Angela Carter: New Critical Readings

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Genesis and Gender: The Word, the Flesh and the Fortunate Fall in 'Peter and the Wolf' and 'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest'

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If there is any one myth that Angela Carter repeatedly returns to as she goes about her 'demythologising business' (Carter 1997b: 38), it is the creation story in Genesis and the accompanying Christian myth (or doctrine) of the Fall.[1] Carter views Genesis as one of the more insidious patriarchal narratives, since within Western culture it has had such a significant impact on the construction of gendered subjectivities as well as socio-sexual roles and/or relations; she exposes in her numerous rewritings of this myth the ways in which Genesis articulates and constructs a repressive fear of female sexuality in order to police female (and often male) desires. The Fall, as her work suggests, is also analogous to psychoanalytic models of the origins of sexual differentiation and maturation, particularly Freud's theory of the castration complex. Likewise, both Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous offer corresponding readings of Genesis in psychoanalytic terms: Eve's economy of desire or pleasure, represented by her transgression of eating the forbidden fruit, is perceived as a threat to the Law of the Father, which relies on a masculine or phallic unity that represses female difference in the name of the One God (or, the one sex, 'man'). We see this same scenario played out in two of Carter's short stories, 'Peter and the Wolf' (1982) and 'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest' (1974), both of which challenge the myth of the Fall through their emphases on the female flesh as representative of an economy of desire that disrupts the repressive authority of the paternal law or word. Furthermore, in both stories Carter offers male perspectives that (unlike Freud's male subject) refuse to reduce the other's (or 'woman's') difference, thus providing an 'other' discourse of sexual relations. Although she remains sceptical of the possibility of divorcing Genesis from its misogynist heritage, Carter's revisionist (rather than strictly deconstructive) approach towards the biblical creation myth in these two stories provides another example of her repeated attempts at negotiating the terms of (female) transgression and desire.

Both patriarchal and feminist readers view Eve as a decidedly subversive figure, whose desires are capable of transgressing those socio-cultural laws dictating gendered identities and behaviour. Throughout the long literary tradition of predominantly male

readings of Genesis, it is 'woman', or Eve, who plays the most crucial role in evolving receptions of the tale, since within the deep structure of the biblical text the 'feminine' serves as an anomalous, mediating element permitting various constructions of 'man' and his others (Milne 1993: 154–5). In other words, Genesis positions Eve/woman as a disruptive presence that must be contained in her threat to a patriarchal order's desire for masculine or phallic unity. As Pamela Norris observes in her comprehensive study, *The Story of Eve*, if the woman is to blame for the breaking of taboos and man's expulsion from paradise, then to maintain the (patriarchal) social order Eve and her daughters are necessarily 'cursed', safely consigned to their desexualized roles as 'suffering' child bearers; thus, the Virgin Mother arises out of the Christian theology of original sin and redemption, where Mary as suffering mother redeems Eve's 'terrible flesh'. Overall, as Norris also points out, the vast corpus of rabbinical commentaries and Christian exegeses surrounding Gen. 1-3 set up a conflict between male reason and female passion, situating 'woman' as the dangerous other, and thus justifying the need to repress female bodies and desires.

However, the obsession with controlling and repressing female sexuality creates a strong impulse towards the forbidden, inevitably exposing the ways in which male fantasies or narratives, due to the unravelling of their inner logic, do not always succeed in containing female desires. As Kristeva argues, Eve's transgression in eating the forbidden fruit could be representative of Adam's sublimated desire to transgress the law; the responsibility for the man's shame or guilt is then shifted onto the woman in an attempt to rationalize men's powerlessness to resist their own forbidden desires (Kristeva 1986: 143). Accordingly, if 'woman' is positioned as the embodiment of a patriarchal order's unconscious desires, then she is also emblematic of the return of the repressed; this in turn bestows upon the female subject immense powers of disruption, whereby she has the potential to destabilize the rigid boundaries a patriarchal order constructs in the effort to keep out or suppress what is threatening to its rationale. This power of feminine disruption consequently lends itself to various feminist appropriations of the myth, which attempt to offer a more productive reading of the biblical text that recovers and asserts a feminine form of knowledge that might bring into play more reciprocal relationships between the sexes.

Dating back to Christine de Pizan's *L'Épistre au Dieu d'amours* (1399), the majority of 'feminist' readings of Genesis have been aimed at freeing the text from its androcentric biases through a confrontation with those translations or scriptural interpretations that emphasize a relationship of distorted inequality between the sexes.[2] In other words, if we accept this reformist argument, it is not the biblical text that is the problem, but a history and tradition of male-centred readings (mis)informing our understanding of the original egalitarian messages intended to be discovered therein.[3] On the other hand, Pamela J. Milne questions whether the Bible can be liberated from its patriarchal heritage; though Genesis attempts to present a universalistic perspective, it is written from the male point of view since the story's logic presents the primal human as male. Furthermore, as Milne argues, even if the mythic theme of the Fall posits sexual differentiation as bringing mutual joy and pain to both men and women, it is ultimately used to shift the guilt of the Fall/sin away from God and 'man', onto 'woman' and the serpent. For Milne, then, a feminist reformist approach is unlikely to succeed in ridding the text of its androcentric biases. Thus, if we accept that the biblical text is thoroughly embedded in patriarchal discourse, then tactics of deconstruction might provide the most viable means of confronting the underlying phallocentricism of Genesis, while also allowing for the possibility of effectively changing our relations to a text that cannot be rejected due to its profound and continuing influence on Western thought (Milne 1993: 147, 149, 158–9, 162–3).

Kristeva also insists on reading the story of Eve and Adam as an unquestionably patriarchal narrative, as it attempts to suppress the (female) flesh in its privileging of the (male) word, or God's Law, indicating women's subsequent exclusion from the symbolic order. In Kristeva's interpretation of the biblical text, Eve's disobedience in going against God's prohibition opens up an alternative feminine space of fleshly desires, placing her outside the law since she fails to submit to its demand for the rejection of sensual pleasure. Thus, as Kristeva goes on to argue, the Genesis narrative structures women's knowledge as corporeal, 'aspiring to pleasure', yet in its desire for masculine unity, represented by a monotheistic God, the text suppresses this female knowledge. The word, then, relies on excluding women from its symbolic economy, since by designating 'woman' to the realm of the flesh, 'man' is granted the sole privilege of engaging in the discourse of the law. Paradoxically, the integrity of the law/word is kept in place by that threat of feminine desire: if 'man' is in possession of the law, his power over it is sustained by creating one who does not have it and desires to seize it. In other words, the male is threatened with castration, necessitating the repression of female bodies and desires. As a result, sexual differences are inscribed according to a code of oppositions and the relationship between the sexes becomes one of envy, fear and hostility (Kristeva 1986: 140–5, 151–4).

Kristeva's analysis of this scenario explicitly connects monotheistic principles to core precepts found in 'Freudianism', acknowledging that neither of them can be separated from their patriarchal heritage. Carter also conflates monotheistic and psychoanalytic narratives to examine how they attempt to construct 'woman' as other and thus outside the symbolic order, marginalizing and silencing female identities and desires. By exposing this repression of the (female) flesh, as well as any feminine knowledge, from the paternal word/law, Carter works towards opening the 'forbidden book' (Carter 1996b: 288) of women's bodies, which the creation myth endeavours so hard to keep closed. She achieves this by 'entering the female body into a structuring discourse' (Wyatt 2000: 62), and for Carter, the Fall is indeed fortunate because it moves us outside the mythic (hence oppressive) and undifferentiated space of paradise, allowing women's bodies, desires and voices to enter into history (and by extension individuated, socio-cultural specific subjectivities). As Carter reminds us in *The Sadeian Woman*: 'Flesh comes to us out of history' (Carter 2000: 11). Furthermore, her texts present the Fall as a form of grace, as opposed to sin, overturning much of the rationale underpinning the myth in a way that potentially allows for a productive alliance between the sexes based on a respect rather than repression of sexual differences.

The premise of an impassable abyss existing between the sexes is reinforced by Freud in his formulation of the castration complex (Kristeva 1986: 145), which he asserts is the defining moment in the (male) child's 'fall' into knowledge of sexual difference. According to Freud, the boy's 'terror of castration . . . is linked to the sight of something',

which is actually 'nothing'; in other words, when he first catches sight of the female genitals, he can only interpret the girl's lack of a penis as a horrifying absence (Freud 1990b: 322), and thus a threat or reminder of his possible castration. Subsequently, although his fear of castration is necessary to resolve his oedipal complex, the boy's attitude towards the female sex will later develop into either 'horror of the mutilated creature or triumphant contempt for her' Freud 1990c: 272). Freud seems to see no other possible relation to the 'other' sex.

As for the little girl, Freud claims 'she is cast out of her fool's paradise' the moment she realizes she must relinquish her desire for the penis, which she recognizes as 'the superior counterpart of [her] own small and inconspicuous organ' (ibid., 309, 314). She is compelled to give up her original identification or love-object (the mother) for her father, and accept his child (his law/the phallus) as a substitute for the penis she may never obtain (Freud 1990a: 309). It would seem, then, that the little girl is a little Eve, forced to denounce her desire/pleasure (for the flesh/penis and/or maternal body) and submit to the Law of the Father (a phallic economy). However, what if the little girl was never introduced to this law, and what if the boy refused to play by these rules? If we remove Freud's 'law of castration', what happens to the notion of sexual difference as a relationship of antagonism, where the boy feels fear/contempt towards the girl for her 'lack', and the girl is mired in her inferiority and envy for what she has been convinced is lacking (in her)?

'Peter and the Wolf' explores these questions, rewriting the Freudian scene of the boy's discovery of sexual difference and the girl's 'failure' to leave her delusional paradise, imagining both in the context of the Fall. Or, for the wolf-girl in this story, there is no Fall, since she remains in her state of prelapsarian grace (unconsciously) drawing the boy, Peter, into her innocence of the law, whereby he experiences 'the vertigo of freedom' (Carter 1996b: 291). Carter challenges the privileging of sight in the psychoanalytic reduction of anatomical differences by setting up two crucial moments in her text centred on the boy's observation of the female genitalia/body. Contrary to Freud's description of this moment, when Peter is confronted with 'the thing he had been taught most to fear' (Carter 1996b: 284), he sees what is present rather than what is absent. As Jean Wyatt observes, Carter 'answers Freud's "no thing" with a complex whorl of fleshly things, his "nothing" with a material "infinity"', and by doing so, the text avoids reducing 'female difference to a logic of the same' (Wyatt 2000: 61).

The wolf-girl is truly 'other' in the sense that she is a borderline, liminal creature, neither animal nor human. When the pack of wolves invades the house to reclaim the girl, terror overwhelms the entire family, since 'that which they feared most, outside, was now indoors with them' (Carter 1996b: 288). However, before the wolves 'rescue' their fosterling, Peter observes the distinguishing mark of her human femaleness; when the wolf-girl crouches upright 'she offer[s] . . . a view of a set of Chinese boxes of whorled flesh that seemed to open one upon another . . . drawing him into an inner, secret place in which destination perpetually receded before him, his first, devastating, vertiginous intimation of infinity' (ibid., 287). In that moment Peter experiences the 'sensation of falling' yet initially remains unconscious of any fear, drawn into the sight of 'her girl-child's sex' while viewing 'her intimacy clearly, as if by its own phosphorescence' (ibid.). In other words, the boy 'falls' into the girl's otherness, but without horror or contempt,

without seeing the absence of a penis as an indication of something lacking; rather, in this passage Carter insists there may be another way of seeing, that there is in fact something to see, something that offers plenitude and plurality.

This different way of seeing, however, is never presented as a simple alternative, since Peter's first 'vertiginous' contact with the other is merely an 'intimation' of difference, and he must struggle against becoming indoctrinated by the Law of the Father. As for the wolf-girl, she returns to her 'fool's paradise', if she ever left it; she 'closed up her forbidden book without the least notion she had ever opened it or that it was banned' (ibid., 288). Peter, on the other hand, has been allowed a glimpse into that book, but because it is a text that is 'banned', he becomes 'consumed by an imperious passion for atonement' and studies with the village priest (ibid., 289). Carter indicates here that even if the child sees differently from the prescribed vision, he or she must still negotiate his or her relationship to the symbolic order, which determines one's entrance into adulthood and its constructions of language and time. Peter's journey from child to adult, then, does not simply centre on his discovery of sexual difference, but on how he learns to interpret that difference. He is forced to negotiate his identity in relation to the safe familiarity or acceptance promised by the law/word and to that which exists outside the law, the strange 'devastating' intimacy of the flesh/other.

Peter is allowed a second glimpse of the wolf-girl, or more appropriately, wolf-woman, when seven years later he leaves home to join the seminary, eager yet anxious 'to plunge into the white world of penance and devotion' (ibid., 289–90). He encounters the wolf-woman on the other side of the river where he has camped, and this vision provides him with passage into another world that has nothing to do with guilt and sin. The wolf-woman now seems more animal than human, as a kind of primal mother with cubs feeding from her 'dangling breasts' (ibid., 290). Rather than feeling revulsion, Peter is overcome with the same sense of 'awe and wonder' (ibid., 284) he experienced when he first saw the wolf-girl as a child. Luce Irigaray argues that this 'awe and wonder' is crucial to forming an 'ethics of sexual difference', whereby the sexes are 'always meeting as though for the first time' so that 'one will never exactly fill the place of the other' (Irigaray 2001: 238). Peter not only refuses to reduce this female other to the reflection of his projected desires and fears, but while watching her lap water from the river, he appreciates how she herself has no awareness of any reflection: 'she had never known she had a face and so her face itself was the mirror of a different kind of consciousness . . . just as her nakedness, without innocence or display, was that of our first parents, before the Fall' (Carter 1996b: 290). Her knowledge is corporeal, or 'informulable' (Kristeva 1986: 140), and in the face of this 'other' knowledge, Peter longs to cross over to the other side of the river and 'join her in her marvellous and private grace' (Carter 1996b: 290).

For Cixous, who employs the myth of the Fall to structure a different discourse of relationships between self and other, grace is an experience of coming to know the other through a 'delicate movement of detachment' (Cixous 2002: 236), or rather, in non-appropriative terms, which she claims can only be received after the Fall. This is because in the undifferentiated space of Eden there is no acknowledgement of otherness, since for Adam and Eve before the Fall they have no understanding of their (sexual) difference. Their innocence, which has no knowledge of loss or death, is meaningless,

and Cixous insists that the only meaningful innocence is marked by an 'absolutely guilty' knowledge of the other's irreducible difference, but without trying to repress that difference; in this way we might receive the grace of a 'second innocence' in which we are innocent (not guilty) of appropriating the place of the other (ibid., 234–6). For example, Peter is 'guilty' in his knowledge of the wolf-woman, yet he never attempts to deny her otherness. When she runs off 'into the bright maze of the uncompleted dawn', into the story belonging to her, 'a child suckled by wolves, perhaps, or of wolves nursed by a woman' (Carter 1996b: 290–1), Peter does not appropriate that story or try to impose his own meanings onto its strangeness; he is determined to make his way 'into a different story' (ibid., 291). He refuses to look back on his childhood as a lost paradise, which has become a savage, impersonal, oppressive place that he has managed to escape. Through this movement of departure, he begins to progress forward in a newly discovered innocence of the world, free to construct his future without the burden of sin or shame. Moreover, Peter's second unexpected encounter with the wolf-woman, in which he accepts the vision of her 'animal' beauty as a gift of grace, demonstrates the possibility of embracing the other's difference. In both key moments of Carter's story, Peter experiences without fear the fall into an infinity of possible identities and relations, revealing how 'the vision of real difference, taken in without denial or defensive categorisation, opens the mind to the previously unsignified, springing the subject free from established categories of thought' (Wyatt 2000: 61).

This process of transgressing the boundaries of established orthodoxies and/or myths, in order to find a different way of seeing and relating to the irreducible differences of the other, is perhaps one of Carter's most enduring themes, and is encountered in an earlier story that is equally intent on disrupting Freud's specular theory of castration. 'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest' also presents a newly invented Adam and Eve who refuse to pay loyalty to the (phallic) law; the moment of recognition (of sexual difference) is again located in the male gaze, and similar to Peter's vision this gaze looks on the other with awe and wonder. Moving beyond the impenetrable silence of the wolf-girl, however, Carter opens up a space for the articulation of female desires in order to provide not simply an alternative relation to the law but perhaps a complete dismantling of it. In this text, Eve's perceived transgression primarily derives from her discourse with the serpent, with that which is outside the law. Carter implies that Eve's desire is threatening because she does not desire the phallus (law) but rather the flesh/fruit, which is 'desired to make *one* wise' (Gen. 3:6), promising a (fleshly) knowledge of pleasure. Ultimately, the text poses the question: If a woman does not desire the phallus, if her desire is for something outside the law, then what precisely sustains a phallic economy in its definition of women's bodies as castrated or lacking?

As Cixous argues, contra Freud, it is not anatomical sex that determines differences between men and women but how they negotiate their desires. Cixous claims that 'every entry to life finds itself *before the Apple*' (Cixous 1988: 15); it is only when one is confronted with situating him or herself in relation to pleasure, to the body, that one might gain a necessary knowledge of the flesh that initiates our growth into full, responsible human beings. Similar to Kristeva's interpretation, Cixous reads the Genesis text as one of the most significant examples of how patriarchal narratives attempt to exclude from the symbolic order a feminine knowledge. The figure of Eve is representative of how 'woman' is the one who has 'to deal with [this] question of pleasure' (ibid.), since the creation story describes 'a struggle between the Apple [the flesh] and the discourse of God [the word]' (ibid., 16). God's word, as Cixous goes on to illustrate, not only attempts to subordinate the flesh to the spirit/mind, but because it is mediated by Adam to Eve, she is allowed no direct relation to God; whereas the Apple presents itself to Eve as an unmediated interior, so that the 'genesis of woman goes through the mouth, through a certain oral pleasure, and through a non-fear of the inside' (ibid.). Thus for Eve, God's threat that 'you will die' has no meaning; it is an abstraction that has no relevant connection to her direct knowledge, which is corporeal, revealing that what is at stake in the law/word is a conflict between absence and presence (ibid.).

Although Carter's story is concerned with discovering a different discourse outside the Law of the Father, the text follows a movement from the margins or boundaries of the law to a secret interior, which is figured as a maternal space where the children gain knowledge of fleshly pleasures. Their fall into such 'guilty' knowledge, however, is experienced as a form of grace, since both regard each other with renewed innocence, and without fear or the desire for appropriating the other's difference. Carter positions the girl as a somewhat aggressive Eve, the initiator of this entrance into the realm of desire, while the boy passively follows her lead in accepting the forbidden; yet his acceptance opens up into 'a multiple, universal dawning' rather than enclosing them in sin and shame (Carter 1996a: 66). Although Carter follows a close reading of Genesis in her characterization of Adam and Eve, picking up on those elements in the biblical text where Eve comes across as far more active due to her curiosity, by dismantling the notion of original sin she offers a very different interpretation of the Fall. If sin is a matter of the flesh, as patriarchal interpreters of Genesis often assert, then Carter indicates this is a particularly insidious myth since it not only conveys a 'savage denial of the complexity of human relations' (Carter 2000: 6) but also prohibits any reciprocity between the sexes.

'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest' opens with the description of an edenic landscape: a pristine, untouched territory; a vast valley 'like an abandoned flower bowl' surrounded by mountains; and in its centre a dense forest (Carter 1996a: 58). Within this forest is a 'malign' tree, 'whose fruits could have nourished with death an entire tribe'; though no one has seen this tree, its presence 'categorically forbade exploration' of the forest (ibid., 59). At least Dubois, a widower and father of the twins, Madeleine and Emile, explicitly forbids any exploration of the forest. Initially, Madeleine and Emile are infantile versions of Eve and Adam, and Dubois is an absent god whose only demand is that his children remain locked in their innocent and undifferentiated purity. As the twins grow older, they begin to desire knowledge of the forbidden forest and begin exploring its outskirts; thus, Carter exposes the ways in which the law creates a desire for the very thing it prohibits.

Significantly, at the age of thirteen, and marking the onset of puberty, the children decide to penetrate the heart of the forest, going further 'into the untrodden, virginal reaches of the deep interior' (ibid., 61), determined to eventually reach its 'navel' (ibid., 62). Although Emile and Madeleine refuse to believe in the threat of the mythical tree, they are fearlessly curious about it, driven by the sense that their world seemed

incomplete, lacking 'the knowledge of some mystery' (ibid., 62–3). What they discover in the forest is 'a vegetable transmutation', where previously recognizable forms of natural wildlife undergo 'an alchemical change', presenting an array of fantastical variations (ibid., 65). As they journey towards that 'central node of the unvisited valley' (ibid., 62), the forest seems to envelop them like a womb, the changes in the landscape progressively taking on distinctly feminine maternal features. One tree proffers fruit like oysters, another has breasts from which the children drink a milky liquid (ibid.). Their exploration of this maternal terrain, the very thing their world has been lacking, is marked by a lush exoticism that returns them to a fleshy origin that pre-exists the father's law, initiating a discovery of their own flesh.

Madeleine and Emile are also introduced to the tension of power relations as they gradually become 'less twinned' in relation to each other (ibid., 65). For instance, when they bathe together in a river, Emile can no longer ignore his sister's nakedness, and is overcome by a momentary 'unfamiliar thrill of dread' (ibid.). Madeleine, sensing her brother's anxiety, is now motivated by a desire 'to make him do as she wanted, against his own wishes', and in turn is thrilled by her new-found power over Emile (ibid.). Just as we see in 'Peter and the Wolf', though, it is not so much the children's discovery of sexual difference, but how they comprehend those differences that informs their relations to each other. Their journey into knowledge is fraught with danger, with necessary risk, as Cixous would urge, because without risking the disruption of the other, there is no meaningful, or at least productive, experience of grace or love. The twins eventually learn to negotiate their sexual differences and desires beyond the restrictions of the paternal law, and it is Madeleine who forces them to deal with the question of pleasure through her disobedience. She insists that everything they discover must remain secret, convincing Emile of the need to conceal something from their father. Emile at first believes that his sister, after being bitten by a 'fanged flower' (ibid.), has 'received some mysterious communication from the perfidious mouth that wounded her' (ibid., 64), as if Madeleine, like Eve, has been holding discourse with a (wise) serpent. He discovers in his sister 'the ultimate difference of a femininity'; yet he does not view her with dread or contempt but rather desire for 'this difference [that] might give her the key to some order of knowledge to which he might not yet aspire' (ibid.).

For Emile, this awakening of desire is unsettling not only because he recognizes something lacking within himself, thus penetrating to the heart of desire, but also because he accepts this lack rather than project it onto his sister. He respects that Madeleine's difference gives her access to a specifically feminine knowledge, and because her irreducible difference is something 'he might not yet aspire' to understand, he merely hopes to receive this 'other' knowledge as a gift of grace. Consequently, Emile's non-appropriative desire figuratively opens up an alternative space in which the (maternal) flesh supersedes the demands of the (paternal) law. Overall, Carter enacts a disruption of the phallocentricism embedded in Genesis, and in privileging this maternal space, she exposes where the maternal and/or female body has been repressed by the patriarchal narrative.

When the children reach the centre of the forest, they find a small inner valley with a fresh-water pool (which has no visible source and is the navel/womb they have been seeking). Beside the pool they discover the supposedly malign tree, which seems to exhibit both masculine and feminine attributes, and is thus representative of an erotic alliance between the two, displaying elongated 'flowers tipped with the red anthers of stamens' and 'clusters of leaves' that 'hid secret bunches of fruit, mysterious spheres of visible gold' marked by 'a round set of serrated indentations exactly resembling the marks of a bite made by the teeth of a hungry man' (ibid., 66). Madeleine, in a burst of laughter, because the threat of death now seems absurd, eagerly accepts the fruit as a gift from the forest. The image of her eating the fruit is presented through Emile's eyes, and unlike the traditional depiction of Adam's distrust and displeasure with Eve's act of disobedience, he experiences a moment of ecstasy while observing his sister's specifically feminine pleasure, which dares to laugh at the law by rejecting its prohibition of the forbidden (flesh). Emile views the juice dribbling down his sister's chin, her 'newly sensual tongue' licking her lips, in silent appreciation, and when she offers him the fruit: 'Her enormous eyes were lit like nocturnal flowers that had been waiting for this especial night to open and, in their vertiginous depths, reveal . . . the hitherto unguessed at, unknowable, inexpressible vistas of love' (ibid., 67).

Daring to step outside the law, then, experiencing a fall into fleshly knowledge might not lead to sin or shame, but 'vistas of love'. Madeleine and Emile, like Peter and the wolf-woman, seem to have achieved that difficult proximity, coming together as if for the first time and without the fear of being consumed by the other. Their sense of awe and wonder allows them 'a space of freedom or attraction, a possibility of separation or alliance' (Irigaray 2001: 238). They choose an alliance through the consummation of their desires, as Carter's story simply and abruptly ends: 'He took the apple; ate; and, after that, they kissed' (Carter 1996a: 67). Even the taboo of incest is rejected in this garden of earthly delights, and in overturning the myth of original sin, the text explores through the unsanctioned desires of incest, as both a literal and metaphorical device, the possibilities of sexual relations operating outside the law. Carter's rewriting of Genesis suggests the need for escaping the limits of the patriarchal narrative while seeking out an alternative discourse of sexual differences that does not remain loyal to the paternal law in its repression of the 'feminine'. Madeleine and Emile's willingness to risk the prohibitions of the law indicates an economy of transgression that opens the way to a discourse of fleshly (feminine) pleasure, one that resists and subverts the monolithic unity of the law's privileging of phallic desire.

In spite of the feminist revisionary approach towards the Genesis myth in 'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest' and 'Peter and the Wolf', indicating a slight shift away from Carter's self-proclaimed 'demythologising business', she remains rigorously self-critical of her own remythologizing impulses. Even if her texts seek out possibilities for transgression and subversion, she primarily does so through a necessary confrontation with their limits, as seen in the various reincarnations of Eve and Adam that appear across the body of her work: Melanie and Finn in *The Magic Toyshop*, Marianne and Jewel in *Heroes and Villains*, and of course Eve/lyn in *The Passion of New Eve* are set up as originary couples or figures, all of them struggling (and perhaps failing) to escape the old gendered scripts and/or oppressive influence of a monstrous God (or Goddess); in *Nights at the Circus* Fevvers and Walser must both experience a fall before they can achieve grace (or, the consummation of their desires); and the obsession with origins in *Wise Children* indicates the fallen world of

Dora and Nora's illegitimacy and their accompanying desire to gain access into the 'lost paradise' of legitimacy they believe their father's recognition and love might confer upon them. In each of these texts, the subject's attempts at transgressing or escaping the tyranny of the paternal law are fraught with difficulties, since in the world outside fiction and fantasy, subversion (as Carter often demonstrates) does not always work as some utopian leap of the imagination, but is a long and complicated process, a struggle perhaps against one's own interior colonization. It is precisely this ongoing struggle that Carter negotiates in her texts, seeking out ways in which the articulation of disruptive desires are capable of productively challenging our most potent cultural myths, as well as reimagining and rewriting gendered identities.

Notes

1 We should keep in mind that nowhere in Genesis 1-3 is there mention of 'original sin'; this element has been superimposed upon the Hebrew text by the New Testament. As a result, the Christian myth of the Fall has come to dominate our cultural perceptions of the Hebrew creation story in Genesis. Furthermore, though there is no mention of Eve after Genesis 5, there exists a wealth of Jewish apocrypha and post biblical exegeses that address themselves to her character. These commentaries also have had a large influence in constructing gender relations according to social schemas that rely on biological justifications for women's 'inferiority', dichotomously categorizing male and female attributes. An extensive compilation and analysis of these commentaries can be found in Kvam *et al.* (1999).

2 Pizan embraces the Fall as a 'fortunate' event; by doing so, she attempts to overturn a history of misogynist interpretations of Eve, arguing that Eve was 'made of very noble stuff', in God's image as much as Adam, and that 'she never did play Adam false' having offered him the forbidden fruit in complete innocence. Pizan then challenges anyone who 'would search . . . in the Bible just to prove me wrong', since the Bible itself supports her egalitarian reading; rather it is religious doctrine that has distorted Eve/woman's reputation, only providing examples of corrupt and immoral women in order to instruct young schoolboys 'so they'll retain such doctrine when they're grown' (Kvam *et al.* 1999: 236–40). For a wide range of contemporary revisionist readings see Brenner (1993).

3 See Trible (1973) which had a significant influence on feminist re-readings of Genesis.

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