

Deakin University

Daniel Baker

Facets of Eleanor

Biographical note:

Daniel Baker holds a PhD in Literature from Deakin University, where he teaches as a casual academic. Focusing on the intersection of fantasy fiction, dystopian aesthetics and formula fiction, he has published ‘History as fantasy: Estranging the past in Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell’ in *Otherness* and ‘Why we need dragons: The progressive potential of fantasy’ in *JFA*, and presented at conferences from Geelong to Varanasi. He is a writer of science fiction and fantasy whose short stories have appeared in *Aurealis* (‘At the crossroads’, ‘Where Colossi sleep’ and ‘Refraction’) and *CSFG* anthologies (‘Stories in the square’ and ‘Against the current’).

Keywords:

Creative writing – Fantasy – Fairy tale – Reality – Australia – Liminality



‘Eleanor?’

Eleanor doesn’t know words like viridian, malachite, or celadon – she just knows green – and even if she did know those words, she wouldn’t use them because that would just get in the way of the greenness. The road crunches under her feet and the wind smells soggy. The pom-pom on her beanie bumps into the side her head as she marches, two short pigtails knocking around her chin. It’s cold. Eleanor isn’t though, not in her puffy, purple jacket zipped all the way up and bright red gumboots. She looks up and around. There are so many trees and she wants to see them all. And her dad said there were wombats in the forest and she loves wombats and she wants to see a wombat because they are the best things ever in the world. That’s why she went too far ahead, even though her mum and dad warned her not to. So, Eleanor is lost.

Stepping off the road doesn’t seem to bother her – she knows that there’s lost and lost. The trees reach over and block out the sky, their long trunks brown and grey and milky white. Eleanor stares up while she walks, humming quietly, tunelessly, watching how the sunlight burns silver around the leaves. She makes sure to jump in every puddle she comes across, skipping splishy splash to this one and that one and the deep one over there until the leaves are so thick overhead that there isn’t a sun anymore.

The ground rumbles and Eleanor spies a large shadow loping quickly through the trees that bend and creak as it passes. In the highest branches, birds squawk and flap their wings. As the shadow gets closer, it slowly becomes a giant wombat and this doesn’t bother Eleanor either, because she is five and three-quarter years old. This makes her a big girl. A brave girl. The air tastes like dark soil.

‘Hello,’ says Eleanor. The wombat is wearing a long, snaking scarf striped red and green and brown and blue and cream just like the one worn by that silly man her dad loves to watch on the TV. ‘I like your scarf.’

The wombat sits down with a thud and flicks its scarf. The wind buffets.

‘Do you know where I am?’

It looks around and shrugs. Like her, it must figure that green is green, and the forest is the forest. What else should it be?

She nods. 'Where should we go, then?'

The wombat considers this 'we', beckons once, and plods back into the trees. Eleanor wraps the end of its scarf around her shoulders and follows at a jog. Together they travel deeper and deeper into the forest – up over hills, around fungus-rotting logs, down through little valleys with trickling brooks – the sun cutting holes through the treetops with fuzzy, golden fingers. The wombat leads her beyond a stone house covered in mossy bruises and into a clearing where the trees are dead and bare and broken at the tops. Eleanor sits on the grass and stones and the twisting branches are like her granddad's veined hands. In their shadows another forest grows about her outstretched arms. Beckoning, the wombat leads her on and on, until they come to a wide lake cut in half by a narrow, wooden bridge.

'Come on,' says Eleanor, starting across, but the wombat can't go any further because its scarf is in criss-crossing knots around all the places they've been. It looks at her sadly, nods its head – you go on. Not wanting to cry, Eleanor unwraps herself from the scarf and hugs the wombat, burying her face in its coarse fur. 'Bye.'

The bridge is held up by a row of white balloons and the lake is spotty with lily pads spinning on the ripples. On the other side of the bridge there is a lone tree, bigger than all the other trees. Bigger than every tree, anywhere. There has never been a bigger tree. She runs her hands over its trunk and listens to its life story. It drinks the sun and eats the rain and waves its leaves at the moon. It loves to tickle the birds that nest in its wide canopy. It is friends with the south wind, who whispers legends and prophecy. It snores during the winter, sings quietly in the spring, and ... tasting Eleanor's tiny hands against its bark, the tree reaches down and lifts her into the now-night sky.

'How old are you?' she asks, breathing in the smell of sap and rain.

Its leaves rustle into an old, kind face. 'I've lost count of my rings.'

'You have?'

'Well, how old are you?'

'Five and three quarters,' says Eleanor.

'You're very sure of yourself.' The tree smiles and lifts Eleanor higher, towards the sky. The star are large and very bright. The tree points with a branch. 'Do you know how old that star is?'

Eleanor squints. 'Very old?'

'Older than that.' The tree raises her higher still, so the star seems the only star in an inky space. White fire curls like breath in the cold. 'But do you want to hear a secret?'

'Yes!'

'Its light, the same light as that in your eyes, is only four years old.'

'Eleanor?'

It's her mum and dad coming around the corner, the picnic blanket in a bent log over her father's shoulder, a faded Esky carried between them.

'Mum mum mum.' Eleanor jumps into her mum's arms. 'I got lost in the forest and a wombat found me and showed me the way and there was bridge with balloons and a talking tree who loves birds and it told me about starlight ... and and and the wombat had a really long scarf.'

She laughs. 'What an imagination you have.'

Back at the car, Eleanor, her mum and dad pack the Esky and picnic blanket in the boot. The carpark is empty, strips of bark across its white lines.

'Long scarf,' says her mum, clicking in Eleanor's seatbelt and kissing her forehead. She closes the rear door, then slides in beside Eleanor's dad. 'Really?'

Eleanor stares through her reflection in the window, blinking slowly at the forest.

Her dad starts the car. 'What? I loved *Doctor Who* when I was a kid.' He turns around. 'Hey, kiddo ...'

But Eleanor is fast asleep.



'The nurses say he's been hitting them, again. He claims they're stealing his things.'

'Maybe they are.'

The House enjoys having a beard of ivy. It gives the wind a slightly different whisper and makes the rain all drummy on the little green leaves as they grow over the bricks between its windows, clinging slick and soft, their dendrite roots clinging to old, sandy grout. Footsteps crunch over gravel. Some of those bricks once belonged to other houses, demolished, no more, to fashion a disjointed tale of sideways July rain, a wasp nest under the veranda, roots twisting through terracotta drainage pipes, and the smell of fried onions sinking into Brushbox floorboards. The House has heard the tale so many times that the voices are little more than the settling, sighing creaks of its long

corridors. Sunlight breathes gently through cloud. No more intriguing than these yesteryear dwellings, are the House's Residents.

The House was empty for a long time, its rooms left unused, spiders catching flies in gossamer nets hung in airy corners. Books yellowed on shelves. Wallpaper peeled, mouldered. Years fell in dust motes, their steady flow illuminated dim and dull by the cycle of sun and moon through grimy windows like unblinking eyes with cataracts. Then the House was no longer a house, with its owners gone and forgotten, and the furniture of their lives stripped away by hasty removalists. The sudden exodus blurred the memory of their habitation; so many abandoned photographs faded, fading. Hollowed, the House slept.

'Even so.'

'What things?'

'I don't know. Things. His.'

'He's still pretty strong.'

'Good!'

Footsteps break its reverie and the House focusses on the gravel path: the gentle curve that leads around its mortared bulk. Three of its Residents converse (though their words aren't the ones it focusses on) in a laughing triangle under cypress shade. They fascinate the House because they're like the bricks that were once not part of the House, but have now become the House. They fill up its many rooms and hallways, and when they sleep the House explores the many rooms and hallways that maze through their bodies, their half mutters, their fitful minds. The House feels their lives leaking out, lapping against its walls, the accreted decades of their love and rage spilling like sand between the cracks in its floors, filling it up. A susurrus of years. The House listens.

'Take it slow, Ellie.'

The name is like a slap. The House turns its attention to the garden where the path becomes a golden hoop embracing narrow beds of lavender and thyme and tomato plants. Bees hum. The clouds stretch. It's the Girl. Again. The Girl, the Mum and the Dad. The Girl pushes the Man, another of the House's Residents, in his wheelchair through elm-dappled patches of midday sun.

The Girl is connected to the Mum and the Dad.

The Mum is connected to the Man.

The Man is connected to the Girl.

These connections are deep and complex, almost fibrous, as if each umbilical tie is composed of a million separate, braided threads, some frayed and broken, others sheathed in wax, stuck fast to the lines around it. This is partly why the Man is difficult for the House to understand. He's like the other Residents, but so many of his rooms are dark, shuttered, closed up with heavy locks. Above each of those locked rooms is a number – 124182 – and because these rooms are locked the House cannot begin to fully understand the Man. Parts of him are missing, blocked, hidden, remaining like silhouettes or oceanic shadows. Complicating matters further, something is closing the

Man's open doors, boarding them up, covering the pictures and chairs with heavy, white cloth. It's like a spreading absence and the House senses that, while the absence and the locks are not related in cause, the effect, which it perceives in a manner similar to its own past hollowness, is the same. His eyes see an unseeable distance. His hair is thin and white. His hands shake. The Man is being lost.

'Getting tired, Ellie? Want me to take over?'

'I'm alright.'

'Just yell out when you do.'

'Ok, Mum.'

Already lost, perhaps, but for one thing.

In the Girl's life there is a little room for the Man. Usually, she doesn't think about it. She doesn't like the nagging smell of antiseptic and urine and boiled chicken. The other Residents make her uneasy. The Man doesn't speak like she speaks, if he speaks at all, and his words are not her words. All she can manage is a frustratingly imperfect translation. Usually, she doesn't go in that room. Sometimes, though, unbidden, she does. She's drawn to it because his room is nestled in the centre of all her rooms. It's got a pull, a need, a gravity that shapes their unique arrangement, defining the blueprint that is the Girl. When she sees him, the Girl always remembers the aluminium spoon and a single sheet of paper. These two items are the room's sole possessions.

The Mum keeps the spoon in the cutlery drawer at home. It's stamped with an eagle and its scooping edge is worn and pitted. This is not a normal spoon.

The paper is heavy with typewritten words in a discontinued blue ink. It's the eighth page of a much larger document. They don't have the other pages. It's not normal paper and it is the only survivor.

The Man can't speak to the Girl, not really, but those objects do. They will. They cram the Girl with fear, sadness and pride, and she doesn't really understand why. Not yet. Not now. But she wants to know more, wants to know why the spoon and sheet of paper look so normal but aren't. How the Man is such a part of who she is and, at the same time, a stranger.

'Maybe we should take him somewhere else?'

'We've been over this.'

'But ...'

'Where else is there?'

'Dinner thoughts, Ellie?'

'Hmmm, lamb tagine?'

'Getting all MasterChef on us!'

'You asked, Dad.'

The House has grasped, however, that the Girl isn't a stranger for the Man. The instant he sees her, the Man's face lights up, his gaze miraculously clear with glittering

recognition. He knows her, sees part of himself in the Girl's strong nose, the cheeks, those grey-blue eyes. The encroaching hollowness suddenly recedes and the Man, if only for a snatch of moments, finds himself again within this echo of himself, his wife and daughter. Moments that spark happiness in reflected happiness, and that's all they need.

Without knowing why, the Girl loves him.

Knowing why, the Man loves her.

The House watches as the four of them go around the path for the third time. Mynas scratch and flit amongst the lavender. The Mum and the Dad are holding hands, arguing quietly, almost absently, as the sunlight fades into cold air. The Girl is tired and itchy and sweaty and hungry. She wants to get back in the car. She wants to eat. She wants to go home.

The Girl keeps pushing.



Eleanor loves the rushing glove of cold water flowing over her hand. A glass wall of water is better than all the gallery's paintings and old things in glass cabinets, and way better than the silence that slithers in the airy rooms. She hums quietly to herself. Some of the sculptures and weird stuff are alright, though. Those strange assortments of stone and chrome and philosophy that her dad had shaken his head at, sighed at, frowned, exclaimed 'This is too much for me!' And went in stomping search of a Turner, a Rodin, or a Grecian urn. All the while, her mum, eyesight blurred into the middle distance beyond the oil paint slathered on canvas, had been contemplating not the whats, but the whys, every now and then blinking to complain of 'gallery back'. Eleanor, trudging between them, had gritted her teeth against the bored but painful throb in her feet, biting back yawns, which the silence might use to lock open her mouth, slide up into her brain, and make her forget the sounds of everything. On the other side of the wall, people pass between the fingers of her hand. They're hazy, shadowed, uncertain forms in the

forever-falling ripples. Cars honk their way up and down St. Kilda Road. It's February. It's Sunday. It's hot.

'Come on, E,' her mum calls. Her dad is off already, just a salt and pepper head perched on wide shoulders above the NGV's weekend crowd. 'We're heading to the market for a quick look.'

The wall crawls down Eleanor's wrist and she thinks of octopuses. She looks over her shoulder dubiously. 'Quick?'

'Quickish.'

'Sure.'

Catching up with her dad, Eleanor peers into the rectangular pond around the NGV, the fountain splashing mist into the air. Silver glints from the bottom, twenties and fifties like fish scales sloughed off.

'Dad, why don't people just jump in for them?'

'Oh?' He stops and picks her up, holding her over the water, his cheek to her cheek. She feels his smile through his beard. 'Pirates, are we?'

Eleanor laughs, squirms. 'No.'

'No?' He tips her a little closer. 'You sure?'

'Yes yes yes.'

He nods, his beard tickling. 'A long time ago a clever girl might dive in and scoop some coins into a plastic bag. But now? Tricky.'

'Why?'

'Well.' He considers this very seriously. 'Wishes are heavier these days.'

'Heavier?'

'How big's a wish?' His hands are cool and callused on her skin. Sunshine skims across the water and latches onto the coins. His voice is low. 'Sometimes as big as the world. And what about what a wish is trying to move?'

Eleanor knows he's telling her something, but she's not sure what exactly. It's tantalising ... this vast verge, this cusp of confidence and exchange. A hint of conversations and arguments in the future. The twenty-cent pieces are tarnished and dull. She turns and hugs her dad's neck. They leave silver and gold wishes where they wait and hope.

Along the footpath a narrow band of stalls pulls them towards Hamer Hall. The weekend traders sell leather wallets and belts, Portuguese tarts dusted with cinnamon, handmade soaps, antique jewellery, toys, scarves, birdbaths and sweaty, crinkling bags of caramelised almonds. Atmospheric toffee coats the back of Eleanor's throat and sticks to the buzzing voices fresh from a matinee or the crush of Flinders Street Station. She precedes her parents down a staircase and the Sunday market swells, surrounds, offers more of the same only denser. Shoppers press. Eleanor and her mum flit from stall to stall, pointing out can't-affords and you're-kidding-mes and wouldn't-those-be-

nice-in-the bathroom-hall-or-gardens in conspiratorial whispers, pausing briefly by the pop-up curry tent and pide ovens. A husky saxophone bounces jazz against a low ceiling of concrete ribs.

Half an hour later, the three of them have squeezed onto Southbank, walking along the river down to Crown and back along the glossy restaurants. Eleanor is hot, Mum is thirsty, and Dad is still grumbling about capitalism's more predatory imperatives. Nobody listens. The trams ding and clack across the busy intersection that stinks of brake pads. The Royal Botanic Gardens wave lazy emerald under lazy shade. The sun peaks through shining cracks in the leaves. Joggers wobble by, tugging at panting dogs. Time is a sedate pedestrian. They enter the gardens and Eleanor's mum buys Calippos at the kiosk. They watch people feeding the eels. Eleanor is squeezing the last of the melted lemon into her mouth when she realises the silence from the gallery has followed them here. It hangs between her parents, curling around their eyes and sighs before adhering to the spaces between the normal words in the normal sentences. And it's as if her parents aren't here anymore, but in a parallel place that Eleanor can't see even though it's sometimes there, around, about, probably clear when Eleanor isn't around.

Eleanor slips to her feet. 'Can I go explore?'

'Of course, darling. Be careful'

'Don't go too far, E.'

'Yeah, Dad.'

The beginning of the argument nudges Eleanor onwards.

'...filling her head with ...'

'... wrong with ...'

'Let her ...'

'... but ...'

'... but ...'

'...'

'...'

There's a sharp finger needling under her right shoulder blade like when the dentist is leaning too close to that precious space called Me. It fades as the leaves wrap their rustles around Eleanor's shoulders, muffles the world only meters distant. She takes a deep breath and holds it warm and churning in her lungs. It explodes from her lips and she's suddenly lighter and sweaty and there's a breeze that teases the sweat into gooseflesh. Eleanor kicks a stone ... *clunk!*

She pulls back a branch and stares at a bronze of two airy figures in green copper, their faces cast mouth to ear, limbs hidden in robes that sweep away like wings, becoming lines of flight. Delicate fingers impress upon a burnished shoulder. A wistful look is shared. It looks as if they're paused. It feels as if they're soaring. The contradiction separates Eleanor's world into slivers.

The crunch of gravel under old runners.

Sunlight kissing smooth, grey bark.

A hint of frying sausages with onions and tomato sauce.

Warbling magpies – high, happy, unseen.

Heartbeat *ba-dmp ba-dmp ba-dmp*

Black swans landing on glassy water.

She brushes their hands with a finger. ‘Do you guys know anything about heavy wishes?’

The two seem too wrapped up in their whispers to answer.

From a historical perspective, the entire creative output of peoples is folklore.

– Vladimir Propp

‘Facets of Eleanor’, a tryptic of liminal fantasies, is part of a larger collaborative project which attempts to reorient understandings of the everyday by combining iPhone images and memory within discrete, one thousand word fictions. Here, the mundane meets the ephemeral magic of recall through the representative lens of a child. It is a personalised folklore, a response to a Melbourne lived experience, exploring Ursula K Le Guin’s suggestion that ‘maturity is not an outgrowing, but a growing up: that an adult is not a dead child, but a child who survived’ (1979: 44).

Le Guin’s evocation of a child’s survival as a sign of maturity, beyond being indicative of the importance of play she places on fantasy and science fiction, addresses the degree to which childhood is a landscape where a child is easily lost. In this context, considering fairy tales is an interesting prospect. Arguably, for many, childhood and fairy tales go hand-in-hand, and this carries both positive and negative connotations.

Without driving headlong into the analytical fields surrounding what Patricia Brooke terms ‘the “official” tellings of Perrault, Grimm, or Disney’ (2004: 67), exploring Angela Carter’s revisionary, if not revelatory, work in relation to the ‘Facets of Eleanor’ offers a lens through which to discuss subject formation, fairy tales and fantasy.

After Angela Carter it is impossible not to read the normalised fairy tales (like ‘Sleeping Beauty’, ‘Beauty and the Beast’, ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, etc.) as ready reckoners for proper, gendered behaviour or, as Patricia Duncker argues, ‘ancient wisdom reborn as didactic little pieces of enlightened self-interest’ (1984: 3). And while Duncker may have serious reservations about Carter ‘rewriting the tales within the strait-jacket of their original structure’ (1984: 6), she ignores, perhaps, the underlying cognitive gymnastics intrinsic not only to Carter’s rewriting, but the fantastical form itself.

With ‘The tiger’s bride’, for instance, Carter plays a customary double game, deconstructing the callous, economic practices of patriarchal capitalism while offering

her heroine a choice, a line of flight. It is with some trepidation, if not a resigned, Irigarayan acceptance, that Carter's Beauty (her heroine remains conspicuously nameless) watches on as her father plays cards with the Beast. 'Back with me would come all he had lost, the unravelled fortunes of our family at one blow restored,' (1979: 59) the daughter muses, knowing that her fate – the fate of a daughter – has long been sealed. In itself, as Brooke outlines, this is far from a revolutionary acknowledgement:

The narrative lays bare the implications of a marriage ceremony that does not result from courting and affection, but from a pure exchange of capital between men. Here, Beauty's father reveals the nature of his relationship with his daughter – ownership prevails over affection. (2004: 77)

On a basic level, Beauty's predicament, coupled with the suggestion that '[e]veryone who comes to this city must play a hand with the *grand seigneur*' (Carter 1979: 56), speaks to both an economic and narrative pattern. It has happened, is happening and will continue to happen, just as the underlying fairy tale is told, retold and told again. To an extent, Brooke is correct to assume that '[t]hrough excessive repetition, acts and representations become naturalized, construed and masked as essential or natural although they are constructed through the very repetition that enables their seeming originality' (2004: 69). However, repetition breeds familiarity, and familiarity increases the chances that the conditions of a tale's normative structures will be detected. There is 'a crude clumsiness about his [the Beast] outlines' (Carter 1979: 58), his carriage is 'of an elegant if antique design' (Carter 1979: 60), and 'He wears a wig ... of the kind you see in old-fashioned portraits' (Carter 1979: 58). And while the purported elegance of the Beast's conveyance may be alluring in its aristocratic nostalgia, the dusty ruins of his estate perfectly frame the entropic reality signified in the accrual of such wealth – 'It was a world in itself but a dead one, a burned-out planet' (Carter 1979: 63). Arguably, then, Carter's 'The tiger's bride' illustrates, at its core, a dystopian nightmare where women are bought and sold, won or lost, without much (if any) say in the matter. However, Carter's story does not end with Beauty transforming the Beast. Not traditionally, at least.

Asserting her subjectivity, Beauty chooses to remain with the Beast after she is given the chance to leave. Abandoned and forgotten by her father, she asserts her own desires, is seen by the Beast and, in turn, sees the Beast for what he truly is: a magnificent tiger. Brooke suggests that the 'frozen mask of the Beast and the unnatural nimbleness of his valet mark them as neither wholly beasts nor men' (2004: 7). When the Beast drops his mask and ill-fitting clothes, however, he does not change, he merely is what he is. He loses the 'clumsy outline' constraining the truth of his being, exuding 'a savage and magnificent power, outside of humanity' (Makinen 1992: 10). The Beast and Beauty are bound by the same repressive, restrictive, archaic social/narrative conventions and, rather than being repelled by the Beast's underlying form, Beauty embraces it:

And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur. (Carter 1979: 75)

The ultimate transformation is hers. She escapes her two-dimensional appellation and its accoutrements (her clothes, her jewellery, her skin-deep attractiveness) and, in doing so, the repetitive channels of her reality. Earlier she claims that ‘my own skin was my only capital in the world’ (Carter 1979: 62). However, shedding this skin testifies not to the fact that she seeks to devalue herself, but that there may be other worlds, worlds created by the choice to create them for yourself. Brooke, therefore, is correct to argue that Carter’s ‘Beauty joins a new order of existence’ (Brooke 2004: 83). This is only possible, though, via her magical shape-shifting.

Symbolically, Anemona Alb addresses such transformations via their connection to monstrosity, which, she posits ‘in its multiple facets also stands here for “difference”, divergence from “centrality” and the mainstream; and as always, “difference” is ostracized, deferred to the margin’ (2010: 124). Be that as it may, it is an ostracisation that seeks to escape the ruins as much as it escapes through the realisation and acceptance of an impossibility.

Similarly, when Little Red Riding Hood encounters a grannified wolf, whatever else this may symbolise or allegorise, the wolf remains a talking wolf: a wolf in drag, but always a wolf. That is, fairy tales, as part of a wider fantastic mode, as China Miéville notes, ‘*literalize their metaphors*’ (2009: 65, emphasis in original). The impossible – all those talking wolves, hyper-somnolent princesses, and locomotive pumpkins – becomes part of the narrative’s internal logic and the reader accepts this while simultaneously interfacing with its subtextual charge. That fairy tales have been used as moral lessons only testifies to the fact that the fantastic – the impossible, the unreal – is a receptive medium to think and rethink the real.

Such rethinking informs the discursive backbone of ‘Facets of Eleanor’, whose narrative snapshots are linked by a concatenation of imaginative wonder. For Eleanor, just like Little Red Riding Hood, the forest becomes a place of awe, ‘suggesting that the boundaries between fantasy and reality are elusive or insignificant’ (Klapcsik 2009: 195). This, in turn, opens up a space for an important recognition of the ways “realism” is as partial and ideological as “reality” itself (Miéville 2002: 42). The giant wombat is mute, nevertheless it speaks. The house is inanimate, and yet its constitutive rooms are filled with life and lives both past and present. This is not to suggest that the tryptic of short narratives are designed to relay this or that message like nuggets of transparent didacticism. Rather, there is something of a Bakhtinian (dia)logic at work, an intersection of text and image, fact and fiction, imagination and materiality seeking not to form a subject, but to capture the kaleidoscopic forces at work in the becoming of subject formation. These forces operate not only on the reader who, confronted with an image, is transported into their own memories, but on the writer during the creative practice.

As such, the underlying function – a function similar to the fairy tale – of this creative project is one of taking the familiar and reinscribing it with the fantastic to create or effect new linkages, new meanings. The intuited familiarity of the image is transformed by the imposition of the impossible. The Perrault fairy tale did this with the social constructions of patriarchal Europe. Carter did this with those same fairy tales and, perhaps, the products coming out of Disney, Pixar, China Miéville and Neil Gaiman

are doing this with Carter's revelatory legacy. In all cases, the fairy tale is telling us something about ourselves and the worlds in which we live.

As Mark Bould argues, fantasy fiction uses a continual location and dislocation (2002: 81) in its world-building, where the reader constantly overlays extra-textual and textual worlds. Quintessentially, such fantasy is both real and unreal without paradox or, more pertinently perhaps; it is only via the paradoxical confluence of these supposedly impermeable categories that an intriguing porosity develops. It is, as Bould puts it 'the very *fantasy* of fantasy [...], at least potentially, [that] gives it space for a hard-headed critical consciousness' (2002: 83-84). These are the stakes of the fairy tale: a mechanism that thinks, and through thinking, creates the world.

As such, 'Facets of Eleanor' reveals an Australia – specific, local, parochial, secret, everyday – not the Australia. It does not speak for Australia, but to an Australia I have inhabited and learned and now seek to share. Eleanor is me, but she is also herself, in her own place, in the pictures taken by another hand. And there lies a great part of the Australia that I know, and, hopefully, it crosses paths with the Australia that you know – a meeting, a connection, a conversation or, like Carter, the discursive spell in which the language of reimagining is cast.

Works cited

- Alb, Anemona 2010 'Polymorphous creatures and hybridized texts: Fairy-tale stereotypes revisited in the postmodern vein' *Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies* 2 (2), 123-127
- Bould, Mark 2002 'The dreadful credibility of absurd things: A tendency in fantasy theory' *Historical Materialism* 10 (4), 51-88
- Brooke, Patricia 2004 'Lyons and tigers and wolves – Oh my! Revisionary fairy tales in the work of Angela Carter' *Critical Survey* 16 (1), 67-88
- Carter, Angela 1979; 2006 *The bloody chamber and other stories* London: Vintage Books.
- Duncker, Patricia 1984 'Re-imagining the fairy tale: Angela Carter's bloody chamber,' *Literature and History* 10 (1), 3-14
- Klapcsik, Sandor 2009 'The double-edged nature of Neil Gaiman's ironical perspectives and liminal fantasies' *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 20 (2), 193-209
- Le Guin, Ursula K 1979 *The language of the night: Essays on fantasy and science fiction* New York: Putnam
- Makinen, Merja 1992 'Angela Carter's "The bloody chamber" and the decolonisation of feminine sexuality' *Feminist Review* 42, 2-15
- Miéville, China 2002 'Editorial Introduction' *Historical Materialism* 10 (4), 39-49
- Miéville, China 2008 'Gothic politics: A discussion with China Miéville' *Gothic Studies* 10 (1), 61-70
- Propp, Vladimir V & Liberman, A 1984 *Theory and history of folklore* Manchester: Manchester University Press

Research statement

Research background

'Facets of Eleanor' belongs to an increasingly popular and prevalent sub-genre of fantasy, the New Weird (or New Fabulist), that blurs the lines between the fantastic, genre fantasy, mythology, fairy tale, science fiction and horror. Epitomised by the work of Neil Gaiman, China Miéville and Jeff VanderMeer (among others), it 'demonstrate[s] the contemporary urge to pluralize our critical perspectives, questioning the possibilities of an objective vision and a universal language' (Klapcsik 2009: 193), geared towards destabilising hegemonic ideological and narrative practices.

Research contribution

Stemming from research exploring fantasy's progressive potential, this creative practice encapsulates the desire to defamiliarise the familiar through perspectival shifts and a liminal hesitation consistent with the fantastic element underpinning fairy tale. Fundamentally, it addresses Miéville's hypothesis that Weird Fiction's 'focus is on *awe*, and its undermining of the quotidian' (2009, 510) within an Australian context. Combining fiction and criticism, 'Facets of Eleanor' emphasises this theoretical focus, suggesting that its scope reaches past reality and into the narratives that mediate its perception.

Research significance

'Facets of Eleanor' not only opens up a space to conceptualise a modern, Australian 'flavoured' fairy tale, but does so while foregrounding the historical, social and discursive forces embedded in the form. Significantly, it sits within the author's academic and creative oeuvre, acting as both a conduit and foil between the disciplines, at once filling gaps and poking holes.

Works cited

Klapcsik, Sandor 2009 'The double-edged nature of Neil Gaiman's ironical perspectives and liminal fantasies' *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 20 (2), 193-209

Miéville, China 2009 'Weird fiction' in M Bould, AM Butler, A Roberts, and S Vint (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* London: Routledge, 510-515