



## Metamorphosis & the Therapeutic Function of Storytelling: *The Arabian Nights* Vs. Franz Kafka's Animal Stories

### METAMORPHOSE ET LA FONCTION THERAPEUTIQUE DU CONTE: LES MILLES ET UNE NUITS VS HISTOIRES D'ANIMAUX DE FRANZ KAFKA

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Received 20 July 2011; accepted 27 August 2011

#### Abstract

Story telling in the book of *A Thousand and One Nights*, functions as a way sublimating Shahrayar's desire for murdering Sharazad and releasing it through catharsis. i.e. the stories function as a therapy for Sharayar and as a brain-washing mechanism through which Shahrayar hopes to cure Sharayar from his murderous desire that has led to the deaths of many women because of his wife's act of infidelity. In this article, I will highlight the similarities between some of the stories in the book of *A Thousand and One Nights* which focus on ingratitude and metamorphosis as dominant themes and some of Franz Kafka's animal stories (*The Metamorphosis*, *A Hunger Artist*, and *A Report to An Academy*) which share the aforementioned themes. By doing so, I hope to prove that there is a good reason to assume that Kafka was, at least indirectly, influenced by the book of *A Thousand and One Nights* which, to the best of my knowledge, is something that haven't been done before.

**Key words:** Arabian Nights; Franz Kafka; Storytelling & Therapy; Postcolonial Criticism

#### Résumé

Raconter des histoires dans le livre de Mille et Une Nuits, les fonctions sont comme un moyen de sublimer le désir de Shahrayar pour le meurtre de Sharazad et de la libérer par la catharsis. à savoir la fonction des histoires comme une thérapie pour Sharayar et comme un mécanisme de lavage de cerveau à travers lequel Shahrayar espère de guérir Sharayar de son désir meurtrier qui a conduit à la

mort de nombreuses femmes en raison d'un acte de sa femme d'infidélité. Dans cet article, je vais souligner les similitudes entre certaines des histoires dans le livre des Mille et Une Nuits qui se concentrent sur l'ingratitude et de la métamorphose comme thèmes dominants et certains des histoires d'animaux de Franz Kafka (*La métamorphose*, un artiste faim, et un rapport une académie) qui partagent les thèmes susmentionnés. En faisant cela, je l'espère, pour prouver qu'il ya une bonne raison de supposer que Kafka était, au moins indirectement, influencé par le livre des Mille et Une Nuits qui, au meilleur de ma connaissance, c'est quelque chose qui n'ont pas été fait auparavant.

**Mots-clés:** Mille et Une Nuits; Franz Kafka; Contes & Therapie; Critique post-coloniale

Ahmad M.S. Abu Baker (2011). Metamorphosis & the Therapeutic Function of Storytelling: *The Arabian Nights* Vs. Franz Kafka's Animal Stories. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 7(3), 86-95. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/j.ccc.1923670020110703.375> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020110703.375>

In this paper, I will compare the stories of "The Merchant and Hind," the story of "The Merchant and Two Dogs," the story of "The Second Calender," and "The Story of Sidi-Nouman" from the book of *A Thousand and One Nights* which focus on metamorphosis as a dominant theme with three of Franz Kafka's animal stories which are: "A Report to an Academy", *The Metamorphosis*, and "A Hunger Artist" which I classify among the animal stories because though the protagonist looks human, he is not fully human as well be explained later. Through this comparison, I hope to reveal the similarity between the aforementioned stories in terms of the focus on the half-man, half-beast middle state, and on the similar therapeutic use of storytelling. Once these similarities are proven, they will hopefully generate reasonable doubt strong enough to assume that Kafka was influenced by the

book of *A Thousand and One Nights* which is, to the best of my knowledge, something that hasn't been claimed before.

## STORYTELLING & THERAPY IN THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

To begin with, let us examine the role of storytelling in therapy. In his study on healthcare and storytelling, Andre Heuer concludes that storytelling is "helpful in the healing and rehabilitative process" because "within a group process [it] would provide support, create a sense of community and belonging, and help the survivor to integrate their experience in a meaningful way" not to mention its "cathartic effect" (Heuer). Likewise, Sam Vaknin explains that storytelling serves "the important functions" of "amelioration of fears, communication of vital information ...the satisfaction of a sense of order (justice), the development of the ability to hypothesize, predict and introduce theories" (Vaknin). Further, he observes that "talk therapy" transfers the "energy from one brain to another through the air" in order to "trigger certain circuits in the recipient brain" (Vaknin).

Vaknin's remarks might help one understand the way Shahrazad's stories affect Shahrayar's mind through triggering "certain circuits" in his brain. Furthermore, Muareen Welsh claims that "emotional disclosure, writing or talking about emotional events, has physical and psychological benefits" (Welsh). In addition, Trent Parker and Karen Wampler maintain that "[s]torytelling has been used in community projects, health promotion and disease prevention, coping with grief, and other concerns of a therapeutic nature" (Parker & Wampler). Clearly, then, storytelling is used for medical purposes and has a very effective role to play.

In *A Thousand and One Nights*, storytelling functions as a way of sublimating Shahrayar's desire for murder and releasing it through catharsis. i.e. the stories function as therapy for Shahrayar and as a brain-washing mechanism that aims to cure him from his murderous desire caused by his wife's act of infidelity that subsequently led to the deaths of many women. Shahrazad "was clever and courageous in the highest degree" because "[h]er father had given her the best masters in philosophy, medicine, history and fine arts" (Lang, p.2). She used her knowledge to cure Shahrayar and to control him at the same time. Shahrazad's actions bring to mind Foucault's remark that "power and knowledge directly imply one another" (Foucault, p.27). Indeed, through her vast knowledge, Shahrazad maintains her power over Shahrayar. It is this knowledge that made her *volunteer* to marry Shahrayar thus throwing herself directly into the path of death in order to save other girls from dying at his hands.

Shahrazad uses suspense as a survival technique and as a way of maintaining power over Shahrayar; she

leaves her stories unfinished and uses a story-within-a-story technique to give Shahrayar, who is caught in the web of her interesting stories, a sufficient reason to spare her life for another night, until he is eventually cured from his traumatic experience. Surprisingly, a similar technique is found in the psychological practice of Lankton and Lankton (1986); they use "multiple embedded metaphors." This term means that "stories intended to focus and uncover resources are stacked within one another." In other words, "the therapist begins to tell a story designed to produce a change in attitude, but before the story is completed and at a specific time, the therapist begins to tell a new story that facilitates a client experiencing a particular emotion." Once this happens, "the therapist then provides a story intended to produce behavioral change." After this is completed, "the therapist may then focus on material intended to change the client's self-image before completing the original attitude story" (Lankton & Lankton in Parker & Wampler). Clearly, Lankton and Lankton's practice greatly resembles that of Shahrazad who hopes to produce a behavioural change in Shahrayar. Hence, Shahrazad combines the strength of technique (form) and subliminal messages (content), which are examined below, to induce the desired change in Shahrayar and to control him.

A close examination of Shahrazad's stories would reveal that they contain subliminal messages that work on the mind of Shahrayar. The word "subliminal" can be defined as "existing or operating below the threshold of consciousness; being or employing stimuli insufficiently intense to produce a discrete sensation but often being or designed to be intense enough to influence the mental processes or the behavior of the individual" (Dictionary.com). An example of the subliminal messages can be found, for instance, in the story of "The Greek King and The Physician Douban" in which the leper king is cured by Douban; Douban inserts hidden medicine into a hollow polo club and gives it to the king to play with, thus curing him while having fun. This story can serve as a reminder of Shahrazad's hidden medicine i.e. the therapeutic function of her stories that cures Shahrayar while also having fun. Should Shahrayar kill her afterwards, he would regret it just like the Greek King regrets killing Douban.

Similarly, in the story of "The Husband and The Parrot", a wife offends her good husband, but the parrot informs him of the offence. The husband scolds his wife. Consequently, the wife deceives the parrot into thinking it is raining, and when the parrot informs his master about the rain, the master thinks that the parrot was lying in both instances and has him killed. Shahrazad functions as the caged bird that is threatened with death although she is telling stories to her master. The subliminal message is that Shahrayar should not be ungrateful like that husband and foolishly kill her.

One might sense here a kind of contradiction between

Shahrazad's power over Shahrayar in Foucault's sense and her image as a caged bird whose life depends upon Shahrayar's will. This contradiction, however, can be explained by the fact that Shahrazad's story of the parrot is only the second story she tells to Shahrayar, i.e. she is not yet in control of Shahrayar, and she feels vulnerable at this point. Another possible reason can be explained through Bakhtin's dialogic imagination.<sup>2</sup> One finds in the *Arabian Nights* two realms: a) The Fictitious realm which gives Shahrazad power over Shahrayar and helps her to cure him from his traumatic experience. b) The realm of Reality in which she feels vulnerable like the caged bird. Hence, Shahrazad uses subliminal messages in the fictitious realm to control the realm of reality and to bring about the desired change in behaviour and attitude in Shahrayar and to control/cure him by triggering certain brain circuits as previously explained.

Another subliminal message can be found in "The story of The Second Calender", a genius kills the woman who betrayed him and decides to kill her lover (The Second Calender). Hoping to escape his fate, the second calender tells the genius the story of the "Envious Man and Him Who Was Envid". He explains to the genius the subliminal message of the story; "this Sultan was not content with merely forgiving the envious man for the attempt on his life; he heaped rewards and riches upon him" (Lang, p.90). The calender expects the genius to do the same to him. The message is a reminder of the subliminal messages in Shahrazad's stories that target Shahrayar himself.

"The story of The Genius and The Merchant" provides another example of subliminal messages. The merchant accidentally and unknowingly kills the son of a genius. Two merchants tell their stories to the genius to help the wretched merchant escape the genius' wrath. After hearing the stories, the genius forgives the merchant for the murder of his son. This story includes a subliminal message for Shahrayar who should, in turn, spare Shahrazad's life for telling him stories.

In addition to subliminal messages, Shahrazad uses the theme of Metamorphosis to bring about the desired change in Shahrayar's attitude and behavior. Metamorphosis, in the stories of *A Thousand and One Nights*, has the cathartic function of releasing Shahrayar's desire for murder and deflating it. By making metamorphosis the fate of the sinners instead of capital punishment, Shahrazad probably hopes to teach Shahrayar that human life is sacred and should not be easily thrown away, and to show him that there are higher powers in nature that function as gods of retribution, and revenge should be left for them. For instance, in the story of the merchant and hind, the ungrateful witch-wife, during her husband's absence on a

journey, transforms the adopted son of her husband into a calf and his mother into a cow. Upon his return, the witch-wife informs her husband that the slave woman died, and his adopted son disappeared. Eight months later, on the day of the feast of Bairam, the husband asks the servant to bring him a fat cow to sacrifice, which turns out to be his slave woman. Although transformed into a cow, the slave retains her human consciousness; she begs for mercy by "low[ing] most piteously" with eyes "streaming with tears" (Lang, p.14). The husband loses the ability to kill her, but his servant kills her for him. However, she turns out to be only skin and bones although she looked so fat.

The servant, then, decides to sacrifice the calf. Like his mother, the son is transformed into a calf but retains his human consciousness; "it threw its head at [the husband's] feet, with its head on the ground" (Lang: 14) to beg for its life. Hence, the husband refuses to sacrifice it, and later discovers that the calf is actually his adopted son. Through the help of a girl, the boy is released from the spell, and he marries her. As for the witch-wife, the girl wanted to kill her, but, upon the husband's request, she is transformed into a hind. Judging by what happened to the cow and the calf, the witch-wife will retain her human consciousness as well. In effect, the ungrateful wife, the mother, and the adopted son all lose their human shapes and become animals. However, they do not lose their human consciousness and do not become fully beasts. They hang in a grey area between the human and the beast.

"The Story of The Merchant and The Two Dogs" is another story of ingratitude and metamorphosis. The merchant has helped his brothers repeatedly through their misfortunes. However, on their business voyage, they get jealous of him for marrying a woman and for his prosperity, so they decide to murder him. They throw him into the sea with his wife who turns out to be a fairy and saves her husband. She decides to kill the merchant's brothers, but he begs her not to. Hence, she transforms them into dogs and dooms them "to remain for ten years in these shapes" (Lang: 21). Notice that the transformation of the ungrateful brothers into dogs substitutes murdering them, and that, they retain their human consciousness; they are only partially beasts, because they are changed only in their "shapes".

Likewise, in "The Story of The Second Calender", a genius decides to kill the second calender. After imploring the genius to forgive him, the genius decides to be "merciful" and satisfy himself with transforming the man into an animal of his choice; he could become either "a dog, an ass, a lion, or a bird" (Lang: 84). The genius then declares, "Quit the form of a man, and assume that of a monkey" (Lang: 90). Notice that the change is only

<sup>2</sup>am indebted to Dr. Fadia Suyoufie, an associate Prof. at Yarmouk University/Jordan, for her insights on Bakhtin which helped greatly in discussing certain ideas in this paper from the perspective of Bakhtin's dialogic imagination.

in form; the second calender becomes a monkey with a human consciousness which is evident in his ability to row (Lang: 90), to write in a “beautiful” way (Lang: 92), and in his superior intelligence; the Sultan wonders, “a man who could do as much would be cleverer than any other man, and this is only a monkey!” (Lang: 93). The calender becomes half-man, half-beast. He is later rescued by a princess who loses her life in the act of transforming the monkey back into a human.

In “The Story of Sidi-Nouman”, another story of ingratitude and transformation, Sidi-Nouman was married to Amina, who turns out to be a witch. He is surprised when he sees her eating just several grains of rice using a long pin (Lang: 333). At night, and without her noticing him, he follows her into the cemetery and is shocked to see her in the company of a female ghoul who feeds upon dead bodies. She joins the ghoul in a “frightful repast” (Lang: 335). When the husband later confronts her, Amina changes him into a dog (Lang: 339) and opens the gate of the house with the intention of crushing him as he goes through it. However, though changed into a dog, he retains his human consciousness. He states, “Dog though I was, I saw through her design” (Lang: 339). He escapes the danger of being crushed except for his tail which gets hurt in the process. This incident reveals that he retains his human consciousness, which is also evident in his ability to give thanks to the baker by bowing his head and shaking his tail (Lang: 340), and in his ability to distinguish whether a coin was good or bad (Lang: 341). Thus, he is half-man, half beast. Eventually, he is rescued by a good female magician who transforms him back into his former shape and gives him a magical potion with which to transform his evil wife into a mare. Judging by what happened to him and to the other transformed characters, one can safely assume that the wife also retains her human consciousness when transformed.

In all the aforementioned stories from the *Arabian Nights*, one can notice a pattern of a human transformed into an animal while retaining his/her human consciousness. Thus, these transformed characters become trapped in a situation in which they do not belong to the world of humans or to that of animals; they become trapped inside strange/alien bodies and are consequently alienated from the society they belong to. In other words, they become entrapped in a grey area (half-man; half beast) which will help them reach a realization about themselves – a realization that invokes Bakhtin’s claim that at the heart of metamorphosis there exists the chronotope of “the life course of one seeking true knowledge” (Bakhtin: 130). Similarly, Shahrayar is expected, through the subliminal messages contained in these stories, to achieve self-realization that will cause the desired change in his behaviour.

The aforementioned characters feel insignificant and entrapped in what can be considered an existential context that offers no exit except through death or through magic.

Now, it is true that existentialism is a modern concept that should not be used to describe a context from the *Arabian Nights*, but if one contemplates the situation of the aforementioned characters, one would realize that it is indeed an existential context even though existentialism as a movement was not born yet. Once the aforementioned stories are compared to Kafka’s, which are also embedded in an existential context, some very interesting results will appear.

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## FRANZ KAFKA & THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

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Before starting the comparison between Kafka’s animal stories and those of the *Arabian Nights*, one has to answer the following question: Why would someone assume that Kafka was influenced by the *Arabian Nights*? One reason for this assumption is that Kafka had so much interest in the East. For instance, Schopenhauer and Rudolph Steiner observed Kafka’s “interest in Eastern wisdom” (McCort: 187). James Whitlark also points out that “the East in Kafka’s works is not there for its own sake but as the instrument of a certain agenda” which is “the socio-evolutionary rather than cultural-critical or autobiographical” (Whitlark in McCort: 188). Moreover, Kafka was interested in Eastern religions such as Buddhism which is evident in Michael Ryan’s observation of “Kafka’s use of the Hindu/Buddhist notions of Karma and rebirth as literary devices for characterization” (Ryan in McCort: 188) and in Dennis McCort’s association of the name of Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis”, to “the Buddhist concept of samsara” (McCort: 187). Further, Rolf Goebel refers to Kafka’s “revisions of Greek myths, biblical stories, heroic biographies, and Chinese history” (Goebel: 194). All the aforementioned critics agree to one thing, Kafka was indeed interested in the East. Now, the question one needs to ask is, “If Kafka was so much interested in the East, is it really possible that he did not read the *Arabian Nights*?” The answer is probably no.

More to the point, Kafka was greatly interested in fairytales—a fact that increases the assumption that he must have read the *Arabian Nights* because they are quite similar in nature to the fairytales of the Grimm Brothers. “Kafka expressed a lifelong love of fairytales in diary entries and letters (Bridgewater, pp.73-74). However, according to Bridgewater, “Kafka’s fairytale-like works involve many echoes of the folk-fairytale, their purpose being, typically, to deny the hope that was a fundamental feature of this, while at the same time, indirectly expressing a nostalgia for it” (Bridgewater: 93). Kafka was greatly influenced by the Grimm Brothers’ tales. In fact, according to Bridgewater, when Kafka died, several fairytale books were found in his library. One of them was the Grimms’ *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (Bridgewater: 73). However, Kafka was not happy by the Grimms’ ever-existing hope of always defeating evil which permeates

their stories. In effect, Kafka made his fairytales more realistic by placing them within an existential context and deleting hope from the equation.

Studying Kafka's diaries reveals a piece of evidence that gives weight to all the aforementioned speculations. His diaries reveal that he read Goethe and was, therefore, influenced by his writings. Kresh maintains that "the image of Kafka that is captured in the diaries ... reveals a man struggling with contradictory feelings about marriage, culture, and his identity as a writer." One finds that "[c]ertain people (like Napoleon and Goethe) appear often enough to raise an eyebrow, pointing to obsessions and literary influences less obvious in his fictional work" (Kresh). Moreover, Kafka writes in his diaries:

Goethe probably retards the development of the German language by the force of his writing. Even though prose style has often traveled away from him in the interim, still, in the end, as at present, it returns to him with strengthened yearning and even adopts obsolete idioms found in Goethe but otherwise without any particular connection with him, in order to rejoice in the completeness of its unlimited dependence. (Diaries 1910-13 197; Tagebucher 318 in Corngold, Stanley.)

Kafka's diaries, hence, reveal his preoccupation with Goethe who was influenced by the *Arabian Nights*.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Kafka was at least influenced indirectly by the *Arabian Nights*. In other words, if A (Goethe) was influenced by B (*Arabian Nights*), and C (Kafka) was influenced by A (Goethe), then C (Kafka) is indirectly influenced by B (*Arabian Nights*).

Our next question would be, "Supposing that Kafka did read the *Arabian Nights*, how come nobody so far, to the best of my knowledge, has noticed or assumed the influence of the *Arabian Nights* upon his art?" One possible reason for this is perhaps Kafka's intelligence in covering the sources of his influence. This aspect can be noticed in Rolf Goebel's remarks "against universalism in Kafka, particularly in the sense of a metaphysical or spiritual essence presumably held in common with the Eastern wisdom traditions" (Goebel 1997 in McCort: 187). In addition, Goebel maintains that "Kafka's relation to the East is a particularly controversial issue that ... perhaps cannot and should not be resolved in any final sense of closure" (Goebel: 190). Kafka, then, has an extraordinary ability to hide the sources of his influence.

Further, Goebel claims that Kafka "incorporates faint echoes and dispersed shards of these now-embattled traditions into his writings through cryptic allusions and fragmentary citation" instead of "trying to preserve as a metaphysical whole what has been irretrievably dispersed" (Goebel, pp.194-95). By dispersing "irretrievably" the traditions that influence his writing, Kafka hides the sources of his influence. Thus, Kafka presents an "amalgamated, universal world" which "originates from

the metaphysical, mythic, and mystic experience of the writer" (Goebel: 194). In effect, he amalgamates the different traditions into a new existence – a matter that makes the task of finding out Kafka's sources of influence really problematic.

The last reason to claim that Kafka was probably influenced by the *Arabian Nights* would result from a comparison between Kafka's animal stories and some of the stories in the *Arabian Nights*. One would find, for instance, that Kafka's stories and those of the *Arabian Nights* function therapeutically and focus on a similar existential situation mainly that of a person who is trapped in a middle-state between man and beast. To prove this point, let us compare the aforementioned stories from the *Arabian Nights* with some of Kafka's which also focus on metamorphosis and ingratitude.

To begin with, Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" is about an ape from the "Gold Coast" called Red Peter, who is violently captured by the leader of a "hunting expedition sent out by the firm of Hagenbeck" (Rice: 174); Red Peter "came down for a drink at evening among a troop of apes", and the hunters "shot" at the apes. He was "the only one that was hit .... in two places" (Rice: 174). He explains that he was shot "in the cheek," but it was only a "slight" wound. However, "it left a large, naked, red scar which earned [him] the name of Red Peter" (Rice: 175). Later, Red Peter befriends the leader of the expedition and "drunk many a bottle of good red wine" with him (Rice: 174). The violent capture of Red Peter in the Gold Coast (Ghana in Africa), his forced immigration into another country, as well as his later transformation into something close to a human, invoke the process of capturing and enslaving Africans by white merchants who used to hunt them down and sell them as livestock for white farmers in The New World in the 18th and 19th Centuries. This connection between Red Peter and the dehumanized Africans serve the important function of framing the story within a colonial context.

One can deduce the presence of the colonial practice in this story through the several remarks that Red Peter makes about the violent change of his circumstances. He claims, for instance, that he "spurred [himself] on in [his] forced career" (Rice: 173, my italics), and refers to "the strong wind that blew after [him] out of his past" (Rice: 173). Red Peter is, then, a colonized person who is thingified and dehumanized by his colonizers—a claim that echoes Aimé Césaire's equation "*colonization=thingification*" (Williams: 177). Furthermore, "[a]s Darwinism, ethnology and anthropology developed as disciplines in the 1860s", they "lent their weight to the idea of there being a gulf between African and European, fuelled by the search for a missing link between humans

<sup>3</sup>For proof of the influence of the *Arabian Nights* upon Goethe please refer to Prof. Katharina Mommsen's lecture "'As Master You Will Recognize Scheherazade'. How the *Arabian Nights* inspired Goethe" delivered on the 16th of December 2009 at the Orient Institute Beirut.

and anthropoid apes” (Childs 11-12). Red Peter becomes the missing link between humans and apes and reflects Kafka’s own feelings of inferiority being a Jew among Germans as shall be explained later in more details.

The leader of the expedition becomes Red Peter’s teacher. Their relationship proves Albert Memmi’s claims about the colonizer and the colonized. Memmi maintains that “[t]he first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him”. He also claims that “one must resemble the white man, the non-Jew, the colonizer” (Memmi, pp.119-122). His remarks help one understand Red Peter’s desire to imitate his teacher, and Kafka’s own desire to imitate the Christian European which will be discussed later. Through his teacher’s help, Red Peter escapes being an ape and acquires a different self which makes him close to being a human. For instance, Red Peter imitates his teacher in drinking bottles of beer and in “breaking into human speech” (Rice: 182). Memmi argues that “[l]ove of the colonizer is substituted by a complex of feelings ranging from shame to self-hate” (Memmi: 119-122) which resemble Red Peter’s feelings as a captured ape who desires to resemble his teacher/capturer and who is ashamed of being an ape.

Using the help of the teacher, the ape is transformed into his human-like self. Memmi explains that “[i]n the name of what he hopes to become, [the colonized] sets his mind on impoverishing himself, tearing himself away from his true self.” Further, Memmi claims that “[i]n order to free himself, at least so he believes, he agrees to destroy himself.” Thus, “the colonized in the throes of assimilation hides his past, his traditions, in fact all his origins which have become ignominious” (Memmi, pp.119-122). Notice how similar these remarks are to Red Peter’s actions. Red Peter claims that his achievement would have been impossible if he “stubbornly set on clinging to [his] origins, to the remembrances of [his] youth.” He adds, “to give up being stubborn was the supreme commandment I laid upon myself” (Rice: 173).

Furthermore, the colonized Red Peter wishes to “free himself” by “destroying himself”; imitating the colonizer, he believes, is the way out of the cage, out of entrapment. He explains that “the place for apes was in front of a locker—well then, I had to stop being an ape. A fine, clear train of thought, which I must have constructed somehow with my belly” (Rice: 176), insists that “there was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason” (Rice: 182), that “One learns when one has to; one learns when one needs a way out; one learns at all costs” (Rice: 183), and that “One stands over oneself with a whip; one flays oneself at the slightest opposition” (Rice: 183). In effect, Red Peter erodes his past and sheds away his ape skin in order to resemble his teacher/colonizer.

Red Peter’s story resembles that of the second calendar both of them become half-men, half-monkeys. The

princess who loses her life in the act of transforming the second calendar into humanity functions more or less as Red Peter’s teacher who also loses metaphorically his life in the process of transforming Peter into humanity. Red Peter explains, “My ape nature fled out of me, head over heels and away, so that my first teacher was almost himself turned into an ape by it” and that his teacher “had soon to give up teaching and was taken away to a mental hospital” (Rice: 183). In addition, the story of Red Peter, like those of the *Arabian Nights*, has a therapeutic function. Dennis McCort argues that “Kafka creates a fictive wheel of suffering, repeatedly giving birth to various conflicted aspects of himself in succession of characters that populate at least some of his stories” (McCort: 188). Similarly, according to his biography, “Kafka is everywhere in his tales, especially his fears and insecurities” (Hornek).

Kafka, hence, uses the animal stories which contain metamorphosis therapeutically as a way to come to terms with his own suffering of being a Jew in Prague. In other words, Kafka desires to escape his Jewish origin and to become like the non-Jewish white Christian Europeans just like Red Peter wishes to escape being an ape. The attempt to resemble the Europeans is evident in Red Peter’s claim that he “managed to reach the cultural level of an average European” which got him out of the cage and “opened a special way out” for him which is “the way of humanity” (Rice: 183). Notice that Red Peter chooses, without hesitation, “the variety stage” over “the Zoological gardens” which will only be “a new cage” (Rice: 183). This choice reveals Red Peter’s status as an artist, which is also evident in his drinking beer bottles “like an artistic performer” (Rice: 182). Thus, imitating Europeans became the way out for Red Peter and for Kafka as a dehumanized artist as well.

More to the point, Red Peter tries to escape his past identity as an ape by assuming the new human-like identity in a similar way to which the colonized people try to erase their identity and assimilate that of their colonizers, as explained before. Kafka, being a Jew in threat of being killed by the Nazi regime which used to control Prague, must have felt colonized and wished to escape his Jewishness into that of Christianity – a feeling which he expressed in the stories chosen in this article. Indeed, in his diaries, Kafka wonders, “What have I in common with Jews? I have hardly anything common with myself and should stand very quiet in a corner, content that I can breathe” (The Modern World-Kafka Quotations).

Kafka’s wish to escape his Jewishness and erase his identity resembles Red Peter’s wish to escape his inferior self into that of a human. In doing so, Kafka belongs to what Fanon calls “a race of angels”; Fanon warns that colonisation controls the colonised and starts “emptying the native’s brain of all form and content.” Using “a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed

people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (Fanon: 170). He also warns that such practices eventually produce "individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless – a race of angels" (Fanon in Williams: 395). Similarly, Red Peter belongs to the "race of angels" as manifested by his inability to properly represent his former ape feelings; he states, "Of course, what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human terms, and therefore I misrepresent it" (Rice: 176). In addition, he claims that after his transformation, his past memories as an ape as an act of "revenge ... has closed the door against [him] more and more" (Rice: 173).

Red Peter becomes trapped in a gray area between Man and Ape. Michael Pinsky explains, "Red Peter can never be purely human, but he is no longer pure animal either. He must continually narrate between the two" (Pinsky: 121). Matthew T. Powell also maintains that "[b]y playing off this tension between human and non-human, between what is 'the self' and what is 'not the self,'" Kafka observes "the *ontology of otherness* that clarifies the space between self and other" (Powell: 130). He also claims that "Kafka is particularly careful never to allow his protagonist to claim a level of human-ness, but merely an ability to learn and mimic" (Powell: 138). Red Peter, then, is not completely human. According to the newspapers, his "ape nature is not yet quite under control" because whenever he has visitors, he pulls off his trousers "to show them where the shot went in." Red Peter claims that people can see on his body the "well-groomed fur and the scar made ... by a wanton shot" (Rice: 175). Although Red Peter is closer to a human, he still retains fur on his body; he cannot erase/repress his ape identity as manifested in his willingness to pull off his trousers in front of the guests.

The newspapers' claim about Red Peter's ape nature confirms the failure of the process of assimilation between the colonizer and the colonized; as a colonized subject, Red Peter tries to imitate the superior model of the colonizer, but he is met with rejection. Memmi claims that "[i]n order to be assimilated, it is not enough to leave one's group, but one must enter another, now he [the colonised] meets with the colonizer's rejection." If the coloniser does not intend to "offend the colonized too much", he will, according to Memmi, "use all his psychological theories. The national character of peoples is incompatible; every gesture is subtended by the entire spirit, etc." However, "[i]f he is more rude, he will say that the colonized is an ape". In effect, "[e]verything is mobilized so that the colonized cannot cross the doorstep" thus proving that "assimilation and colonization are contradictory" (Memmi 123-27). Thus, although Red Peter tries to imitate his colonizers, he will never be considered fully human.

Red Peter contrasts his new self to that of the "half-trained little chimpanzee" (Rice: 184). Peter takes "comfort from her as apes do" (Rice: 184). However, he tries not to see her during the day because "she has the

insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eye" which only he can see and which he "cannot bear" (Rice: 184). In effect, though one might change through metamorphosis, one cannot really escape his true self. He might try to erase his identity, but he cannot fully acquire a new one. Red Peter can still see his old self in the chimpanzee, and, consequently, he cannot bear it. He also relates to the painful mad process of transformation seen in the "bewildered gaze" of the chimpanzee who becomes lost between the world of humans and that of animals. This process is, indeed, mad – an aspect that explains why Red Peter's teacher almost loses his humanity into that of an ape's during the process of transformation and is taken to a mental hospital afterwards.

Since the story of Red Peter reflects Kafka's own suffering as a Jew among Germans, then Kafka himself becomes stateless and rootless, belonging to a race of angels – a claim that is evident in Calum A. Kerr's assertion that though Kafka was "brought up in a Jewish household," he "did not practise his religion". Kerr also asserts that Kafka "[a]long with society and his work, ... felt alienated from his religion; refusing to engage with it" (Kerr: 1). In other words, Kafka used the story of Red Peter as a psychological outlet for his suppressed emotions about his Jewishness. Indeed, living in a society that is dominated by the Nazi regime, must have made Kafka feel inferior, insecure about his life, and inhuman. He used storytelling therapeutically to heal himself from his feelings of racial and religious inferiority just like Shahrazad used it to heal Shahrayar. As in the *Arabian Nights*, Kafka, from a Bakhtinian perspective, is using the imaginary fictitious realm to gain control over the realm of reality and to achieve self-realization through this dialogic imagination.

Kafka's attraction to a different religious identity can be also found in "A Hunger Artist". I classify this story among the animal stories although the protagonist is human because when one reads it, one realizes that the artist spends most of his life in a cage sitting on straw and ends up displayed among circus animals where he eventually dies. This artist's humanity then is not full. He is half-man, half-beast which makes him similar to Red Peter. The hunger artist is doomed to spend his life observing humanity through the bars of his cage without really participating in it.

This idea is further emphasized when the hunger artist dies, and his place is taken by a panther. Nathan Cervo asserts that "[t]he etymons of the word 'panther' (Greek pan and ther: 'all,' 'beast') suggest the Dionysian, or Bacchic, aura emanated by the story's subtext" (Cervo: 99). So, the half-man, half-beast is replaced by an all-beast. Notice that the idea of the half-man, half-beast in "A Hunger Artist" is similar to the one already discussed in the aforementioned stories from the *Arabian Nights*. Further, Cervo claims that the panther refers to Jesus. He explains that "[t]he phrase *huios parthenou* ('son

of an unmarried woman' might have been misheard as *huios pantherou* ('son of Panthera')". Hence, the panther stands for Jesus who "may be caged (systematized) but 'freedom' is seen by 'even the most insensitive' 'to lurk' 'in his jaws'" (Cervo: 99). In effect, Kafka expresses his yearning for Christianity by making the panther replace the artist in the cage. Again, storytelling therapeutically and cathartically relieves Kafka of his emotional burden and helps him gain control over the realm of reality by using the realm of fiction from a Bakhtinian perspective.

Like the discussed stories from the *Arabian Nights*, the story of "A Hunger Artist" focuses on ingratitude. Nobody appreciates the art of the hunger artist. People who watch him in the cage always suspect him of cheating; they assume that he has found a way of secretly eating without being noticed. The artist is misunderstood and victimized by his society. Nobody is there to witness the records of fasting he is breaking. "[N]o one counted the days, no one, not even the artist himself, knew what records he was already breaking, and his heart grew heavy" (Rice: 254). Instead, he is forgotten and left to die in his cage like an animal. Ingratitude and lack of appreciation is something that Kafka felt himself. Veronica Loveday explains that "Franz Kafka spent most of his life feeling inadequate and unimportant" (Loveday). She claims that Kafka "was highly critical of his writing and felt his work to be full of imperfections. He was unconvinced of his great talent and requested that all of his writing be burned following his death" (Loveday). Kafka never felt appreciated by his father, by society or even by himself – a matter that explains his desire to have his unpublished works burned after his death.

Clearly, Kafka used the story of "A Hunger Artist" therapeutically to release his feelings of depression, frustration, and lack of appreciation. The artist's dehumanization is complete when the circus overseer and his men "poked into the straw with sticks and found him in it" (Rice: 254, my italics). They poke for him as if they are afraid that he might attack them like a wild animal. The same idea is evident when the artist "reacted with an outburst of fury and to the general alarm began to shake the bars of his cage *like a wild animal*" (Rice: 249, my italics). The artist is more or less a wild animal though he retains his human consciousness.

As for Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, the title itself reveals his interest in transformation. The story is about Gregor Samsa, a travelling salesman, who has been enslaved by capitalism in the process of paying off his father's debts to a cruel and insensitive boss. The story focuses on Gregor's alienation; he does not have any time to socialize. Gregor wakes up one day to find himself transformed into a giant bug. According to Tom Hartman, "this horrible metamorphosis is from Gregor's point of view not that big a change .... it is quite as if he has merely become ill, caught a terrible bug rather than become one" (Hartman: 34). Like most of Kafka's

protagonists, Gregor simply accepts his fate.

Bakhtin explains that "Metamorphosis serves as the basis for a method of portraying the whole of an individual's life in its more important moments of *crisis*: for *showing how an individual becomes other than what he was*" (Bakhtin:115). Through transformation, Gregor reaches the moment of epiphany regarding himself and his family. Hence, "this moment of crisis" is the most important in Gregor's insignificant and futile absurd life. Notice that Kafka chose the forms of a beetle or a cockroach for Gregor which are repulsive due to his feelings of inferiority and dissatisfaction with his body, unlike the husband who chose for his wife the form of the hind in the *Arabian Nights* so that they "could see her in the family without repugnance" (Lang:14).

Through transformation, Gregor's body has taken action against a life of enslavement. It has rebelled against him and against the tyranny of the materialistic system. Gregor's situation is similar to that of soldiers who lose on the battle fields their eyesight or become paralysed for no obvious medical reason, and psychologically this can be interpreted as a survival technique that the body exercises to preserve itself from annihilation. Similarly, Gregor's human body shuts down, and he wakes up to find himself transformed into a cockroach or a beetle which reveals his Sisyphus-like status in an absurd futile context on the one hand, and his dehumanized, insignificant status on the other.

Gregor's tragic self-sacrifice, which culminates in the ultimate sacrifice of giving up his life for his family, is rewarded ungratefully by his parents and his sister; his father breaks his back, his mother abandons him, and his sister wants to kick him out of the house though he saves them from the tenants who have taken control of his family and of their house. Grete, Gregor's sister explains that the metamorphosed Gregor must be gotten "rid of" (Rice:124). She insists to her father and mother that they "must try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor .... If this were Gregor, he would have realized long ago that human beings can't live with such a creature, and he'd have gone away on his own accord" (Rice:125). The presence of the metamorphosed Gregor becomes problematic to Grete. Without him, she "would not have any brother" but she could "go on living and keep his memory in honor" (Rice:125). Grete's words reveal the painful effect of having someone caught in the gray area between Man and beast not only for the afflicted person but also for those around him. Luckily for him, he dies before that ever happens.

In his article, "Samsa and Samsara: Suffering, Death, and Rebirth in 'The Metamorphosis'" Michael: Ryan explains that "suffering and dying in order to free his family can certainly be considered Christ-like" (Kerr). Gregor, in this respect, represents Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself for the sake of humanity to atone for the Original Sin – a matter that again highlights Kafka's



interest in Christianity. Bakhtin explains that in stories about metamorphosis there is a cycle of “guilt” that causes “punishment” and then “redemption” that leads to a state of “blessedness” (Bakhtin:118). In Kafka’s story, Gregor is *guilty* of neglecting himself, wasting his youthful years to pay off his father’s debts, forgetting his humanity, not socializing with others, and of being enslaved by capitalism. Hence, he is *punished* by being transformed into a beetle or a cockroach in order to achieve self-realization that led to his *redemption* which is manifested in his interest in himself and in the new activities he devotes his time to. Following this redemption, Gregor reaches the final stage of *blessedness* by sacrificing himself like Jesus Christ for the salvation of his family.

Gregor’s dehumanization is more emphasized after his death. The servant “pushed Gregor’s corpse along way to one side with her broomstick. Mrs. Samsa made a movement as if to stop her, but checked it” (Rice:128). Like the hunger artist, Gregor has to be poked because he is a dangerous animal. Everyone seems happy that Gregor is dead. His father announces, “[N]ow thanks be to God” and he “crossed himself, and the three women followed his example” (Rice:128). Gregor’s ultimate dehumanization, however, occurs when none of his family wishes to learn what the servant has done with his body. The servant who gives up on arousing the interest of any of the family members about what she did to Gregor’s body finally announces that they “don’t need to bother about how to get rid of the thing next door. It’s been seen to already” (Rice:131). Indeed, Gregor did not matter to his family when he was alive, why should he matter after his metamorphosis or after his death? Notice again Kafka’s interest in Christianity through making Gregor’s family Christian despite the fact that the characters in the story reflect Kafka’s own family and clearly reveal his bad relationship with his father. Kafka was “profoundly affected by his father’s authoritarian and demanding character” who “was described as a ‘huge, selfish, overbearing businessman’” (Wikipedia).

This story, like the aforementioned stories, cathartically functions to release Kafka’s own feelings of alienation, insignificance, lack of appreciation, and his negative feelings for his father and his job. Kafka was not happy with his reality. He probably found a substitute reality in the world of the *Arabian Nights* which inspired his story of the metamorphosis in which Gregor becomes half-man, half-beast. He is caught in a twilight zone between the two.

To conclude, the task of deciding whether Kafka was influenced by the *Arabian Nights* or not is not an easy one, knowing that he intentionally covers his sources of influence. However, through the comparison, one notices the way Kafka uses stories therapeutically to heal his tormented soul from the pain of the existential context in which he is trapped which is similar to what Shahrazad was trying to do for Shahrayar. i.e. healing and/or having

catharsis through storytelling. In the selected stories from the *Arabian Nights* and those of Kafka, one notices the interest in depicting individuals, who find themselves, through transformation, caught in a half-man, half-beast situation. One can also notice the focus on ingratitude in the stories chosen from the *Arabian Nights*, in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* and in “A Hunger Artist”. In the final analysis, and due to the aforementioned similarities, one can claim that there are strong reasons to believe that Kafka was influenced by the *Arabian Nights*. Hopefully, this study will instigate other studies in which researchers will provide hard evidence to prove that Kafka actually read the book of the *Arabian Nights* and was indeed influenced by it.

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