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THE ETHICAL DIMENSION OF CYBERFEMINISM

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The term "cyberfeminism" captured the mood of the moment for many women in the mid-1990s who were discovering the enrichment and empowerment that advanced communications and information technologies promised. The term seems to have sprung up simultaneously in several parts of the world, notably with VNS Matrix[1] in Australia and with Sadie Plant's[2] writing in the United Kingdom. Yet even from its birth, cyberfeminism seems to have been something of a problem child. This chapter identifies and explores those problems and goes on to question the continuing relevance of cyberfeminism in the twenty-first century. I conclude that only if the political and especially the ethical dimensions are thoroughly interwoven into cyberfeminism's somewhat hesitant theoretical roots can it deliver its early promise.

Cyberculture

If, as I claim, cyberfeminism has proved a somewhat unruly child, then perhaps we need to look to its parents to understand its roots.

One parent is *cyberculture*, the term used to describe the explosion of interest in cultures developing around virtual reality (VR), the Internet, and artificial intelligence (AI) and artificial life (the modeling of populations using digital technology)—much of which speaks in a markedly futuristic voice. Few cultural commentators can fail to marvel at the extraordinary efflorescence of cyberculture—a burgeoning interest in the social sciences has quickly spawned a number of anthologies.[3] Cyberculture has a number of interesting features, not least of all its relationship to feminism.

First of all, in its popular form it is a youth culture. At first sight it appears to go against the grain of a more general worldview that is skeptical about the progress of science and technology. The "anti-science" view came to prominence in the 1960s with worries over nuclear power and warfare, and it lives on in various guises in concerns over animal testing, ecological destruction, cloning and genetic testing, genetically

modified foods, and so on. If not exactly "anti-science" today, one can at least characterize this broad sweep of viewpoints as critical of technoscience and strongly aware of political and ethical concerns. Whether or not one agrees with a particular position, remembering that some activities such as destroying genetically modified crops may lie outside the law, there is no doubt that politics and ethics are overwhelmingly the drivers of this movement. One should also note that although it might be difficult to argue that this movement cuts across class barriers, it certainly appeals to a wide range of ages and to both genders.

Cyberculture presents an interesting contrast in its appeal to youth, particularly young men. Clearly it engages their interest in the technical gadgetry of computer technology, and in this it has been strongly influenced by the cyberpunk genre of science fiction, which although offering a distinctly dystopian vision of the future, at least offers alternative heroes in the form of the macho "console cowboys." To "jack in" to "cyberspace" appears to offer a way of transcending the mere "meat" of the body, signaling a male retreat from bodies and places where bodies exist.

Jacking in, *cyberspace*, *meat* are metonymic cyberpunk terms that have entered the lexicography of cyberculture, many of them from William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, the first cyberpunk novel.[4] In *Neuromancer*, the hero, Case, logs onto or jacks into cyberspace through a special socket implanted in his brain. Cyberspace is a shared virtual reality, a "consensual hallucination" where the body that one chooses to enter into within cyberspace has bodily sensations and can travel in the virtual reality. Meat-free, but sinister artificial intelligences inhabit cyberspace, having finally downloaded themselves and having left their obsolete, merely meat, bodies behind. But these images are a far cry from contemporary cyberspace and the current mundanities of logging onto a computer, of experiencing the Internet, often rather slowly, through the interface of screen and keyboard.

A Meat-Free Existence

It is interesting to note the contrast between the bodily involvement of anti-science protesters in their protest and the shunning of the somatic by cyberculture's console cowboys. Physical protest and demonstration has long been the tactic of those opposing nuclear weaponry. Genetically modified crops are destroyed by organized groups of protesters; some animal rights protesters have even died for their cause. Contrast this with the way that cyberculture's aficionados often appear to have forgotten that they have bodies at all. However, the ultimate inevitability of one's "meat" is demonstrated by Stone's observation: "The discourse of visionary virtual world builders is rife with images of imaginal bodies freed from the constraints that flesh imposes. Cyberspace

developers foresee a time when they will be able to forget about the body. But it is important to remember that virtual community originates in, and must return to the physical. No refigured virtual body, no matter how beautiful, will slow the death of a cyberpunk with AIDS. Even in the age of the technosocial subject, life is lived through bodies."[5]

One wonders what sort of bodies virtual-reality developers will have in store for us. For instance, Thalmann and Thalmann[6] picture a perfect, blond, red-lipped Marilyn Monroe lookalike seemingly without irony. And writing as a prominent mainstream AI roboticist, apparently quite separately from and rather earlier than cybercultural influences, Hans Moravec has proposed the idea of *Mind Children*.[7] Moravec's opinions belong more to the realm of the science-fiction writers than to hard-nosed engineering based roboticists, for he envisions a "postbiological" world where the human race has been swept away by its artificial children, the robots. Our DNA, he suggests, will find itself out of a job when the machines take over, robots with human intelligence will be common within fifty years.

There are at least two important issues at stake in projecting this curiously meat-free existence. The first concerns birth. Moravec sees his robots as his progeny and this has strong parallels with Stefan Helmreich's[8] research on an artificial life (A-life) laboratory where the scientists involved were strongly motivated by metaphors of birth. Feminists might question *why* they feel the need to have artificial or robot children. But if the roboticists are not creating weapons of destruction, like all parents they may not be able to control the actions of their offspring. Sue Jansen[9] has pointed to the way in which several AI scientists express their dream of creating their own robots, of "becoming father of oneself."[10]

Helmreich argues that A-life researchers take this view one step further in their creations of "worlds" or "universes." He asked a researcher how he felt in building his simulations. The reply was, "I feel like God. In fact I am God to the universes I create."[11]

The options then are (1) to create an artificial world and become God, (2) to download the mind into a robot, or (3) to enter the realm of pure intellect in cyberspace. All these views involve both the assumption that it is possible to leave the body behind and the masculinist desire to transcend the body. This, of course, leads to the idea of escape.

Cyberspace as Escape

The idea of transcendence and escape is important in the rhetoric of cyberculture. Indeed some authors[12] suggest that therein lies cyberculture's appeal as a means of producing new forms of expression, new psychic experiences that transcend mundane uses of technology, in a fusion of technology and art with cyberspace as the medium of this

transformation. This offers an alternative to drug culture where virtual reality and related information technologies offer a seemingly endless supply of new experiences but without the toxic risks of drugs. Ralph Schroeder[13] analyzes the tension between the technical problems that have yet to be solved and the worldview of human wish fulfillment that has been projected onto the technology. In popular form probably the most available form of cyberculture is the cyberpunk nightclub and cybercafe, which spring up in the middle of U.K. and U.S. cities. In addition, a number of North American magazines or fanzines (zines, for short) proclaim themselves the denizens of cybercultures. In upholding the traditionally macho values of cyberpunk, they are unlikely to find a mass audience among feminists. Anne Balsamo[14] sums up their style: "Interspersed throughout the pages of *Mondo 2000* and conference announcements, a tension of sorts emerges in the attempt to discursively negotiate a corporate commodity system while upholding oppositional notions of countercultural iconoclasm, individual genius, and artistic creativity. The result is the formation of a postmodern schizo-culture that is unselfconsciously elitist and often disingenuous in offering its hacker's version of the American dream."

Cyberculture for Feminists

It seems unlikely that the cyberpunk version of cyberculture, in its masculine attempts to transcend the "meat," holds much appeal for women and especially for feminists, particularly as feminist analysis has gained so much momentum in recent years, in so many areas—not least of all within science and technology. The problem is that cyberculture, at least in its popular form, lacks a critical edge. The lack of critique manifests itself in several different ways. First, popular cyberculture is in danger of becoming ensnared in the nets of technological determinism, a determinism against which both modern science and technology studies and gender and technology research have long wrestled to be free. Broadly speaking, for cyberculture, technological determinism offers a view that takes technological development as inevitable, as having its own inner logic and where society dances to technology's tune rather than, possibly, the other way round. In cyberculture, determinist views are given voice in predictive statements about what sort of technology we will have ten, twenty, or fifty years hence. Such predictions are always subject to revision; if they are long enough in the future the perpetrator will be long gone, and so the owners of the predictions need never really be called to account.

Such technological predictions also carry predictions of how the technology will be used. For instance, the prediction that the widespread availability of teleshopping means that we will sit at home making purchases denies the complex physical and emotional pleasures of shopping in a world where we are often reminded that a visit to the

mall is the most popular leisure pursuit for the middle classes in developed countries. Some of us may not wish to lose the pleasures of the meat; indeed many of us may believe that we are not "us" without our meat. The high priests and priestesses of cyberculture are expert in such futurespeak, in blending an almost mystical way of writing with a view that the advances on which they depend may be just around the corner.

Given that cyberculture draws so much from the rhetoric of cyberpunk fiction there are interesting tensions. Cyberpunk's future world is dystopian; there are no communities, only dangerous, alienating urban sprawls. Yet cyberculture looks to a future utopia where communities will spring up (and already have done) on the Internet, somehow to replace the old communities that people feel they have lost. Kevin Robins[15] sees a tension between the utopian desire to recreate the world afresh, in a virtual culture that is heavily dependent on a rhetoric of technological progress on the one hand, and a dissatisfaction and rejection of the old world on the other. Part of this hope manifests itself in the promise of a digital voice for groups traditionally far removed from political and economic power.[16] For instance, Jennifer Light[17] argues that computer-mediated communications on the Internet, as they escape centralized political and legal control, may diversify and offer alternative courses of action for women.

But if there is a determinism at work in the utopian view of the future that such utterances seem to suggest, there is also a determinism in the uncritical acclaim with which future advances in the technology are hailed. Truly intelligent robots, shared virtual realities, and cyberspace rest on technological advances that have not yet and may never happen. This means we need to keep a cool head when thinking about virtual reality and cybertechnology.

The Comfort of Cyborgs

If popular cyberculture offers little comfort for feminists, then it may be that we should look elsewhere within the groves of cyberculture, to the writings of academic theorists and to studies of women's use of the internet and VR, in chatrooms and in Usenet groups. If cyberculture is cyberfeminism's wayward father, then her mother is surely to be found in cyborg feminism.

While sociological studies of cyberculture are proliferating, one of the most potent images to emerge is that of the cyborg, or cybernetic organism. The idea of the cyborg hails from cyberpunk fiction and film but also predates it in older images of the fusion of human and machine. The cyborg is not a feminist invention; indeed in its manifestation in films such as *Terminator* and *Robocop* it is the epitome of masculine destruction, yet it has been appropriated as a feminist icon, most famously in Haraway's *A Cyborg*

Manifesto[18] which John Christie describes as having "attained a status as near canonical as anything gets for the left/feminist academy."[19]

In Haraway's hands the cyborg works as an ironic political myth initially for the 1980s but stretching into and finding its full force in the next decade and well beyond, a blurring, a transgression and deliberate confusion of boundaries of the self, a concern with what makes us human and how we define humanity. Her vision, coming before the upsurge of interest in virtual reality and the specific identification of cyberculture as a cultural entity, sees modern war as a cyborg orgy, coded by C^3I, command-control-communication-intelligence. In our reliance on spectacles, hearing aids, heart pacemakers, dentures, dental crowns, and artificial joints, not to mention, computers, faxes, modems, and networks, we are all cyborgs, "fabricated hybrids of machine and organism."[20]

The cyborg is to be a creature of a postgendered world. As the boundary between human and animal has been thoroughly breached, so too has the boundary between human and machine. The transgression of boundaries and shifting of perspective signals a lessening of the dualisms that have troubled feminist writers, and this means that we do not necessarily have to seek domination of the technology. This is a move away from earlier feminist theories toward a thoroughly postmodern feminism, which has since become a more mainstream part of feminist theory in the ten to fifteen years since the original writing of Haraway's essay. Her cyborg imagery contains two fundamental messages:

> First, the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of the reality. . . ; and second, taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life. It is not just that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex dominations. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia.[21]

Why has Haraway's essay held such an appeal for feminists? It is partly the language she uses, the mixture of poetry and politics. Christie notes "its ability to move with a kind of seamless rapidity from empirically grounded political recognition of the profound and deadly military-industrial technologies to a cyborg empyrean."[22] All this has heralded an upsurge of academic interest in the program of cyborg feminism, which in

terms of gender, sexuality, and the body is found most notably in the work of Sandy Stone especially on boundary transgressions,[23] and Anne Balsamo on virtual reality and bodies.[24]

Cyberfeminism

If Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" has played so vital a role in spawning a feminist cyborg postmodernism, feminists may be disappointed in some of its offspring. For instance, in looking to the lure of cyberculture, Judith Squires argues: "whilst there *may* be potential for an alliance between cyborg imagery and a materialist-feminism, this potential has been largely submerged beneath a sea of technophoric cyberdrool. If we are to salvage the image of the cyborg we would do well to insist that cyberfeminism be seen as a metaphor for addressing the inter-relation between technology and the body, not as a means of using the former to transcend the latter."[25]

It seems as if Squires is arguing that cyberfeminism, if indeed there is such a thing, is in danger of falling into the same trap with regard to the body, as cyberculture in general, which is a particularly masculine connotation of the new continuity of mind and machine. As I shall discuss below, although there are some feminist approaches to cyberculture that do not suffer from the same problems, it is with the writings of Sadie Plant, self-declared cyberfeminist, that Squires takes issue. Plant's writing has done much, at least in the United Kingdom, to bring issues of women and cybernetic futures to a more popular audience.[26] Squires describes Plant's style as one that "shares the apoliticism of the cyberpunks but also invokes a kind of mystical utopianism of the eco-feminist earth-godesses."[27]

In addition, Plant's writing has a universalizing tendency against which Haraway and many other feminist writers have fought a long battle, arguing that women's experiences are *not* all of a piece. This manifests itself in statements such as the following: "Women . . . have always found ways of circumventing the dominant systems of communication"[28]; "they (women) are . . . discovering new possibilities for work, play and communication of all kinds in the spaces emergent from the telecoms revolution"[29]; "Women are accessing the circuits on which they were once exchanged."[30] But who are these women? Allowing for the way in which some of this material was written for a more popular audience, it does not seem quite enough to say that "facts and figures are as hard to ascertain as gender itself in the virtual world."[31] At least by the time of Plant's most recent writing a number of empirical studies of women's use of the Internet exist as well as many more on women and computing in general, some of which offer facts and figures.[32] The lack of reference to these or any studies like them makes it difficult to know who are

the women about which Plant is talking. This is a pity, given the rather pleasing image that she creates of women subverting the Internet toward their own ends.

There is evidence to show that women are still in the minority in Internet usage, even in the United States, the most wired country in the world.[33] There is a tension between the way that some women clearly find the Internet a potent means of communication with one another, as witnessed by the proliferation of women's newsgroups, and at the same time the negative effects of stories about sexual harassment. It is this tension that prompts Kira Hall to talk of two forms of cyberfeminism.[34] First, what she terms *liberal cyberfeminism* sees computer technology as a means toward the liberation of women. On the other hand *radical cyberfeminism* manifests itself in the "women only" groups on the Internet that have sprung up in response to male harassment.

Susan Herring's well-researched study of discourse on the Internet shows that computer-mediated communication does not appear to neutralize gender.[35] As a group she found women more likely to use attenuated and supportive behaviour while men were more likely to favor adversarial postings. These she linked to men favoring individual freedom, while women favor harmonious interpersonal interaction. And these behaviors and values can be seen as instrumental in reproducing male dominance and female submission.

The view also exists that interactions in cyberspace can magnify and accelerate inequalities and harassment found elsewhere, which is broadly the conclusion of Carol Adams's study of cyberpornography: "Multiple examples—including overt computer-based pornography and a careful analysis of male privilege in cyberspace—powerfully confirm feminist analyses of society and pornography. Indeed, it appears that certain features of cyberspace can accelerate and expand the male dominance and exploitation of women already familiar to us 'in real life'" (IRL).[36]

In case one imagines that all one has to do is literally to pull the plug, one should take heed of Stephanie Brail's story of the harassment she received by way of anonymous, threatening, obscene e-mail messages that she was unable to trace. These came in the wake of a "flame war" in a newsgroup on alternative magazines, where she and others wished to talk about "Riot Grrls," a postfeminist political group. "At the mention of Riot Grrls, some of the men on the group started posting violently in protest. . . . I . . . had no idea how much anti-female sentiment was running, seemingly unchecked, on many Usenet forums."[37] So fearful did she become that she made sure the doors in her house were always locked and she practiced self-defense. Brail adds that the real result is that she never gives out home phone numbers and addresses now and has stopped participating in Usenet newsgroups. She says, "And that is the true fallout: I've censored myself out of fear."[38]

If it is difficult to recognize the women in Plant's writing, it is also difficult to recognize the technology. There is a mystical, reverential tone with which she treats "complex dynamics, self-organizing systems, nanotechnology, machine intelligence."[39] The "connectionist machine is an indeterminate process, rather than a definite entity. . . . Parallel distributed processing defies all attempts to pin it down, and can only ever be contingently defined. It also turns the computer into a complex thinking machine which converges with the operations of the human brain."[40]

But it is the loss of the political project, originally so important in Haraway's cyborg feminism, which is most problematic in Plant's elaboration of cyberfeminism. Some of the reason for the loss is possibly because Irigaray is the only feminist writer to which Plant relates her work, and of all the French feminist writers, Irigaray exhibits the greatest sense of their being little point in attacking the structures of patriarchy. More important, the problem may also relate to the coupling of cyberfeminism to cyberpunk and cyberculture, which deliberately sets itself apart from politics. Squires finds this the most disquieting aspect of cyberfeminism;[41] for although cyberpunk offers no hope of a better world, Plant is claiming that cyberfeminism offers women a better future, but with no political basis to back this up.

Cyberfeminism in the Twenty-First Century

In its cynicism over traditional political structures and its enthusiasm for information and communications technologies, cyberfeminism forgets that women's relationship to technology is not always positive. However, much other research can be used to paint a more balanced picture, which shows what use women *are* making of the new cybertechnologies and which can be used to preserve at least some sense of political project, even if there is no consensus as to what the politics should be. Indeed it is interesting to note that a number of more recently published works make use of cyberfeminism in their titles.

Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein's, *CyberFeminism* is the first anthology specifically devoted to the topic.[42] The editors of this book are similarly uninspired by the type of cyberfeminism of which Squires is critical, interpreting the topic in a more practical way in a range of upbeat though critical projects. This also ties in with other authors' interpretations of cyberfeminism as a practical project of getting women online and keeping them online.[43]

Lyn Cherny and Elizabeth Reba Weise's,[44] *wired_women* collection paints a fascinating picture of some women's actual uses of Internet technology. As Howard Rheingold suggests on the back cover, these are "women who know their net culture from the inside," so they could well be candidates for Plant's cyberfeminists, subverting the pathways of the Internet for their own ends. It is no criticism to point out that the writers in this collection are highly educated North American women, doctoral students and computer professionals, confidently enjoying and at home with their technology, with jobs and positions that not only provide the necessary technical equipment but also permit them access and the time to use it. They are among the elite of technically confident women, yet amid the cheerful humor and their easy natural use of the new jargon are many tales of male harassment on the newsgroups and bulletin boards.

Hence the vector of recent writing on cyberfeminism is more practical and less speculative than earlier writing, and it remains positive in tone while retaining a balance between positive and negative experiences. However the political side of cyberfeminism has yet to coalesce into a meaningful political voice. Significantly the ethical dimension of cyberfeminism remains almost completely unexplored. The remainder of the chapter marks a beginning to the process of such an exploration.

Ethics and Cyberfeminism—Feminist Ethics

There are (at least) two aspects to the relationship of ethics and cyberfeminism. The first aspect involves the appropriation of relevant ethical theory; the second involves applying that theory to significant examples and drawing out implications for the development of further policy and even legislation. The relevant ethical theory may be found among the burgeoning collection of writings of feminist ethicists.

Feminist ethics involves rethinking and revising aspects of traditional ethics that devalue the moral experience of women.[45] Arguing that traditional ethics fails women in that it regards their experiences as uninteresting, one observes that at the same time it places an emphasis on traditional masculine ways of ethical reasoning that are based on individual, rationalistic, rule-based ethical models. The overall aim of feminist ethics is "to create a gender-equal ethics, a moral theory that generates non-sexist moral principles, policies and practices."[46]

Feminist ethics can help expose the power inequalities that case studies often reveal and that traditional computer and Internet ethics renders invisible in its pursuit of mainstream ethical views and its lack of critique of professional roles and structures. It is this critical edge that has proved appealing to many feminist authors. The challenge then is to harness this energy into positive applications in cyberfeminism.

Applying Feminist Ethics to Cyberfeminism

It is not an easy task to see how feminist ethics might be applied to cyberfeminism. The best place to start lies in a somewhat different direction from cyberfeminism's more usual job of discussing ways that women have appropriated digital technology for their

own ends. Instead we should look to some perennial ethical problems of the Internet, uncover the ways in which these can be viewed as gendered problems, and enter into a thorough analysis of their gendered nature that incorporates the concepts of feminist ethics. Cyberstalking, Internet pornography (particularly pedophilia), and hacking are all contenders. Most cyberstalkers are male, their victims female.[47] Most Internet pedophiles are male, their victims children and their families. [48] Although it does not make sense to talk about one category of victim in the same way for hacking, it is clear that hacking itself is a predominantly masculine activity; indeed the absence of women hackers has often been a source of comment in the hacking fraternity.[49]

What draws some men to such antisocial, even criminal activity, perpetrated through digital technologies? Carol Gilligan's ethic of care,[50] Annette Baier's second-person knowing,[51] and Sara Ruddick's maternal ethics[52] all emphasize the web of connectedness of moral agents in contrast to the rugged moral individualism of traditional ethical theory, particularly Kantian theory.[53] The pathology of the perpetrators of all three varieties of cyberproblem leans toward the masculine social outcast, with few friends and little sense of community or empathy. Indeed although we might be revolted by his abusive crimes, one member of an Internet pedophile ring in a U.K. documentary explicitly alludes to the sense of community that he felt on the Internet.[54] The challenge then for a cyberfeminist ethics is to develop further the argument that shows how the masculine individualism of traditional ethics is damaging in extreme circumstances, particularly when coupled with the dystopian, apolitical stance of cyberculture that allows individuals somehow to justify to themselves that their activities are not wrong.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to form a critique of cyberfeminism that concurs with other authors in arguing that cyberfeminism's apparently apolitical stance is problematic, not least of all in its avoidance of ethical questions. Although practical examples of cyberfeminist activities offer a much more promising direction for the cyberfeminist project, the ethical dimension still tends to remain in the background. The way forward would seem to lie in a much more explicit attack on ethical problems concerning digital technology from feminist ethics, particularly in acting as a pointer to future policy and ultimately legislation. Whether cyberfeminism will go down in the annals of feminist history as purely a late-twentieth-century phenomenon, or whether it can be rescued for the twenty-first century by developing a new political and ethical consciousness, remains to be seen.

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| 10 |

THE FIVE WIVES OF IBN FADLAN: **WOMEN'S COLLABORATIVE FICTION ON ANTONIO BANDERAS WEB SITES**

Sharon Cumberland

> When I first came up with the idea for this series, I was not thinking of Antonio at the time, but of the friendship I share with these ladies. I was driving home from the grocery store and the thought occurred to me, "We care about each other so much, I bet we could even be in a harem, all married to the same man, and still get along great!"
>
> —*JoAnn K. Prater, "Johanna of Bavaria"*

The Five Wives of Ibn Fadlan is a sequence of related stories set in the ninth century CE, in which each wife of an Arab sheik tells the tale of how she was kidnapped from a distant country and brought to Baghdad to be married to Ahmad Ibn Fadlan, a character who is also the protagonist of Michael Crichton's novel *Eaters of the Dead* (1976). The five women authors are fans of Spanish actor Antonio Banderas, who starred in the film version of Crichton's novel, *The 13th Warrior*. They used the universe of the film to insert themselves into the romantic world of an imaginary harem. While Crichton's novel tells a buddy story about an Arab diplomat who falls in with Vikings and goes with them to a far kingdom to kill monsters (a revisioning of *Beowulf*), the five fan writers tell a story about the protagonist that *they* want to hear: A mysterious sheik accepts virgins from a villainous kidnapper as repayment of a debt, then marries each in turn, showing them his kindness, generosity, and, of course, his sexual prowess. Over the course of the five stories, the wives and their offspring become as devoted to one another as they are to their dashing husband, forming a community that unites their disparate cultures.

While *The 13th Warrior* is an adventure saga, focused on the action film demographics of 18- to 25-year-old men, *The Five Wives of Ibn Fadlan* is a romance that capitalizes on the exotic (and erotic) themes of desert romances from *The Sheik* to *The English Patient*. Unlike the novel and the movie, which exist in commercialized media,