to his tomb. She evokes the biblical Mary Magdalene and only wishes to serve. She tries to kiss his feet and yearns for the sublime that she found in the living Messiah whom she regarded 'as pure God, who should not be touched by flesh' (p. 134). But 'the teacher and the saviour are dead' (p. 132). His triumph lay in conquering death and his transfiguration has changed him. He no longer wants to be worshipped and has outlived his self-imposed chastity, which Madeleine is unable to comprehend. She too is rejected. He is nauseated by her yearning for the Saviour in him, his chastity and his old life of giving without taking. Her wish to worship repels the man, as did the casual unquestioning greed for sex in the peasant's wife.

The man, then, rejects the Christian denial of the flesh and reflects on his own self-imposed chastity, concluding that ‘virginity is a form of greed; and that the body rises again to give and to take, to take and to give, ungreedily’ (p. 135). The woman that he seeks is one who ‘can lure [his] risen body, yet leave [him his] aloneness’ (p. 138). The emphasis here lies both on the sexual union and the maintenance of his individuality. His former agony and suffering have filled him with bitter regret and disillusionment: ‘A revulsion from all the life he had known came over him again, and the spear-thrust through his bowels,’ with ‘the sickness of unspeakable disillusion’ (p. 134). He relinquishes his mission and teachings, and chooses to live without the greed of giving or the ‘compulsion of love’ (p. 140). He seeks a relationship never before experienced and desires a physical relationship with a woman who can give and take ‘ungreedily ... he had risen for the woman, or women, who knew the greater life of the body ... with whom he could mingle his body’ (p. 135).

He travels from Jerusalem towards Sidon, where the temple of Isis braves the cold winds that blow ‘from inland, from the invisible snows of Lebanon’ – although it is described as ‘facing south and west, towards Egypt’, amidst a ‘grove of Mediterranean pine trees and evergreen oaks ... on a little, tree-covered tongue of land between two bays’ (p. 141). He continues his search until he reaches Sidon, Lebanon, where he finally encounters the priestess of Isis. She is the daughter of the peasant’s wife and is seeking the resurrected Osiris on behalf of the goddess in an attempt to fulfil the ancient Egyptian myth.⁵⁸ When she encounters the man she believes him to be Osiris. Critics such as John B. Vickery and Eugene Goodheart agree that the importance of the priestess of Isis lies beyond her sexual encounter with the man. Goodheart deems that it is only with her tenderness that his wounds are healed, as he is cured of his aphephobia and is reconnected with the living universe:

The tenderness between the man and the priestess is not the sentimentalism of a new love code. The touch of the priestess heals the man’s wounds, but more than that it connects the man with the living universe and restores to him a sense of power.⁵⁹

The priestess helps to complete the man’s resurrection so that he rejects his mission and accepts both his sexuality and the existence of other gods. Their sexual encounter can be described as mystic, in that the two consummate their

love before the statue of Isis inside the temple. Vickery believes that their physical encounter surpasses sex into a ritual of pagan 'initiation, propitiation and ordination'⁶⁰ where the man who had died cries, 'Now I am not myself. I am something new ... I am risen!' (p. 159). The union between the priestess of Isis and the man who had died, and his subsequent departure is a good example of the characters who, in Joanna Grant's words, are 'torn between the desire to lose themselves in the Other and to cling all the more desperately to the fragile individualities threatened by eruptions of uncontrollable forces.'⁶¹

The Man Who Died is deceptively simple. It conforms to a style of oral narration and emphasises physical sensations such as the man's bandages, the feel of the wheat beneath his wounded feet, and the sexual union with the priestess. Characters, apart from Madeleine, are not identified by name but either by what had happened to them (the man who had died), or by their function (the peasant, the slave, the priestess of Isis), or by their relationship to other characters. In addition to the superficial simplicity of style, different components of the Middle East are blended, manipulating both time and place. Lawrence brings together Biblical characters associated with Jesus Christ (7-2 BC to 30-33 AD) and pagan characters adopted from the Egyptian pantheon of gods (as early as 3100 BCE). In terms of place, he creates an imaginary, geographically inaccurate location for the Temple of Isis, surrounded by the olive tree groves on a peninsula between two bays from one side and the snowy mountains of Lebanon on the other. Vickery states that in *The Man Who Died* Lawrence 'takes a well-established myth or legend and in the process of retelling it fleshes it out with his own imaginative extrapolations.'⁶² These elements turn the novella into a fable which tells us something about how we might begin to live our lives. The story does not wholly repudiate Christ or Christianity, but it does address important themes: the Resurrection and the humanity of Christ from a non-traditional perspective. It was, after all, Christ's body that rose from the dead so that the man who had died represents a very human Christ. It is after all natural for humans to be of this world, and Lawrence seems to suggest that that is how they must truly live.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

- ¹ D. H. Lawrence, 'New Heaven and Earth', in *Look! We Have Come Through*, Introduction by Frieda Lawrence and Illustrations by Michael Adam (Marazion, Cornwall: The Ark Press, 1957), p. 85.
- ² Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 4.
- ³ Dawson, p. 21.
- ⁴ Dawson, p. 173.
- ⁵ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Vol. II (London: The Reprint Society, 1939), pp. 520-1.
- ⁶ Margaret Fuller, 'The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men. Woman versus Women', *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 5th ed., Vol. 1, Gen. Ed. Nina Baym (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1998), p. 1611.
- ⁷ As mentioned in Chapter V, see Georgina Howell, 'Government through Gertrude', in *Gertrude Bell: Queen of the Desert, Shaper of Nations* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), pp. 274-302.
- ⁸ J. T. Laird, 'T. E. Lawrence: The Problem of Interpretation', *The Australian Quarterly*, 32 (1960), 93-99 (p. 93). <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20633597>> [accessed 16 September 2015]. Other biographies have similarly dismissed Lawrence's contribution to the Arab Revolt, including those written by Arab historians such as Suleiman Mousa, *T. E. Lawrence: An Arab View*, trans. Albert Butros (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), published originally in Arabic in 1960 (details unavailable).
- ⁹ Laird, p. 94.
- ¹⁰ Dawson, p. 172.
- ¹¹ Dawson, p. 173. See also Homi Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism' in *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference 1976-84*, ed. by F. Barker, P. Hume, M. Iversen and D. Loxley (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1986).
- ¹² Suleiman Mousa, *T. E. Lawrence: An Arab View*, trans. Albert Butros (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 90-1.
- ¹³ At the end of World War I, Lawrence determined to challenge the secret 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement through which Britain and France, allies in the war, had arranged to share the Near East between them after the war: France would be granted Syria and Lebanon, and Britain would rule Mesopotamia (now Iraq and Jordan) and Palestine. The Arabs, with whom Lawrence had fought and to whose cause he was dedicated, would get full control of nothing. <<http://www.cliohistory.org/thomas-lawrence/paris/>> [accessed 18 September 2015].
- ¹⁴ Mousa, p. 263.
- ¹⁵ Dunlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender Identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 121.
- ¹⁶ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 299.
- ¹⁷ Silverman, p. 305.
- ¹⁸ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 450.
- ¹⁹ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 452.
- ²⁰ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 454.

- ²¹ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 454.
- ²² Malcolm Brown, ed., *T. E. Lawrence: The Selected Letters* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1988), pp. 261.
- ²³ Brown, p. 360.
- ²⁴ Lowell Thomas, 'The Uncrowned King of Arabia', *The Strand Magazine*, 59. 349 (1920), p. 43
<https://archive.org/stream/TheStrandMagazineAnIllustratedMonthly/TheStrandMagazine1920aVol.LixJan-jun_djvu.txt> [accessed 18 September 2015].
- ²⁵ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 27.
- ²⁶ Mallikarjun Mansoor, *The Story of Irish Orientalism* (Dublin: Hodges, Figges & Co., 1944).
- ²⁷ Mansoor, p. 23.
- ²⁸ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2010), p. 423.
- ²⁹ James Joyce, *James Joyce: Critical Writings*, ed. by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), p. 160.
- ³⁰ Carol L. Shloss, 'Joyce in the Context of Irish Orientalism', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 35.2-3 (1998), p. 266.
- ³¹ For full details see the lecture Joyce presented at the Università Popolare in Trieste on 27 April 1907, see 'Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages' in *James Joyce, Critical Writings*, ed. by Mason and Ellmann.
- ³² For more details see Carol L. Shloss, "'Behind the Veil': James Joyce and the Colonial Harem", *James Joyce Quarterly*, 35.2-3 (1998): 333-47; see also Malcolm Sen, "'The Retina of the Glance": Revisiting Joyce's Orientalism' *Dublin James Joyce Journal*, 1.1 (2008), 54-68.
- ³³ James Joyce, 'Araby', in *Dubliners* (London: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 2006), pp. 21-6. All future references will be to this edition.
- ³⁴ Heyward Ehrlick, "'Araby" in Context: The "Splendid Bazaar," Irish Orientalism, and James Clarence Mangan', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 35.2-3 (1998), 309-31 (p. 309).
- ³⁵ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 2006), pp. 21-26 (p. 22, note 7).
- ³⁶ Lynne A. Bongiovanni, "'Turbaned faces going by": James Joyce and Irish Orientalism', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 38.4 (October, 2007), 25-49.
- ³⁷ See James Joyce, 'James Clarence Mangan' [Dublin 1902], rep. in *Critical Writings* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 78 <http://www.ricorso.net/rx/az-data/authors/m/Mangan_JC/comm.htm#JJoyce> [accessed 22 September 2015].
- ³⁸ Joyce, 'James Clarence Mangan', p. 78.
- ³⁹ William B. Yeats, 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', in *The Poems*, ed. by Daniel Albright (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1990), p. 256.
- ⁴⁰ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2010), p. 35. All future references will be to this edition.
- ⁴¹ Haroun Al-Raschid: (786-809 A.D.) of the Abbasid Dynasty and Caliph of the Islamic nation with Baghdad as its capital. A moderate ruler whose era proved a Golden Age with peace and flourishing arts and sciences. See Chapter III, Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights'.
- ⁴² R. B. Kershner, 'Ulysses and the Orient', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 35.2-3 (1998), p. 273.
- ⁴³ Kershner, p. 273.

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- ⁴⁴ John Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 46.
- ⁴⁵ Nizar Qabbani, 'Damascene Poem' <
<http://nizariat.com/poetry.php?id=65> >.
- ⁴⁶ David Ayers, *English Literature of the 1920s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 200.
- ⁴⁷ Joanna Grant, *Modernism's Middle East: Journeys to Barbary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 32.
- ⁴⁸ Grant, p. 32.
- ⁴⁹ D. H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent (Quetzalcoatl)*, ed. by L. D. Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 104. All future references will be to this edition.
- ⁵⁰ Judy Ruderman, "'Rekindling the Father Spark': Lawrence's Ideal of Leadership in *The Lost Girl* and *The Plumed Serpent*", in *The Critical Response to D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by J. Pilditch (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 125-40, (p. 132).
- ⁵¹ Witter Bynner, *Journey with Genius: Recollections and Reflections Concerning the D. H. Lawrences* (London: Octagon Books, 1974), p. 204.
- ⁵² David Ayers, *English Literature of the 1920s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 193.
- ⁵³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1976), line 299, p. 93.
- ⁵⁴ For more details on D. H. Lawrence's preoccupation with Oriental sex, see: Kimberley Van Hoosier-Carey, 'Struggling with the Master: The Position of Kate and the Reader in Lawrence's "Quetzalcoatl" and "The Plumed Serpent"', in *The Critical Response to D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by J. Pilditch (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 153-66, and Gerlad Doherty, 'The Plumed Serpent: Transcending the Orgasm', in *Oriental Lawrence: The Quest for the Secrets of Sex* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 111-22.
- ⁵⁵ Now part of Lebanon.
- ⁵⁶ D. H. Lawrence, *The Virgin and the Gypsy and Other Stories*, ed. Michael Herbert, Bethan Jones and Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 123. All future references will be to this edition.
- ⁵⁷ For example, a cock crowing would normally bring to mind Christ's denial by Peter in the New Testament (Matthew 26.33-35 and Mark 15.29-31).
- ⁵⁸ According to the Egyptian myth, the goddess Isis seeks the mutilated body parts of her husband who was killed and whose body was scattered over the earth. She eventually manages to assemble his body parts and resurrect him so she can conceive Horus.
- ⁵⁹ Eugene Goodheart, *D. H. Lawrence: The Utopian Vision* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2005), p. 152.
- ⁶⁰ John B. Vickery, 'Myth and Ritual in the Shorter Fiction of D. H. Lawrence', in *The Critical Response to D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by J. Pilditch (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 234.
- ⁶¹ Grant, p. 48.
- ⁶² Vickery, p. 234.

CHAPTER VIII

BEHIND THE FANTASIES: AN INTERLUDE

A woman cannot be whole unless she enjoys the freedom granted her by the law and by her innate disposition ... the veil as we know it is a great hindrance to a woman's progress, and indeed to a country's progress.

Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and the New Woman*¹

It might be agreed that in Western Literature the Middle East has been used in literature as the “far away and distant place” of magic, romance and fairy tales. The magical world is also satirised in, for instance, Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, where Haroun's father, the story teller and Shah of Blah, tells him that stories ‘[come] out of an invisible Tap installed by one of the Water Genies, . . . You have to be a subscriber.’² Orientalism, however, continues unabated. It is the place outside of society's social norms where its rules might be tested but, unlike the Forest of Arden, the Middle Eastern Fantasy has allowed an ever-increasing transgressive behaviour in literature and travelogues by both male and female writers, as Victorian moral codes were broken down during the *fin de siècle*. The women of the Middle East have largely been portrayed by Western writers as subdued, uneducated, and hidden behind their veils, or, on the other hand, as sexual objects, devious and dangerous to males. In the former attitude writers of the *fin de siècle*, writing in the more factual mode, have simply observed the condition while admitting they can do nothing about it; in the latter mode, writers have rarely gone beyond the stereotype. In terms of cross-cultural-dressing, while dancers of the seven veils continue to be popular in the West, both male and female writers chose, during the *fin de siècle*, to dress as Arab males. In the Middle East, however, change was also occurring during the early twentieth century. These changes operated both in relation to national identity, and in relations between the sexes. In many minds the two were inextricably linked, although change was slow in coming.

Of course, Arab women writers have always existed, but these writers did not write in English, nor were they widely translated in the West. Further, they

did not figure in the influences that Arab writings brought to bear upon the West during early contact. Until the 1950s Widad Sakkakini, the Syrian novelist, defined women's literature as:

[T]he literature in which a woman writer expresses her inner feelings and subtle sensitivity in female spheres which are out of men's reach. Women's literature describes female habits and modes of thinking which no man writer, however talented he might be, could reach.³

However, prior to the fall of Baghdad in 1258 female writers could excel and earn widespread respect. Such women would recite poetry in public even during the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammed. Tumaḍir bint 'Amr ibn al-Ḥarth Al-Khansa's (circa 575-664) eulogy for her brother Sakhr was well known:

I was sleepless, and I passed the night keeping vigil, as if my eyes had been anointed with pus,
 Watching the stars – and I had not been charged to watch them – and anon wrapping myself in the ends of ragged robes.
 For I had heard – and it was not news to rejoice me – one making report, who had come repeating intelligence,
 Saying, “Sakhr is dwelling there in a tomb, struck to the ground beside the grave, between certain stones.” ...
 You used to carry a heart that brooked no wrongs,
 compounded in a nature that was never cowardly,
 Like the spear-point whose (bright) shape lights up the night,
 (A man) bitter in resolution, free and the son of free-men.
 So I shall weep for you, so long as the ringdove laments and the night stars shine for the night-traveller,
 And I shall never make peace with a people with whom you were at war, not till the black cooking-pot of the (good) host turns white.⁴

Such eulogies were written in support of men at war, valorising their bravery and their 'resolution' to be free. Al-Kansa's brother was not cowardly – his heart is a 'bright spear point' – an image which is both war-like yet still lights up the darkness of night. Now he is lying 'in a tomb stuck to the ground beside the grave, between certain stones.' These stones serve as a barrier separating brother and sister, but Sakhr is remembered and will continue to be lamented. Al-Khansa was deemed 'the finest poet amongst jinn and humans'⁵ by Al-Nabighah Al-Dhubyani (circa 535-604).⁶ Al-Khansa is by no means the only female Arab poet; there were other female poets who won fame during

this period, including Layla AL-Amiriyya (648 - ?), Layla Al-Akheelia (?-circa 700) and Rabi'a Al-Adawiya (717-801).

By the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century there were a number of Arab women who wrote for themselves and who could envisage a life not wholly dependent upon men. A general dissatisfaction and anger was current in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt. This came as a result of the succession of foreign powers that had colonised Arab countries, giving rise to the Nationalistic Movements in the first half of the twentieth century, some of which succeeded in ousting the foreign colonisers and instituting independent Arab states. With this movement came calls for the emancipation of Arab women. Many Arab politicians believed that the Arab nation could not be liberated from foreign occupation with half of its society subdued by the other half. As suggested earlier in the thesis, this had been a question for the colonisers too. For example, in India there was the question of whether *suttee* should be prevented. Such an action would interfere with local cultural practice and perhaps generate disharmony which might, in turn, affect the profits of the East India Company.

G. H. Talhami, however, connects the Nationalist Movement in the Middle East with the rise of Arab feminism and lists several male reformers⁷ who saw the emancipation of women as an aspect of necessary modernisation if imperialist claims 'of barbarism and retardation as justification for colonial control were to be refuted.'⁸ The links between the need for modernisation, democracy and women's rights have been made a number of times. Even in the United States women's rights were firmly linked to the claim to democracy in the American Constitution and the nation building and modernisation that took place during the nineteenth century. Such movements in the United States, however, did not rely wholly (or even mainly) on male reformers – nor did they in the Middle East.

Arab women speakers on the subject of women emerged into the public sector prior to World War I. Aisha al-Taimuryia, also known as Aisha Taymur (1840-1902), Zainab Fawwaz (1860–1914), and May Ziyade (1886-1941) all sought reform during the nineteenth century and might be considered pioneers of Arab feminism. By the time Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947), and Saiza Nabarawi (1897-1985) were writing, Gertrude Bell had worked in the Middle

East for some time, Vita Sackville-West had written her travelogues, and Woolf's *Orlando* was already in print. These Arab women who called for equality and women's rights were, like their British counterparts, upper-middle and upper class women. Unlike working women, such women had the opportunity to pursue an education. Their efforts in the Middle East resulted in the foundation of The Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923. If we are to understand the Arab writers, both male and female, who wrote in or were translated into English in the second half of the twentieth century, then some consideration of these early feminists who wrote about the issues facing Arab women is necessary.

The early Arab women writers were the product of their time and society, but nevertheless, a quality of resistance and struggle pervades their works. They were progressive in their writing, though some readers detect an ambivalence in their attitude toward women's rights. Joseph Zeidan in *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond* comments that men, such as Qasim Amin, were more vehement in their demands for equality and reform than the Arab women writers of the period. He suggests that women writers seem 'apologetic and hesitant' in comparison and that they avoid the 'controversial issues of veiling and equality between the sexes.'⁹ In saying this, however, Zeidan takes little account of the circumstances in which these women wrote. Literary activity, as with other activities in the Middle East, took place in keeping with Arabic religious and cultural expectations. For example, in order to become involved in a literary milieu at all, May Ziyade, writing in the first part of the twentieth century, resorted to running her own literary salon¹⁰ which hosted some of the most renowned literary figures of the age, including Taha Hussein, Khalil Moutran, Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayed, Antoun Gemayel, and Abbas Al-Akkad.

Aisha Al-Taimuryia was another activist. Despite her confinement within the domestic sphere, she wrote about women's right to education, work and financial security, although she endorsed the veil:

With a hand of chastity I maintain my veil,
And with my honour I rise above my peers.
A glowing mind and a critical disposition
Refine my literature.
I compose my verse following those

Honourable women in their private quarters
 ...I guard my mind and eloquence
 With the mighty charm of my veil.
 My private quarters and the knot of my veil do not grieve me
 Neither do my long dress or my precious sanctuary.
 My anklet would not hinder me from reaching glory
 Nor would my wimple or veil delay me
 To race forward when ambitious
 Camels complain of the difficult course.¹¹

Al-Taimuryia expresses her appreciation of the veil and she claims that it bestows honour on women. However, the veil does not deter her from seeking an education and becoming a renowned writer.

Zainab Fawwaz, who lived until the beginning of World War I, also felt the need to found a literary salon. Her salon maintained segregation between men and women. However, despite the segregation she was able to share her writings with her male guests and listen to their prose and poetry from behind a window.¹² She, too, wrote of some sort of equality between the sexes. In 1891 she wrote that ‘woman is a human being as man is, with complete mental faculties and acumen, and equivalent parts.’¹³ Clearly aware of European women’s movements, she takes them as an example and points to their demand for the right to vote, involvement in the political life of their country, as well as the right to work and obtain financial independence. She commends the ‘women of England’ and wishes to follow their pattern. In her demand for women’s right to work, Fawwaz also highlights historical female figures:

How many a woman has ruled over men, conducted the
 business of state, determined statutes of law and behaviour,
 recruited soldiers, gone forth to battle, and carried out wars –
 like the queens who ran their kingdoms superbly ... Among
 them are the likes of Cleopatra, Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra,
 Elizabeth, and others who have come before us.¹⁴

By invoking these historical characters, Fawwaz urges Arab women to break free from their restraints, seek education and fulfil their potential in life. However, the presence of male writers within the salons of these women does suggest that their message was confined to a small and largely sympathetic audiences, while the lack of education among women, especially lower class women, meant that their works could not be read by most. Further, there is no

mention of the veil and Fawwaz obviously upholds the veil and the segregation of the sexes.

Huda Shaarawi, however, was an activist who demanded social reform in terms of women's rights and education in Egypt, in addition to her contribution to the Nationalist Movement against the British occupation of Egypt. She wrote during the early decades of the twentieth century. Her struggle for women's suffrage and Egypt's independence was supported by King Faisal the First, King of Iraq, who considered her the 'sea captain' leading the feminist movement in the Arab world.¹⁵ In her writings, Shaarawi describes the nature of life for Egyptian women of the time and articulates the differences in treatment between herself and her younger brother. The advantages and privileges he enjoyed were entirely due to the fact that he was a 'boy', as her stepmother tells her:

Haven't you understood yet? ... [y]ou are a girl and he is a boy ... One day the support of the family will fall upon him. When you marry you will leave the house and honour your husband's name but he will perpetuate the name of his father and take over his house.¹⁶

This statement is a bitter testimony to women's status in Arab society: daughters suffer discrimination in their parents' home because their offspring will not carry their family name. After marriage, their duty shifts from revering their parents to revering their husband, nor do they have much choice about who the husband will be. In Huda Shaarawi's case, her husband, forty years her senior, was forced upon her. She narrates details of her marriage to Ali Pasha Shaarawi, her cousin, who was fifty-three years old. She was only thirteen:

To the roll of drums the women hastened out of the room, or slipped behind curtains, while the eunuch announced the approach of the bridegroom ... Faint and crying, [Huda was supported by a friend who] wept as she tried to console me with tender words. Then a woman came and lowered a veil of silver thread over my head like a mask concealing the face of a condemned person approaching execution. At that moment, the bridegroom entered the room ... I was trembling like a branch in a storm ... When the customary goblets of red sorbet were offered, I was unable to taste the ritual drink. Finally, my new husband took me by the hand. In my daze I knew not where I was being led.¹⁷

By expressing her fear and sorrow on her wedding night, Huda Shaarawi becomes a representative for all child brides. She condemns the practice of early marriage forced upon young girls in Egypt and the Middle East. The lowering of the veil of silver thread is symbolic of all that is to come and no account is taken of her emotions. The veil conceals the face of a 'condemned person' although it is childhood innocence that is destroyed. In her memoirs, Shaarawi writes of the experiences of other women who are made to suffer polygamy, social injustice and are deprived of their own children if divorced. She reveals the complexities of women's lives in patriarchal Arab society. Rula B. Quawas regards Shaarawi's memoirs as a journal of a 'revolutionary consciousness'¹⁸ in which she rebels against the double-standards of her society. Indeed, while Shaarawi is not the only female voice who calls for change, she is bolder and more *avant-garde* compared to those writing prior to the impact of modernism and the twentieth century.

Shaarawi calls for the empowerment of women on two levels. She asks for individual empowerment by granting women equal opportunities of education and higher education. On a socio-cultural level she demands the creation of social organisations to support women and a change in patriarchal social norms to attain an equal moral code for both genders. In 1909 she established Mabarrat Muhammad'Ali, the first charitable society to address the issues of female and child poverty in Egypt. She also founded the first Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923, and led the first delegation of Egyptian women to the International Women's Suffrage Alliance Congress that took place in Rome that same year. On her arrival back in Alexandria, she disembarked with her face unveiled in public for the first time, defying instructions even from male members of her own Wafd Party who had been in England negotiating independence.¹⁹ She also appeared unveiled in Cairo Railway Station as she got off the train that took them from Alexandria to Cairo.²⁰ Shaarawi called for women to have equal opportunities in the political arena by allowing them to vote and even nominate themselves for local, governorate, parliamentary and senate elections.

At the Pan-Arab Feminist Conference, which took place in Cairo in 1944, Shaarawi addressed the delegates stating, not without humour, that:

[T]he man who alone distributes rights, has kept for himself the right to legislate and rule, generously turning over to his partner his own share of responsibilities and sanctions without seeking her opinion about the division.²¹

She goes on to emphasise the benefits and progress that the nation would gain if all society, not just the male half, was liberated and free to work. She compares Egypt to Western countries, where women have finally received the right to vote and participate in political life, declaring:

Every woman who does not stand up for her legitimate rights would be considered as not standing up for the rights of her country and the future of her children and society. Every man who is pushed by his selfishness to trespass on the legitimate rights of women is robbing the rights of others and bringing harm to his country.²²

The American Suffrage movement had successfully used a similar argument for the general good of having a female political voice that would bring those elements considered to be of the female sphere into the political arena. As Rula B. Quawas comments:

[Shaarawi] was very much an engaged critic, a contextual critic, a cultural critic whose feminist critique was undergirded by cultural analysis, a re-examination of the interweave between women and Arab society, a reassessment of prevailing hegemonic, masculinized values and of women's position in society. Her social thought and cultural criticism interplay and explicate one another, and they are energized by her emergent feminist ideology's catalyzing force.²³

Reading the memoirs and speeches of Shaarawi, the reader is illuminated about the difficulties Arab women suffered, not least of which was the wearing of the veil that was placed upon her head on her wedding day and which she had removed on arriving home after the International Woman Suffrage Alliance Congress. The veil is a matter of ongoing difficulty.

Qasim Amin, the Egyptian Judge and reformer (1863-1908) mentioned above, however, was in essence a social reformer and critic. He was an admirer of the Western women's fight for equality and connected it to their nations' progress. He is regarded by Arab critics as a pioneer Arab feminist, yet he was greatly influenced by the Victorian attitude towards women and he was shaped by John Ruskin's opinions, particularly those expressed in his lecture *Of*

Queen's Gardens (1865). In his lecture, Ruskin denounces the idea that 'woman is only the shadow and attendant image of her lord, owing him a thoughtless and servile obedience',²⁴ and emphasises the importance of education for men and women equally. But Ruskin also highlights what he considers to be the difference between men and women, describing the man as 'the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary.'²⁵ On the other hand, Ruskin deems that woman's intellectual capacity is 'not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision ... [and her] great function is Praise.'²⁶ His patronising attitude is evident in his assumption that women are feeble and require to be 'protected from all danger and temptation' by the man who 'guards the woman from all this.'²⁷

However, Amin was also a follower of John Stuart Mill's philosophy, that 'the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement.'²⁸ He condemns the 'unequal upbringing'²⁹ of women and calls for equality of education and women's rights, but he often implies that women lack the power of reasoning and depend solely on their emotions for judgment. He mentions that throughout history women developed their 'cunning' and 'foxlike trickery'³⁰ instead of wisdom:

History has left the woman behind without nurturing her mind through any sound training, thus weakening her rational and intellectual power ... Women lost their reasoning power during the darkness of past eras. A woman's physical weakness disabled her from acquiring it ... They lost their freedom because they lost the basis for sound, forceful judgment.³¹

Here, he does not blame women for their situation, since history has left them behind, but the 'cunning' and foxlike trickery' to which women are said to resort carries uncomfortable connotations of the *Arabian Nights*, for which both Sheherazade and Salome might stand accused. Amin also echoes Ruskin in a comparison between the middle and upper class husbands and their wives, suggesting that the man is a sensitive, compassionate person who cherishes ideas, has an ideology, sympathises with the poor and celebrates the good. The middle class wife, on the other hand, is an ignorant woman who 'assumes that

[her husband's] only purpose in life is to cater to her needs by purchasing for her expensive fabrics and precious jewellery'. He goes further, stating that:

A woman is unable to love a man because she has not tasted the meaning of real love ... a woman is as far as heaven is from earth from a love that can be described as the blending of two spirits.³²

Despite these comments, Amin was considered very progressive for his time, indeed, he was criticised by some Arab and Muslim critics because of his pro-Western ideas. He was even compared with Western Orientalists by critics such as Nergis Mazid, who points out that Amin considers 'the Egyptian who did not take advantage of colonialism's civilizing mission' to be the "ignorant Egyptian".³³

Amin was educated in France, and impact of his education is apparent in his thinking, but the conditions he describes continue to dominate discussions regarding Arab women in modern times, many of whom still suffer enslavement and abuse. On the centennial anniversary of the publication of Qasim Amin's *The Liberation of Women* the Egyptian Supreme Council of Culture held a conference on gender issues and women's rights (23 October 1999). It was noted, during the conference, that 'time has not passed in the Arab world' and that very little had been achieved regarding 'the regressive situation of women'³⁴ in Egypt and the Arab world. In *The Liberation of Women* (1899) and *The New Woman* (1900), Amin expresses his support for women's education and importantly denounces both the extreme veil/burqa dress code and the harem/purda seclusion of women. Again, however, he puts forward the case of Western women and compares their development with those in the Middle East, stating that: 'women in nations with a more advanced civilization have gradually advanced from the low status to which they have been relegated and have started to overcome the gap that has separated them from men.'³⁵

Amin denies that Islamic law subjugates women; instead, he blames the maltreatment of women on the ignorance and despotism that prevails in Arab nations.³⁶ Arab women, he says, suffer from contempt, ignorance, and seclusion behind 'the curtains of darkness'.³⁷ Amin comments on the matter of the veil and points to the sad reality that the Arab woman is used by man 'as an

object of delight and pleasure ... part of that totality of which he took possession'.³⁸ He goes on to say that the veil, as an Islamic dress code, 'is a great hindrance to a woman's progress, and indeed to a country's progress.'³⁹ As to the veiling of women or their isolation in the harem, he suggests that women should be able to modestly mingle with men. He denounces the objectification of Arab women in all its manifestations and demonstrates that any 'extremes' of veiling or the seclusion of women would imply that men 'turn women into objects or goods [they] own.'⁴⁰

Amin's view of the harem is also harsh, and he draws a bleak picture of a space that the Arab/Muslim man fills 'with slaves, white or black, or with numerous wives, satisfying himself with any of them whenever his passion and lust [drives] him'.⁴¹ For Amin, the harem represents not only a mistrust of women and their objectification, but also polygamy, which remained legal and permissible in Islam. Amin considered this to demonstrate 'an intense contempt for women'⁴² and 'nothing short of a legal trick to satisfy [men's] animal-like desire.'⁴³ He argues against the concepts of polygamy, harem and veiling women, suggesting that virtue is of equal value to men and women, and that men should avert their gaze for fear of temptation rather than demand women to cover up and be secluded. Amin introduces a revolutionary idea:

If men feared that women would be tempted, why were not men ordered to wear the veil and conceal their faces from women? Is a man's will considered weaker than a woman's? ... that men's desire may escape the control of their minds, and they may thus be tempted by any woman they see, however ugly or disfigured she be?⁴⁴

The problem, however, is bigger than just the harem or the veil. The Arab/Muslim woman has no recourse to law and, Amin states, 'can only attain the status and honor she deserves if she has also the right to initiate divorce'⁴⁵ which of course she lacks, regardless of how badly she may be treated. For Amin, however, it begins when Arab/Muslim women are denied the right to education, a theme still prevalent in Muslim nations in the twenty-first century. Then, an uneducated woman, in the eyes of Muslim men, may be seen as an incomplete human being so that 'a Muslim man thinks he has the right to dominate her or treat her accordingly.'⁴⁶ Amin emphasises the importance of education for women on an individual level, to enable them to 'develop their

abilities to their full potential'⁴⁷ and become independent and self-sufficient. For him it is economically important on a national scale, since women constitute half of society. Denying women proper education means denying the country of 'the benefits of the abilities of half its population'.⁴⁸

Some male Arab writers, like their Western counterparts, had difficulty with women calling for their rights and expecting to play a part in society that was equal to that of men. Before travelling to France for his education in 1925, Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1898-1987) expressed conservative opinions regarding women and the veil in his early plays, particularly in *Al-Mar'ah Al-Jadidah* (The New Woman), published in 1923. The play, which carries the same title as a pamphlet written by Amin, comes as an answer and attack against the rising voices calling for the liberation of women and the disposal of the veil, and includes the voices of Amin and Shaarawi. In the play Layla, the protagonist's daughter, represents the modern Egyptian woman of the 1920s; she is intelligent, educated, has a strong character and enjoys her freedom. Al-Hakim expresses his disapproval of women's liberation, according to Ali Al-Ra'i, by depicting Layla as a mistress of her father's friend, thus signifying that 'freedom for women meant moral laxity.'⁴⁹

Al-Hakim depicts woman's liberation as a threat against the institution of marriage and the stability of social life, particularly through Ni'mat, a liberated woman who abandons her husband to seek other men. The critic Mohammed A. Hammad considers Al-Hakim to be a misogynist who deliberately mocks those who support women's rights, by suggesting that 'Qasim Amin calls for woman's liberation from the veil so that she becomes a fallen woman.'⁵⁰ Critics such as Sahib Al-Rubae and Ahmed Saqar⁵¹ contend that Al-Hakim's attitude towards women is expressed not only in his plays but also in his essays. Al-Hakim declares:

Woman is like the moon ... for she does not shine from within herself, but rather she reflects the rays of light coming from the sun of the man. She is like a moon: a negative being and a dark surface in herself.⁵²

Thus, Al-Hakim appears to regard women as a passive extension or reflection of men, with no individuality, value or identity of her own.

Al-Hakim wrote *Pygmalion* (1942) after his return from Europe. The play considers two types of women: the domestic goddess or 'angel in the house' and the beautiful and dangerous femme fatale. Al-Hakim employs the classical myth to approach the issue of the ideal woman, and question the value of Life versus Art. He classifies the play as belonging to 'the theatre of the mind',⁵³ while Mohammad Salama considers it 'a play that thematizes the struggle between Art and Life.'⁵⁴ Al-Hakim conflates the classical myth of Pygmalion, who creates a stunning sculpture of a woman and falls in love with it, with the myth of the self-loving Narcis (Narcissus) who appears in the play as Pygmalion's servant. Pygmalion is said to have a creativity that surpasses that of the Greek gods. He sculpts a breath-taking statue of a woman he names Galatea, falls in love with it and prays to Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, to grant the statue life. In response to his prayers and a challenge by Apollo, the god of arts, Venus breathes life into Galatea, who becomes a passionate woman. Galatea knows nothing of her past but she is pleased that Pygmalion 'spent the money on buying [her] these jewels, dresses, perfumes and presents which adorn [her].'⁵⁵ However, Galatea elopes with Narcis, crushing Pygmalion's heart and leading Venus to challenge Apollo to see if he could give Galatea a better life/soul. Apollo accepts the challenge, upon which Galatea returns a repentant and adoring woman, full of appreciation and esteem for her artistic Pygmalion.

Pygmalion, however, cannot accept a domesticated angel as his own Galatea: 'You are not my artwork ... I didn't create a woman carrying a broom in her hand!'⁵⁶ Clearly, for Pygmalion women are for pleasure and beauty only. Nor can he tolerate her mortality, which means that her beauty will fade, and he blames the gods for ruining the sublimity of his masterpiece by breathing mediocre life into it; thus they debase to 'the sky into a roof' and rob him of his fine art by making 'the flying horse fly off this room!'⁵⁷ Torn between the eternal beauty of art and the inevitable betrayal of beauty by life, he loves both: 'Each of you is pulling my heart ... [s]he, by her loftiness and eternal beauty ... [a]nd you, by your kindness and mortal beauty ... [s]he is the art ... and you are the wife!!'⁵⁸ However, both of these women are constructed from his vision of Galatea, their gifts are endowed by him, through the gods, and neither particularly work well.

In his search for the ideal woman, Pygmalion is taunted by both Venus and Apollo. Venus makes a beautiful woman of passion, who is happy, but not quite content with her husband's adoration, so that she elopes with another. Apollo's woman, on the other hand, is a domestic goddess who adores her husband and glorifies him as a genius. The first woman exhibits the fine beauty of the statue and is probably closer to Pygmalion's artistic creation in her beauty, coldness, and aloofness. The second Galatea is warm, loving and caring, but damages the loftiness of his creation and reminds him that she is mortal, with a temporary and fragile beauty. It is not surprising that Pygmalion rejects both women, for neither of these women are real. He demands to have his statue back. This could be attributed to the artist's narcissistic tendencies of self-worship through Galatea, who becomes the 'artistic externalization of his own self-adoration.'⁵⁹ Mohammad Salama has observed that Pygmalion's rejection of both women reflects the author's negative sentiments towards Arab women, whether educated or not, as he declares in a collection of essays titled *My Donkey Told Me* (1945): 'The woman is so insignificant when she is ignorant, and if she is gifted with intelligence she becomes a dangerous individual.'⁶⁰

On a symbolic level Al-Hakim examines the value of Art, symbolised by the statue of Galatea, against the value of Life, as represented by Galatea the woman. He reveals the dilemma of the artist and the man through Pygmalion's indecision and inability to choose. His tension and ambivalence is felt throughout the play; initially he yearns for love and the warmth of life, but the feminising of the statue dispossesses it of its loftiness and timelessness. Pygmalion is shattered by the loss of the sublimity of his masterpiece and 'her deterioration from Reflective Art to pleasant art.'⁶¹ He implores the gods to take life back and restore the ideal of his ivory statue as it used to be. As they restore the statue to its original lifeless form, Pygmalion falls into despair and sorrow and eventually shatters it, dying with a broken heart. He cannot be satisfied with the woman, whether a beautiful temptress and lover or a domestic goddess. He yearns for the sublime which exists only in his art:

Olympus inhabitants ... you are able to knead the mixture of beauty, ugliness, nobility, life! ... [b]ut you can never create as I did, that purified clear thing which is called art ... yes art is my power. . . I, the mortal human . . . [i]t is my

arrogance ... [m]y miracle ... [a]nd my weapon ... I can
match your loftiness ... [a]nd overcome your weapons with
mine ... your weapon is life, mine is art.⁶²

The immortality of Galatea the statue signifies Pygmalion's attempt to overcome human limitations to compete with and surpass the gods, at least in terms of beauty.

Al-Hakim employed a Greek classical myth to explore the value of Art for Art's Sake, as opposed to the value of Life without Art, and unable to resolve these tensions. However, his failure to create an 'ideal' woman reflects on women in general, and Arab women in particular. He rejects both Venus's and Apollo's Galatea and thus both of the roles women are given to play – the sex goddess and the traditional housewife. An educated and emancipated woman is not an option for Hakim. Mohammad Salama makes a comparison between Al-Hakim's *Pygmalion* and the *Pygmalion* of George B. Shaw in his article 'The Aesthetics of "Pygmalion" in G. B. Shaw and Tawfiq Al-Hakim: A Study of Transcendence and Decadence'. He contends that the classical myth is employed to deliver 'a social [message] from decadence to transcendence in Shaw's version, and an ideational one from transcendence to decadence in Al-Hakim's play, which epitomizes the struggle between art and life.'⁶³ Furthermore, Salama comments that 'the message of Al-Hakim's *Pygmalion* is not only that "art and life can-not coexist," ... but is also that art cannot be achieved, or realized, because, if realized, it will inevitably fall into decadence.'⁶⁴ Another critic, Muhammad Ghunaymi Hilal, regards the symbolic shattering of the statue at the end of the play as:

[A] reflection of Al-Hakim's personal conviction that ... in order for art to survive, serious artists must do away with women-agents of dissuasion – so as not to be distracted from their works.⁶⁵

His comment assumes that any 'serious artist' will axiomatically be male, and presumably women will remain in the harem.

In Western literature individuals who represented the harem, Reina Lewis confirms, had to '*position themselves in relation to the imagined spatial frameworks attributed to the ideal harem of the generic stereotype.*'⁶⁶ In other words, Western authors have made use of the Oriental harem as a topos, rather than as an actual place, reinforcing the image of female subjugation and

suffering or male sexual fulfilment, as has been demonstrated in Leopold Bloom's imagining of the East in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It has been left to Arab writers, both male and female, to continue to debate these questions. The following chapters continue to examine depictions of Middle Eastern women by Arab writers. The works of these authors were either translated into English or, written in English, the language of the country where they now live as a result of Arabic migration due to war or more cultural differences during the post-colonial age. These chapters begin with the first Arab writer to win the Nobel Prize, Naguib Mahfouz.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VIII

- ¹ Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and the New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, translated by Samiha S. Peterson (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), p. 47.
- ² Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Granta Books / Penguin Books, 1991), p. 22.
- ³ Bouthaina Shaaban, 'Arab Women and Literature: An Overview', in *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, ed. by Suha Sabbagh (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1996), p. 236.
- ⁴ A. J. Arberry, *Arabic Poetry: A Primer for Students* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 38.
- ⁵ Emily Nasr Allah, *Nisa Ra'idat Min Al-Sharq (Pioneer Women from the East)*, (Egyptian Lebanese House of Publication, 2001), p. 63.
- ⁶ Al-Nabighah Al-Dhubiani is one of the famous seven pre-Islamic Arab poets who composed the *Seven Golden Odes* (Al-Mu'allaqat), which were hung inside Al-Kaaba in Mecca.
- ⁷ For example, Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1839?-97), Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1801-73), Mohammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Qasim Amin (1863-1908). See Ghada H. Talhami, *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1996), p. 24.
- ⁸ Talhami, p. 24.
- ⁹ Joseph T. Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 88.
- ¹⁰ Literary salons, including those run by women, have an old history in the Arab world, the earliest being run by Prophet Mohammed's great-granddaughter, Sukaynah Bint al-Hussein, circa 740 AD.
- ¹¹ Aisha Al-Taimuryia, 'With a Hand of Chastity I Maintain My Veil', translated by Leen Al-Hadban
<<http://www.poetsgate.com/ViewPoem.aspx?id=154524>> [accessed 10 October 2015].
- ¹² Zeidan, p. 82.
- ¹³ Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (eds), *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 224.
- ¹⁴ Badran and Cooke, p. 124.
- ¹⁵ Nabil Raghib, *Huda Shaarawi wa Asr Al-Tanwir* (Huda Shaarawi and the Age of Enlightenment) (Cairo: Al-Hayaa Al-Misriyya Al-Amma Lilkitab, 1988), p. 156.
- ¹⁶ Huda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*, translated by Margot Badran (London: Virago Press, 1986), p. 36.
- ¹⁷ Shaarawi, p. 57.
- ¹⁸ Rula B. Quawas, "'A Sea Captain in Her Own Right': Navigating the Feminist Thought of Huda Shaarawi', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8, (2006), 219-35 (p. 222).
- ¹⁹ Wafd Party is a Nationalist and Liberal political party, established in Egypt after the end of World War I in 1919 by Saad Zaghlul Pasha with the aim of liberating Egypt from the British Occupation and obtaining Independence.
- ²⁰ Huda Shaarawi created quite a stir by removing her veil in public. For more details on the incident see *The Egyptian Gazette*, 16 June 1923, *Le Journal du*

Cairo, 4 June 1923, *Al-Lata'ef Al-Musawwarah*, 4 June 1923; Shaarawi, pp. 129-30.

²¹ Badran and Cooke, p. 338.

²² Badran and Cooke, p. 340.

²³ Quawas, p. 220.

²⁴ John Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens' (London: G. Allen, 1902), p. 20 <<https://ia600303.us.archive.org/35/items/ofqueensgardens00ruskrich/ofqueensgardens00ruskrich.pdf>> [accessed 21 January 2014].

²⁵ Ruskin, pp.20-1.

²⁶ Ruskin, p. 21.

²⁷ Ruskin, p. 21.

²⁸ John Stuart Mill, 'The Subjection of Women', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. by M. H. Abrams (New York: W. W. Norton and Co. Inc., 2000), p. 1156.

²⁹ Amin, p. 17.

³⁰ Amin, pp. 15-16.

³¹ Amin, pp. 15-16.

³² Amin, p. 21.

³³ Nergis Mazid, 'Western Mimicry or Cultural Hybridity: Deconstructing Qasim Amin's "Colonized Voice"', p. 45 <http://i-epistemology.net/attachments/691_Ajiss19-4%20-%20Mazid%20-%20Western%20Mimicry%20or%20Cultural%20Hybridity.pdf> [accessed 15 December 2013].

³⁴ Malek Abisaab and Rula Jurdi Abisaab, 'A Century after Qasim Amin: Fictive Kinship and Historical Uses of "Tahrir al-Mara"', *Al Jadid: A Review and Record of Arab Culture and Arts*, 6.32 (2000). <www.aljadid.com/content/century-after-qasim-amin-fictive-kinship-and-historical-uses-tahrir-al-mara> [Accessed 16 December 2013]

³⁵ Amin, pp. 6-7.

³⁶ Amin, p. 9.

³⁷ Amin, p. 9.

³⁸ Amin, p. 9.

³⁹ Amin, p. 47.

⁴⁰ Amin, p. 36.

⁴¹ Amin, p. 9.

⁴² Amin, p. 83.

⁴³ Amin, p. 85.

⁴⁴ Amin, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Amin, p. 99.

⁴⁶ Amin, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Amin, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Amin, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Muhammad M. Badawi, ed., *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 368.

⁵⁰ Compiled by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, *Tawfiq Al-Hakim: Author, Thinker and Man* (Cairo: National Centre of Literature, 1988), p. 212.

⁵¹ For further details see Sahib Al-Rubaei, 'Tawfiq Al-hakim's Inferior View of Woman' in *Al-Hiwar Al-Motamadin (Civilized Dialogue)*, Issue 1339, (6 October 2005) <<http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=47196>>, and Ahmed Saqar, 'The Female Character in Tawfiq Al-Hakim's Theatre' in *Al-*

Hiwar Al-Motamadin (Civilized Dialogue), Issue 3299 (8 March 2011)

<<http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=249625>>.

⁵² Tawfiq Al-Hakim, *My Donkey Told Me* (Cairo: Maktabat Misr/Egypt Library), 1945), p. 89.

⁵³ Abder-Rahim Abu-Swailem, 'Two Plays by Tawfiq Al-Hakim in Translation, with a Critical Introduction' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign, 1987), p. 187.

⁵⁴ Mohammad Salama, 'The Aesthetics of "Pygmalion" in G. B. Shaw and Tawfiq Al-Hakim: A Study of Transcendence and Decadence', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 31.3 (2000), p. 229 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4183416>> [accessed 22 July 2014].

⁵⁵ Abu-Swailem, p. 208.

⁵⁶ Abu-Swailem, p. 235.

⁵⁷ Salama, p. 235.

⁵⁸ Salama, p. 236.

⁵⁹ Salama, p. 237.

⁶⁰ Al-Hakim, p. 74.

⁶¹ Salama, p. 230.

⁶² Abu-Swailem, p. 237.

⁶³ Salama, p. 222.

⁶⁴ Salama, p. 236.

⁶⁵ Muhammad Ghunaymi Hilal, *Al-Adab Al-Muqaran (Comparative Literature)* (Beirut: Dar Al-Awdah, 1962), p. 309.

⁶⁶ Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2004), p. 183.

CHAPTER IX

CALLS FOR CHANGE IN THE MID TWENTIETH CENTURY

Be my friend,
 It would be delightful if we remained friends.
 Every woman occasionally needs a friend's palm,
 And sweet words to hear
 ... Be my friend,
 I occasionally need to walk on the grass with you.
 I occasionally need to read a poetry book with you.
 And — as a woman — it delights me to hear you.
 So why do you care for how I look, Eastern man?
 Why do you see the Kohl embellishing my eyes,
 And cannot see my mind?
 ...
 Every woman on earth
 Needs an intelligent deep voice,
 And to sometimes fall asleep on a piano or a book.
 ...
 I am so weary of this era which considers woman a marble
 statue.

Nizar Qabbani, 'Be My Friend'¹

This chapter focuses on the image of Arab women as depicted by male Arab authors who, aware of women's complex life experiences, did not co-opt women characters as an imagined ideal or stereotype. The urge to depict Middle Eastern women and explore their status in society was not restricted to Arab social reformers or women writers. Male authors included: Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006), the Egyptian novelist and the first Arab writer to win the Nobel Prize; the Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih (1929-2009); and the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani (1923-98) who revolutionised Arabic poetry by introducing free verse in the 1940s and thus freeing it from classical metred form. These three authors dedicated a significant part of their work to revealing the deplorable life conditions and lack of autonomy of women in the Middle East.

Nizar Qabbani tackles the women's causes in his poetry. His first collection of poems, *The Brunette Told Me* (1944), is full of erotic, romantic themes of love which earned him the title of "The Woman's Poet" in the Arab world. His poetry later evolved to deliver powerful social and political protest against Arab regimes and the social norms that dominated Arab society. This may be seen in his poem 'Bread, Hashish, and Moon' (1954) and his long poem *Journal of an Indifferent Woman* (1968). This condemnation of male behaviour is shared with Tayeb Salih, who unveils the tragic status of women in Sudan in his novel *Season of Migration to the North* (1966). He sheds light on the myth of the Orient through the role-playing of male Arab students in the West. He shows such students capitalising on their orientalism and its associated fantasies. Best known in the English speaking world is Naguib Mahfouz, a prominent Arab author who won the Nobel Prize in 1988 for *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956-7). This work consists of *Palace Walk (Bein El-Qasrein, 1956)*, *Palace of Desire (Qasr El-Shoaq, 1957)*, and *Sugar Street (El-Sukkareyya, 1957)*. In these novels Mahfouz captures the reality of life for Middle Eastern women. These are not the women met by Vita Sackville-West or Gertrude Bell. The lives of these women are hidden behind closed doors, whereas foreign travellers like Sackville-West and Bell get to meet women of the higher classes, if any.

Mahfouz's depictions of womanhood in the *Cairo Trilogy* have been criticised as reducing women to opposing stereotypes: the housewife and the prostitute. However, Mahfouz writes of a third category, the rebel, revealing a deep insight into women's psyche and dreams of change. Mahfouz's fiction also reveals the inadequacies and tyranny of Arab male behaviour.

Mahfouz was born and raised in a lower-middle class Muslim family in Gamaleyya, one of the old quarters of Cairo, and he drew on his background to create his fictional characters, using old Cairo as the setting for many of his novels including *The Cairo Trilogy*. Initially, he intended *The Cairo Trilogy* to be published as one novel, but eventually, under pressure from his publisher, he agreed to publish it as three separate novels. This was due to financial issues and fear that censorship might ban the whole *Trilogy*, at a time when the political atmosphere in Egypt was not ready to accommodate the different and contradictory political and religious ideologies explored in the third novel,

Sugar Street. The novels take place between World War I and the end of World War II and revolve around three generations of the family of Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad, a lower-middle class shop keeper, and cover the period 1917-1944. The three novels concentrate on the women of the family, and on Middle Eastern women in general. Sasson Somekh suggests that in the *Trilogy* Mahfouz reveals ‘the slow emancipation of women from medieval shackles . . . the increasing influence of western culture [and] the decline of . . . religious adherence among the urban middle class.’² The *Trilogy* portrays subservient Middle Eastern women trapped between domestic servitude and sexual abuse in a colonized society in which masculinity is asserted by rendering females more helpless. Pamela Allegretto-Diulio comments that females subsist ‘on a far lower status than men’.³ She also suggests that the three women of the Al-Sayyid family – Amina, Al-Sayyid’s wife and the mother of the two daughters, Khadija and Aisha – represent typical Arab women who remain trapped ‘between religious mandates and cultural norms created by males . . . [and who were] never in a position to negotiate [their] position in society.’⁴

Mahfouz draws a realistic image of patriarchal society that dominated the Middle East in the beginning of the twentieth century, presenting the reader with three types of women. Literary and feminist critics such as Nawal El Saadawi and Pamela Allegretto-Diulio pinpoint the first two types of female characters and censure Mahfouz because of them. The first is the domestic goddess who lives within, and submits to, the restrictions of patriarchal society, such as the characters Amina and Khadija. These women receive minimum education in their early childhood, so that they can barely read and write. Their domestic training, however, continues to make them the perfect housewives whose mission in life is to care for and obey the male figure in their lives, whether father, brother, or husband and children. They are secluded in the harem and literally isolated from the rest of the world outside the boundaries of their homes, and they are only permitted to peep into the outside world through the holes of their *mashrabiya* (oriel window with latticework wooden shutters). The second type is the *almas* (belly dancers) or prostitutes, such as Zubayda and Jalila. Equally uneducated and illiterate as the housewives, they are more aware of the male-dominant society around them. They defy the moral laws and still complement that society. They form the nightly secret *other* life of

men who otherwise appear to be staunch, pious figures. Mahfouz also depicts a third type of woman who are far more rounded and complex than the prototype housewife or prostitute and even the housewives and prostitutes have their own dreams in Mahfouz's work. The rebels, however, actually attempt to cross boundaries delineated by their traditionalist society, either to experience more freedom or in search of a better life. Both Aisha, Al-Sayyid's youngest daughter, and Zanuba, the lute player, both belong to this type. Boundary-crossings form the core of my discussion.

Palace Walk (Bein el-Qasrein, 1956) begins with the nightly routine of Amina, Al-Sayyid's wife, as she waits for her husband to return from his soirée to 'serve him until he went to sleep' (*Palace Walk*, p. 1). Though Amina is the central character of the first chapter, Mahfouz only refers to her using the pronoun 'she', so the reader does not learn her name until the second chapter. This emphasises the marginalised value of Al-Sayyid's wife in Arab/Egyptian society, despite her central role in domestic life.⁵ Amina represents the quintessential Middle Eastern domestic goddess of the early twentieth century, in her physical confinement within the home:

A quarter of a century had passed while she was confined to this house, leaving it only on infrequent occasions to visit her mother in al-Khurunfush. Her husband escorted her on each visit in a carriage, because he could not bear for anyone to see his wife, either alone or accompanied by him. (*Palace Walk*, p. 35)

The difference between Al-Sayyid's despotism and Amina's servitude is established from the very beginning. On the one hand, he asserts a god-like authority at an early stage of their marriage with verbal abuse and the threat of physical abuse:

I'm a man. I'm the one who commands and forbids. I will not accept any criticism of my behaviour. All I ask of you is to obey me. Don't force me to discipline you. (*Palace Walk*, p. 4)

On the other hand, Amina has neither rights nor expectations. She is not even allowed to voice her concerns when she finds out that her husband has many concubines. Her mother states that she should be grateful because:

[Al-Sayyid] married you after divorcing his first wife. He could have kept her too, if he'd wanted, or taken second,

third, and fourth wives. His father had many wives. Thank our Lord that you remain his only wife. (*Palace Walk*, p. 5)

This motherly advice is a clear indication of how women remain objectified in Middle Eastern society. Amina does not express her discontent at her imprisonment at home or her husband's endless affairs; furthermore, she should be thankful that he did not add more wives into his harem.

Amina breaks free from her mental imprisonment, however, and creates a haven within the physical walls of her prison – or, more accurately, on top of it: the garden on the roof of the house. The roof with its beautiful garden is her favorite place, where she can be free to pet her hens and pigeons, take care of her pots and flowers and set her imagination free beyond the physical limits of her world. On the roof,

[her] spirit soared over [the minarets'] tops, as close as possible to the heavens ... and her yearnings mingled with the sorrow that pervaded her every time she remembered she was not allowed to visit [Al-Husayn's shrine]. (*Palace Walk*, p. 35)

The roof garden highlights the imaginative difference between Amina and Al-Sayyid. She is a nurturer who brings joy and life and creates a delightful garden with cared-for birds and beautiful carnations, roses and jasmine vines. In the garden, Amina takes flight away from the demands of social and religious restrictions: Her spirit soars above even the minarets.

Al-Sayyid is bound by society and becomes the domestic despot he is expected to be. He turns the house into a cage within which he keeps his wife and daughters. Images of the caged woman resonate with the caged birds on the roof, who are well-fed till the day of their slaughter. Yet, other than the time spent on her roof haven, Amina accepts her domestic confinement, believing that she owes her husband obedience, loyalty and care. In return, she expects her husband to provide for the house, but she has no further expectations from him – such as kindness, fidelity or monogamy. It is a common Middle Eastern concept that a man has a right to indulge himself while expecting his wife to be loyal and obedient. This imbalance between the male rights and female expectations influences Khadija and Aisha, who are taught blind obedience; they learn not to question their father's authority and yield to it without any hesitation. Mahfouz highlights this through the question

of the offspring's marriage; Al-Sayyid is the one who decides when and whom his children will marry, consulting neither with them nor their mother. Amina does not acknowledge any rights for women, and believes that it is unnatural for women to expect or demand more respect or loyalty from men. This attitude could have its roots in her religious upbringing. It stems from the teachings of Quran and Hadith (quotations of Prophet Mohammed) in a religious society, as indicated by Pamela Allegretto-Diulio and Fatima Mernissi.⁶ Even the congregational clergy of Massachusetts took alarm at the idea of women in the nineteenth century making their views public for:

When she assumes the place and tone of a man as a public reformer, our care and protection of her seem unnecessary If the vine, whose strength and beauty is to lean upon the trellis work and half conceal its clusters, thinks to assume the independence and overshadowing nature of the elm, it will not only cease to bear fruit, but fall in shame and dishonor in the dust.⁷

However, housewives and mothers are not the only women who suffer from the lower social status accorded all women.

In contrast with the domestic servitude of Amina, Mahfouz presents a different type of woman who is the subject of men's lust. The famous *almas* or belly dancers, represented by Zubayda and Jalila dominate the night life of Al-Sayyid Ahmad and his merchant friends. They provide alcohol, singing, dancing and sexual entertainment. In return, they enjoy the kind, merry, generous side of Al-Sayyid. Zubayda receives generous gifts 'of candied nuts and dried fruit, sweets and other presents' such as the stove Al-Sayyid commissioned for her which was 'decorated with silver plate.' (*Palace Walk*, p. 97) In opposition to his cruel and intolerant nature at home, Al-Sayyid reveals a humorous and cheerful nature among his friends and a refined, amorous nature with the *almas*:

I won't deviate from my long-standing practice of making my own pleasure a secondary objective after hers, which is the real goal and climax. In that way my pleasure will be achieved in the most perfect fashion.' (*Palace Walk*, p. 99)

Mahfouz describes Al-Sayyid's as experiencing not love, but only lust. Nevertheless, he is not simply an animal in that he loves song and music and had 'elevated lust to its most exalted type.' (*Palace Walk*, p. 99) Even his

conjugal love, affected as it was by familiarity and moments of affection, was based on carnal desire. 'No woman was anything more than a body to him.' (*Palace Walk*, p. 99)

Although the *almas* enjoy much more physical freedom than the housewives, they are prisoners of their own reputation and their activities are circumscribed by their patrons. They are treated with suspicion by other characters both male and female, and nowhere in the *Trilogy* do we find the *almas* on their own, expressing their own feelings, desires and aspirations. They exist in Mahfouz's society only as long as Al-Sayyid and his friends have a sexual appetite for them. The contrast between the lives of housewives and that of the *almas* is made through Al-Sayyid's comparison between liking a woman and respecting her. Umm Maryam, a flirtatious neighbour is said to be '[a] thoroughly dangerous woman [and] although she was a precious jewel to skirt chasers like [Al-Sayyid], on the domestic front she would be a bloody disaster' (*Palace Walk*, p. 342). The *almas* break all society's rules of decency and modesty, but nevertheless enjoy a wide popularity and financial security. They are considered 'not respectable' and are themselves quite aware that their popularity and affluence are but temporary and dependent upon their youth. They are queens of the night only as long as they are young and beautiful. Zubayda eventually becomes a drug addict, loses her beauty and her wealth, and culminates as a homeless beggar.

Conjugal relations between men and women are repeated by the second generation. Even in the early days of her marriage to Al-Sayyid's son Yasin, Zaynab revolts against her oppressive life in Al-Sayyid's house when she demands that her husband to take her to the theatre. This enrages Al-Sayyid who is still the head of the household. Even Amina regards Zaynab's attitude as a 'form of coquetry' and wonders, 'How can she claim rights for herself that no other woman has ever claimed?' (*Palace Walk*, p. 391). There is a clear difference between the expectations of the two generations. For Amina: 'Zaynab was arrogating to herself masculine prerogatives' (*Palace Walk*, p. 311) For her part Amina:

takes exception to this conduct, precisely because she was a woman who had spent her life shut up inside her house, a woman who had paid with her health and well-being for an innocent visit to al-Husayn, the glory of the Prophet's family

– not to Kishkish Bey. Her silent criticism was mixed with a feeling of bitterness and rage which she seemed to be rationalizing when she observed to herself, “Either that woman is punished too or life has no meaning.” (*Palace Walk*, p. 311)

Amina’s attitude represents the legacy of subordination that is passed from one generation of women to the next. Amina was raised to be submit to men’s desires rather than her own and this view, supported by the whole weight of society and religion, prevails. She raised her daughters to behave exactly as she did toward their father, and expects no less from Zaynab. Similarly, Yasin, Al-Sayyid’s eldest son, behaves towards his wife the same manner as his father behaved toward Amina.

Yasin and his first wife, Zaynab argue because Yasin follows his own (and his father’s) path of debauchery. He comes to her drunk every night and is caught attempting to rape her black servant. At this, Zaynab revolts, makes a scene, and eventually demands a divorce. Her behaviour is deemed impudent and shameless because:

It was not appropriate for a good wife to implicate her husband in a scandal ... no matter what the circumstances ... Yasin would have been within his rights to discipline her for what she had done ... Yasin had made a mistake, but she had even made a greater one. (*Palace Walk*, p. 389)

Nevertheless, Zaynab gets her way. Yasin divorces her and she returns to a much more open life under her Circassian father’s roof who stands as an example of more moderate and progressive role-model than Al-Sayyid. However, later, in *Palace of Desire* (*Qasr el-Shoaq*), Yasin’s second wife, Maryam, daughter of the flirtatious neighbour, fares no better. He is a reluctant groom desired by both mother and daughter, but eventually marries Maryam only to divorce her for protesting against a drunken orgy that takes place with Zanuba, the lute player and prostitute whom he brings home.

Zanuba, the playful lute player and foster child of Zubayda, is clear about her own desires. She is famous for her ‘laughing black eyes with glances full of merriment and deviltry’. (*Palace Walk*, p. 73) She is smarter and more ambitious than her foster mother, Zubayda, lover of Al-Sayyid. Miriam Cooke suggests that Zanuba ‘is in control of the illusion that she is surrendering, and she is in control of the man’s desire and burgeoning need for her body and not

that of any other woman.’⁸ Zanuba, aware of the grim fate awaiting other *almas*, utilises her desirability, as did Salomé, to forge a different path. She begins her career as a lute-player with her foster mother and belly-dancer Zubayda, but she aspires to rise above becoming a common prostitute and wishes to become an escort of Al-Sayyid in the *Palace of Desire*. She is entangled in a love-triangle between Al-Sayyid and his son Yasin, both of whom are unaware each other’s involvement, she uses temptation and rejection to achieve her desires. She denies Al-Sayyid sex unless he marries her. Zanuba defies the strict social boundaries of Egyptian society and Al-Sayyid comments:

... marrying a girl like you would be disgraceful and nothing but an anecdote for buffs of embarrassing jokes ... [s]ince ideas like these fill your head, you’re no longer fit to associate with me. It does me no good to frequent lunatics.
(*Palace of Desire*, p. 298)

After failing with the father, she uses the same tactic successfully with Yasin, who does marry her. However, although Zanuba defies social norms, ironically she does not change the gender relations within the patriarchal society, but chooses which cage she will enter.

Zanuba has climbed the social ladder to become a middle-class ‘respectable’ wife. In doing this she is compared to a ‘spider’ (*Palace of Desire*, p. 298) setting a ‘trap’ (*Palace of Desire*, p. 325). Yasin is accused of destroying the reputation of the whole family, as Al-Sayyid points out: ‘You’ve forced a lute player on the family. She’ll be one of us along with her children ... [y]ou’ve disgraced the family’s honor’ (*Palace of Desire*, p. 329). However, Zanuba’s metamorphosis is unexpectedly a complete and permanent one. She becomes Yasin’s third wife and the only one who manages to maintain a stable and steady marriage, thus acquiring the approval and acceptance of Al-Sayyid’s family. As Zanuba says ‘A woman like me who weds really values her marriage’ (*Palace of Desire*, p. 283).

Zanuba had succeeded in gaining everyone’s respect, and Amina said of her one day, “No doubt she comes from a good family ... for she’s a good girl and the only one who has been able to live with Yasin.”⁹

Zanuba is rewarded for her newly acquired modesty, dedication and patience, and gains the respect of her husband and his family. Yasin, who used to think of a woman as ‘a pair of shoes’ (*Palace Walk*, p. 408) to be cast away at any time, acknowledges Zanuba’s merits, stating that he thinks ‘more highly of Zanuba ... because Zanuba’s more emotional, more sincere, and more dedicated to [their] marriage’ (*Palace of Desire*, p. 365). However, as Mondal comments:

a recurrent theme is emerging in which women who are not contained by the institutions which police respectability and who do not conform to the familial role are consistently represented as threatening and dangerous. They must be re-contained.¹⁰

A renegade woman like Zanuba is re-contained through marriage, in order to eliminate the danger to the patriarchal system.

Aisha, Al-Sayyid’s sixteen-year-old daughter, is another rebel, though her fate is entirely different from that of Zanuba. Described as slender and blond with golden hair and blue eyes, Aisha is ‘the very picture of beauty’ (*Palace Walk*, p. 27). In the strict conservative environment of her home, and despite the fact that women are not allowed to leave the house at all, she sees a police officer from her *mashrabiya* and makes herself visible to him:

Her glance had fallen on him as he looked up at her face with astonished admiration ... he had made an unforgettable impression on her imagination with his gold star and red stripe. A vision to enchant the mind and ravish the imagination, it hovered before her eyes for a long time. (*Palace Walk*, pp. 24-5)

This visual contact is regarded as a serious transgression and a threat against the rules of society. Miriam Cooke comments that: ‘Women’s insubordination – any hint of autonomy – threatens these men’s fragile identities and represents the final stage in their alienation.’¹¹

In an era when virtuous housewives are expected to be asexual, Aisha acts upon her sexual desires by gazing upon the police officer. This is an absolute taboo amongst Middle Eastern ‘respectable’ families of the time. Not only has Aisha made herself visible but she desired the police officer in particular. This stands in direct contrast to Amina’s asexual nature and challenges the boundaries imposed by Al-Sayyid and society. Mahfouz’s critics agree that in

the Egyptian society domestic housewives are not to be associated with sex: Oersen observes that in Egypt ‘there were certain subjects with which [respectable women] were never associated, such as desire or sexual pleasure.’¹² Mondal likewise argues that an *alma* or prostitute’s sexualisation ‘is the corollary to [the domestic housewives’] desexualisation and hence their respectability.’¹³ But Aisha defies her ‘oppressive fear’ (*Palace Walk*, p. 25) day after day, by sneaking to the window and appearing to the police officer. Despite the exaltation of seeing him, Aisha is aware of the gravity of her rebellion. She has a heavy conscience, as if she is ‘hiding evidence of a bloody crime’ (*Palace Walk*, p. 24). Meanwhile Al-Sayyid declares that if he doubted that any man has ever seen Aisha or Khadija ‘not even murder would satisfy [him]’ (*Palace Walk*, p. 157). However trivial Aisha’s actions might seem to the Western reader, her gazing is a serious offence and would be deemed an honour crime leading to her death at the time, if it were discovered that she had brought disgrace upon her family.

The police officer’s admiration of Aisha leads him to ask for her hand in marriage but this is rejected by Al-Sayyid. Her father marries her to someone else with whom she is happy in marriage, but her husband and two sons die of typhoid. Her only remaining daughter dies in childbirth years later, leaving her in agony and sorrow. In her own words, Aisha describes herself as ‘the outstanding beauty of her day ... [who] became the cautionary tale of her day’ (*Sugar Street*, p. 5). Yasin wonders, “What has Aisha done to deserve this?” (*Palace of Desire*, p. 422). The patriarchal Middle East is unforgiving in Mahfouz’s novel which demonstrates again and again that attempts by women to cross society’s boundaries do not succeed. Males, on the other hand, such as Yasin and Al-Sayyid, seem to suffer no consequences for their licentiousness, but are rewarded with obedient wives. Mondal considers Aisha’s afflictions to be the punishment for her foreignness and visibility. Her blond hair, blue eyes, her beauty, her laziness and, above all, her awareness of that beauty and rebellion against the hijab by making herself visible to the police officer ‘allude to a foreign paradigm of womanhood ... she represents a foreign ideal of womanhood which is specifically non-maternal.’¹⁴ This modern, untraditional model of womanhood is a threat to patriarchal society, hence the character is punished on a personal level through bereavement and on a symbolic level by

ensuring that this rebellion has ‘literally ... no future.’¹⁵ By punishing her with such a grim fate, Mahfouz exposes men’s secret fear of strong, wilful women and as a male author he punishes them. Nevertheless, Mahfouz does present the reader with a third type of women; the transgressive or rebel who is not satisfied with her lot in life and who tries to act on her own desires.

The three generations of women in the Al-Sayyid family, Amina, Khadija and Aisha, and the granddaughters, Na’ima and Karima, all remain uneducated and home-confined. The grandsons, or at least some of them, rebel against old family traditions. Born prior to World War II are studying at university during the war. Khadija’s son, Ahmad, marries Sawsan Hammad, a communist and an educated woman who works for the same journal where he is employed. Sawsan represents a New Arab Woman who challenges patriarchal society and seeks education, work and autonomy. She is treated by Ahmad, her husband, as an equal rather than a follower:

We began as comrades in the struggle for freedom, working together like one person – each of us a candidate for incarceration. Whenever I praise her beauty, she stares at me in protest, frowns, and reprimands me – as if love were beneath us. (*Sugar Street*, p. 240)

The word ‘comrade’ is significant, signalling both the Communist ideology which the couple embrace and Ahmad’s perception of Sawsan as a companion with whom he can share the life of the mind as well as the intimacies of the body. Both fear a German invasion:

“Soon Rommel will enter [Alexandria] with his troops.”
Then after a short silence he added, “At Suez, he’ll join forces with the Japanese armies, which will have completed their march through Asia. Then the Fascism of the Stone Age will return. (*Sugar Street*, p. 241)

The fact that the Middle East is still under foreign rule plays no small part in both attitudes toward women and the changes that can be seen in the novels among the third generation. Ahmad is politically aware in ways that Al-Sayyid’s generation was not, and, like Sawsan’s father, both he and his wife are communists. They are mindful of the many enemies of their ideology outside Egypt, while inside it ‘the Muslim Brethren and the reactionaries, who hardly differ from each other’ (*Sugar Street*, p. 241), all seem to conspire

against them. Even Ahmad's brother, Abd Al-Mun'im, considers the Brethren's message 'a progressive one that is far superior to materialist forms of socialism.' (*Sugar Street*, p. 241) While Sawsan feels that the Brethren's conduct is:

“[A]n appalling campaign of misinformation. When conversing with educated people, they present religion in contemporary garb. With uneducated folk, they talk about heaven and hell. They gain adherence in the name of socialism, nationalism, and democracy.”
 “My darling never tires of talking about her beliefs,” Ahmad reflected. (*Sugar Street*, pp. 241-42)

Ahmad's comment here, while fond, and somewhat enlightened, is patronising. One is reminded of how easily women, who during times of war stood alongside men in terms of the work they did, can be pushed back into domesticity once the war is over.

With his progressive mentality, Ahmad admits his shortcomings and his inability to completely overcome the convictions of his background:

Perhaps what upsets me most about myself is that – steeped as I am in the conventions of *Sugar Street* – I still occasionally look at women with a traditional bourgeois eye. During hours of lethargic backsliding, I fancy that socialism in the progressive woman is simply another captivating characteristic comparable to playing the piano or presenting a fine appearance. (*Sugar Street*, p. 242)

Significantly, Sawsan rejects the conventional rhetoric of romantic compliments; she is determined not to be packaged as a beautiful object but to be respected as a fellow worker. The family women who abide by the norms of patriarchal society do not welcome Sawsan into their world, especially Khadija. When she finds out that her son wants to marry her she comments: 'So she's a journalist too! God's will be done! What kind of girl works outside the home except an old maid, a hag, or a woman who apes men?' (*Sugar Street*, p. 249).

Sawsan's communist ideology and her work – both as a journalist for *The New Man* journal and as a distributor of political pamphlets that call for Egypt's independence – reflect Margot Badran's statement about Egypt's New Woman:

When Egyptian women moved into public space, inventing new roles for themselves or entering ‘male’ professions, they understood their own advancement/liberation as ‘new women’ to be intrinsically connected with the nationalist rhetoric of progressive men.¹⁶

Sawsan is a pragmatic woman who is not undermined by criticism or rejection from her mother-in-law and from the wider middle-class world her husband’s family comes from. She is not even intimidated by the authorities arresting her husband and reassures her mother-in-law that there is no evidence to incriminate Ahmad. While Khadija finds this response cold and unfeeling, Sawsan becomes a symbol of female power with her inner calm strength. The readers never get an insight into Sawsan’s inner psyche, as they do with Aisha, Khadija or Amina, however, her character makes a powerful statement about the possibility for change and a new mode of womanhood.

Mahfouz’s fiction is rife with traditional Middle Eastern women and domineering, hypocritical and licentious men who have very little or no regard for women. Al-Sayyid, the archetype of such men, addresses his wife in anger: ‘by God, who knows? You’re just a woman, and no woman has a fully developed mind’.¹⁷ Mahfouz’s male characters, such as Al-Sayyid Ahmad or his son Yasin, seem to carry on with their lives unscathed, without suffering any consequences for their hypocrisy or lewdness, whereas Aisha, Al-Sayyid’s daughter and rebel, seems to be the most unfortunate character in the novel. Some critics, such as Nawal El Saadawi, consider Mahfouz’s work an expression of reactionism.¹⁸ S. B. Oersen argues that ‘Mahfouz’s representations reinforce the very kind of biased “orientalism” that Said sought to isolate as a sustained Western discursive construction regarding the “east”’.¹⁹ Although, Allegretto-Diulio argues that Al-Sayyid-Amina’s relationship stands for a facet of Islamic culture that Mahfouz critiques:

[Mahfouz] denigrates those who accept it as normal ... [a facet] that has historically caused women and men like Qasim Amin to address the passivity and subservience of women promoted by abusive patriarchal construct.²⁰

Ayo Kehinde considers Mahfouz’s depiction of women to be conservative and traditional but also highlights ‘the key challenges facing gender equality and tolerance in his works.’²¹ On the other hand, Nawal El Saadawi claims that

Mahfouz's 'understanding of [women's] situation has not moved from a superficial analysis of their social conditions to a deep and sensitive realization of the tragedy women are made to live.'²² She accuses him of stereotyping women into the only two categories permitted within patriarchal society, 'the sacred pure mother or ... the prostitute.'²³ However, Mahfouz had a very deep understanding of his society, and he manages to reveal the appalling conditions of Arab/Egyptian women through his accurate, though fictional, characterisation in *The Cairo Trilogy*.

However, Mahfouz's stark contradictions and Dickensian, seemingly cartoonish characters do condemn the ignorance and apathy that prevailed in Egyptian society in the first half of the twentieth century. He accentuates the pathetic status of Arab women in that era. In the *Palace of Desire (Qasr el-Shoaq, 1957)* When Kamal, the youngest son of Al-Sayyid, complains of the social structure of his family he comments:

Mother...Ignorance is your crime, ignorance ...ignorance ...
ignorance. My father's the manifestation of ignorant
harshness and you of ignorant tenderness. As long as I live,
I'll remain the victim of these two opposites.²⁴

Thus condemning the ignorance and lack of education that prevail in Egyptian/Arab society, not only for women but also for men. There is no doubt that Mahfouz demands change in Arab society. He draws a realistic panorama of Egyptian society at the beginning of the twentieth century, giving full details of women's life and their marginalisation. More importantly, in both the *Trilogy* and in later novels, he provides a sympathetic image of prostitutes, humanising them, giving them a voice, and tracing the flaws in a patriarchal society that made them work the streets and treated them, and all women, as inferior sex objects.²⁵

Mahfouz's characterisation of women is complex and controversial for critics, who seem unable to decide whether he is sympathetic toward Arab women or whether he depicts his female characters from a patriarchal bias. Yet Mahfouz's work does read as a photograph. His image is that of an observer depicting Egyptian women and their fate as it could typically be in the Cairene setting of the first half of the twentieth century. However, there is really no such thing as an entirely objective view and in a feminist reading of Mahfouz,

Miriam Cooke suggests that the heterosexual relationships in Mahfouz's early novels consist of a 'binary model of master/slave':

Men who cannot control their own lives ... turn to women as objects over which they can have dominion. The relationships Mahfouz's men initiate with women are always explicitly grounded in asymmetric power. Women's insubordination – any hint of autonomy – threatens these men's fragile identities and represents the final stage in their alienation.²⁶

In a colonised Egypt, Mahfouz exposes the 'asymmetric power' which forms the basis of the relationship between men and women in Egypt and the Arab world.

The Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih (1929-2009) also unveils the tragic status of women, this time in Sudan, in his novel *Season of Migration to the North* (1966). Furthermore, Salih reveals the Shahryar²⁷ mentality of Arab male students in the West who capitalise on their exotic looks by evoking the figure of the Sheik and re-creating the harem fantasy in the West. However, there was always a violent aspect to Hull's Sheik and it is this aspect that the protagonist embraces. Mustafa Sa'eed, the protagonist of *Season of Migration to the North*, recreates the harem fantasy without any consideration of the damage that eventuates. The protagonist allures Western women into falling in love with him before destroying them. Mona Takieddine-Amyuni reads the novel as an 'existential fable of Arab man and woman in search of identity, a place in the universe, meaning in life [expressed through] a series of violent confrontations between east and west, black and white, village and city.'²⁸ The story of Mustafa Sa'eed, a Sudanese PhD graduate who studied in London and travelled around Europe, and whose ancestors might have been natives who assisted Herbert Kitchener in his Sudanese campaign of 1898, is framed by a present day narrator who reads his journals after his death. Mustafa a well-built, very handsome man with dream eyes and whose eyebrows are like crescent-moons,²⁹ was living in his village in Sudan in the last few years of his life before committing suicide. The narrator meets Mustafa briefly before his death and collects information about him and he comes to know other details through Mustafa's diary, letters and pictures. Other details come from people who knew Mustafa during his childhood and later after his return and who have

created a legend around him. There are, then, numerous narrators, including Mustafa himself, around whom our narrator forms a frame. Thus we see Mustafa through various eyes, while his own narrative forms a metafiction that we can only negotiate through the eyes of the narrator.

Mustafa describes himself as ‘different’ (*Season of Migration*, p. 20), with a mind ‘like a sharp knife, cutting with cold effectiveness ... I was cold as a field of ice, nothing in the world could shake me’ (*Season of Migration*, p. 22). He characterises himself as sharp, cold and ungrateful, without any social warmth towards those who care for him and bears many of the symptoms of the complete psychopath. He is the dark other of the Western imagination. He lures many Western women during his stay in Europe with his Oriental physique and a bedroom whose decoration appears to have been selected from a 1918 *One Thousand and One Nights* catalogue:

[The bedroom’s] curtains were pink ... the carpeting was of a warm greenness, the bed spacious with swansdown cushions. There were small electric lights, red, blue, and violet, placed in certain corners; on the walls were large mirrors, so that when I slept with a woman it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously. The room was heavy with the smell of burning sandalwood and incense, and in the bathroom were pungent Eastern perfumes, lotions, unguents, powders and pills. (*Season of Migration*, pp. 30-1)

The list reflects the material culture of an imagined Orient and invokes Lady Montagu’s descriptions of Ottoman palaces and harems. Mustafa is not looking for love, or any other sentiment beyond satisfying his sexual appetites. He ‘would do everything possible to entice a woman to [his] bed. Then [he] would go after some new prey’ (*Season of Migration*, p. 30). The narrator comes to know that Mustafa broke many hearts in Europe, destroying the lives of several women, a few of whom even committed suicide.

Mustafa’s victims may be many, but his method of enticing them is one: he draws on the Oriental fantasies of these Western women which are in some sense masochistic. However, his indigeneity and tribal masculinity is all that they see, despite his degree in economics. The first is Ann Hammond, who gasses herself after Mustafa breaks her heart. She is a student of Oriental languages in Oxford, and Mustafa lures her with his dark skin that reminds her of ‘tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons’ (*Season of Migration*, p. 30).

Another suicidal victim is Sheila Greenwood, who is charmed by the smell of burning sandalwood and incense and the 'ivory necklace [he] had placed like a noose round her beautiful neck' (*Season of Migration*, p. 35), implying both sexual entrapment and a death penalty. A third woman, Isabella Seymour, is enchanted by his stories as he tells her about Tarik ibn Ziyad, the Arab leader who conquered Spain in 711 A.D. Mustafa attracts her because he is an African Arab, like Othello, and she imagines him as 'a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles' (*Season of Migration*, p. 39).

Mustafa's greatest asset, according to his diary, is his intellectual and sexual prowess; his constant references to his brain as a 'knife' throughout the novel is an indication that he considers his intellectual capacity to be the source of his phallic potency. However, he hunts women as prey and continually refers to himself as a warrior battling women with his 'bow and sword and spear and arrows' (*Season of Migration*, p. 34). These phallic symbols are used repeatedly in Mustafa's diary, and when he murders Jean Morris, the readers are unable to determine whether 'the dagger' (*Season of Migration*, p. 164) is a metaphorical one or an actual literal dagger, until they reach the part where the hot blood gushes from her chest and she dies. Jean, his murdered wife, referred to him as a 'savage bull' (*Season of Migration*, p. 33). Mustafa's aggression is targeted toward Western women, while, it appears, he treats his Sudanese wife with kindness foreign to his fellow Sudanese. However, she remains unnamed, and theirs appears to have been a traditional marriage, perhaps partaking in the emphasis on traditional ways and cultures as a means of asserting identity in the aftermath of colonialism.

The novel has a postcolonial dimension. Susan S. Friedman, refers to *Season of Migration to the North* as a rewrite of *Heart of Darkness*:

Reversing Kurtz's journey to the south, which begins in his idealism and ends in brutality and despair, Mustafa's journey to the north begins in his embrace of modernity and ends in the seeming destruction of his humanity at the heart of imperial civilization.³⁰

Mustafa goes to Egypt to further his education after finishing his primary schooling as a stepping stone to England and Europe. He remembers that: 'people were not keen about [schools] and so the government would send its

officials to scour the villages and tribal communities, while the people would hide their sons'. (*Season of Migration*, p. 20). Schools were regarded by the tribal communities as an evil that had come to them with the occupying armies. Mustafa, however, seizes the opportunity to go to school when told that he too can become a government official. He became a prodigy and was encouraged to go to Cairo by the English school headmaster, where he is cared for by an English couple, the Robinsons.

Mustafa is cold, and when he sees his mother for what will be the last time, they exchange only a bag of money. It is in Cairo that he encounters Mrs. Robinson, a woman of laughter from whom he learned to love Bach's music and yet: '[he] enjoyed nothing' (*Season of Migration*, p. 28) Janice Boddy comments on the part played by British women in the employ of the colonial enterprise, aimed at "civilising" the Sudanese and observes: 'how state schooling was directed toward making energetic and reliable workers of northern boys, and prolific mothers and modern housewives of girls.'³¹ Mrs. Robinson is one such woman and Mustafa desires her. By the time he goes to England, he is fluent in English but the language is not his language, so that when he travels to England and to his world of women, and finally to the world of Jean Morris. He says that 'Everything which happened before my meeting her was a premonition; everything I did after I killed her was an apology, not for killing her, but for the lie that was my life.' (*Season of Migration*, p. 29)

Mustafa fails to see Jean as she really is. He pursues her for three years before she mockingly suggests that he marries her. The marriage was not a good one: 'My bedroom became a theatre of war; my bed a patch of hell.' (*Season of Migration*, p. 34) He remains unable to penetrate her thoughts as she remains aloof, a bitter smile constantly on her lips and he knows he has lost the combat: 'It was as though I were a slave Shahrayar you buy in the market for a dinar encountering a Scheherazade begging amidst the rubble of a city destroyed by plague.' (*Season of Migration*, p. 34) Ultimately asking him to kill her as she plays the guilty Desdemona.

Saree Makdisi suggests that he launches a 'campaign to throw colonialism back on the colonizers' including presumably the colonial love of indigeneity:

Mustafa carries out this self-appointed mission by inflicting pain and suffering on British women. Just as imperialism had

violated its victims, Mustafa violates his ... The acts of finding lovers and engaging with them sexually become scouting operations and skirmishes in a war fought on the personal level.³²

In England, Mustafa frequented the pubs of Chelsea, the clubs of Hampstead and the gathering of Bloomsbury. He talked of poetry, religion, and philosophy, and said ‘things about the spirituality of the East.’ (*Season of Migration*, p. 30) while doing everything possible to seduce English women of any and every persuasion to his bed. These are not loving encounters, but acts of conquest. In one of his sexual encounters, Mustafa compares his victim, Isabella Seymour, to ‘Carnarvon when he entered Tutankhamen’s tomb – have been infected with a deadly disease which has come from you know not where and which will bring about your destruction’ (*Season of Migration*, p. 39).

Mustafa’s postcolonial sexual vengeance becomes more explicit when he says at his trial for the murder of his wife Jean Morris:

In that court I hear the rattles of swords in Carthage and the clatter of the hooves of Allenby’s horses desecrating the ground of Jerusalem. The ships at first sailed down the Nile carrying guns not bread, and the railways were originally set up to transport troops; the schools were started so as to teach us how to say “Yes” in their language. They imported to us the germ of the greatest European violence, as seen on the Somme and at Verdun, the like of which the world has never previously known, the germ of a deadly disease that struck them more than a thousand years ago. Yes, my dear sirs, I came as an invader into your very homes: a drop of the poison which you have injected into the veins of history. (*Season of Migration*, pp.94-95)

Mustafa recalls the violent encounters between the East and the West over a long period of history exploiting his colonial origins in which he might appear the victim. He frames his history in a post-colonial context and brings back the issue of the British Empire, casting the Westerns as invaders and colonisers who are ‘desecrating the ground’ and who commit ‘violence’. Mustafa, the result of years of colonisation, now turns history against his accusers, depicting his sexual conquests as retaliation for centuries of ‘poison’, now returned to infect the contaminators.

Tayeb Salih does not limit the novel to the narrative of Mustafa’s sexual conquests in Europe. In a parallel sub-plot about Mustafa’s Sudanese wife and

life in the village, Salih exposes and condemns the appalling conditions of women's life in rural Sudan through the village men's chit-chat. He touches on social issues such as lack of education and female genital mutilation, and reveals how women who are nothing more than sex-slaves to appease men's desires are degraded. Mona Eltahawy, in her work *Headscarves and Hymens*, reveals that according to a UNICEF study:

Djibouti, Egypt, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen are the Arab League member countries most associated with FGM and in Sudan, where 88 percent of women ages 15 to 49 have suffered FGM (according to UNICEF). There has been no law against the practice since 1983, when the limited ban on the harshest type, implemented under British rule in 1945, was struck down.³³

In Salih's novel, *Wad Rayyes*, an old man in his seventies who changes women as he changes donkeys, proudly narrates how he rapes a young girl 'who'd just reached her puberty' (*Season of Migration*, p. 74). *Season of Migration to the North* also highlights the issue of rape of young girls and also critiques brutal female circumcision: other nations 'leave their women as God created them. As for us, we dock them like you do animals' (*Season of Migration*, p. 81). Shortage of schools and poor health services, which are the cause of high infant fatality and death at childbirth, also come under attack:

Let them build the schools first ... our children have to travel several miles to school. Aren't we human beings? Don't we pay taxes? Haven't we any rights in this country? Everything's in Khartoum. The whole of the country's budget is spent in Khartoum. One single hospital in Merawi, and it takes three days to get there. The women die in childbirth – there's not a single qualified midwife in this place. (*Season of Migration*, p. 118)

Salih also points out the atrocity of forced arranged marriage and its consequences in the marriage between *Wad Rayyes* and *Mustafa's* widow, *Hosna Bint Mahmoud*. *Hosna* is forced by her father to marry *Wad* although he is forty years her senior. After two week of unconsummated marriage, *Wad* attempts to rape *Hosna* and, defending herself with all her might, she kills him and commits suicide. The tragedy does not end here, for the horror lies in the attitude of the society, including women, towards *Hosna*. Sudanese society does not give the woman the right to accept or decline a marriage proposal.

Furthermore, they repudiate the idea of marital rape and deny the woman the right to say no to her husband. This is evident in the villagers' sympathetic attitude towards the deceased Wad and the curses they hurl upon Hosna's memory. The narrator's mother refers to her as 'an impudent hussy!' (*Season of Migration*, p. 123). Another man says that 'she wasn't worth a millième. If it wasn't for the sake of decency she wouldn't have been worth burying – we'd have thrown her into the river or left her body out for the hawks' (*Season of Migration*, p. 133).

Season of Migration to the North is a socio-political condemnation of the reality of life in Sudan. In this male-dominated, oppression-based society, women's fate is determined before they are born; they cannot obtain an education, they cannot select their path in life, they cannot choose whom to marry, and they do not have a voice of their own. Mona Takieddine-Amyuni observes that in the novel Salih reveals how a woman 'is handled like a commodity in an age which demands dignity and equality for all human beings on earth ... women are the victims of a vitiated power game which fatally leads to destruction and death.'³⁴ In addition, the novel depicts a grotesque identity of Arab men: whether in the East, constantly abusing their women, or in the West, where Mustafa draws on the Oriental fantasy to lure European women into his bed and to their ultimate destruction. This leads us to question the differing fates of these two groups of women – Eastern women are shackled by the norms of society and a lack of autonomy, while Western women pay the price of a colonisation that was never their own. They follow their unrealistic fantasies and are lured to their destruction.

The poet Nizar Qabbani was born into a middle class Syrian family. When he was fifteen years old his elder sister, Wisal, committed suicide because she could not marry the man she loved. The suicide had a profound effect on Qabbani who always referred to his sister as 'the martyr of love'.³⁵ He began writing poetry while he was studying law at the University of Damascus. After graduating in 1945 he commenced a career as a diplomat, but he continued to write poetry. His poetry was distinguished by its explicitly erotic themes and poignant political messages. Qabbani was a revolutionary poet in more ways than one. Amila Buturovic remarks that he 'bravely challenges several [ideologies]: poetic conventions, gender relations, religious discourse,

linguistic elitism, etc.’³⁶ Most of his poetry is dedicated to the cause of Arab women, but he also wrote political poetry that challenged Arab regimes, as in ‘Bread, Hashish, and Moon’ (1954):

On those eastern nights when
The moon waxes full,
The East divests itself of all honour
And vigour.
The millions who go barefoot,
Who believe in four wives
And the Day of Judgment;
The millions who encounter bread
Only in their dreams;
Who spend the night in houses
Built of coughs;
Who have never set eyes on medicine;
Fall down like corpses beneath the light.³⁷

This poem condemns the Arab regimes of the Gulf nations and the structure of Arab society. In particular, he protests against the disparity of wealth which condemns millions to suffer in poverty while a few indulge in unbelievable luxury. He is troubled by the way in which these millions are lulled into a state of lethargy by Islam’s creed of polygamy and the promise of a better life after death.

By writing this poem, and other controversial political poems, Qabbani endangered his diplomatic career and his books were banned in some Arab countries. In 1954, ‘Bread, Hashish and Moon’ evoked a crisis in the Syrian Parliament, which demanded that Qabbani’s diplomatic career be terminated. In 1967, after the Arab defeat in the Six Day War, and the publication of his long poem, ‘Marginal Notes on the Book of Defeat’, Qabbani was proclaimed a *persona non grata* in Egypt, where his books were banned until he obtained a special pardon from the Egyptian President Gamal Adel Nasser.

However, Qabbani himself states that he is unable to separate homeland and women:

[Arabs] forget that the great rebel can only be a great lover.
He who loves a woman loves his homeland ...and he who
loves a beautiful face loves the world ... Love, for me an
embracing the universe, and embracing the human. The
homeland might become, at some stage, a beloved more
beautiful than any other woman.³⁸

Amila Buturovic comments on the amalgamation of the erotic and the political in Qabbani's poetry: 'The free sexual "self" as conceived in [Qabbani's] emancipatory verse became correlative to the social and political freedom ... [t]he issues of sexuality and gender relations were deeply intertwined with the process of national self-determination.'³⁹ This amalgamation is a distinctive feature of Qabbani's poetry. Arieh Loya confirms that 'apart from the artistic value of his poetry, Qabbani's poems remain social documents reflecting the social problems of Arab youth and their inter-sex relationships in Arab society. . .'⁴⁰ In *The Woman in My Poetry and My Life*, Qabbani discusses the phenomenon of "Shahreyarism" in the Arab world and how he unveils it in his poems:

The Arab world is dominated by economic feudalism, sexual and political exploitation, myths, quackery, witchcraft, fortune-telling, Arab medicine. When I discussed in my poetry sexual exploitation as practiced by Arab man in poems such as 'Pregnant', 'The Vessels of Pus', 'A Voice from the Harem', and *Journal of an Indifferent Woman* I intended to expose and unveil this phenomenon ...⁴¹

Qabbani assumes a feminine "I" to emphasise the female prerogative in some of his poems by writing from a woman's point of view.

In *Journal of an Indifferent Woman*, the narrator faces a grim fate because she is born a woman:

I am a female ...
I am a female ...
The day I came into this world
I faced my death sentence.
I never saw the gate of the court
Nor did I see
The faces of my judges.⁴²

She protests against the restrictions imposed on her just because she is a woman and uses a network of legal imagery to rail against her pre-judged and pre-condemned status. Significantly, the narrator refuses to reveal her name to the reader:

My name? Names are not important:
Raniya, perhaps, or Zainab?
Hind ... or Haifa?
The silliest thing that we carry, dear Sir,
Are our names. (p. 27)

She insists that names are insignificant, implying that all Arab women are in the same predicament: voiceless, nameless, and helpless. The narrator compares herself to her brother who earns supreme respect just by being a male, no matter what his flaws are:

My brother returns drunk
From the tavern at dawn ...
He returns ... like a sultan ...
I wonder!
Who actually crowned him
A sultan in our house?
In the eyes of my parents
He remains the best and
The dearest ...
He remains, even in his
Debauchery and sin
The purest and the most sanctified
of us all ... (Journal of an Indifferent Woman, p. 82)

Even though the brother is marked by alcoholism, debauchery and sin he can do no wrong in his parents' eyes, his gender transforming these into seeming virtues. He is raised high above his sister, revealing the double standard in Arab society. Qabbani's choice of the word 'sultan' is significant, employing the diction of the *Arabian Nights* to show that woman's status has remained unchanged throughout centuries.

The narrator then moves to describe her father, the ultimate authority of the house and the man persecuting her and the other females of the house:

My father ... like
The 'Abbasid Caliph
Haroon Al-Rasheed
Has his Harem ... his slaves
Those who put him comfortably
On his throne.
While we, his prisoners,
His victims,
Are like mops
In his dirty palace ... (Journal of an Indifferent Woman, p. 77)

Once again, Qabbani's narrator refers to another sultan, this time Haroon Al-Rasheed who treats his Harem as objects whose only uses are to satisfy his sexual pleasure and to cater to his domestic needs. *Journal of an Indifferent Woman* is a condemnation of the status of Arab women in the Middle East, and an attack on the authority figures in Arab societies. It is an outcry against

oppression and persecution. Buturovic comments that ‘Qabbani elevates, in a very passionate and poetic way, the discussion of gender relations at the plane where other acute social and political issues – modernity, secularism, nationalism – are disputed.’⁴³

The Arab authors discussed in this chapter are post-colonial. Naguib Mahfouz, in the *Cairo Trilogy*, looks back to the period between World War I and II to depict a somewhat stereotyped, but also an accurate image of Arab women’s lives who live behind locked doors and are limited in their existence to taking care of the household – a world little changed by gaining national independence. In *Season of Migration to the North* Tayeb Salih sheds light on the damage caused to and by men in a colonised society rife with sometimes good intentions that nevertheless perpetrate social ills and crimes which in this novel are perpetrated against British women despite the “civilising” influence of the British. Back in Sudan child marriage, rape and female genital mutilation continues. The colonial educators, like Mrs. Robinson, intended to shape student by engaging with them educationally and in the case of midwives and other medical staff, bodily. The efforts were supposed to be character building while exercise would produce good workers, and for the women successful reproduction capacities. However, while the colonial administration seemed to endorse these aims:

They also thwarted them, owing to their principle of encouraging ethnic authenticity as a means to indirect rule They were reluctant to erode indigeneity by letting European colonisation go too far. . . . They nurtured “tribalism” by exhorting its expression in dress, language, deportment, and the like.⁴⁴

However, the shielding of indigeneity met a real challenge when faced with female genital mutilation because it is indigenous to parts of North African Arabic culture but it is inimical to European and many Arab women and modern sexuality and motherhood. For the colonial enterprise it represented authenticity lost. Thus, while Nizar Qabbani’s poetry attacks the social conditions and makes a direct call for rebellion, but social protest does not end there. The convergence of degrading social conditions for women, a culture of fear, and dreams of a better life forced many to flee the Middle East. My final

chapter turns to diasporic women's literature, and the use of words to express this fear, loss and hope.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IX

¹ Nizar Qabbani, 'Be My Friend', excerpt translated by Leen Al-Hadban.

² Sasson Somekh, *The Changing Rhythm: A Study of Najib Mahfuz's Novels* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), p. 106.

³ Pamela Allegretto-Diulio, *Naguib Mahfouz: A Western and Eastern Cage of Female Entrapment* (New York: Cambria Press, 2007), p. 118.

⁴ Allegretto-Diulio, p. 74.

⁵ Allegretto-Diulio, p. 81.

⁶ Islam, as a religion, demands that the wife obey her husband in everything except in sin. There are many Quran verses and Hadiths urging Muslim wives to be obedient to their husbands (for example, Surat At-Tahrīm (The Prohibition) 55:6 or Surat An-Nisā' (The Women) 4:34. Prophet Mohammed Hadith 'A woman, who at the moment of death enjoys the full approval of her husband, will find her place in Paradise.' Documented by Ghazali. For more details see Allegretto-Diulio, pp.25-9; Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (New York: Schenkman Publishing, 1975), pp. 59-67.

⁷ Quoted from *The Liberator*, August 11, 1837, in Aileen S. Kraditor, 'the woman question', *Past Imperfect: Alternative Essays in American History, Vol I: from Colonial Times to the Civil War*, ed. Blanche Wiesen Cook, Alice Kessler Harris & Ronald Radosh (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1973), p.256.

⁸ Cooke, p.114.

⁹ Naguib Mahfouz, *Sugar Street*, translated by William M. Hutchins, Lorne M. Kenny and Olive E. Kenny (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), p. 374. All future references will be to this edition.

¹⁰ Mondal, p. 17.

¹¹ Cooke, p. 107.

¹² S. B. Oersen, p. 44.

¹³ Mondal, p. 9.

¹⁴ Mondal, p. 13.

¹⁵ Mondal, p. 13.

¹⁶ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 74.

¹⁷ Naguib Mahfouz, *Palace Walk*, translated by William M. Hutchins and Olive E. Kenny (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), p. 156. All future references will be to this edition.

¹⁸ For more details see: Ibrahim El-Sheik, 'Egyptian Women as Portrayed in the Social Novels Of Najib Mahfuz', in *Critical Perspectives on Naguib Mahfouz*, ed. by Trevor Le Gassick, pp. 85-100 (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1991); Anshuman Mondal, "Naguib Mahfouz and his Women: The Cairo Trilogy", in *SOAS Literary Review*, 1 (1999)

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/soaslit/issue1/MONDAL.PDF>, and Miriam Cooke, 'Men Constructed in the Mirror of Prostitution', in Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar (eds.), *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993), pp. 106-25.

¹⁹ S. B. Oersen, 'The Representation of Women in Four of Naguib Mahfouz's Realist Novels: *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, *Sugar Street* and *Midaq Alley*', (unpublished master's thesis, University of Western Cape, 2005), p. 7.

- ²⁰ Allegretto-Diulio, p. 117.
- ²¹ Ayo Kehinde, 'The Contemporary Arabic Novel as Social History: Urban Decadence, Politics and Women in Naguib Mahfouz's Fiction', *Studies in the Humanities*, 30.1 (2003), p. 144.
- ²² Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, trans. & ed. by Dr. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed, 1989), p. 167.
- ²³ El Saadawi, p. 81.
- ²⁴ Naguib Mahfouz, *Palace of Desire*, translated by William M. Hutchins and Angele B. Samaan (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), p. 19. All future references will be to this edition.
- ²⁵ For further examples of Mahfouz's prostitutes see the character of Ihsan in *Cairo Modern* (1945), Hamida in *Midaq Alley* (1947), Nefisa in *The Beginning and the End* (1950) and Nur in *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961).
- ²⁶ Cooke, p. 107.
- ²⁷ Also spelt Shahreyar and Shahriyar.
- ²⁸ Mona Takieddine-Amyuni, 'Images of Arab Women in *Midaq Alley* by Naguib Mahfouz, and *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 17.1 (1985), pp. 25-36 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/163307>> [accessed 12 August 2014].
- ²⁹ Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. by Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), p. 7. All future references will be to this edition.
- ³⁰ Susan S. Friedman, 'Cultural Parataxis and Transnational Landscapes of Reading: Toward a Locational Modernist Studies', in *Modernism*, vol. 1, ed. by Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007), p. 42.
- ³¹ Janice Boddy, *Civilizing Women: British Crusades in Colonial Sudan* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.180.
- ³² Saree Makdisi, 'The Empire Renarrated: "Season of Migration to the North" and the Reinvention of the Present', *Critical Inquiry*, 18.4, Identities (1992), pp. 804-20 (p. 811) < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343831>> [accessed 20 October 2015].
- ³³ Mona Eltahawi, *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2015), p.129.
- ³⁴ Mona Takieddine-Amyuni, 'Images of Arab Women in *Midaq Alley* by Naguib Mahfouz, and *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih', in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 17.1 (1985), pp. 25-36 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/163307>> [accessed 12 August 2014].
- ³⁵ Nizar Qabbani, *My Story with Poetry* (Beirut: Publications of Nizar Qabbani, 2000), p. 74.
- ³⁶ Amila Buturovic, "'Only Women and Writing Can Save Us from Death": Erotic Empowering in the Poetry of Nizar Qabbani', in *Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature*, ed. by Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hallaq (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000), p. 143.
- ³⁷ Nizar Qabbani, 'Bread, Hashish, and Moon' <<http://allpoetry.com/Bread,-Hashish-And-Moon>> [accessed 20 October 2015].
- ³⁸ Nizar Qabbani, *The Woman in My Poetry and My Life* (Beirut: Publications of Nizar Qabbani, 1981), translated by Lenn Al-Hadban, pp. 33-4.
- ³⁹ Buturovic, p. 148.

⁴⁰ Arieh Loya, 'Poetry as a Social d\Document: The Social Position of the Arab Woman as Reflected in the Poetry of Nizar Qabbani', *Muslim World*, 63 (1973), p. 52.

⁴¹ Qabbani, *The Woman in My Poetry and My Life*, pp. 51-2.

⁴² Nizar Qabbani, *Journal of an Indifferent Woman*, trans. by George N. El-Hage (N.P.: Published by George N. El-Hage through Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), p. 41. All future references will be to this edition.

⁴³ Buturovic, p. 157.

⁴⁴ Boddy, p. 182.

CHAPTER X

SCHEHERAZADE ABROAD: ARAB WOMEN'S VOICES IN THE DIASPORA

Along with the loss of their culture and home comes the loss of the traditional patriarchal structures that limited their lives in their own land. Exile in its disruptiveness resembles a rebirth for the woman. The pain of breaking out of a cultural cocoon brings with it the possibility of an expanded universe and a freer, more independent self.

Mahnaz Afkhami, *Women in Exile*¹

Arab countries witnessed a significant wave of migration in the second half of the twentieth century – mostly of the educated middle classes, many of whom were actually educated in the West. Citizens left their home countries for a variety of reasons, including fear of political or religious persecution, economic concerns, and the horrors of war and civil war. Regardless of the reasons for migration a common denominator may be found in Arab women's diasporic literature: that is an interrogation of the concepts of freedom, safety and personal identity, in addition to a sense of loss and nostalgia. Literature of loss and nostalgias constitutes a diasporic literature of trauma. Some Arab women authors' literature, as Zahia Smail Salhi suggests, is 'an expression of the pains of exile as it is loaded with the endless search for identity, loss, and longing.'² However, some Arab women authors contribute significantly to modernising the image of Arab women and breaking free from the two extremes of imagination that Arab women have typically evoked for the Westerner. This may be the pre-twentieth-century Orientalist imagination of Arab women as a symbol of sensuality and sexual availability in the harem, or, more recently, the image of Arab women hopelessly subdued by Arab men and rendered helpless, and lacking agency. These women are depicted as shackled by their veil and the socio-religious system of the harem. This chapter examines contemporary writings of Arab women in the diaspora, both those dealing with trauma caused by war and civil war in their countries and those escaping political, religious

and social persecution. These things happen to men as well, but such miseries contain a gender-bias that lies at the heart of women's persecution. Some of these women — including Inaam Kachachi, May Witwit, Wafa Sultan, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali — write non-fiction, publishing memoirs and email correspondence. Other diasporic writers find their voice in fiction and published novels or plays. These include Assia Djebar, Fadia Faqir and Heather Raffo.

The Algerian feminist academic Marnia Lazreg is quoted by Suha Sabbagh in *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*. She comments on the stereotyping and calls for 'greater emphasis [to] be placed on a humanistic tradition in the field of Arab studies, including Arab women's studies, which stresses the common experience of individuals, in this case women, in the East and West.'³ However, certain trends and themes can be traced in Arab women's diasporic literature, such as the expression of gender-based social and political persecution, and depictions of the horrors of war and civil war, as well as alienation, the search for an identity, all coupled with a sense of loss and nostalgia. Many Arab women choose to give a voice to their memories and publish their memoirs in exile. Jennifer Langer suggests that though the exile may provide a sense of safety for such authors it does not isolate them entirely from their family and community. Consequently, the social taboos remain in place for most, causing 'a process of self-censorship by women and censorship by the family.'⁴ These forms of censorship, especially self-censorship, are a difficulty Mona Eltahawy suggests that there are different motives for veiling: piety, the belief that the Quran forces this tradition, the wish to be visibly identifiable as "Muslim". 'For them,' Eltahawy suggests, 'a form of veiling is central to that identity.'⁵ However, Arab and Iraqi women writers also choose to narrate their own traumatic experiences as a means of discovering themselves.

The Iraqi author Haifa Zangana (b. 1950) deals with the political imprisonment and torture under the Baath Party of President Ahmed Hasan Al-Baker, who served Iraq for the period 1968-1979 and the trauma she suffered. She published her memoirs after migrating to Britain in 1976. In *Through the Vast Halls of Memory* (1991) she states:

Is it my charm for curing the leprosy that permeated my body on the day it was touched by whatever I hate; my charm for warding off forgiveness that comes with passing of time, for repelling widespread failing memory, repelling the return to a country where they still practice insulting rituals, repelling the conscious emptying of memory or its rage, repelling oblivion, oblivion, oblivion?⁶

Zangana suppresses nothing. She rejects oblivion and writes candidly about her prison experience, detailing the heat, the filth, and the shocking description of tortured women. She does not shy away from the raw pain of remembrance: ‘What do you do if you have inside you a wound as big as yourself. What do you do if the wound inside you is your very existence?’⁷ Daphne Grace comments on Trauma Literature, considering it a therapeutic device through which the authors ‘have a means of exploring the aftermath and implications of violent experiences ... where the text is written as an attempt to write away the trauma, to address traumatic memory or to seek healing.’⁸ Writing becomes a cathartic tool by which to dispel trauma.

Arab women authors participate in the literature of trauma in a variety of ways. Exiled writers are said to seek a new identity through their memoirs as well as some sense of control. The identity of Arab women migrants is challenged and altered when they move into their new country, especially in the case of exiles and refugees who were forced to relocate out of fear. To compensate for that they attempt to reconstruct their identity through memory in order to maintain their identity, or at least part of it, in their new country. As Langer suggests:

Many refugee writers of today reconstruct their origins through memory. For the exiled writer, memory is retrieved from the past and reconstituted in the present as a means of survival in the new space. If it is preserved intact, it can become life itself. The literature on loss and memories is sad and moving and is a site of mourning. The memory of loss is the writer’s history and a deep longing and an awareness of loss pervades much of the work.⁹

This process helps diasporic authors deal with the loss of their family and familiar surroundings as well.

Inaam Kachachi (1942 –) in her *Tashari: A Novel* (2013) constructs a story of displacement about an Iraqi doctor, a refugee in France. The work may fall into the realm of the non-fiction novel, as it is based on the real life experiences

of her aunt, a doctor who obtained asylum in France after the second Gulf War (2003). The novel is written in Arabic, but Kachachi, nevertheless, lives and works in France as a journalist for Arabic newspapers. In *Tashari*, Dr. Wardiya Eskander suffers the sorrow of having her family dispersed to several countries around the globe:

As if a butcher sentenced her organs to disperse everywhere with his cleaver, throwing the liver to the North American continent, hurling the lungs towards the Caribbean, leaving the arteries floating on the waters of the Gulf. As for the heart, the butcher used his sharp scalpel ... to extract the heart warily from where it was ensconced in between the Tigris and the Euphrates and rolled it under Eiffel Tower.¹⁰

The body parts are butchered, chopped and scattered throughout the globe to represent the savage dispersal of family members that occurs when refugees seek asylum. One of Dr. Eskander's daughters lives in Canada, the other in the UAE; her son lives in the Caribbean, while Dr. Eskander herself was given asylum in France. This sense of estrangement and fragmentation was unknown in Iraqi society before the First Gulf War (1990). In Iraqi society, the family as a unit is the primary focus of loyalty before and above other sectarian, ethnic, or economic social institutes.¹¹ Small details of old memories show that Dr. Eskander lives in the past and present simultaneously. Upon meeting the Pope in the Élysée Palace, Dr. Eskander's memory takes her to a discussion she had on her wedding day about the difference between a smoking suit, a bonjour jacket and a frock. She comments: 'What a stubborn memory holding on to everything and refusing to let go of any details.'¹² Memory behaves in a variety of ways in the novel. Sometimes it presents a moment of no consequence from the past, while at other times, memory distresses:

[E]ven the policemen disappeared from the streets and intersections, then came back wearing different uniforms, some covering their faces, some armed, others are bearded and the rest seem to suffer an existentialist crisis. The city itself is suffering an existentialist crisis. No one knows who to trust and who to fear, and the streets are divided according to sects.

Dr. Eskander's memories serve as a bleak testimony to Iraq's contemporary history and cover themes of loss, dispersal and alienation.

Descriptions of Iraq's contemporary history and its effects on women can take a more immediate form. The epistolary *Talking About Jane Austen in*

Baghdad (2010) maps the electronic correspondence between May Witwit, an Iraqi lecturer specialising in English Literature, and Bee Rowlatt, BBC World Service journalist, although the work was not published until after Witwit left Iraq for Britain in 2008. Rowlatt contacted Witwit to get an informed insider's vision of life in Baghdad during and after the second Gulf War (2003), but Rowlatt could not remain neutral as she realised the increasing danger of civil war that threatened Witwit's life. She facilitated Witwit's migration from Iraq to Britain. Their correspondence places Witwit's traumatic experiences and the reality of everyday life during civil war in harsh juxtaposition with Rowlatt's comfortable life in London, rendering it almost comic when placed beside the horrors that make up Witwit's life. She writes:

I heard about the assassination list from an acquaintance I was discreetly told that my name is on that awful list. The instructions are to kill university teachers 'mercilessly'. It applies not just to political activists, but also to university teachers who don't belong to a religious sect or party, or who are termed technocrats We are trying to keep a low profile as much as possible. The religious parties have imposed their ideals on the Iraqi streets as part of the new democracy. I've heard of horrible things happening to others, so I've decided to stick the street rules. That's why I drive to college with my hair and arms covered.¹³

Being a female academic, makes Witwit a perceived threat and her husband, younger than her and unemployed, can offer no protection. Should Witwit be captured, she would be subject to rape, torture and eventually death. The emails cover the period from January 2005 to October 2008, and the incidents are narrated simultaneously with the events taking place. This gives the narrative impact and urgency compared with the memoir or even the letter writing form. The occurrences are not shrouded by time or softened by nostalgia.

Memoir writing, however, is not only used to express nostalgia for a former life back or to maintain identity as in Kachachi's *Tashari*. Wafa Sultan (b. 1958), the Syrian-American activist, and the Somali-born refugee Ayaan Hirsi Ali (b. 1969) both publish memoirs. In Sultan's *A God Who Hates* (2009); and Ali's *Infidel* (2007) and *Nomad* (2010) they attack the predominant patriarchal social system in the Middle East as well as criticising Islam as a misogynistic, regressive, oppressive religion, particularly in its ill treatment of

women and the status in which they are held in Muslim countries. Both Sultan and Ali speak against certain social practices targeting women, such as polygamy and female genital mutilation.

Wafa Sultan writes about her childhood and life in Syria, condemning both the patriarchal system and Islam for the malpractices and abuse of women prevalent in Arab countries. She recollects how her brother used to beat her up and when she cried her grandmother would say: ‘May God quiet her voice ! ... You shameless girl! So your brother gave you a slap on the face — what’s the problem? He’s just disciplining you. Has the Kaaba collapsed?’¹⁴ In a Muslim Arab family the sons have a much higher status than the daughters who are expected to obey and serve their brothers. This teaches male domination and violence towards females from an early age so they grow up accepting this as the norm.

Girls of any age are unable to choose the husband by whom they will be dominated. Nor can they refuse to take one:

It was not until her wedding night that she saw the bridegroom for the first time. When he came into her room she began to shudder. The wedding guests were all waiting outside the door for proof of her virginity. The bridegroom fell upon her like an animal and emerged from the room a few minutes later bearing a piece of cloth stained with her blood. The female members of the family shouted for joy and danced. (*A God Who Hates*, p.24)

Huda, the bride, appears in Sultan’s chapter as an example of the miseries of married life under Islam’s misogynistic traditions. She does not love her husband and fears him, but lacks any other options. Sultan comments: ‘I never saw a single open window in the entire neighbourhood the whole time I stayed with them.’¹⁵ When she tries to defend Huda against her husband ‘he would quote from the Koran and the sayings of the Prophet in order to justify his behaviour and assert his right to mistreat his wife.’ (*A God Who Hates*, p.25) The Quran also gives men the upper hand, making them superior to women, thus in charge of them:

Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to

beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great.¹⁶

However, Huda's husband was afraid of Sultan's sharp tongue and also terrible at following the logic of his own arguments. He would smooth things over by saying 'half joking and half seriously, "You will end up in hell, because you don't follow the teachings of Islam."' (A *God Who Hates*, p.25) Huda's story occurs in a chapter entitled 'A God Who Hates'. Sultan stayed with the family for one year and continued to visit thereafter once or twice a week. She comments:

During those years I was able to observe first hand the crime against humanity – against both men and women – that was being perpetrated in Ahmad's and Huda's home, which to a greater extent was representative of how people in Aleppo live. The teachings of Islam have destroyed the men and women there, and rendered them incapable of the smallest measure of humane behavior. (A *God Who Hates*, pp.25-26)

Sultan enjoys the safety of exile to launch her attack against Islam and the structure of Arab society. Here the exile ceases to be what Edward Said calls a 'discontinuous state of being'.¹⁷ Syrine Hout contends that this state, 'fulfils one's desire for displacement, dislocations and detours in post-modern culture.'¹⁸

The Somali refugee and author Ayaan Hirsi Ali writes to defend women's rights in Muslim countries in her autobiographies *Infidel* and *Nomad*. Ali is a controversial Muslim-turned-atheist activist who sought asylum in the Netherlands in 1992 to escape from family persecution and to avoid an arranged marriage. After her escape she became a political activist and a speaker for women's rights against Islam and wrote the script for the notorious Dutch movie *Submission* (2004) which criticises the treatment of women in Muslim societies. She received death threats, and the Dutch director Theo Van Gogh was subsequently assassinated by a Muslim fanatic in the same year. In her autobiographies *Infidel* and *Nomad* Ali celebrates the freedom she earned in the West. She explains that the path she chose 'released [her] from obedience and tradition and took [her] to Holland and the freedoms of the West.'¹⁹ With freedom of speech and the protection granted to her by the Netherlands²⁰ she explores the treatment of women in Somali society, focusing

on the discrimination between women and men which starts at a very early age. She reminisces on her own training, at the age of five, to serve the men of the house and narrates her life experiences along with that of her sister Haweya, in juxtaposition with that of Mahad, her brother:

[Mother] wanted three things from Mahad. First, she wanted him to help her discipline Haweya and me. This cooperation was most often expressed in tying us up and beating us ... Haweya was always being punished for going outside the house, staying up late reading novels, and coming home late from school ... I would be punished for neglecting to complete the housework, the cooking, cleaning, tidying up, washing the clothes, and doing the grocery shopping ... The second thing Ma [*sic*] wanted from Mahad was to stay in school ... Only his destiny was significant — not hers, and certainly not Haweya's or my own ... The third thing Ma wanted from Mahad was to be pious: to read the Quran, pray, and one day perhaps even become a religious leader. But Mahad was more attracted to the lures of the street.²¹

It is clear from this quote that daughters are of little value to the family. They are unlikely to go to work but will be valued for their housewifery, their obedience, and their beauty. The family simply guards the girls until they can be turned over to husbands. The mother places a greater value on her son's future success than on his sisters' because she will retain his support, financial and otherwise, even after his marriage. Whereas the daughters will be sent to their spouses' families. In order to be able to get a good wife he needs to be well educated and able to pay a large dowry. The mother urges him to dominate his sisters and provides him with the authority to beat them up whenever he likes. The expectations of the son are quite different from those of the daughters, who are trained to be obedient servants for the men in the family: fathers, brothers, uncles or husbands. The education of women is discouraged and any deviation from the accepted societal and religious norms by girls is severely punished, though there is a high degree of tolerance for prodigality and aberration in boys.

Female genital mutilation is commonly practiced in Ali's Somali society as a precautionary measure, to curb the sexual desire of women and assure the virginity of girls until they are married:

In Somalia, where virtually every girl is excised, the practice is always justified in the name of Islam. Uncircumcised girls will be possessed by devils, fall into vice and perdition, and become

whores. Imams never discourage the practice: it keeps girls pure.²²

Ali speaks against this brutal practice justified in the name of Islam, although there is no mention of it in The Quran. Ali's father, however, was a modern man and disapproved of cutting his girls as does the mother. It is the grandmother who arranges for the circumcision to take place while the father is in jail – imprisoned for political reasons – and the mother away. Both have to flee with their family to Kenya on his release. The experience of circumcision for Ali and her younger sister is traumatising. The primitive procedure was performed on herself and her younger sister at the same time, without any form of anaesthesia or sterilisation, by an 'itinerant traditional circumciser from the blacksmith clan'²³ with no medical qualifications whatsoever.

Haweya, who was only four was traumatised not only by genital mutilation, complicated by infection causing it to be redone, but also by the events of exile caused by her father's political activism. Her ongoing pain, much worse than Ali herself had suffered and the psychological trauma sees Haweya suffering permanent mental damage. In the Netherlands, Ali's younger sister suffers psychotic episodes which last for more than six months, but she goes to Kenya to be reunited with her mother. Shortly afterwards, while married and pregnant, Haweya dies in a psychotic episode. Ali reveals that the culture of shame associated with mental health issues especially regarding women extends even after their death. The mother condemns her deceased daughter for making her 'worst dream come true. [The psychotic episode] was much worse than Haweya dying.'²⁴ The scandal that arises from people knowing about Haweya's mental health issues is greater than her death. It is an attitude which attributes shame to women and keeps men faultless, and that remains predominant in the Middle East. Ali sends a clear message of condemnation against this misogynistic view of women:

Controlling women's sexuality and limiting men's access to sex with women are the central focus of the code of honor and shame. Muslim women are chattel, and every Muslim girl must be a virgin at marriage. Once wed (with or without her consent), she must be faithful to her husband, who, in traditional societies, she will never refer to by his first name but only as *rajel*, my lord. In case of divorce or widowhood, the job of monitoring her sexual activities is assumed by her new guardians: her sons, if they are adults, or

her husband's father and his male bloodline. These men may select a new husband for her. Few Muslim women are ever free to choose whom they will have sex with.²⁵

The emphasis on the importance of virginity and assigning it high dowries, in addition to the practice of polygamy – a combination of tribal Arab social and Muslim practices – turn Arab women into commodities and strip them of their individuality and autonomy. It forces women to flee.

Not all diasporic women writers catalogue their trauma through personal memoir, diaries or letter writing. Assia Djebar, Fadia Faqir and Heather Raffo, write fiction, and their novels or plays reflect, thematically, their rage concerning the plight of women in the Middle East. They assign their memories, experiences and anxieties to fictional characters that highlights gender-specific traumas such as rape, torture and honour-killing. Langer argues that this is done because even in the safety of exile 'women who write about gender specific persecution ... would not generally write in detail about the atrocity because of the community in exile's link with the home country and the honour and shame ethos.'²⁶

Assia Djebar is the pen name of Fatima-Zohra Imalayen, an Algerian novelist born in 1936. Djebar is known for her feminist stance and feminist interpretation of Islam. In her writings she attempts to reassign historical significance and voice to women who were overshadowed in the history chronicles written by men, whether the medieval history of Islam or the more modern history of Algeria during and after the French occupation. Her female characters demonstrate a strong will and purpose, unlike the puppet figures who merely *exist* in the male-written history books. For Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar, Djebar 'recovers [women's] ability to speak from the silence imposed by national and colonial views of women.'²⁷ Jane Hiddleston suggests that Djebar negotiates contradictory ideological positions in her writings: on the one hand she is a feminist who struggles to 'subvert modes of criticism that homogenise the feminine community'²⁸ because she is an advocate of individuality and freedom of choice. On the other hand, Hiddleston goes on, Djebar attempts to separate herself from 'the discourses of both Islam and Western secularism as they are conventionally perceived [She] stresses how the opposition between the individual and the community, and its association with Western

versus Eastern thought, is an artificial one.’²⁹ Djebbar comments on Islam in her early works; for example, in her novel *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* (1962), which was translated into English as *Children of the New World: A Novel of the Algerian War*, she expresses her national sentiment by acknowledging Islam as an integral part of the Algerian Revolution, but at the same time her heroine Lila realises that ‘Islam was not merely her family’s and society’s way of conforming but also, in the past, a source of innumerable adventures for visionaries mad with audacity and exultation.’³⁰

In her collection of short stories: *Women of Algiers in their Apartments* (1980), Djebbar examines women’s lives during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62) and the following years. Ironically, the title of the work is inspired by the Eugene Delacroix painting of the same title (1834). Djebbar’s women, however, are anything but languid, lethargic or stupefied, on the contrary, these women are freedom fighters, messengers and torture victims trying to cope with their yearning, fears, pain and suffering behind closed doors.

Djebbar reveals the especially precarious situation of Algerian women whose image was appropriated by the Algerian male nationalists. Radhika Mohanram comments, ‘There is a metonymic link between the veil, Algerian women and Algeria itself, in that the colonization of Algeria is equated with the unveiling of its women.’³¹ The dilemma of Algerian Muslim women was a unique one under the French occupation, so that it became a ‘defining issue in the cultural conflict between the French and Algerian Muslims by the end of the nineteenth century.’³² The downtrodden status of Algerian women was pinpointed by French authors as an indication of the backwardness of Algerian society under Islamic law and local custom. On the other hand, Algerian society tried to enforce and maintain the image of the ideal Muslim woman as means of a nationalist anti-colonial trend.³³ Even reformist movements that supported women’s liberation called for ‘A Free Algerian Woman, not a Free French Woman.’³⁴ Djebbar is critical of this appropriation of women, and her heroines are focusing on the ‘emotional parameters in which decisions are made’, presenting less-than-perfect, realistic, Algerian women ‘within their homes and private spaces.’³⁵ In *Women of Algiers in their Apartments* Sarah, the protagonist of the title story, becomes Scheherazade:

For Arabic women I see only one single way to unblock everything: talk, talk without stopping, about yesterday and today ... Talk among ourselves and look. Look outside, look outside the walls, and the prisons! ... the Woman as look and the Woman as voice, not the voice of the female vocalists whom they imprison in their sugar-sweet melodies but the voice they've never heard.³⁶

Sarah repudiates Arab women's 'sugar-sweet melodies' of submission; instead she invites women to give way to the voice of their resistance which has not been heard before. Sarah highlights the importance of the Arab women to break the silence and speak for themselves, to give voice to their cause, and to tell their stories, their real stories, not romanticised versions. Here, Djébar aims at breaking the cult of silence surrounding women, as she does in *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) and *Far from Madina* (1991). In fact, she titles several of her chapters in these two books 'VOICE' to highlight the importance of women speaking for themselves. Djébar's feminist voice becomes louder in her novel *Les Alouettes Naïves* (1967). Translated as *The Naive Larks*, in which she writes about Algerian prostitutes, or the Ouled-Naïl dancers as they were called by French soldiers, depicting them as women of inner strength.

In *Far from Medina* (1991), Djébar creates an historical fiction about Muslim and non-Muslim women who live in the early years of Islam. Her reading of the chronicles of Islamic history written by Ibn Hisham, Ibn Sa'd and Tabari³⁷ inform her female characters. But she breaks away from the muteness and insignificance with which they appear in former chronicles, and brings them to the front of the stage. A good example is Selma, the Rebel. Selma, a captive-turned-Muslim, receives news that her brother, Hakama of Bani Ghatafan, was killed in battle after he defected from Islam. Selma, far from being a submissive captive, does not surrender to tears. Instead, she apostatises and takes on the role of leader of her tribe and goes to fight the Muslim army led by Khalid Ibn Al-Walid, one of the fiercest, and dauntless military leaders of Islam:

Selma, an army chief. Selma at the head of widespread dissidence; wave after wave of rebels reaching as far as her father's lands ... [s]he, in avenging [her brother], will unite many tribes. Her desire for victory has grown and carried her away.³⁸

Djébar narrates the story of Selma's defection with pride and honour, and she calls her 'a lioness dying in the sun.' (*Far from Madina*, p. 28) Her bravery and daring in leading her tribe earn her great respect. After a fierce battle Khalid Ibn

Al-Walid gives his men the order to target and kill the camel she is riding: ‘Unless we can bring down the camel and kill this woman, we cannot break the enemy army!’ (*Far from Madina*, p. 28) Selma is eventually killed, but her victory lies in her rebellion, in denouncing the image of the frail helpless woman; thus she becomes a fighter, a leader, and a model for ‘[e]very free Bedouin woman [to rise] up, resuscitating the hero who died in the battle!’ (*Far from Madina*, p. 26)

However, Selma is not the only rebel. Djebbar also narrates the story of Sajah Bint Al-Harith of Bani Tamim, who uses her poetical faculty to claim that she is a prophetess, and she leads her tribe to fight against the Muslim armies in 632 A.D. Djebbar describes Sajah’s aspirations as follows:

She has dreamed of [Prophet Mohammed], desired to meet him, certainly not as a woman ready for his harem. No, as an equal; does she not also possess the Word? She creates images, she invents rhymes, she pours forth, effortlessly, clusters of obscure but dazzling stanzas ... she, too, has decided to give the name of ‘God’ to this fire of devouring poetry which burns within her. (*Far from Madina*, p. 36)

Sajah sees herself as an equal to Prophet Mohammed, and believes her poetry is of equal value to the poetic prose propagated by Prophet Mohammed in the Quran. Djebbar has a distinctive and unique approach to the historical tale; she does not demonise Sajah or belittle her character and poetry. On the contrary, she focuses on the human aspects of her character, her desires as a woman, and her artistic poetical talent, allowing her to give the name of ‘God’ to her poetic faculty and equating it with Prophet Mohammed’s revelations and Quranic verses. In this way, Djebbar makes Sajah an equal of the Prophet, the ultimate symbol of male hierarchy in the Arab and Muslim world. Djebbar has a similar approach in depicting certain incidents and narratives from the biographies of renowned Muslim women, such as the Prophet’s daughter Fatima, and his youngest wife, Aisha. She strips the legendary status of these women and focuses on the human aspirations, dreams, disappointments and frustrations that motivated them to act as they did. Thus Djebbar does not aim at re-writing history; rather, she attempts to artistically re-create her historically-based female characters by depicting them as humans, not legends, and by highlighting their individuality and giving them voices with which to express themselves.

Fadia Faqir (b. 1956), the Jordanian-British author and feminist, is another diasporic author who resorted to fiction and novels to write about her homeland. She could not extract herself from the woes of Middle Eastern women so she focused much of her writing on their issues. She says of herself:

As an Arab writer, writing about the Arab culture in English, I find myself preoccupied with themes of exile and representation that reflect the condition of an ‘expatriarch’ ... [b]ehind the all-embracing problems of creative duplicity, from a post-colonial position emerges one writer’s struggle to comprehend an alien world and cope with the profound consequences of living a bicultural identity.³⁹

This bicultural identity is a common factor amongst diasporic writers and is the source of their originality. Zahia Smail Salhi suggests that Arabic diasporic literature is a bridge between Arabic and Western cultures. She argues that diasporic writings ‘refuse to belong to either side of the bridge ... while the East uses [them] as a window to better understand the West, the West also uses [them] as a means to better understand the East.’⁴⁰ Faqir deals with a variety of oppressed women in various situations in her novels.

Faqir’s first novel, *Nisanit* (1988), tells the story of Eman, a young Arab girl who suffers when her father is sentenced to death because of his political activities. Eman’s suffering continues when her lover, a Palestinian guerrilla fighter, is arrested and tortured to the point of madness, crushing her dreams of a happier future. *Pillars of Salt* (1996), Faqir’s second novel, focuses on the affliction of Arab women mainly because of the subjugating patriarchal society and partially because of the British occupation of the state (of Jordan). Fadia Suyoufie comments on Faqir’s themes and technique, pointing out that the writer:

displays the intricacies of postcolonial discourse in that she is writing *Pillars of Salt* (1996) as a counter-discourse to T. E. Lawrence’s *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. The text itself stands between East and West, and combines Arabic traditional storytelling with postmodern narrative tricks.⁴¹

In a style similar to that of *The Arabian Nights*, the readers find themselves in a story within a story, with the frame story narrated by a male itinerant storyteller whose narration is interrupted by the two main female protagonists, Maha and Um Saad. The readers are led into the story of Maha, a Bedouin, and Um Saad,

an urban woman from Amman, both of whom are confined to a mental asylum in Jordan during the British Mandate. Maha is a widow who, though strong, brave and passionate, is constantly abused by Daffash, a spoiled brother who wishes to marry her off to an old sheik. On the other hand, Um Saad does not enjoy any more autonomy than Maha, despite her urban background. As the daughter of an oppressive father, she cannot choose the man she likes for a husband. Instead, she is forced into an arranged marriage to an older man who dumps her, years later, to marry a much younger wife. Faqir adds a national dimension to the novel by demonstrating the destructive effect of the British Mandate on the state, highlighting the loss of lives by the tribes who attempted to fight the occupation in order to obtain independence.

Faqir's *My Name is Salma* (2007), published in the United States as *The Cry of the Dove*, follows the life of Salma, a Bedouin shepherdess from the village of Hima, in the Levant, who falls in love. She becomes pregnant out of wedlock, and in order to escape honour killing by her father or brother she surrenders herself to the police and is confined to prison; there, she gives birth to her daughter, Layla, who is taken away on the spot. After some years in prison, Salma is smuggled into a nunnery in Lebanon; and obtains asylum in England with the help of some nuns. Salma seeks safety and a new life in England, but although she attempts to adapt to the new life she faces indifference and racial discrimination. Though she eventually marries an Englishman and gives birth to a boy, her mind is never at ease, as she keeps remembering her daughter who remained in Hima and imagines her crying for help. After long hesitation she goes back to Hima, only to find out that her daughter has recently been killed by her brother. She is shot by her brother while mourning her daughter.

Salma's story is narrated through a series of short sketches of her current life in England, with intermittent flashbacks to her former life among her tribe. Geoffrey Nash maintains that the structure of the novel consists of a fractured 'series of discrete time-blocks in Salma's life' to mirror 'the fragmentation and dislocation of her experience more successfully than a linear narrative would'.⁴² The abrupt change from present to past reflects the anguished mental state of Salma, who struggles to find acceptance in her new society and make

peace with her past. The first glance of Salma's life in England shows her looking up the word 'adapt' in the Oxford English Dictionary:

Adapt: fit, adjust, change. Apparently in England the police stop you in the street and check your papers and sense of belonging regularly. An immigration officer might decide to use my ability to digest fish as a test for my loyalty to the Queen. I chewed on the parts that were still frozen and said to the young man who brought them for me, with tears in my eyes, 'Yumma! it delicious!' 'Yummy!' he said rebuking me.⁴³

In her attempts to adapt to her new society and obtain a new identity, Salma must lose her old one. She tries to bury her Bedouin self and hide it from the Western eyes, although not very successfully. Following the advice of Miss Asher, the nun who adopts her and helps her to obtain her refugee status, Salma adopts an English name, Sally. She spends hours grooming herself to make herself more acceptable in her new society, but cannot see beyond the mundane details of everyday life in Exeter. This gives her little solace and fails to help her overcome her memories of home and dreams of her daughter. The drunkenness of Liz, her landlady, the dried excrement on the toilet seat of her house, the endless spread of pubs, and the impersonal relationships of couples as they appear to her outsider eyes make her yearn for the primitive purity of village life, harsh as it used to be. She remembers the dry mountains and the olive trees, and wonders '[w]hat was better: to live with half a lung, kidney, liver, heart or to go back to the old country and get shot?' (*My Name is Salma*, p.201) Faqir uses the same anatomical imagery used by Kachachi earlier to refer to her protagonist, Dr. Eskander's sense of dispersal and loss. Here nothing entered Salma from her Western life to replace what have been lost. She was never a willing migrant, but was forced to flee her homeland and the entire region for fear of her life. This brings to mind Amin Maalouf's theory of identity for people in exile. He argues that people define their individual identities by the one aspect or dimension of their character which is under threat at a specific point of time. He contends that '[w]hen modernity bears the mark of "the Other" it is not surprising if some people confronting it brandish symbols of atavism to assert their difference'.⁴⁴ This may be true but other identity theorists suggest that there is a:

meaningful relationship between persons and things [and] incorporate the concept of resources (things that sustain persons and interactions) as a central component in identity processes (Freese and Burke 1994). Much of the meaningful activity within a role that is governed by an identity revolves around the control of resources (Burke 1997); this feature as much as anything, defines social structure.⁴⁵

Salma is unable to control any of the resources of her English surroundings. She fails to understand the knife and fork, the soup spoon or why she had to ‘corner the green lettuce [and] cut it into pieces.’ (*My Name is Salma*, p.109) She cannot please her landlady, her boss, or indeed anyone else, and remembers the little items that she once used in her former life: ‘pomegranates, fresh coffee beans in an ornate sandalwood pestle and mortar, honey and spicy ghee wrapped in fresh baked bread. She thinks of her grandmother’s Ottoman gold coins . . . [her] mother’s wedding silver money hat, a full moon hidden behind translucent clouds.’ (*My Name is Salma*, p.15)

Salma also faces discrimination from several characters including Liz, her landlady, who is a descendent of an imperial family. Liz is ‘confused’ as to whether Salma was ‘a lodger, a confidant or a servant? Her state of mind altered according to the amount of alcohol she had consumed.’ (*My Name is Salma*, p.16) Another example is Max, her kind yet xenophobic boss. Max ostracises Salma, as a foreigner who cannot understand British culture and politics. When she tries to comment on a photo of Princess Diana in a swimming suit, Max states: ‘Sal, you don’t know anything about us, the British, do you? . . . I don’t blame you, being foreign and all.’ (*My Name is Salma*, p.241) On another occasion we see an expression of his xenophobia against Japanese investors: ‘Take your filthy foreign hands – no offence – off my shop and go back home, eaters of monkey brains.’ (*My Name is Salma*, p.105). The doctor, on the other hand, disregards Salma’s medical complaint because of the difficulties she faces communicating in English. The discrimination against Salma comes not only from Western Anglo-Saxons, but also from other migrant minorities; Parvin, a Pakistani woman who later becomes her close friend, asks a porter about Salma’s origins:

‘Somewhere in the Middle East. Fucking A-rabic! She rode a camel all the way from Arabia to this dump in Exeter,’ he said and laughed.

'I am not going to share the room with an Arab,' she spat. (*My Name is Salma*, p.14)

Parvin, a minority herself, initially shows intolerance toward another minority in an attempt, probably, to disavow minorities and blend in with Western society.

But Salma's worst suffering in her new life comes not as a result of society's discrimination, but is caused by the internal incrimination Salma inflicts upon herself, a direct result of the patriarchal society's attitude towards women. She was made to feel worthless even in Hima where she was stigmatised by her own femininity, even as a young girl: 'My brother Mahmoud kept an eye on me while brushing his horse; I started hunching my back to hide my breasts'. (*My Name is Salma*, p.12) The sense of inferiority brought about by her own femininity is made worse by Salma's transgression against the Bedouin code of honour. She fell in love and gave birth to an illegitimate child, under a social code which stipulates that women should be passive sexually and must not express or attempt to fulfil any carnal desire, otherwise they would tarnish not only their own, but also the family's and tribe's reputation and honour. Leila Abu Lughod points out that for Arabs in general, and Bedouins in particular:

The more women are able to deny their sexuality, the more honorable they are ... [t]he modest woman admits no interest in men, and makes no attempt to attract them through behavior or dress, and covers up any indicator of a sexual or romantic attachment (even in her marriage). The woman who does not is called a 'slut' (*qhaba*) or a 'whore' (*sharmuta*).⁴⁶

This code of honour applies only to women, while men who commit seduction or even rape go unpunished. In the novel *Hamdan*, Salma's seducer and father of Layla is unharmed by what happened between them. He is not threatened by honour killing and, furthermore, bears no responsibility towards his biological daughter. Salma, on the other hand, spends her life stigmatised, feeling guilty, worthless, and impure: 'my face was black as if covered with soot, my hands were black and I had smeared the foreheads of my family with tar.'⁴⁷ Thus, Salma fails to find a home and a new identity in England, as her sense of alienation prevails and consumes her existence:

It was like a curse on my head; it was my fate: my accent and the colour of my skin. I could hear it sung everywhere: in the cathedral, 'WHERE DO YOU COME FROM?'; in the farmers' market ... Sometimes even the cows on the hills would line up, kick their legs in unison and sing, 'Where do you come from, you? Go home!' (*My Name is Salma*, p.167)

The increasing sense of alienation and lack of belonging, combined with telepathic dreams of her daughter, haunt Salma until she cannot ignore the call to go home even after marrying John and giving birth to their son. She relinquishes her safe haven and goes back to Hima to meet her grim fate.

Salma's attempts at assimilation are doomed, as Geoffrey Nash points out, by '[a] dreadful determinism [that] undermines every step she makes toward integration in the land of migration, toward setting a distance between her new self/selves and the cultural site of her offence.'⁴⁸ This determinism, reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's novels and evoking the fate of Tess, culminates with Salma's tragic return to her village, sacrificing her safety and the love of her husband and newborn baby, only to discover the recent murder of her daughter before she is killed herself. Salma does not get a happy ending; instead her cruel death serves as a reminder that honour crimes persist in the Arab society of today. Faqir condemns this code of honour and the double moral standards that come with it. In an interview, she affirms that:

What's wrong in the Arab world is the structure of the family— it is an oppressive structure, overtly or covertly. The Arab family has to be scrutinized if the Arab world is going to change. The family is a structure with a figurehead, a patriarch who makes all the important decisions and treats everyone as infants. You see that structure multiplied everywhere in the Arab world. The state functions that way as well: it is undemocratic and repressive.⁴⁹

Salma's tragic end is not altered by getting asylum in England but her story is a cry for change in Arab and Muslim society and that change must come from within.

The diasporic women writers discussed in this chapter attempt to carve a niche in their new society through their writing. They use different techniques to express complex emotional ties with their home countries and a range of emotions. These range from yearning and nostalgia for home, as seen in Kachachi's *Tashari*, to the revulsion felt as women are forced to escape from

their homeland. The techniques used to tell the stories of these women include the use of emails to give a sense of urgency to their narrative as opposed to the traditional form of epistolary literature. Flashbacks are used to enable the reader to compare past experiences with new realities. The women in these stories demonstrate a selective memory that enables them to deal with trauma and its aftermath. All of these women are shadowed by intolerably painful memories. These writings also demonstrate an attempt to define identity and fit into the new society. Langer suggests that:

[T]hrough the act of writing, exiled women are confirming their roots as well as battling to explore and deploy the new space in which they find themselves. Exiled women writers are engaging in the creative process in the borders between the self and the other, thus producing literature with novel and different insights and perspectives so that the border becomes wavy and fluid. As a result, existing borders are questioned and shifted.⁵⁰

Langer seems to suggest that diasporic women writers become agents for change, not only in the misogynist society they left behind, but also in the new society in the West they must now inhabit. These diasporic writers are no longer the women who left the Middle East but nor are they wholly Western. Zahia Smail Salhi remarks that diasporic literature, whether written in Arabic and translated later, or written in the language of the host country:

is by no means similar to that of their host country, nor it is similar to that of their country of origin It is also a space where both home and the host cultures converge, intersect, and even clash, resulting in a third culture, which situates itself in a third space which is that of the Diaspora.⁵¹

The works of diasporic women writers deal with subjects that have been ignored and shadowed by those who do not want to change; the honour killing, rape, female genital mutilation and torture and suffering of women in prison. These subjects were ignored by the West for political economic reasons and having to maintain allies in the Middle East to ensure the continued flow of oil. Although the diasporic women writers enjoy the safety and freedom of speech offered in the West, they have never wholly succumbed to Western binary opposites. Their voices are individual but they have not forgotten their sisters back home.

NOTES TO CHAPTER X

¹ Mahnaz Afkhami, *Women in Exile* (Virginia: Virginia University Press, 1994), p. 45.

² Zahia Smail Salhi, 'Introduction', in *The Arab Diaspora: Voices of an Anguished Scream*, ed. by Zahia Smail Salhi and Ian Richard Netton (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.

³ See Suha Sabbagh, 'Introduction', *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, ed. by Suha Sabbagh (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1996), p. xii.

⁴ Jennifer Langer, 'Crossing Borders: The Extent to Which the Voices of Exiled and Refugee Women Have Adapted to their New Western Diasporic Space', in *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5.3 (2004), 66-74 (p. 67) <<http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol5/iss3/7>> [accessed 26 March 2015].

⁵ Mona Eltahawy, p.35.

⁶ Haifa Zangana, *Through the Vast Halls of Memory* (Paris: Hourglass, 1991), back cover.

⁷ Zangana, p.11.

⁸ Daphne Grace, *Relocating Consciousness: Diasporic Writers and the Dynamics of Literary Experience* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 62-3.

⁹ Langer, p. 69.

¹⁰ Inaam Kachachi, *Tashari*, tr. by Leen Al-Hadban (Beirut: Dar Al-Jadid, 2013), p. 17.

¹¹ 'Kinship groups are the fundamental social units, regulating many activities that in Westernized societies are the functions of political, economic, religious, or neighborhood groups. Rights and obligations center on the extended family and the lineage. The family remains the primary focus of loyalty; and it is in this context, rather than the broader one of corporate loyalties defined by sectarian, ethnic, or economic considerations, that the majority of Iraqis find the common denominators of their everyday lives. A mutually protective attitude among relatives is taken as a matter of course. Relatives tend to be preferred as business partners since they are believed to be more reliable than persons over whom one does not have the hold of kinship ties. On higher levels, deeply ingrained family loyalty manifests itself in business and public life.' See Helen Chapin Metz, ed. *Iraq: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1988.

< <http://countrystudies.us/iraq/> Accessed:30 November 2015

¹² Kachachi, *Tashari*, p. 12.

¹³ May Witwit and Bee Rowlett, *Talking about Jane Austen in Baghdad: The True Story of an Unlikely Friendship* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 174.

¹⁴ Wafa Sultan, *A God Who Hates* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), p. 22. All future references will be to this edition.

¹⁵ Sultan, p. 24.

¹⁶ Muhammad M. Pickthall & Marmaduke W. Pickthall, Tr., *The Glorious Qur'an: The Arabic Text with a Translation in English* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 2006), Surah An-Nisa (The Women), Verse 34, pp. 75-76.

¹⁷ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. by Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, and Cornel West (New York: The New York Museum of Contemporary Art in collaboration with Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1994), p. 360.

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- ¹⁸ Syrine Hout, *Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction: Home Matters in the Diaspora* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 23.
- ¹⁹ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad: A Personal Journey through the Clash of Civilizations* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2010), p. 17.
- ²⁰ Andrew Anthony, 'Taking the Fight to Islam' in *The Guardian*, 4 February 2007 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/feb/04/islam.religion>> [accessed 12 April 2015].
- ²¹ Ali, *Nomad*, p. 55.
- ²² Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel* (New York: Free Press, 2008), p. 31.
- ²³ Ali, *Infidel*, p. 32.
- ²⁴ Ali, *Infidel*, p. 259.
- ²⁵ Ali, *Nomad*, p. 153.
- ²⁶ See Langer, pp. 67-8.
- ²⁷ Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar, *Haram in the Harem: Domestic Narratives in India and Algeria* (New York: Lang, 2009), p. 55.
- ²⁸ Jane Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar: Out of Algeria* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2006), p. 81.
- ²⁹ Hiddleston, p. 81.
- ³⁰ Assia Djébar, *Children of the New World: A Novel of the Algerian War*, trans. by Marjolijn de Jager (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2005), pp. 132-3.
- ³¹ Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), p. 73.
- ³² Ruth Roded, 'Recreating Fatima, Aisha and Marginalized Women in the Early Years of Islam: Assia Djébar's *Far from Medina* (1991)', *HAWWA: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, (June 2008) 225–53 (p. 227).
- ³³ For further details on the subject see Julia Clancy-Smith, "La Femme Arabe: Women and Sexuality in France's North African Empire," in *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, ed. by Amira El-Azhary Sonbol (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), pp. 52–63. Also, Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
- ³⁴ Doria Cherifati-Merabtine, "Algeria at a Crossroads: National Liberation, Islamization and Women," in *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* ed. by Valentine M. Moghadam (London and New Jersey: Zed, 1994), pp. 44–5.
- ³⁵ Rajakumar, p. 58.
- ³⁶ Assia Djébar, *Women of Algiers in their Apartments*, trans. by Marjolijn de Jager (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 50.
- ³⁷ Ibn Hisham: an Arab historian and biographer, born in Basrah in the 9th century. He edited the biography of Muhammad written by Ibn Ishaq. Ibn Sa'd (784-845 AD): an Arab historian and Muslim scholar from Baghdad. Al-Tabari (839–923 AD): an influential Persian historian and scholar expert in the exegesis of the Qur'an.
- ³⁸ Assia Djébar, *Far from Madina*, trans. by Dorothy S. Blair (London: Quartet Books, 1994), pp. 26-7. All future references will be to this edition.
- ³⁹ Fadia Faqir, 'Lost in Translation: The Arab Book in the Language of the Other', *AlMeisan*, 29 July 2010 <<http://fadiafaqir.blogspot.co.nz/2010/07/lost-in-translation-arab-book-in.html>> [accessed 10 November 2015].
- ⁴⁰ Salhi, 'Introduction', p. 4.

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- ⁴¹ Fadia Suyoufie, 'The Appropriation of Tradition in Selected Works of Contemporary Arab Women Writers', in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 39.2 (2008), 216-49, (p. 230) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25597975>> [accessed 1 March 2015].
- ⁴² Geoffrey P. Nash, *Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English* (Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2007), p. 129.
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Fig. 7: Layla AL-Attar, *Savagery*, ca. 1990, Private Collection

CONCLUSION

This thesis has considered the multiple and complex ways in which Arab and Middle Eastern women have been conceived in the literature written by both Western and Arab authors, and by both men and women. The diverse range of forms discussed have included: travelogues; epistolary writing; poetry; drama; novels; memoirs; biographies; social criticism; and art. This method has shed light on the historical encounters and influences that built up an image of the Middle East as an Oriental trope and blurred the line between the real and the imagined Arab, man or woman.

I began by examining the early encounters between East and West — namely the Crusades of the eleventh century — and the literature that resulted, including accounts from individual pilgrims, annals, letters, *chansons de geste*, and the poetry surrounding Saladin and Richard the Lion-Heart. I concluded that the seeds of tension and discord were already sown in the eleventh century, as were images of otherness that have continued since. Influences and imagery flowed from the Arab world but were adapted by the West as the Crusaders distanced themselves from cruelty and ruthlessness by claiming to fight for a divine cause and adopting the chivalric values of heroism. Arabic techniques and allusions were employed by Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales* but he endorsed ideas of the Arab male by presenting us with a despotic Sultan. Shakespeare's Othello is driven by passion for his wife, and perhaps his sense of inferiority and insecurity allows Iago the entrance that leads to the honour killing of Othello's wife.

Further, the Courtly Love tradition emerged first in Arabic poetry and philosophy, as in the *Treatise on Love* (Risala fi'l Ishq) by Avicenna (*Ibn Sina*) and *The Ring of the Dove* (*Tawq al-Hamamah*) written by Ibn Hazm, were both composed in the eleventh century and its images are evident in parts of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as the tradition of Courtly Love. At the time however, the Near East was considered a place of moral relativism rather than a place of absolute value in the literature. Thus, in Chaucer's *The Man of Law's Tale*, the Sultan's passion outweighs all other considerations, and is not far removed from the lust of the false Knight. The Near East is also seen as a 'land

of sexual excess'¹ in Chaucer's work. Further, while Chaucer employs Oriental techniques and allusions, he attenuates the effect by 'substituting highly courtly and Western motifs, especially where women and love are concerned'². For example, Chaucer's Canace, the heroine of 'The Squire's Tale' includes techniques and allusions borrowed from the *Arabian Nights*, such as the frame story technique, the story of the three magical gifts, the flying ebony horse, and the story of the talking falcon, all of which first appear in *The Arabian Nights*. However, because Chaucer adapts these stories to European use, Canace, for example, is a Christian heroine, and barely distinguishable from the pale and virginal heroines of other Romances available at the time. The Christian heroine is a way of 'domesticating the exotic'.³

Hostility against women lies at the centre of the thesis throughout and as Western women writers writing about the Middle East emerge another "moment in time" is created. Lady Montagu's letters go some way to define 'the cultural and political challenge represented by Islam.'⁴ Impressions of the Middle East, as conceived by women travellers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Julia Pardoe, Harriet Martineau and Lady Isabel Burton, were perhaps less imagined than those of male writers, but were limited. These women did have access to the harem and a narrow interaction with Middle Eastern women. They often ignored the differences between various social classes but Montagu never relinquishes her position as an observer and, like Chaucer, her observations are constantly referenced to English womanhood. There are constant comparisons with the status of women in Britain. However, the freedoms that high-class Turkish women enjoyed and the respect with which they were held within the Harem were not lost on Montagu. She admires the freedoms that come from being held safe behind closed doors, but is unaware of what happens behind closed doors. Harriet Martineau, on the other hand, is horrified by polygamy which she refers to as 'hell on earth', but remains unaware of the advantages of sisterhood in the harem. Neither version is complete.

During the Romantic Period of British literature a pan Arab Orient truly emerges as a literary trope. One of the most important elements in creating the Orient as a trope is Sir William Jones' translation of the *Mu'allaquat or the Seven Arabian Poems* and the translations of Persian poetry such as

Firdausi's *Shahname* and the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, but – above all – the translations of the *Thousand and One Nights*, also known as the *Arabian Nights*. The *Arabian Nights* were seen as one of the richest fictional sources of actual knowledge regarding the East, and was often accepted as reality by European audiences. The first English translation was entitled *The Arabian Nights' Entertainment* appeared in a Grub St. Edition of 1706. Its impact on the Western imagination can be detected in the material culture of the eighteenth century.

Scheherazade, who with Salomé forms one of the most important figures in Western concepts of Eastern women, appears in the frame story of the *Arabian Nights*. In this story extremes of subjugated women and all-powerful husbands are displayed. Scheherazade, however, is a heroine who saves herself, her sister and other virgins from certain death at the hands of her husband by story telling. Her nightly stories, which form the bulk of the *Arabian Nights*, so beguile her husband that his practice of killing his bride after the wedding night, so that she cannot commit adultery, begins to wane. His urge to hear the end of Scheherazade's stories becomes stronger than his urge to seek vengeance on all women. Scheherzade is seen as a good Eastern woman who outwits her husband to get her way. Other women of the *Arabian Nights* beguile men to get their way, but in both cases, women must use what they have to ensure survival. It is fair to say that these two types, epitomised by Scheherazade and Salomé, become something of the Eva and Ava figures of Western imagination, whereas, in fact, they represent the agency of women.

The influence of these Arab/Persian literary masterpieces can be detected in the works of Robert Southey, William Beckford, P. B. Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and George Gordon, Lord Byron. In their works Arab men are depicted as feminised, cruel despots, while women are often passive, with beautiful bodies and souls that reflect characteristics of Western heroines rather than Arab women. It is when women are active that they become dangerous, seeking to seduce men into wrongful actions, depleting their strength. At this point, such women are more often compared to Salomé, Jezebel, or Beckford's Nouronihar. The thesis traces changes in the imagined

Arab woman character in literature, now depicted as a femme fatale, heavily sexualized and dangerous.

In the mid Victorian period, poets such as Matthew Arnold and Alfred Lord Tennyson invoke the Oriental setting and era of Haroun Alraschid and other imaginary caliphs to contemplate the morality of the age, ponder the uncompromising nature of law as opposed to the human condition, and contrast the doubts and fears of the Victorian age with dreams of the luxury and joyful faith of the Abbasid Empire. However, as the century comes to a close, the sense of crisis and loss of identity associated with Victorian Decadence of the 1890s influenced images of Salomé that became prominent in the artistic and literary works of the *fin de siècle*. This is especially true of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* who occupies a world in which meaning has disappeared, but also includes Heinrich Heine's *Atta Troll*, Stéphane Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, Gustave Moreau's paintings of Salomé, Gustave Flaubert's *Herodias*, and the illustrations of Wilde's play by Aubrey Beardsley. A femme fatale emerges who is dangerous because, aware of her own sexuality and because she acts upon her own desires. This femme fatale is closely associated with the New Woman, particularly those with an interest in female sexuality. Such women are seen in Punch cartoons and elsewhere as destroying the very fabric of society. Yeats employs Salomé's dance to represent the chaos in Ireland in his poem *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*. The dangerous Salomé also evolved into an image of the New Woman, appearing in the popular Desert Romances of Edith Hull and subsequent film adaptations, which engraved the image of the heavily masculinised, exotic and romantic Sheik into the Western psyche through the acting of Rudolph Valentino. He alone, was a match for the New Woman.

My research does not just explore depictions of Middle Eastern women in fiction, but extends to cover the travel writings and impressions of famous women travellers to the Middle East in the early twentieth century, including Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark, Agatha Christie and Vita Sackville-West. These women were explored themselves as they explored the Middle East but wrote within a colonial discourse tradition with ingrained ideas of empire and the superiority of the West. The presence of these Western women in the Middle East sets them apart from local women. They own liberties only men can

dream of in the Middle East, and local women do not relate to them as other women, but rather they become distinguished as a third sex. They simultaneously have access to the Harim and to Men's council. This is important because it seems to identify a rift between Western and Eastern women which persists even when both live together in the West.

Male characters in literature can be seen to define themselves against the Middle East with its vast deserts which can demonstrate a man's heroism and challenges his masculinity. Here, as with female characters, however, the line between reality and fantasy can become blurred. Cross-dressing and cultural cross-dressing allowed travellers to take on an ambiguous identity in their travelogues, and to become both the observer and the observed. In a sense, it allowed a sort of blending, but it was hardly a practical necessity for European travellers. This may be seen in T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and more particularly, in the movies about 'Lawrence of Arabia'. Other authors employ the Oriental trope to affect masculine and feminine identity and create a fictional space where sexual and social mores can be explored as in Virginia Woolf's dialogic novel, *Orlando* and where dreams of alternative life can exist, as in, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and D. H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*.

Historically, Arab/Middle Eastern women living in the East lacked a voice with which to express their ordeal, while in the West their issues were obscured and over-simplified by stereotyping. By the time of World War I, Arab women speakers on the issue of women had emerged into the public sphere with authors such as Aisha Taymur, Zainab Fawwaz, May Ziade and Huda Sharaawi. These women express their concerns on women's education and arranged marriages, but do so with great caution and within the framework of Islamic faith. Arab male authors' contributions were more confident, urgent, and demanding of social change as can be seen in the writings of Qasim Amin, Naguib Mahfouz and Nizar Qabbani. Therefore, I conclude that Arab/Middle Eastern women are marginalized as women in their own society, and as "other" and women in Western society.

This can be observed in the history of Iraqi and Egyptian women who benefited from the rise of the Nationalist Movement with its calls to educate women, get rid of the veil and allow women equal rights with men, was replaced, more recently, by regressive sectarian calls to Islam as an only

means to identity in a fragmented world. In Algeria, Algerian women's progress was hindered by the National Revolution because this progress (getting an education and economical independence through work) was associated with French identity. The East-West dichotomy and its consequent stereotyping can no longer wholly be blamed for the predicament of Middle Eastern women, but Western interference and its pervasive presence in Middle Eastern affairs has caused a reactionary embracing of Islam as a means of rejecting Western secularism and forging identity. This caused a great deterioration for the status of women and their civil rights in the region and elsewhere.

It is true that Arab women can find their voices and do express themselves in the safety of living in the West. The works of diasporic women writers deal with trauma, loss and the search for a new identity. Their works reveal issues such as honour killing, rape, female genital mutilation and child marriage, in addition to political persecution targeting women effectively. These diasporic writings provide fresh insights into the complex social conditions of Arab/Middle Eastern women living in the West and suffering from a loss of identity in a neo-liberal environment. They confront a different culture, while struggling with the maintenance of a personal identity which, for women, might mean, in some senses, the abandonment of a religion they still care for or believe in, or a fundamental revision of the interpretation of the Quran which, in present circumstances can only be done by male clerics.

In the twentieth century, the increasing number of Arab voices have contributed to shifting and contradictory perceptions and representations of Arab women. The emergence of Arabic feminism, seen in the work of Aisha Taymur and Zainab Fawwaz, resulted in calls for social reform, emancipation, equality of women, and national independence. However, in many ways male Arab authors were more articulate in calling for equality and demanding women's rights to education and employment, as is evident particularly in the work of Qasim Amin. Other women such as Huda Shaarawi and Saiza Nabarawi were more direct in their approach and in their rejection of the veil. The issue of Arab women's status in society and their lack of autonomy remained a significant topic for Arab authors well into the twentieth century, as evident in the works of Naguib Mahfouz, Tayeb Salih

and Nizar Qabbani. These authors call for change: Naguib Mahfouz uses social realism to highlight the oppression Arab women suffer in everyday life, at a time when the only power that accrued to Arab males in a colonial society was that wielded with the family against women. Tayeb Salih sheds light on the damage caused by and to men in a post-colonial society rife with social ills and full crimes against women, such as child marriage, rape and female genital mutilation often supported by the women themselves. After all, to wear the veil is to assert one's own culture. Nizar Qabbani launches a more direct attack on the social conditions that cause Arab women to be treated as mops in the Caliph's dirty palace, and his poems invites women to rebellion.

Finally, I focused on the voices of Arab diasporic women writers escaping war and persecution, dealing with loss, searching for a new Arab identity and a better life in the West. These writers include Assia Djebar, Inaam Kachachi, May Witwit, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Fadia Faqir. Despite the relatively greater safety and freedom these authors enjoy in the West, they still express intricate emotional ties with their home lands and demand social and political change within Arab countries to improve the human condition and enhance the status of Arab women.

Drawing on a variety of postcolonial and feminist criticism, I have argued that the packaging and commodifying of Arab women by both Western and Arab authors has been damaging. The fantasies held in the West of Arab women, ranging from the extreme passivity and sexually availability women of the Harem to the dangerous sexually explicit femme fatales and belly dancers, have witnessed little change throughout history. In the contemporary world Arab women are still silent victims of Islamic law. In his paper 'The Arab as the "Dangerous Other"? – Beyond Orientalism, Beyond Post-Colonialism', David Weir admits that the Arab is seen as the "Dangerous Other" more than ever. This can be observed even in contemporary children's fiction. In Roald Dahl's *The Big Friendly Giant* (1982) the Queen of the Giants calls the Sultan of Baghdad to ask him if anything unpleasant happened in his city, upon which he answers: 'Every night unpleasant things are happening in Baghdad ... [w]e are chopping off people's heads like you are chopping parsley.'⁵ This highlights that the image of the Middle East as a dangerous place is deeply rooted in the psyche of the West.

Towards the end of my research for this thesis I took part in a play by Heather Raffo's (b. 1970) *9 Parts of Desire* (2003).⁶ This experience inspired a socio-political voice to many of the conclusions I had come to in the course of writing my thesis. A consideration of this play brings my conclusions to a fitting end. Heather Raffo gives voice to nine different Iraqi women and their experiences of patriarchal society, despotic political regimes, persecution, war, fear and loss. The play is a condemnation of war, but it also gives voice to Iraqi women who explore the deep issues and problems they have suffered before and after Saddam's regime. Raffo challenges Western stereotyping of Iraqi women and explores the complexity of their situation:

I intended to write a piece about the Iraqi psyche, something that would inform and enlighten the images [the Americans] see on TV. . . . [I]t is a dialogue between East and West. The characters are deeply engaged in circumstances unique to them as Iraqis and yet through their passions seem to answer the concerns of the West . . . I wanted audience members to see these women not as the "other" but much more like themselves than they would have initially thought.⁷

Raffo attempts to make Iraqi women understandable to Western audiences; thematically, by delving into the characters' individual everyday concerns and technically, by creating a conversational space between the characters and the audience which allows all the women to speak directly to their audience. The members of the audience thus shed their passivity and become involved in the action as witnesses, bearing testimony to what happens in Iraq.

The nine women come from different walks of life to share their stories and they assume the role of a collective Scheherazade as they narrate their individual experiences and the story of their country. Mullaya, as a professional mourner, provides the framework for the other women to tell their tales. She mourns the afflictions that befell Iraq in its modern history and warns her audience that this is not a pleasant story, saying:

My feet hurt
I have holes in my shoes
I have holes now even in my feet
There are holes everywhere even in this story.⁸

She invokes the Tigris and the archaeological sites which stand witness to Iraq's glorious past and wonders – 'Where is anything they said there would

be?’ (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 4) – that is the politicians’ promises of freedom, democracy and welfare. Mullaya sets the stage for the stories that follow.

Next comes Layal, the artist. Her character is based on the Iraqi artist Layla Al-Attar who was killed in an America air raid in 1993. Layal is a mixture of Salomé, the artistic active agent in control of her own fate, and Scheherazade, who identifies with all of the other female victims of the despot Shahrayar. She relates how in her search for true love she had an adulterous relationship and how her reputation was tainted with accusations that she might have slept her way to success to become the curator of the Saddam Art Centre. But Layal maintains that she is unable to distinguish her body from the bodies of other women when she paints nudes:

Always I paint them as me
or as trees sometimes like I was telling you.
I do not ever want to expose exactly another woman’s body
so I paint my body
but her body, herself inside me. (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 8)

Layal merges herself with the bodies of her compatriot women and dissolves her emotions into the national sentiment. She does this because she identifies with them – she is unable to separate and distance her own experience from theirs and she knows that for Iraqi women ‘everything in this country is a matter of survival.’ (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 10). Raffo uses Layal to direct the audience’s attention to a disturbing aspect of Iraqi women’s lives: the social stigma of having an affair and the issue of honour killing. Layal becomes a voice for all women through her questioning of her own experience:

So what am I?
Why am I alive?
To be made love to – passed around from one man to
another ... (*9 Parts of Desire*, pp. 50-1)

Layal condemns treating women as mere sexual objects, a common concept in the Middle East. Instead, she takes control of her sexuality in her attempt to find love. She is disillusioned with grand terms such as ‘freedom’, particularly when it comes to women, and rebuffs the freedom promised to the Iraqi people by the West. She addresses her Western counterparts, and declares:

Your Western culture, sister, will not free me
from being called a whore
not my sex

Women are not free. (pp. 61-2)

In these lines Layal reiterates the opinion commonly held by many Arab feminists: feminists who reject the imported feminism of the West and emphasise the importance of the 'humanistic tradition' in women's studies. Yvonne Y. Haddad and Jane I. Smith suggest that the newly obtained '[Western] freedoms have not liberated Western women who are still subject to the chauvinism of the males in Western society; they have in fact turned them into sexual objects.'⁹

Amal, the naïve yet intense, twice-divorced, heart-broken Bedouin, is also searching for love. With the straightforwardness of a child she narrates her tale, shedding light on the bitter reality of life for women in Iraq and the Middle East. Far from politics and war, she tackles family issues such as divorce and the stigma that goes along with it, being a second wife, and, more importantly, the sense of honour that Middle Eastern society imposes upon women. The issue of women's value is raised through Amal's body image issues and lack of self-esteem; upon being rejected by the man she loves, Amal is consumed by shame and wonders:

Always I am asking myself what he think of me?
 What he seed in me that change him?
 I see now I am fat. (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 17)

With her poor English Amal discusses the subject of love and shame which might be less critically important than issues such as war or torture, but are significant for her as an individual, and a defining question for society.

Other characters reveal the cruelty of Saddam's regime. In a manner that reminds the reader of George Orwell's *1984*, Huda (a communist and Iraqi exile in her fifties) recounts the horrors of torture taking place in secret prisons, drawing attention to gender-targeted pain and abuse. Women are subjected to rape, made to be sex slaves, then designated 'prostitutes' (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 19) and beheaded. She sheds light on the regression of Iraqi society from the 1970s onwards, especially in relation to women:

[T]hey go backward
 they abandon their education and now,
 now they are wearing the veils.
 Their grandmothers are more liberated then them. (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 39)

Huda observes the social change that took place between her own generation of intellectual, more liberated women, and the new generation of women who embrace, by choice or force, conservative religious practices.

Sammura, a Westernised Iraqi teenager who dances to the music of N'Sync, lost her father to the tyranny of the regime after her three brothers were killed in the pointless Iraqi-Iranian war. She also portrays details of women's life after the Second Gulf War: being deprived of formal education for fear of being kidnapped, being forced to cover their hair, and even losing their freedom of movement outside the house for fear of gangs and explosions:

[W]e can't go anywheres [sic] without
my uncle . . .
he comes here with his sons . . .
because we have no men. (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 24)

Sammura describes the absolute reliance of women on men for their safety and mobility in a country torn by civil war. She voices the frustration and despair of girls of her generation by saying, 'maybe I should get stolens [sic]/ so I could leave my country' (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 25). Here she expresses a naïve wish to be kidnapped and sold as a sex slave abroad to get rid of the fear and restrictions that shackle her life in Iraq. However, the sense of guilt overwhelms her and as she goes through her father's memoirs she suddenly realises that she had inadvertently betrayed her father to Saddam's secret police.

Along with Sammura, the Doctor and Umm Ghada condemn war and its aftermath. The Doctor demonstrates that it is the women who suffer most the effects of the use of radioactive weapons through breast cancer, still-births and the genetic mutation of new-born infants. Umm Ghada, on the other hand, narrates the tragedy of the air raid against Amiriyah Civilian Shelter and how she lost her family that night. Based on real events, this character engages the audience with her dignity and sorrow, and asks them to witness the horror which took place that night, inviting them to sign the witness book. Umm Ghada's loss and bereavement reduced her life into dwelling in a trailer outside the shelter as a sentinel, bearing witness to what had happened:

I am hard to understand
why I survive
and my children dead.

I ask to Allah why?
Why you make me alive?

All my family is here, Ghada is here
So I am Umm Ghada, Mother of Tomorrow.
My full name is dead with them. (*9 Parts of Desire*, pp. 29,
31)

Umm Ghada questions her survival and the meaning of her life after she lost her family. She refuses to use her full name anymore and prefers to be referred to by her epithet, Umm Ghada, which means ‘mother of Ghada’, ironically meaning ‘mother of tomorrow’.

The American, an autobiographical character, is a woman of Iraqi descent living in the United States who expresses her anxiety over her family’s continued suffering in Iraq. She utters the names of her relatives in an incantation for their safety. Her sentiments are twofold; on the one hand she feels for her family and other Iraqis:

They never forget ever:
They carry everything with them.
I mean everything they are

they can’t let go
of anything
they hold it all inside them.
So when they cry
it’s lifetimes
I’ve never seen anything like it. (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 38)

On the other hand, she has a sense of shame for the safety and comfort of her life compared to the lives of her relatives in Iraq. This shame reveals itself in the many times she says ‘I’m sorry’, and the conversation she had with another American woman while she was having a ‘fucking’ pedicure (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 49).

The final character of Nanna, a street vendor in her seventies, becomes the living witness to Iraq’s modern history because of the nature of her work. Nanna sees the looting, burning and destruction. Moreover, she is the witness to the degraded status of women in Iraq. She reminisces about drawing her mother at school, the teacher objecting to that and telling her that ‘it is wrong before Allah’ and that she is ‘disrespecting’ (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 44) because she draws her mother’s hair, whereupon Nanna ‘just erased her, my mother / it

was only pencil' (*9 Parts of Desire* p. 44). Nanna's statement that her mother 'was only pencil' reflects the fragile status of women and their transient value in a tribal patriarchal society where 'only the fathers and grandfathers [are significant] because of the name line' (*9 Parts of Desire*, p. 44).

Mullaya appears again before the end of the play to complete the cycle of the story, in a manner similar to that of Scheherazade. She mourns the death of Layal as an individual, but she also expresses the grief of all the other characters, borrowing their lines and weaving them into her final speech:

I cannot stop what I am here
 either I shall die
 or I shall live a ransom for all the daughters
 of savagery.
 She called it Savagery
 when you love like you cannot breathe. (*9 Parts of Desire*, p.
 66)

Thus, Mullaya becomes the collective memory and the mouthpiece of Iraqi women.

This play reveals my own story. I was raised in the Middle East, witnessed three wars, went through the religious restrictions and social traditions and functions of marriage and divorce, and fled the horror of civil war to come to New Zealand in search for a better life for myself and my daughter. It is the story of loss, alienation, hope and new identity. And, just like Scheherazade and Mullaya:

I cannot stop what I am here

 I had to tell the story

 Of all the daughters of Savagery.

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

¹ Kathryn L. Lynch, 'East Meets West in Chaucer's Squire's and Franklin's Tales', *Speculum*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Jul., 1995), pp. 530-551 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2865269>> [accessed: 10 April 2011], p.537.

² Kathryn L. Lynch, p.541.

³ Kathryn L. Lynch, p.541.

⁴ Srinivas Aravamudan, 'Lady Mary Montagu in the *Hamman*: Masquarade, Womanliness, and Levantinization', *ELH*, 62.1 (1995), 69-104 (p. 80).

⁵ Roald Dahl, *The Big Friendly Giant* (London: Puffin Books, 2007), p. 167.

⁶ Heather Raffo (b. 1970) is an Iraqi-American playwright born in Michigan, United States to an Iraqi father and an American mother. Her play *9 Parts of Desire* (2003) depict nine Iraqi women, each from different walks of life. It is based on interviews with different Iraqi women in addition to her own experience as an Iraqi-American. It was inspired by a visit made by Raffo to Iraq in 1993, where she was deeply moved by 'Savagery', a painting by Layla Al-Attar, exhibited at the Saddam Art Centre in Baghdad.

⁷ Heather Raffo, 'Director's Note' in the Performance Programme for the Stage Production of *9 Parts of Desire* directed by Heather Raffo at the Illinois Theatre in October 2013.

<<http://www.krannertcenter.com/images/cm/20135221014104128174106178/9PartsProgram.pdf>> [accessed 11 February 2015], p. 5.

⁸ Heather Raffo, *9 Parts of Desire: A Play* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006), p. 5. All future references will be to this edition.

⁹ Yvonne Y. Haddad and Jane I. Smith, "Women in Islam: 'The Mother of All Battles'", in *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, ed. by. Suha Sabbagh (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1996), 137-150, p.138.

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