

PRODUCING THE GENDERED BODY:
THE STORY OF EVE AND ADAM

by

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For centuries, women have been dislodging canonical understandings of the Adam and Eve story and offering their own readings of Eve's strength, intelligence and bravado. In this thesis, another feminist interpretation is offered. One may read this first narrative of Genesis as a story of gender and the body, for it describes how the physical body is not free from gendered differences, but is actually a culturally inscribed entity. Current feminist explorations embrace a view that considers the production of the sexed body and the cultural system of gender as interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and the myth of Eve and Adam describes the construction of human and animal bodies as integrally related to their future roles in social systems. Significantly, gender is one of the ways that bodies are produced and normed both in this fictional story, and in Western culture as a whole.

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THE CULTURALLY INSCRIBED BODY

We live today, we are told, in a “post-Christian” society. The last seventy-five years of capitalism seem to have erased the preeminence of Christianity in Western culture. We survived the sentimental notions of this religion, the saying goes, just as we have surpassed the need for a movement which agitates for women’s empowerment in today’s “postfeminist” world. Unsurprisingly, the death of both movements has been heralded prematurely. To believe that Christianity has lost the majority of its force is to shut your eyes and ears to all that takes place outside of the university. Policy makers run election campaigns from their platform as self-avowed born-again Christians who take the Bible literally, millions of people attend church regularly and place a great deal of hope and trust in the “Holy Book.” While fewer may believe in its absolute truth than in previous centuries, the Old and New Testaments have not lost their cultural authority in the West,. For many, the Bible has moved out of the realms of Judeo-Christian theology and worship and into popular culture.

Since the Eve and Adam story explores fundamental concepts of Western society, arguably more than other biblical stories, it carries a cultural significance much larger than can be reduced to a matter of believing or not believing its truth-claims. As a significant creation story of dominant Western culture, the narrative of Eve and Adam

explains how life came to be, and to some extent, how God intended life to carry on. “[A] culture’s creation myth stands as a foundation to its rituals, laws, and customs” (Froula 197), and thus represents both an opportunity to probe widely held beliefs and to challenge their canonical status. What Genesis instills as *the way things are*, such as the hierarchical divisions between the man, woman and the animal, filters to members of Western culture without much notice. For the story of Eve and Adam is not only the first story in the most widely purchased book in history, it is also a part of our cultural (sub)consciousness.

Genesis guides the reader in ways we need to examine, just as we appropriate its significance in varying ways. The history of this story in Western culture is a history of interpretation and appropriation, as both men and women since at least the fifth century have written passionate accounts about what the actions of the first man and woman reveal, in particular, about sexual politics. When I began to focus on feminist reactions to Eve and Adam, I wondered how women have dealt with a creation myth which casts woman as the catalyst of original sin, which images animal life as devilish, which places one of the glorious moments of some women’s lives, the birthing of a child, as evidence of woman’s transgression. As I read further, I found that I was following what the misogynists had told me about the story, not what the narrative necessarily says.

My analysis seeks to give the voices which exist in the text but are seldom heard a wider audience. Taking my cue from Levi-Strauss, who argues that “a myth is made up of all its variants” (815), I grant alternative readings of the story more validity than the

standard fare of Milton and Augustine. I am not going to argue what Genesis *is*, but rather to chart ideas it may be said to incorporate. I intend to loosen up the possibilities within the text, to open up the recognition of other meanings besides the misogynist readings that have dominated since Augustine in the fifth century.

Current gender theory illuminates the story of Eve and Adam, pushing the text toward an explicit understanding of the centrality of gender in our conception of what it means to exist as a human. Such a reading can also build on the work of others, for the investigation of this story from a feminist perspective is anything but new. As Gerda Lerner describes in her chapter entitled “1,000 Years of Feminist Bible Criticism,” feminist readings of the Judeo-Christian creation story emerged long before any organized feminist movements solidified. Historically, women saw this story as a stumbling block in their path to cultural self-worth. Even in the last gasp of the twentieth century, the Eve and Adam story is used as key evidence in a struggle for change, for giving women the right to live in and love their bodies, men the right to be nurturers, and non-human animals the right to exist. Whether it’s a bumper sticker announcing “Eve was framed,” or a lengthy book explaining how Genesis determines that Christians should be supporters of animal rightsⁱ, this creation narrative remains valid cultural currency. For the purposes of this investigation, I operate under the assumption that it is necessary to know the details of how Western culture thinks about gender, which is so carefully explained in the story, in order to understand how to take it apart.

Cultural historian John Phillips explains that “the story of Eve is, in a sense, at the heart of the concept of Woman in Western civilization” (xii). It is no wonder then, that women have been subverting the traditional readings of the story, which cast woman as the corrupter of humanity, for nearly 1,000 years. Lerner asserts that in this genealogy of feminist criticism, “[t]here is no stronger evidence to show that there always were women who never accepted the patriarchal gender definitions which defined them as inherently inferior” (139). It is also no wonder that in the flurry of women-centered thinking amongst feminist circles since the 1960s, Eve has been a frequent character in books such as *The Modern Eve* by Kim Chernin and Sidney Cornelia Callahan’s *The Illusion of Eve: Modern Woman’s Quest for Identity*, both of which dispense practical information about self-emancipation.

In order to explore the creation myth as informed by current gender theory, I will build upon the insights of past feminists. While feminists working before the twentieth century did not have access to each other’s work, so that in many cases they had to metaphorically “reinvent the wheel,” (Lerner 166), today we have the opportunity to collectively build upon the knowledge of one another. Of the many feminist explorations of the significance of Eve, I will focus on those that investigate the textual Eve, the fictional woman as recorded in Genesis. I have defined the “textual Eve” loosely, so that poetic accounts that address issues central to my reading, in particular the work of Lucille Clifton, form an integral part of this analysis. Lucille Clifton has written a series of poems on the creation narrative entitled “tree of life,” which highlight the power of subverting

traditional interpretations of the story. Filling out the characters of Eve and Adam so that the reader understands their motivations, clifton's feminist work shows the necessity even in 1991, of articulating this story as a pro-woman celebration of life. My reading builds heavily on clifton's insights, drawing both her poetic forms and underlying thinking into the fashioning of an improved "wheel." Critical approaches also form a strong backbone to this thesis, especially the insights of Ilana Pardes. Carefully noting the continuation of Eve's character beyond their departure from the garden, her observations provide necessary character analysis and feminist sensitivity to my reading.

Methodologically, this analysis is conducted as a feminist reading. This does not mean that the chief questions I ask include: is this work feminist? is it sexist? Rather, I employ some tools of feminist thinking to ask: how does this work function? I trace specifically the production and function of bodies throughout the narrative, searching out the ways that bodies are encoded in systems of cultural meaning, even before they are gendered. Applying the far-reaching insights of Judith Butler, gender and biology are not seen as disparate forces, but as working in tandem to produce the culturally inscribed body. I look at the saturation of cultural meaning, and in particular, forces of power, in the material that composes the bodies of Eve, the snake, and Adam. Diverging from feminist accounts in the past, I view the snake as a crucial character in the narrative, and herⁱⁱ body as evidence of the concomitant production and definition of the human against the non-human. By delineating my methodology, I hope to appear not to be forcing the

text to comply with an external theory, but to be conducting exegesis: reading out of the story, linking the ideologies of Genesis to the insights of modern thinkers.

As my focus is on the (en)gendering of bodies in larger cultural systems, and the role of the primordial woman especially, I am confining my reading to the second account of creation. The first account, Genesis 1-2:4, represents a different story, by a different author, in a different historical time than the second account of Eve and Adam. It chronicles the creation of a man and a human simultaneously, both fashioned in the likeness of God. I turn away from this version because it is not this story which has cultural pre-eminence. Most readers of the Bible do not even register these two accounts as contradictory, for the bulk of cultural weight rests on the second myth alone. It is Adam and Eve that matter to Western culture, and thus it is Eve and Adam upon which my reading dwells.

Notes

ⁱ Linzey, Andrew. *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment of Man's Treatment of Animals*. London: SCM Press, 1976.

ⁱⁱ "She" is applied to the snake as a gender-neutral pronoun. The conventional use of "it" for animals is not a suitable term for non-human animals, as they are every bit as animate as we are.

CREATING MAN

A useful way to approach Genesis is through a chronological account of the structure of the narrative, to subject it to a thorough critique like any other literary text, and this analysis will be conducted along these methodological lines. The King James Bible dictates that “the LORD God formed man *of* the dust in the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (2:7). Retranslating the Hebrew, feminist theologian Phyllis Trible posits that “earth creature” is a more accurate rendering of the Hebrew *ha'adam* than is the traditional translation, “man,” as *ha'adam* has a genderless meaning that is ignored in the English versions. Thus, the first creature is not a “man,” but a creature that is differentiated from the larger environment; it is a *ha'adam* formed from the *ha'adamâ*, the earth (Bal 113). Yet, heⁱ is not strictly formed from the earth, he has not been unmodified. Indeed, God has breathed life into him, transforming the creature from dirt into life: “then the LORD God fashioned the human, humus from the soil, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living creature” (2:7).

This genderless creature exists in codependence with the earth in a way that might surprise some modern readers. He appears as an extension of the land, as an alteration of it, not as an entirely different matter of being. His body is formed from the land he

occupies. Rather than the human creature producing the land, he, by the powerful hand of God, arises from it. The process God undertakes to create a human is not to create an entirely new life- form, but to combine two existing elements in order to produce a third, new, being. Dirt plus divine breath create a human creature—an embodiment of matter and spirit.

When this creature is created, he is alone upon the earth. Shortly, God plants a garden geared for the human's purposes: "And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, to the east, and He placed there the human He had fashioned. And the LORD God caused to sprout from the soil every tree *lovely to look at and good for food*" (Alter 2:8-9, italics mine)ⁱⁱ. Already, the earth is significantly altered for the benefit of the human creature. Flora does not exist for its own sake, but for the perceived needs of the human. Yet God felt that the creation of plant species was not sufficient for the pleasure of the earth creature, for he is surrounded by beings foreign from himself – plants are created from soil, but lack the vital breath of God that formed Adam. God reflects: 'It is not good for human to be alone, I shall make him a sustainer beside him' (2:18). God then undertakes the creation of animals, thinking solely of the benefit their existence would be to the earth creature. He forms them from the ground alone without a life breath, offering them to His earth creature as a gesture of companionship:

And the LORD God fashioned from the soil each beast of the field and each fowl of the heavens and brought each to the human to see what he would call it, and whatever the human called a living creature, that was its name. And the human called names to all the cattle and to the fowl of the heavens and to all the beasts of the field, but for the human no sustainer beside him was found (2:19-20).

How did God know solely through the human's act of naming that he refused the other creations as "sustainers"? The creature distinguished and dismissed the animals as companions on the basis of their bodily difference from him, classifying their existence through the language he develops. Structuralist anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, along with a host of linguists, argue that the human mind grasps the overwhelming "external reality" by categorizing it using the tools of language (Tester 33). This categorization works to divide and segment that which the mind observes so effectively that humans "mentally perceive external reality as other" (Tester 33). Humans label other animals depending on their degree of difference from themselves: "Birds are given human Christian names in accordance with the species to which they belong more easily than are other zoological classes because they can be permitted to resemble men for the very reason that they are so different" (Levi-Strauss qtd. in Tester, 34). Thus, "names serve to classify animals in contradistinction to the human, and serve to delimit rigidly what it is and is not to be a fully social being. The names of animals are part of a system, a structure, of classification which makes the perception of human difference intelligible" (Tester 35-36).

The earth creature exercises mental processes for the first time in the narrative as he creates a system of language for the sole purpose of differentiating that which he sees. He has begun not only to observe the other creations with which he will share his life, but also to make decisions and categorizations about what that which surrounds him. The earth creature named, then, as a means of both defining and asserting its own

individuality as a human. God understood this need of His human to interact in its world, if only through a system of divisions based on the bodily appearances of the animals brought before him, and so He left him the task of naming. It had not been necessary for the human to label plant life, also created for its purposes, for physical difference made the differentiation between itself and vegetation obvious enough. For other animal life, however, a more complex system had to be developed by the human so that both the human creature and God could understand how the human responded to its companions. Clearly God has the human go through the process of naming not solely to its advantage, but because the action would benefit Himself as well. The act of classification is the best means for God to ascertain the suitability of animals as companions for His creature, for the human must try to understand and label the Other: “a core of social life is the attempt to establish what it is to be properly human, to establish human uniqueness in contradistinction to the otherness of the natural environment” (Tester 32). Furthermore, Tribble notes that by being classified into species, the animals become associated with plants, which are classified similarly by the narrator, not the human creature, who can exist without classification (91-92).

The creature’s attempt to define a social life results in a differentiated Other, and in the creation of language based on bodily differentiation, “but for the human no sustainer beside him was found” (2:20). Consequently, God creates another creature, this time not from dust or breath, but from the original human: “And the LORD God cast a deep slumber on the human, and he slept, and He took one of his ribs and closed over the

flesh where it had been, and the LORD God built the rib He had taken from the human into a woman and He brought her to the human” (2:21-22). When the creature awakes to find another bodily-alike to himself, he exclaims:

This one at last, bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh,
This one shall be called Woman [*'issa*],
for from man [*'iss*] was this one taken (2:23).

The creature not only classifies non-human animals, but has given names to describe both the new creation and himself. Does the newly-formed woman receive a name deriving from his because he perceives difference, for the name which bears his own at the root is the ultimate sign of otherness? It is not a proper name, a mark of individuality, but a classification for her kind. Woman and man are different from one another, so they are called a name that traces man as woman’s origin, but reasserts their difference. Bal notes that in the Hebrew Bible “naming is a meaningful act meant to establish the relation between the character and its main feature” (335). To be ha’adam, from ha’adamâ, is an important link that describes the role of the first creature: he belongs to the earth. Likewise, woman is rooted in man, both in form and in function.

So where and how does a difference in the form of gender appear? Even before woman was created, the original human is gendered as “he” as early as section 2:7 of the Alter translation. While Alter is careful to depict the first creature as “human,” he offers no note of explanation as to why the creature retains a masculine personification. Has the cultural force of the Adam and Eve story been too strong for Alter to offer an alternative, or does it stem from the lack of a gender neutral pronoun in English? Either way, it is a

curious omission in Alter's commentary. In the King James version and other more traditional translations, the first creature is referred to as "man" and is gendered masculine throughout. According to Mieke Bal, the Hebrew does not connote the masculine gender, however, until the second, female, creature appears: "Of the two words, *'îs* and *'issâ* which in this text indicate sexually differentiated beings, *'issâ*, woman, appears first. It is *'issâ* who changes the semiotic meaning of the *ha'adam* from the earth being into earth man. In this semiotic sense, the woman was formed first, then the man" (Bal 323). This structural appearance of woman before that of man, combined with the man's recognition of their bodily difference in the first directly quoted human speech in the text, demonstrates to Bal "the thoroughly equalizing dialectic of the process" of the creation of gender (324).

Mieke Bal reads Genesis as creating "not the world, but narrative. It presents an account of the making of humanity within a progressive development of character" (319). Chronicling the fashioning of humankind, the story outlines the key elements of narrative, which include the development of a character that possesses awareness, possibility for action, choice, and action. Thus, she has stripped Genesis of its authority as creator of life, and argues instead that it is an insightful look into the emergence of character in narrative; put succinctly, she conducts a reading of genre as well as gender. Bal concludes that character, and by extension, humanity, emerge in this story of creation by differentiation (337).

Like Mieke Bal, Phyllis Tribble has attempted to demarcate the departures of traditional Judeo-Christian thought from the limits of the narrative itself in order to present an idea of human equality present in Genesis. Tribble proclaims her project as the utilization of “feminist hermeneutics” in order to “recover old treasures and discover new ones in the household of faith” (xvi). Limiting the text to the Hebrew “original,” her analysis attempts to locate a notion of equality in the ancient versions of the narrative. Her perspective is clearly invested in capitalizing on the preeminence of the story of Adam and Eve; rather than questioning or otherwise problematizing its cultural weight, she wishes to challenge the canonical interpretation with a new version.

Sensitivity to the Hebrew language leads Phyllis Tribble to different conclusions than Bal about the equality of humans and the simultaneous production of female and male in Genesis. Pointing out that God provided a justification for the creation of plants and animals, but offered no such note of intent prior to the creation of the woman, Tribble believes that woman maintains an equality with the man that contrasts with the position of superiority he holds over the rest of creation:

Specifically, God does not give *ha-a'dam* power over the woman. Hence, the omission of any infinitive clause of purpose in this episode further contrasts the relationship of the earth creature to the woman with that of the earth creature to the earth, to the animals, and to the plants . . . She belongs to a new order that will by itself transform the earth creature (97).

She argues that as a result of the removal of the earth creature's rib, the creature is actually transformed into another being: “this act has altered the very flesh of the creature . . . After this intrinsic division, *ha'adam* is no longer identical with its past, so that when

next it speaks a different creature is speaking” (97). The Hebrew noun that refers to the human can be seen as gendered after the production of the woman, as *ha'adam* becomes a gendered term that usually refers to a male (91). While acknowledging that this gendered distinction, which at times means “human” and at times “man,” presents an “ambiguity”ⁱⁱⁱ (91), she firmly asserts that since the earth creature is transformed into a man at the same moment that the woman appears in Eden, the two humans are created at the same moment.

Why is it so important for both Bal and Tribble to establish the temporal equality of Eve and Adam? The chronological order of Genesis which places man before woman formed a framework for the misogynist teachings of Christian patriarchs. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, argued that the female creature lacked a rational soul and her purpose was strictly that of reproduction (Lerner 141). Tribble points to a long list of misogynous texts justified by the traditional interpretation of Genesis 2:3-4, including the pervasive verse 1 Timothy 2:11-13 (73), which Bal also uses as her epigraph: “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, not to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.”

Women have struggled for centuries against the idea that the female sex was created as an afterthought, as a “helpmeet” for man. In the 1990s, a popular button exclaims: “Adam was a trial run”; in the 1590s pamphleteer Jane Anger writes: “God, making woman of man’s flesh that she might be purer than he, doth evidently show how far we women are more excellent than men. Our bodies are fruitful, whereby the world

increaseth, and our care wonderful, by which man is preserved. From woman sprang man's salvation" (Lerner 150-151). In 1890, the Women's National Liberal Union resolved:

[t]hat the Christian church of whatever name, is based on the theory that woman was created secondary and inferior to man and brought sin into the world, thus necessitating the sacrifice of the Savior. That Christianity is false and its foundation a myth which every discovery in science shows to be as baseless as its former belief that the earth was flat (Lerner 164).

One of the Women's National Liberal Union members, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, compiled *The Woman's Bible* with the assistance of a committee of 25 women in 1895. She poses the question: "as the historical fact is reversed in our day, and the man is now of the woman, shall his place be one of subjection? The equal position declared in the first account must prove more satisfactory to both sexes; created alike in the image of God –The Heavenly Mother and Father" (Stanton 20-21). Like Bal, Stanton sees no reason why the accounts of creation in Genesis 1 should be considered less authoritative than the story of Eve and Adam:

And God created the human in his image,
in the image of God He created them,
male and female he created them (1:26).

For evidence of her assertion that the two accounts are not disparate, Stanton polemically cites passages of the New Testament that speak to both woman and man, for "equality is the soul and essence of Christianity" (21). Bal rests on an equally shaky claim that the stories are not mutually exclusive: "[the second story of creation] provides a specified

narration of what events are included in the idea that ‘God created them male and female’” (326).

Both of these readings which argue for the simultaneous creation of woman and man, whether by the transformation of the original earth creature, or the semiotic equality of the two humans, gloss over several key events of the Eve and Adam myth. The story of Eve and Adam does not end in Genesis 3 and, as is explored later, Chapters 4 and 5 virtually negate the idea that simultaneity begets social equality (Pardes 56). Another element which bears consideration is the role of language as the sole development of the first human. Articulating a language is a significant exertion. It relies on a system of knowledge and the application of these concepts to the world outside of the self. Bal, who argues for the temporal equality of male and female in the text on the basis of semiotics, ironically ignores the significance of language. To classify the world is to exert agency, to shape how humans perceive their world. That man does not recognize and label himself until after the creation of woman is insignificant, for ordering what surrounds one through a system of language necessarily relies on self-reflection. Likewise, this refutes Tribble’s contention that the original creature has been transformed following the creation of a woman – while he now lacks a rib, he is still the same speaking subject he was before he went to sleep that fateful evening.

What does it mean for woman that she has no part in the development of language, that the divine gave the power of creating a linguistic order to the earth creature before she was created? She comes into being forced to adopt an existing system of

signs, and she has no role in engaging linguistically in her new world. The male creature classifies her, as he had labeled animals. He has exerted agency and achieved a degree of self-realization prior to her existence on earth. Christine Froula reprimands Bal for believing that the man and woman could be structural equivalents:

[n]ot to recognize the cultural privilege that Adam's naming establishes is to mistake the myth's strongly gender-marked – i.e., masculine – subjectivity for universal subjectivity. In fact, Bal's argument that *ha-adam* signifies not Adam but a proto-version of Adam-and-Eve risks comparison with conservative grammarians' insistence that "generic" *he* and *man* include the female (210).

Man has asserted agency, whereas the woman is, as yet, inert matter. While he did not exist as a "male" before, for there was nothing to differentiate himself as a certain sex rather than an "earth creature," he still existed and exercised his own subjectivity through language. Thus, he has not come into being through linguistic differentiation from the female sex, but rather is now able to recognize the fact that he exists. As Froula points out, to claim that the power of male appropriated language has no bearing on the issue of the equality of woman and man is to assume that the female fits into the linguistic category the male occupies.

An uncomfortable relationship between women and language does not exist solely in the fictionalized paradise of Eden. On the contrary, feminist thinking about language represents a key component of feminist movements in academe. Whether one speaks of the paucity of women authors before this century, or of the prevalence of misogynist vocabulary, women have an intensely problematic relationship with language.

Psycholinguist Rolv M. Blakar found, as reported by Julia Penelope, "that language is not

only not a 'neutral tool,' but that it serves the 'interests and perspectives' of those in power, men, at the expense of women" (xxi). This stunts not only women's use of language, but also, women's authoring of language. In the preface to his *Dictionary of American Slang*, Flexner comments that slang stems from the "imagination, self-confidence, and optimism of our people" and that "most American slang is created and used by males." (Kramarae 60). Responding to the patriarchal bias evident in his words, Cheris Kramarae states that: "women have been especially cautioned through at least 150 years of etiquette books to avoid the use of slang" (60). Clearly, it is not only Eve who is subjected to a world named and ordered by the male sex, and it is not only the divine in Genesis who prefers the male to possess the authority of language.

Restoring to Eve the power of language and of agency, poet Lucille Clifton subversively rewrites the story of Eve and Adam in a series called "tree of life."

"eve thinking"
it is wild country here
brothers and sisters coupling
claw and wing groping one another

i wait
while the clay two-foot
rumbles in his chest
searching for the language to

call me
but he is slow
tonight as he sleeps
i will whisper into his mouth
our names (78)

Eve does not name herself in the biblical story, so clifton is forced to write a sub-text in order to give Eve the power of language. The woman is shown to be a thinking, conscious being, who is aware of her surroundings, of “claw and wing/groping one another.” Significantly, she seems startled by the sexuality of all creatures in the land, but not distanced from or critical of them. Her relationship with the other animals of creation is not one of classification, but rather identification: she wants her partner to wake so that they may join the other “brothers and sisters coupling.” Yet she does not take the action to wake her partner up, she does not even speak so that others will hear. Instead, she whispers in his sleeping ear, so that no others will be aware of her naming both him and herself. While clifton’s Eve has the power of language, she does not own that power in the public sphere; rather, she acts deceptive and conniving, hiding her abilities so that his power over her remains an unchallenged fiction. Even in this pro-woman subversion of the story, woman’s relationship to language is tenuous, at best.

In “adam thinking”, placed directly before “eve thinking” in the text, clifton complicates the male creature’s character as well:

she
 stolen from my bone
 is it any wonder
 i hunger to tunnel back
 inside desperate
 to reconnect the rib and clay
 and to be whole again

some need is in me
 struggling to roar through my
 mouth into a name
 this creation is so fierce

i would rather have been born (77)

The man is not whole, he feels robbed that he did not come from flesh, but was shaped from dirt and breath. He has no authority over his body, and feels violated by God's removal of his rib without his awareness. Now, he has become incomplete, he needs the woman in order to restore his sense of completeness. Furthermore, in clifton's version, the man does not have an easy relationship with language, for he wrestles with the need to name his experience, but language elides him. He "would rather have been born," clifton rewrites in a powerful reversal of centuries of curse that stem from being woman born. To be born of flesh is not to be tainted, as is commonly interpreted, but rather to be born in peace and wholeness. To be property of the divine, however, a divine that does not respect the man's right to his own body, engenders desperation.

Notes

ⁱ For reasons explained as the essay progresses, I believe that the human is indeed a male, and use the masculine pronoun accordingly.

ⁱⁱ Unless otherwise noted, I use Alter's translation throughout. His 1996 translation of Genesis is evidence of both ongoing and increasing interest in the textual particularities of the opening book of the Bible, and provides a poetic and careful translation that treats Genesis as a great work of literature rather than a sacred text.

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 4:1 in Alter's translation evidences the confusion of the gendered qualities of the Hebrew noun "ha-adam": "And the human knew Eve his woman and she conceived and bore Cain." It is clear that at times this word means man, and at times human, and that perhaps any arguments which are grounded in the use of this word in the text are shaky indeed.

CREATIVE WOMAN

The issues of privilege, of the man's ownership of language, and equality in Genesis cannot be addressed by questions of narrative and temporality alone, as Bal and Tribble attempt to accomplish. A disregard for the significance of the man's sole development of language represents an element of Mieke Bal and Phyllis Tribble's analysis that, despite their challenging claims, renders their critiques unsatisfactory. What other ways can be productively employed to evaluate the relationships between the man, woman, animal and divine in this story?

A reading which focuses on the role of bodies in the text illustrates the complex system of the development of socially inscribed meaning as material existence. The creation of humans to populate Eden can be seen as an event in a narrative that, as one of its key functions, chronicles the placement of material bodies into larger systems of cultural meaning. When man exclaims :

This one at last, bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh,
This one shall be called Woman,
for from man was this one taken (2:23),

he is denoting his own existence through his differentiation from the female sex. He has not come into being through this division, but rather, now can recognize that he exists.

He has claimed a role for himself in the new and confusing world, and he has named a role for the woman.

So how does woman relate to her surroundings? What chance had she to assert her own individuality, to recognize her own existence, to call herself by her own name? Absolutely none, for these actions were all granted by the divine, to the man, and in many cases, prior to woman's existence at all. It is little wonder that her conversation with the serpent plants a seed of daring curiosity beneath her quiet breast:

Now the serpent was most cunning of all the beasts of the field that the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Though God said, you shall not eat from any tree of the garden-- " And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the garden's trees we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden God has said, 'You shall not eat from it and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You shall not be doomed to die. For God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will become as gods knowing good and evil" (3:1-6).

This first time that woman speaks in Genesis, she does not vocalize her thoughts due to a sudden inspiration or desire to assert herself, but because a question has been directly addressed to her. Significantly, it is not the divine or even her fellow human creature that seeks to engage her in conversation, but an animal. Questions concerning the community between woman and the animal, linked to relationships between women and animals in larger society, will be explored later in this thesis. For now, it is sufficient to highlight that it is not God's and man's conversations with the woman that are deemed relevant enough to be recorded in the narration, but her dialogue with the snake. Bal notes that the snake addresses woman using the plural form, so that man is addressed as

well (328), an aspect not visible in Alter's rendering of the Hebrew. Yet it is only woman who responds to the snake, it is only she who reacts to the lure of his words.

Although the woman engages directly in dialogue with the snake, the man still looms as an intermediary force in her actions, for she does not offer knowledge gathered first-hand. God had explained to the man the rules of the garden before woman was created: "From every fruit of the garden you may surely eat. But from the tree of knowledge, good and evil, you shall not eat, for on the day you eat from it, you are doomed to die" (1:17). Answering the snake, she repeats what the man must have informed her about God's regulations on the garden. This conversation between man and woman does not appear in the text, but hints at a time elapse which is not directly explained in the narrative. (Clearly, man and woman, and perhaps God and woman, have conversations which, for whatever reason, are not deemed appropriate to include in the story of Eve and Adam.) What the reader is privileged to learn is how the woman repeats exactly what the man (or God) has told her, without apparent question, without hesitation. While she is vocalizing what is in her mind, she is not undertaking the creative process which independent thought relies on; instead, she echoes what the man has instructed her.

Immediately one wonders: is it accurate to say that she has accepted the man's words without question? Does her willingness to converse with the snake about the truthfulness of God's command, while her partner remains silent, betray her lurking suspicion? Does the snake's encouragement facilitate her own desire to assert her agency, rather than stir up a doubt inside her that was not present before? Considering

that punishment for a wrong choice means death, the woman requires remarkably little convincing by the snake that God has lied. Going from the word of the snake alone, she does not even confer with her fellow human creature before eating of the apple: “And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and that it was lust to the eyes and the tree was lovely to look at, and she took of its fruit and ate” (Genesis 3:6).

Why the woman eats of the apple has received much attention during the last millennium of patriarchal misogyny. Reading the story as a sharp warning to use the gift of free choice respectfully was a practice of many Jews and Christians through the early church (Pagels 108). Augustine, however, introduced the notion in the fifth century that Eve and Adam’s eating of the apple was not only the entrance of death and suffering, as had been previously common belief, but more importantly, the origin of “universal, and inevitable, sin” (Pagels 109). Augustine argues that as descendants of the first parents, we all are the beneficiaries of a thoroughly tainted nature, “since all of us were that one man who fell into sin through the woman who was made from him” (qtd. in Pagels, 109). Milton’s *Paradise Lost* claims another landmark in this story’s history of interpretation and appropriation, for the poet masterfully rewrote the story placing blame on Eve in a reading that not only remains canonical, but also invisibly guides many cultural perceptions of the story to this day.

Implicit in this project of articulating the productions of gender in the story of Adam and Eve, then, is not only arguing for another view of the text, but eroding Milton and Augustine’s still pervasive authority over the text. Though much less known, both in

our present time and to the participants themselves in what Gerda Lerner has called “one thousand years of feminist Bible criticism,” something of a genealogy of feminist interpretation of Eve’s eating exists (138-166). Notable comments include Judith Sargeant Murray’s extended footnote to her essay “On the Equality of the Sexes,” published in 1790 (Rossi 17-18), an essay that is thought to be the first American feminist rereading of the Adam and Eve story. Placing her argument in context of Christian faith, Murray argues that God could not have created an inferior being, and as a human, woman must be able to contemplate God. If she can ponder the exalted, she consequently possesses an active intelligence (Rossi 21). Her desire to eat from the tree stemmed from her mental faculties, not from her lust or weakness, as is often argued: “It doth not appear that she was governed by any one sensual appetite; but merely by a desire of adorning her mind; a laudable ambition fired her soul, and a thirst for knowledge impelled the predilection so fatal in its consequences” (23).

The nineteenth century Black feminist Sojourner Truth not only argued that woman had made a bold and daring choice that should not be criticized, but she also presented the deed as inspiration and guidance for the descendants of the first woman at the Woman’s Rights Convention of 1851: “if de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn de world upside down all her one lone, all dese togeder . . . ought to be able to turn it back an git it right side up again, and now dey is asking to” (Ripley IV, 83). Subverting the idea of sin and punishment entirely, Truth views Eve as a rebellious foremother who should be emulated. Her refusal to accept Eve’s sin is not an educated

rebuttal to Augustine and Milton, for as an illiterate former slave she was clearly outside of the cultural production of the white literary elite, or even of access to reading the Bible itself. Rather, the story was known to her in oral form, and she felt no qualms in appropriating the story to speak to her experience: Eve was her foremother to be viewed as she saw fit, and Truth wasn't about to let anybody tell her otherwise.

Other women, like Murray, took up what they felt to be Eve's cause in the realm of mainstream cultural effects: the publishing of books. Significantly, the first lengthy exploration of women's rights to appear in the rationalist tradition, Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, discusses the story of Eve and Adam, as a matter of course. A refutation of this story not only takes place without a note of explanation of the relevance of the Biblical passage, but as a necessary step in the formulation of any argument in support of the advancement of women¹: Eve and Adam loom before her like a great brick wall that must be knocked down before any step forward can be made. For while Wollstonecraft views the narrative as a "poetical story," and not a passage from Holy Scripture, she nonetheless sees it as a source of woman's inferior status in society (Richey 30, 34).

Since humans could not act without God's permission, Wollstonecraft rejects the idea that the woman caused the "fall" from grace. She argues that woman was not acting out of line in eating of the apple, for "[c]ould the helpless creature whom He called from nothing break loose from his providence, and boldly learn to know good by practising evil, without His permission?" (94). She replies in the negative, that slight woman could

not have freed herself of the “providence” of the man (why doesn’t she question the woman’s partner’s authority over her?) without the support of God. For “[w]hen that wise Being who created us and placed us here, saw the fair idea, He willed, by allowing it to be so, that the passions should unfold our reason” (93-94). Supporting the place of the woman’s desire as foundation to her action, Wollstonecraft thus subverts centuries of woman’s castigation for expressing her will. Furthermore, Wollstonecraft questions the need to view the woman’s eating of the tree as a negative action, for she sees the desire for reason as an exercise of rationality that places humans “a creature above the brutes” (94). She sees no evidence for woman’s inferiority to man, and feels that man just “found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion” (109). One might wonder where she even sees evidence of man’s subjugation of the woman in the text, before remembering that she, like many of our contemporaries to this day, is not looking at the text itself, but is responding to the dominant way the text has been seen: Augustine’s and Milton’s readings (Richey 29, 31).

The strength of Wollstonecraft’s overturning of the traditional interpretation of the text is not completely satisfactory in today’s post-Christian world. She argues not for woman’s ability to make decisions, but rather her lack of an ability to make a wrong move, for all has been approved by God. Thus, the fictional woman is no more guilty or honorable than any other human creature, no more “helpless” than the other beings formed “from nothing.” Woman is equal to man, then, in their inequality to the divine. This is not to strip Wollstonecraft’s argument of any of its force, but rather to

contextualize her beliefs that were outrageous in their time. Other sentiments, in contrast, remain radical to the reader two hundred years after her death: reacting to Milton's depiction of the culpable first woman and her mate, Wollstonecraft writes, "instead of envying the lovely pair, I have with conscious dignity or satanic pride turned to hell for sublimer objects" (108).

In *The Woman's Bible*, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrestles with undoing the sin that Augustine and Milton indoctrinated, by expanding on the reasons that woman ate of the fruit. She considers the snake not to be a devilish figure, but makes a comparison between the animal's skills of argumentation and those of Socrates and Plato. Absent from her argument, in contrast to Murray's and Wollstonecraft's, is an acceptance of the futility of woman, or of the omnipotence of God. Instead, Stanton presents the story as an "interview" between woman and snake, as a conversation between two equals. Furthermore, she clearly views this story not as an ancient Jewish text, but as an occupant of the contemporary cultural canon, and as such directly related to the construction of femininity in her own historical period. Her thoughts about the discussion between snake and woman are worth quoting at length:

In this prolonged interview, the unprejudiced reader must be impressed with the courage, the dignity, and the lofty ambition of the woman. The tempter evidently had a profound knowledge of human nature, and saw at a glance the high character of the person he met by chance in his walks in the garden. He did not try to tempt her from her path of duty by brilliant jewels, rich dresses, worldly luxuries or pleasures, but with the promise of knowledge, with the wisdom of the Gods. Like Socrates or Plato, his powers of conversation and asking puzzling questions, were no doubt marvellous [sic], and he roused in the woman that intense thirst for knowledge, that the simple pleasures of picking flowers and talking with

Adam did not satisfy. Compared with Adam she appears to great advantage through the entire drama (24-25).

Stanton's last comment introduces another common theme in historical feminist reactions to Genesis 2:4-3, the role of Adam's eating. Genesis itself is rather quiet on the issue: "and she also gave to her man, and he ate" (3:7). In the words of Stanton's collaborator, Lillie Devereux Blake, "[i]t takes six verses to describe the "fall" of woman, the fall of man is contemptuously dismissed in a line and a half" (26-27). Why the textual reticence about the man's eating? The lack of information certainly gave opportunity for misogynists to enter their opinions; in general, Adam is seen as blinded by Eve's sin, open to her temptation. Rather than locating the blame on his lack of resolve, it is placed, much like what happens to late twentieth century rape survivors in court, on the woman herself. For many feminists, with equally vested interests in Adam's action, his eating is evidence of Adam's weakness. Judith Sargeant Murray presents an argument to men that, while playfully ironic, nonetheless seems founded on misogyny startling to a modern feminist ear: "[b]lush, ye vaunters of fortitude; ye boasters of resolution; ye haughty lords of the creation; blush when ye remember, that he was influenced by no other motive than a bare pusillanimous attachment to a woman!" (Rossi 24).

In the late twentieth century, Phyllis Tribble criticizes the man's eating of the apple, for "he does not theologize; he does not contemplate; and he does not envision the full possibilities of the occasion. Instead, his one act is belly-oriented, and it is an act of acquiescence, not of initiative" (113). Indeed, the man's motivations for eating are not

known by the reader of Genesis, but this absence does not necessarily imply that his reasons are shallow or nonexistent. It is important to remember that while he needs little convincing to eat of the apple, the woman herself required scant encouragement. If one criticizes man's acceptance of the forbidden fruit without conference with his fellow human, or without a clear rationalization in his own mind, then one must find fault with the woman as well. Recall that Cady Stanton and Devereux Blake praised the woman for her lack of deliberation, reading her action as an expression of a preexistent desire rather than the convincing of the snake. If one accepts this reasoning for the woman, then it must be doubly true for the man.

Notes

ⁱ While Wollstonecraft may present an argument in support of “woman,” she is clearly building on the elitism the singular noun implies: by “woman,” she means women like herself: white, educated, and with money.

PRODUCING GENDER

Disputes that center on proving who came first, woman or man, or who is more to blame, man or woman, have had important places in historical discussion of the creation myth, but offer little to a modern reader. Isn't it time to move beyond declaring "woman is better/more to blame" or "man is better/more to blame," questions that form a chapter of the long praise/blame duality tradition of Western culture, and begin to examine the complexities of gender in the Eve and Adam story? My own interest in the myth is not to prove one character more culpable than the other, but to explore the production of gendered characters themselves, to comment on the interdependence of gender, knowledge, power and desire in the story. Interpretations that strongly support the pre-eminence of one character over another, even in the highly learned and sensitive approaches of Bal and Tribble, convey a sense of urgency, of necessity that their opinions be accepted. I feel that this single-issue approach elides some of the larger questions that loom in this text concerning interlocking cultural systems such as gender and what constitutes the human.

To ask "why does the woman eat of the apple?" thus becomes a question not of locating her superior or inferior reasons, but of examining the complex processes inherent

in the function of her first recorded acts of speech, thought, and action. Let us look at Genesis one more time and read the passage without interruption:

Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the beasts of the field that the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Though God said, you shall not eat from any tree of the garden –“ And the woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the garden’s trees we may eat, but not from the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it and you shall not touch it, lest you die.’ “ And the serpent said to the woman, “You shall not be doomed to die. For God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will become as Gods knowing good and evil.” And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and that it was lust to the eyes and the tree was lovely to look at, and she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave to her man, and he ate. And the eyes of the two were opened, and they knew they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

The woman makes an independent decision to eat of the apple. She builds upon the additional evidence that the snake gives her – that God has lied – and decides that as a consequence, she may respond to her desire and eat from the tree. Thus, for the first time in the story, she has asserted her agency, her ability to take action. Recall that the snake initially addresses both man and woman, but it is woman who enters the discussion, for she has more to gain from the lure of knowledge, of having her eyes opened. Woman alone realizes how transgressing the commandment dictated by God is actually in her own best interest. She has much more to gain from the acquisition of knowledge, for she lives in a world where she had no participation in its development, or its naming.

Most disturbing to the centuries of patriarchal interpreters of the story is the clear expression of the woman’s desire, rendered so beautifully in Alter’s translation. Linking woman’s act of sexual agency to the immediate result of their eating, the awareness of

their naked state, it is generally accepted that the eating of the apple signaled the entrance of sexual desire into Eden. To Augustine, this sexuality is the most clear evidence of their sin, the direct effect of their transgression (Pagels 111). Woman has received the sole blame for ushering sexuality into “paradise,” for it is she who acts on her desire. Importantly, advocating the free expression of female desire and exploring the extent to which desire is knowable has been a central component of twentieth century feminisms. I am not presenting an ontological argument that the story of Eve and Adam created this taboo on female sexuality, or even that interpretations of the story necessarily engendered a legacy of shame, but that it is relevant nonetheless to make a comparison across the centuries.

Like Mary Wollstonecraft, Lucille Clifton celebrates woman’s desire. Whereas she has two poems, one for man and one for woman, about their creation, she writes only one describing their eating of the apple. Presumably, “eve’s version” is that which needs to be told, for man’s version has dominated for centuries:

“eve’s version”
 smooth talker
 slides into my dreams
 and fills them with apple
 apple snug as my breast
 in the palm of my hand
 apple sleek apple sweet
 and bright in my mouth

it is your own lush self
 you hunger for
 he whispers lucifer
 honey-tongue (74).

In clifton's version, the woman is not seduced by the snake, (or by Lucifer, in clifton's view, for she follows Milton's reading which solidified the snake as the devil in the common mind). Woman is attracted to self-knowledge, by the eroticism of awareness and by uniting herself with her body, for the apple seems a natural part of her.

Furthermore, she is not the seducer of the man, for her desire is entirely self-directed. Is clifton echoing the narcissism which Milton established as the motive for Eve's eating? Or perhaps she subverts his project: woman may be attracted to herself, and for good reason; as the apple is analogized to Eve, she desires that part of herself. It is empowering to think that her intent was not to seduce her male companion, but to unite herself with her environment through self-desire. Woman revels in the material, in the connection she feels with the earth, in the possibility of possessing herself.

Eating of the tree fulfills for woman a mental, physical, spiritual and emotional desire. By taking a risk and acting on her desire, absorbing the fruit into her body, she has gained subjectivity. She is no longer strictly an object of God's creation and of the man's system of language, but a subject in her own right. The man becomes a subject before woman was created, when he names the animals, and then classifies both the woman and himself. For woman, however, her subjectivity must be earned, and it occurs only as a result of taking a large risk: the possibility of God executing her. Her move is the first significant, recorded action taken by a human in the garden-world, and, to echo Sojourner's Truth sentiment, it is a bold one.

The woman has distinguished herself as human and distanced herself from the rest of creation by claiming a role of self in relation to the otherness of the tree. Comparing the two distinct courses of action taken by the man and woman to gain subjectivity, important differences appear. When the man names the rest of creation, he does it so that God can judge whether he relates well to the beings, or not. In contrast, woman's move is not to distance herself from her environment, but to integrate it within her own being. The act of eating is a sensual one, and it is also a corporeal one: as clifton highlights, the apple becomes a part of her. Yet it is not requisite to view consumption as an act of closeness, of respect; it can also be an act of objectification and annihilation. Does the apple simply serve her needs, or does she respond to her environment as simply a consumer who wants to possess that which comes before her, at all costs? With clifton's haunting voice in our ear, the answer swings in one direction; if Milton had been quoted, it might drift to the other side.

A decision about the woman's motives would be hard to draft at this point in the exploration of the story, but it does appropriately complicate the reading, as well as draw attention to the ambiguity inherent in responding to a text of this age and brevity. Another approach to the text retracts the argument from one of pure consumption versus respectful eroticism, which has strong undercurrents of the centuries-long debate about blame and honor, and grounds the discussion not in a question of motives but of effects. What is the result of woman's eating of the apple? In light of Judith Butler's feminist theorizing on the body, in order for both woman and man to gain subjectivity they must

become gendered, and to be gendered, they must possess subjectivity. And the result of their gendered bodies is shame, a signifier of sexuality.

After the man and woman eat of the fruit “the eyes of the two were opened, and they knew they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves and made themselves loincloths” (3:7). While this has been traditionally interpreted as the ushering in of sexuality, I argue that it most importantly chronicles the establishment of sexed bodies. The fashioning of loincloths, or fig leaves, demonstrates that they have acquired knowledge and given their bodies meaning. Prior to knowledge they were naked but “they were not ashamed” (2:25); suddenly, their bodies have material significance. In short, once the man and woman have eaten they are gendered, because there is a meaning attached to their physical bodies.

To assert that gender is introduced as a meaning applied to the blank slate of the body is a concept made canonical by 1980s feminisms. The underlying idea is that gender is “knowledge about sexual difference,” (Scott 2), and that it is a social construct slapped on the biological reality of the human body. Yet more recent explorations have turned away from this framework, embracing a view which considers the production of the sexed body and the cultural system of gender as interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Reading the story of Eve and Adam from this perspective uncovers a myth strikingly grounded in these ideas advocated by some 1990s feminists – that the construction of the body and of its role in social systems both produce and are produced by our concepts of what it means to be human.

Judith Butler is the foremost theorist raising these questions about the materialization of bodies. She asserts that the speaking subject is inextricably linked to the establishment of gender, that the two may not be thought of as independent: “[s]ubjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the “I” neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves” (*Bodies that Matter* 7). It is thus significant that the man’s exclamation of bodily awareness represents the first time he speaks in Genesis: “This one at last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh/ This one shall be called Woman, for from man was this one taken” (2:23). Butler contends that “the subject, the speaking “I” is formed by virtue of having gone through such a process of assuming a sex,” (*BTM* 2) a system of maturation that the man obeys. “Once ‘sex’ itself is understood in its normativity,” Butler explains,

the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm. ‘Sex’ is thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the ‘one’ becomes visible at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility (*BTM* 2).

Through the process of differentiating woman and man, not only has the existence of one’s sex been created, but the concept of self at all. By speaking and recognizing himself, the man has asserted his subjectivity. Genesis portrays that one cannot be a sex without asserting oneself as an individual, and vice versa. Additionally, in accordance with the man’s assessment of animals and the centrality of language in ascertaining what

animals mean to the man, becoming a self includes a classification of sex and therefore a place in relation to the outside world.

When the man declares that his companion shall be called woman, he has thus placed a label for her sex on her body. Man, unlike God, however, cannot speak into being – even though he has called forth a name for woman, she does not have the subjectivity that having a sex implies until she herself takes action. While the process of assuming a physical body endowed with cultural meaning had secured them both identities, it is not until they have knowledge of their nakedness that they understand what it means to have a body, what it means to possess an identity of “sex”.

Butler remarks, it is “impossible to separate out ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (*Gender Trouble* 3). As such, gender could not have existed apart from the “knowledge” of the woman and the man, for it is not until they have eaten that they produce a meaning and a concurrent shame for their bodies. Finally, the question begs asking: is it really that their bodies had no prior meaning? For shouldn’t they have had intense awareness of their own bodies since the moment they became alive? Thus, gender is not the only way of being aware of the body, it is only one way of producing bodies. It just happens to be the form that this story, just like Western culture, imposes upon human animals as both inherent and necessary.

Elizabeth Grosz usefully illuminates an intention of feminist theorizing of the body as not being a project of retreat into a mythical past, but as doing the necessary work

of bringing awareness that cultural attitudes have constructed the body, even though it is usually seen as untouched, as pure from cultural taints. To speak of studies of the body, as in this case to speak of the bodies of Eve and Adam, is not to harken the return of simpler times, when the world consisted solely of human and animal bodies unfettered by the normalizing process of culture, but rather, to denote a primary function of culture itself. Grosz explains, “[t]he body is not opposed to culture, a restraint throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product” (23).

How exactly are the bodies of the man and woman in Genesis a cultural product? Simply put, the production of the bodies of woman, man, and animal is an ongoing process throughout the beginning chapters of Genesis, and it is a process which incorporates materiality, identity, subjectivity, knowledge and power: the same forces which come to produce what we normally think of as “culture.” Furthermore, bodies do not just arise in the text – they are fashioned, and fashioned by the hands of a monotheistic deity whose mark of bodilessness is the one feature that distinguishes Him¹ from the rest of creation. Thus, the incarnation of power in the text is the producer of bodies, and not incidentally, the producer and ruler of all. Butler asks: “[i]f gender is constructed through relations of power and, specifically, normative constraints that not only produce but also regulate various bodily beings, how might agency be derived from this notion of gender as the effect of productive constraint?” (*BTM* x). To answer her in the case of Genesis, agency can be easily placed in the hands of the Almighty.

Furthermore, the constraints that shape His formation of bodies are clearly laid out: the different qualities of the materials of divine breath, dirt and flesh.

Recall that man, woman and animal are formed from different earthly materials in Genesis Chapter 2. The man is formed by God out of “humus from the soil, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living creature” (2:7). God took soil from the ground, then blew into the lifeless form “the breath of life,” and miraculously, the ha’adam came to life. God took two elements, and combined them to produce one: man was formed from the combination of “a” and “b,” which became “c.” Animals are formed like the man, but lack the ethereal element: they are dirt alone, without the divine breath. Woman, in contrast, is not formed out the material of the earth: she is produced from the transformed soil, from the ha’adam. Thus, she is materially different from the man, yet also literally a part of him. Furthermore, whereas man and animal have been changed from one material to the other, woman is molded from flesh into flesh of another shape.

In the preface of *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler poses the question: “[w]hat are the constraints by which bodies are materialized as ‘sexed,’ and how are we to understand the ‘matter’ of sex, and of bodies more generally, as the repeated and violent circumscription of cultural intelligibility? Which bodies come to matter – and why?” (xi-xii). In Genesis, the first constraints made upon the body is the material that bodies are made from, for the three bodies are comprised of different materials, and these bodies come to exist in different categories: those of male, female, and animal. Butler wonders

how the matter of bodies will be come to be seen as the “circumscription of cultural intelligibility”; in Genesis, it is through the effects of these different material bodies. For woman, man and animal do not hold the same positions in society, a fact explicitly outlined in the story. All three bodies matter, but all have different functions and roles.

Notes

¹ Can we really imagine that the God of Genesis is not gendered male?

ON THE MATTER OF BODIES

These different social positions of bodies incorporate another force in the text which has not yet been mentioned: the presence of power. Power works through two principle forms: the personified power, God, and in the relationships of power described by Foucault. Simply put, power is the God that materializes the bodies, and it is power as a force that determines and institutionalizes the matter of sex, the materiality of being. The interplay of both forms of power determines which bodies come to matter – and why.

When woman and man eat of the apple they show the first glimpse of understanding that their different bodies are going to shape different destinies. Once they have this awareness, they cannot stand naked before each other, so they hide in shame. This episode is often read as the advent of knowledge itself to the woman and man. The representation of knowledge as the shameful awareness of their physical selves is a highly telling episode which highlights the interdependence of gender, knowledge and the body in the cultural context of the story¹. It is not that the eating of the apple signals the entrance of knowledge into their world, for clearly they already possess key functions of intelligence, such as language, memory and awareness. Rather, the tree is often seen as the tree of knowledge, when in actuality, it specifically catalyzes a feeling of timidity because of their naked bodies. Yet in Western culture, especially with the influence of

Milton and Augustine, shame of the body has come to represent the enlightenment of knowledge.

That woman and man hide their sex organs from one another also implies the advent of bodily desire, of the entrance of sexuality into the minds of Eve and Adam. Knowledge of one's sex arrives at the same time as knowledge of sexuality, implying two interrelated concepts: that the awareness of bodily shame and sexuality are one and the same, and that sexuality is the "natural" and only possible result of having a body. For the tree from which they eat is called "the tree of knowledge, good and evil" (2:17), not the Tree of All Knowledge. More specifically, they have gained understanding of good and evil: which is represented by the entrance of sexuality. It is clear that a long-standing tradition in Western culture is the regulation and suppression of sexuality, particularly for those of various Christian faiths, and much of the justification of these beliefs is based on the Adam and Eve story. Indeed, during the first four centuries of the Common Era the early Christians "invoked the story of Adam and Eve to establish their beliefs" about sexuality (Pagels xx). Augustine and Milton followed suit, declaring sexual desire as sinful, to the effect that "even those who think of Genesis only as literature, and those who are not Christian, live in a culture indelibly shaped by such interpretations" (Pagels xix). Thus, it is not only for Eve and Adam that sexuality becomes the sign of sin and shame, it is also for the descendants of these fictional parents.

In contradistinction from all other life, God is free from a body. He can walk among trees, yet he can also create life by his breath. Following the acquisition of bodily

awareness/shame, woman and man find that it is unbearable to stand embodied before God: “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden in the evening breeze, and the human and his woman hid from the LORD God in the midst of the trees in the garden” (3:8). Woman and man not only hide their genitals, their gender/sex, but their entire bodies, for their incorporeality solidifies the chasm which divides them from God. As Elaine Scarry explains, the effects of the difference of embodiedness between humans and the divine are fundamental to understanding the presence of power in the text (209). In the narrative, there is little to separate humans from divinity except for the restrictive presence of bodies. Thus, the knowledge which humans gain from eating of the fruit is problematic because “man [sic] has a body and God has no body” (Scarry 209), leaving woman and man reeling in the shame of their incorporated inferiority to God.

The final key phenomenon that the Eve and Adam story explains is power. As briefly mentioned above, the presence of power in the text takes on two forms, and as Scarry notes, power is grounded in the realities of material bodies. The interdependence of the body, sexuality and power agree with the principles Michel Foucault sets forth in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. First and foremost, power appears in the form of the LORD God. All the qualities often ascribed to the divine, such as omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence can be traced to one unifying idea: that of pervasive power that can see, do and control everything. The power manifested in His bodilessness is a reflection of the power that created the earth and all its inhabitants. In

the beginning of Genesis, power begins as a mystified singularity, as everything and as nothing. It has no shape, no restrictions, just as the nothingness itself. Power then begins to take action, to create something out of nothing: “When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God’s breath hovering over the waters, God said, “Let there be light” (1:1-2).

When the earth is created, powerful God hides His own actions. Foucault writes that “power is tolerable only on the condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (86); this is similar to the process that God undergoes. How does God mask Himself? Genesis outlines the procedures he follows to fashion all of creation, but these are not known to the inhabitants of newly formed earth. They do know they were formed of soil and flesh, but they do not question why they came to be. In Lucille Clifton’s poem “adam thinking” the articulation of man’s self-awareness disturbs the reader, for it forces one to imagine his agony: “she/ stolen from my bone/ is it any wonder/ I hunger to tunnel back/ inside desperate/ to reconnect the rib and clay/ and to be whole again”. While my reading may establish subjectivity on man and woman as a result of the production of sex/gender, it is Clifton’s reading which makes the man come alive and precipitates the reader’s identification with his angst. The man seems neither reckless nor foolhardy, but a being experiencing the growing pains of an entire species as he asks the million dollar questions: where did I come from? And why am I here, fragmented and alone?

Why or how God has power is not questioned by the narrator of Genesis, but it is questioned by His subjects: the snake, woman and man. They may not know why God came to possess His power, but they feel its effects, and they are willing to test out how powerful He in fact is. Will they die if they eat of the tree? Or is the snake somehow privileged to a deeper understanding, that they will not be punished with death? God has not been completely successful in hiding His own mechanisms of power, for the lingering trees are testament to the force which man and woman have no access to. In fact, God only speaks to His human creatures on two occasions in the story of Eve and Adam, to command the earth creature not to eat of the tree, and to interrogate and chastise the snake, man and woman after they have eaten. If God had not forbidden them from the tree, they would not have known that they lacked a thing. The trace of the tree, however, and its status as out-of-bounds, places a desire in their minds and a will in their breast.

Yet as Foucault teaches us, power is not only an external condition, it is far more than can be represented by a single deity: “relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play” (94). Power in the Adam and Eve story does not only give rise to the earth out of nothing, power also establishes how life on earth will be. When God forms man, animal and woman out of different materials, He is instituting another form of His power, the power that Foucault describes as “the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (93). This power is imbedded in social relations, it is an integral part of all it shapes.

Judith Butler asserts that it is necessary to achieve an understanding of “the matter of bodies as the effect of a dynamic of power, such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects” (*BTM* 2). Indeed, materiality is “power’s most productive effect” and this determines our conceptions of the body (2). Power has shaped the man out of soil and breath, the animals out of soil, and the woman out of the man’s flesh. This move establishes power relations within the creatures themselves, for power has not only produced the body, but established itself within the bodily existence of creation. Certainly the different materials that make up the three different forms of animal life do not need to be arranged in a power structure, especially in a hierarchical relationship to one another. In the culture of Genesis, however, difference means inequality, and the power of God implants these power relations in His beings.

Foucault’s ruminations on the pervasive actions and effects of power are again useful: power is omnipresent “not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (93). In Genesis, the power structures internalized in the creatures’ bodies reproduce themselves from one point to another. The significance of their formation from different materials extends far beyond the moment of their creation: the materiality of their bodies determines their destiny. The second time God speaks in Genesis is to outline the effects of man and woman’s eating of the apple as the effects of their materiality, for their futures are

determined by the nature of their beginnings. Amongst humans in Genesis, the male body is the least incorporated, and therefore closer to divinity, since he was formed from the transformation of two materials into a third. He is consequently esteemed and lifted up in differentiation to the companion who remains embedded in the body, the woman who originated in the man's flesh and as God will explain, shall remain in the flesh.

God begins his speech after He witnesses woman and man hide their naked bodies in the bushes, for He has realized that His one request of the earth creature had been violated:

And the LORD God called to the human and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard your sound in the garden and I was afraid, for I was naked, and I hid." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? From the tree I commanded you not to eat have you eaten?" And the human said, "The woman whom you gave by me, she gave me from the tree and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent beguiled me and I ate" (3:9-13).

Neither man nor woman take responsibility for their actions, it is as if they are trembling before the mighty power of the Almighty and can only whimper lame excuses for their behavior. This passage in particular shows the woman and man in a negative light; to some it shows how their sin has corrupted human nature, yet it can also show the childlike actions of the young couple, who are still learning the effects of their first independent decision. How could they know how to behave maturely when they had never acted upon their own will before?

All the same, their actions anger God, for His power has been challenged. He will not permit such disruption of His authority, and so plants more rules into the lives of His

creatures. Yet some have subverted this idea of God's condemnation of humanity.

Mieke Bal, for example, argues that God's address does not represent a curse, as commonly perceived, as much as an explication of the consequences of their human condition (332): consequences of their material gender, power, knowledge and sexuality.

God tells the woman:

I will terribly sharpen your birth pangs,
in pain shall you bear children.
And for your man shall be your longing,
and he shall rule over you (3:16).

As mentioned above, the embodiedness of humans in contrast to the bodilessness of God is crucial to relations of power, and to be embedded in the body is to be unlike God.

God is explicit in revealing the mark of embodiment to be the domain of woman. Woman is doomed to her flesh, she is "imprisoned in motherhood" (Bal 335), and she is also subjected to man: "he shall rule over [her]." Thus, her status as grounded in the body places the less-embodied man in a position over her. Intertextual evidence lends support to a reading of woman's grounding in the flesh as the direct result of her fashioning not from earth, but from the flesh of the man. As evident in the plant and animal world established in Genesis 1-2:4, God makes fertility a life-force specific to each species, in which reproduction is undergone "according to their kind." The manner in which life is produced consequently has immense effects, for generations are secured through this propagation of the self. The female creature was produced from the prototype of the male, she is merely a diversion from his copy; flesh remains flesh. And flesh will remain flesh. Woman will never be capable of transcending the destiny of her body, her

materiality will remind her of both her origin and her destiny. Historically, generations have taken the fictional placement of the first woman as material to be a necessary element of Christianity. Paula Cooley remarks that in the historical Christian Church, there existed “a dominating identification of female nakedness with sin and evil through the figure of Eve. In short, the first 17 centuries of Christendom reflect the gradual cultural construction of the concept ‘woman’ as synecdoche for all that is material and therefore finite” (65).

That women have been violently and categorically relegated to be the sex that is embodied, to the benefit of men and as evidence of their inferiority, has been a starting point for many American feminists since the turn of the century. Early women’s rights campaigners advocated the right of women to say no to sex, to assert that their bodies were not only the baby-making machines of their husbands, but their own bodies and that they could or could not be mothers, depending on their choice (Ware). In the 1940s, the philosophy of French existentialist feminist Simone de Beauvoir worked from the assumption that woman occupied a position of immanence, that her body was an inescapable locus of reproduction and that men happily bestowed this function on women, so that they could focus on their abilities to transcend biological reality. For de Beauvoir, the unfortunate role of woman is to translate her animal body for use by the male world of culture:

Woman transposes the functions of the female animal into the world of humanity; she maintains life, reigning over the realms of immanence; she brings the warmth and the intimacy of the womb into the home; she it is who cares for and animates the dwelling where the past is preserved, the

future prefigured; she brings forth the next generation and she feeds the children already born. Thanks to her, the existence that the man disperses through the outside world in work and activity is concentrated again within her immanence: when he comes home at night, he is once more at anchor in the earth (199-200).

To de Beauvoir, women's actions in patriarchal society stem from her material existence as embodied, whereas men are free to act as informed by the mind in the (male) realm of culture. Citing the story of Adam and Eve as example of the way that women have been treated as mere bodies and deprived the status of a subjective being, de Beauvoir protests the power that God grants the male creature over Eve:

She was destined by Him for man; it was to rescue Adam from loneliness that He gave her to him, in her mate was her origin and her purpose; she was his complement on the order of the inessential. Thus she appeared in the guise of privileged prey. She was nature elevated to transparency of consciousness; she was a conscious being, but naturally submissive. And therein lies the wondrous hope that man has often put in woman: he hopes to fulfill himself as a being by carnally possessing a being, but at the same time confirming his sense of freedom through the docility of a free person (159-160).

de Beauvoir found the systematic use and abuse of women by men outrageous, as in the example of Eve, where woman is created "for man" and subsequently employed as the tool of her mate's fulfillment. She argued passionately that differences in male and female bodies renders women a lifetime of inequality in passive Otherness, and that women must destroy the immanence of their materiality in order to join men on the plane of transcendence. De Beauvoir failed to realize, however, that it is not the body that creates power, but systems of power that create the body and our understanding of it.

More recently, some schools of feminism have questioned the tactic of assuming control over the body, with its simultaneous degradation of the body as an object that can be manipulated and controlled at will, as a method of liberation. To ecofeminist Irene Diamond, “mainstream feminism in the West has become in some ways trapped and stalemated by its once emancipatory vision that woman’s freedom resided in gaining control over our bodies and sexuality” (35). By way of example she cites the inability of many feminists to understand that practices of birth control are for many poor women of color the effects of forced sterilization by the government, the US included (36). Simply put, it has become problematic in some branches of feminism, ecofeminism in particular, to assert that control of the body is the necessary path that feminists should seek.

Integrating the insights of thinkers like Butler and Grosz, one is also forced to question the feasibility of controlling the body in the first place. For the body is not a one-dimensional thing, it is a complex system of materialized ideology. From this perspective, reworking feminist conceptions of the body might turn up new trails for feminists to explore. For Grosz, “questions about which kind of bodies, what their differences are, and what their products and consequences might be, can be directly raised in ways that may more readily demonstrate, problematize, and transform women’s social subordination to men” (vii).

Regardless of the approach taken, feminist thinking on the body has the same focus in mind: to free women from male power exercised over all aspects of their existence. In the story of Eve and Adam, the man is given rule over the woman because

she first ate the apple, taking the first step that engendered their bodies in cultural meaning. But it is more than this, for the fact of her fleshy origins determines her fleshy future. As Foucault tells us, “power is characterized by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed, tactics which, becoming connected to one another, attracting and propagating one another, but finding their base of support and their condition elsewhere, end by forming comprehensive systems” (95): the power of the Almighty has established a regime of power in their bodies themselves, that undergo reproduction as the woman reproduces. What is remarkable about Genesis is precisely this explication of the methods of establishing the body, of its locus of power, of the tactics employed by the creator. For humanity does not know the origins of our bodies, we cannot successfully trace the base of support because it exists on the multidimensional plane of biology, culture and a mixture of the two.

Like the woman, the man receives a destiny from God that is explicated following the eating of the apple. His future is likewise determined by the place of his origin, the earth itself:

And to the human He said, “Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree that I commanded you, ‘you shall not eat from it,’

Cursed be the soil for your sake,
 with pangs shall you eat from it all the days of your life.
 Thorn and thistle shall it sprout for you
 and you shall eat the plants of the field.
 By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread
 till you return to the soil,
 for from there were you taken,
 for dust you are
 and to dust shall you return” (3:17-19).

While the earth creature slept, God removed his rib, granting him ignorance of his role in bodily reproduction until he viewed the final product. He was the original human; in Alter's otherwise fine translation he is *the* "human," while his companion is referred to as "woman." The man does not remain the immanence of the fleshy body that woman occupies, but he returns to the earth itself. God's explanation that woman and man shall return to their material origin represents another reason why Bal's assertion that the man is not created until differentiated from woman, and Tribble's belief that the man has morphed into another creature following the removal of his rib, are not entirely accurate. Man is clearly the same creature that was created first, for God blatantly reminds him of his dusty origin. Woman, by contrast, has no future outlined for her by the divine outside of the body itself, for her materiality as flesh is all-inclusive.

Man produces, like God. Man, like God, is not grounded in the body, but in his role as producer, whether that be of food from the ground or the creation of the ground in the first place. An individual's degree of materiality is a reflection of the power structures implanted by God, and since man is less restricted to the body, and therefore more like God, he assumes a role of power over the woman. Furthermore, the way that woman is taken from man's body establishes the first man as the producer of the woman. In Genesis, a male God and a male human are counter-intuitively responsible for the creation of humans. This again establishes men and God as having power over woman, remarkably through robbing her of her procreative powers. "In the realm of Creation, the

‘official’ hierarchy goes as follows: God is the Creator, Adam is the Son of God, and Eve is the Daughter of Adam” (Pardes 54).

Woman is not the only creature who is firmly planted in the body: the third member of creation, the snake, maintains a position of immanence. God’s words to the snake reflect how the snake’s embodiment is directly connected to his position at the bottom rung of the power hierarchy:

And the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,
Cursed be you
 of all the cattle and all beasts of the field.
On your belly you shall go
 and dust shall you eat all the days of your life.
Enmity will I set between you and the woman,
 between your seed and hers.
He will boot your head
 and you will bite his heel” (3:14-15).

Of course, God’s harsh words to the snake are in response to her debates with the woman, for it is she who plants the idea of eating in the woman’s mind. Yet there is more at work here than the snake’s position as the tempter. God’s words to the snake also assign to the snake a place in the material power relations of creation— the snake has a lowly body, a result of her low power status. But why does she lack power? Recall that the operation of power is indissociable from the production of sex and gender, for power establishes the ranked categories of male and female, of the forces of production and reproduction. The snake lacks both a sex and a gender, and this secures her a degraded status in relation to man and woman. Indeed, the lack of sex and gender is the only distinguishing factor between her and humanity; the snake demonstrates reason, action, even the capacity for

language. Before humans had knowledge of their sexuality, she even showed herself to be in community with God, for she predicted His actions through assuring the woman that she would not literally die from eating as God had commanded. This lack of gender/sex (like God), but the possession of a body (unlike God) is all that is necessary to create a difference between humans and other animals.

Butler explains that “the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means, such that human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation” (*BTM* 8). In Genesis, the production of what it means to be human is based on a differentiation from other animal life, solely through the implications of gender and sex. But the two genders do not relate to the snake on equal terms. The snake and the woman are both imbedded in and share a community in the bodily, as God and man share qualities of bodilessness. This is not a phenomenon singular to Genesis, for Western philosophers have distinguished maleness by depending on an association of women and animals as “guilty by association with the bodily” and differentiating maleness as “over and against bodily activity” (Spelman 123).

Marilyn French asserts that “patriarchy is an ideology founded on the assumption that man is distinct from the animals and superior to [them] . . . the reason for man’s existence is to shed all animal residue and realize his ‘divine’ nature, the part that *seems* unlike the part owned by animals” (qtd. in Adams and Donovan 2). In the biblical text, the order established by the divine secures the separation of men and animals, and the

association of women and animals. Yet the text is not comfortable with the union of women and animals, for it is this team that challenges the power of God. While in Western culture women and animals have been associated to the benefit of males, this fictional account betrays a fear of this companionship. As a result, woman and animal are to fight, to strike at each other. Furthermore, woman's children are to carry out this antagonistic relationship with their fellow animal creatures. God has secured his power, placing strict divisions on the source of resistance.

Thus, the power which had produced bodies also produces abuse and maltreatment, to be dished out to those beneath one, or in the case of women and animals, sometimes equal to one's own standing. Woman is also to listen to man, but he does not have to recognize in her any authority. Man can exercise power over woman, which, in light of de Beauvoir's analysis, enables him to separate himself from the immanent functions of the body, so he can concentrate on more exalted tasks. Likewise, humans can define themselves against other animals, for the snake is relegated to the pathetic status of sucking dust. The snake was produced from earth, like man, but with a crucial difference: without the divine breath. As such, she has no ethereal qualities, she is only dirt. She is not even granted a return to be part of the earth, but her body must slide along the ground.

While the snake remains genderless, which according to Butler, implies that she cannot be an individualized subject, she does achieve a degree of subjectivity in being in a physical battle with woman and her progeny. Being struck implies the ability to feel

pain, which consequently guarantees for animals the right to subjectivity (Singer). It is not a full subjectivity, however, for she lacks gender, which is required before one can assert oneself as a human. Nevertheless, she is embodied and thus encoded in a system of power. While a human cannot exist in a system of power without the concurrent production of sex/gender, a snake can; recall Butler's contention that gender is itself defined against the nonhuman.

Notes

¹ In this sense, “cultural context” refers to the cultural which produced Genesis as much as the culture that Genesis produced.

CREATION AND PROCREATION

Fictional Adam is fully aware of the process by which God shaped the woman and that she will propagate the entire species. It is because of this understanding that “the human called his woman’s name Eve, for she was the mother of all that lives” (3:20). She has actually not given birth to a soul yet, but it does not matter, for he understands what her role in life will bring. “Adam, by giving the woman that name, is the very character who stresses this creative function” for “[n]aming, as we have seen, is the labeling of the character that completes its formation” (Bal 336). That “the mother of all living” has in fact been the last living creature to be created is often seen by feminists as the final move of a story which places the act of creation, the usual role of female mothers, into the hands of a male God and the male earth creature. Cheryl Exum, for example, reads this strategy as a result of “patriarchy’s fear of women’s reproductive power, its need to suppress it, and its equally strong desire to appropriate it – as for example, in Genesis 2, when the first man gives birth to woman, aided by the creator god in the absence of a creator goddess or goddesses” (28). Whether or not one agrees with this reading of patriarchy as an immobile force that steadfastly fears women’s reproductive abilities, Exum makes a valuable point of the stripping of woman’s power of creation in the text by two male figures as a patriarchal tendency.

Thus, once again woman has been classified by the man, she has been ordered and slotted into an existence which she had no part in creating. God dictates to her that she will have a life of painful reproduction, and the man uses his power of language to confer an appropriate category upon her. Yet an intertextual approach reveals that Adam's naming of Eve is not characteristic of men's roles in the Old Testament. Man's naming of woman is actually an exception, for it is "the only time in the Bible where a man names a newly born female and delivers a speech to celebrate the occasion!" (Pardres 49). As such, "it is meant to single out and glorify the creation of the first woman, while allowing Adam to play the (m)other's part" (ibid). Perhaps this is evidence of woman's position of respect, or perhaps it is another instance where the first male creature has been granted a position of primacy, and the first human events are catered to his benefit.

While Phyllis Tribble typically sets out to disprove any arguments that the myth is a sexist one, in this case she has no hesitation about pronouncing Adam's action as exercising power over the woman. She asserts that in the Hebrew, for example, that the language Adam uses "chillingly echoes the vocabulary of dominion over the animals in episode three . . . Now, in effect, the man reduces the woman to the status of an animal by calling her a name" (133). She concludes that "[w]hat alone might be a title of honor, 'mother of all living,' is in context intertwined with a position of inferiority and subordination" (134).

Poet Susan Donnelly imagines what it would have been like if Eve had been responsible for the function of naming in Eden, rather than the man. Her poem “Eve Names the Animals” is worth quoting in full:

To me, *lion* was sun on a wing
over the garden. *Dove*
a burrowing, blind creature.

I swear that man
never knew animals. Words
he lined up according to size,

while elephants slipped flat-eyed
through water

and trout
hurtled from the underbrush, tusked
and ready for battle.

The name he gave me stuck
me to him. He did it to comfort me,
for not being first.

Mornings, while he slept,
I got away. Pickerel
hopped on the branches above me.
Only spider accompanied me,

nosing everywhere,
running up to lick my hand.

Poor finch, I suppose I was
woe to him—

the way he'd come looking for me,
not wanting either of us
to be ever alone.

But to myself I was
palomino

raven
fox . . .

I strung words
by their stems and wore them
as garlands on my long walks.

The next day
I'd find them withered.

I liked change (10-11).

Like Lucille Clifton's Eve, the voice of this poem feels a strong connection to other animal life. She finds the man's categories completely inappropriate, for identity is not fixed but fluid, and life cannot be ordered "according to size." The man's classification is like a scientific naming, which "gives [animal] a species and describes them as such; who or what they are as individuals matters little for these purposes" (Birke 7). Donnelly's Eve pays exquisite attention to the animals themselves, and understands that categorization cannot be stable. Naming should not be a fixating process, for identity is fluid and should be celebrated as such. In Donnelly's rendering, language from a woman's mouth would sound completely different from that of men, it would not be accused as never having known its subject.

Donnelly's poem re-iterates what feminists interested in language often assert, that language does not speak to women's experiences and that women would articulate a language which is not a process of labeling the Other, but of a subjective assertion of identity. Annie Leclerc, for example, advocates for what she terms "Woman's word":

We have to invent a woman's word. But not 'of' woman, 'about' woman,
in the way that man's language speaks 'of' woman. . . Which is when

women open their mouths and begin to speak. from now on, no man's voice will come to cover up the multiple, vigorous voices of women. But we still aren't there. In fact we won't get there unless woman manages to weave a fabric, whole and new, made of a voice springing from within herself. Because the voice can be new, but the words worn out" (58-59).

What would happen if Eve had named does not need to be imagined solely through fictional accounts, for Eve herself names her sons in Genesis. Ilana Pardes is quick to point out that feminist biblical critics single out Genesis 1-3 as the boundaries of the story of Eve, but in fact her story continues through Genesis 4. Pardes presents that a reason behind this silence is "the continuing impact of the Christian perception of the Fall as the unequivocal conclusion of Creation" when in fact there is "no concept of an Original Fall in Genesis" (39). While Christian tradition may have secured Adam and Eve as the first parents who are charged with causing the sins of humanity, the Old Testament grants them no such importance. Pardes takes Bal to task, correcting her assurance that Adam's naming of Eve is the final stroke in forming her character, for "Eve's impressive comeback as a name-giver in Genesis 4 – and not the emergence of the proper name 'Eve' – is the final stroke in the formation of the first female character" (41).

Genesis 4 opens with Eve and Adam acting on their sexuality and Eve's first speech to the reader: "And the human knew Eve his woman and she conceived and bore Cain, and she said, " 'I have got me a man with the LORD' " (4:1). Another translation renders her comment, "I have created a man (equally/together) with the LORD" (qtd. in Pardes 40). Pardes explains that Eve's naming of her son, and her alignment of her own productive powers with those of God, "presents another phase in the formation of the first

woman's relation to God and Adam as it offers a glimpse of her own perception of motherhood and (pro)creation" (42). Eve is not the silent woman who only receives names, as she appears in Genesis 2-3. Indeed, since she uses the verb *qnh* to connote "create," the same verb that is ascribed to God's fashioning of the world; she is comparing her creative faculties to those of God (43). For Pardes, this action is typical of the woman's character:

If in Genesis 3 she sought to acquire a potential, in Genesis 4 the primordial mother explores the ways in which the knowledge she illegally acquired in the Garden of Eden may be realized. Her hubris is transferred to the realm of creativity. By defining herself as a creatress, she now calls into question the preliminary biblical tenet with respect to (pro)creation – God's position as the one and only Creator (46).

To Pardes, "the first feminist reader of the creation story is none other than Eve herself" (54).

This labeling of her son Cain is not the last time Eve speaks, however, and her final words are unfortunately not a repeated glorification of her powers. She gives birth again after Cain murders her second son, Abel, and "called his name Seth, as to say, 'God granted me other seed in place of Abel, for Cain has killed him'" (4: 25). This naming speech is "a more subdued model" (Pardes 51) than her naming of Cain, for she is no longer associating herself with His procreative powers; "[h]er words now convey respect for the boundaries between the human and divine realms" (52). Has the first woman's pride been completely destroyed? Has the tragedy of her first son's murder of her second born made her see her own creation as less miraculous? (53).

Whichever it is, Eve has not become submissive to her husband, despite God's declaration, for she still names the act of procreation as the function of her and God, whereas Adam is nowhere to be seen (Pardes 53). While God's speeches to the woman and man outline their roles as those of production and reproduction, Eve has shifted from this command. She is not reproducing, she is not following a pattern established by her male predecessors. Rather, the primordial mother is procreating, with all the powers of creation the word implies. In this sense, her naming speeches show her to be almost like a radical feminist: to disavow the miracle of bodily creation is seen as an unnecessary degradation of womanliness, whereas a celebration of woman's procreative abilities, in word or deed, is an act of love and respect.

Eve proclaims her role of creation as if resisting the forces which seek to silence women's roles in the bringing forth of sons. When the long list of the (male) descendants of Eve and Adam are described, for example, woman are completely elided from their position as mothering the children, or as living at all:

This is the book of the lineage of Adam: On the day God created the human, in the image of God He created them. Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and called their name humankind on the day they were created. And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and he begot in his likeness by his image and called his name Seth" (5:1-3).

Chapter 5 repeats the first account of creation, where woman and man are created simultaneously, and then specifically highlights Adam for his God-like method of reproduction, as if he created likenesses of his image purposefully and autonomously. Although he has praised Eve for being the mother of all living beings, and Eve aligns

herself with God's creative powers, the narrator praises Adam, and all his male descendants, not once naming a female as either a daughter, wife or mother for ten generations. Although some feminists, especially Mieke Bal and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, have highlighted Genesis 1 as evidence of the equality of male and female, this chapter shows that simultaneous creation does not mean that woman enjoys the status that man does (Pardes 56). In addition, this passage grants the role of naming of Seth to Adam, while Genesis 4 explains that Eve names her third son. Again, Adam is made to echo God, for God names humankind, and thus Adam must name his son (Pardes 57). If Eve is the first feminist, she is also the first woman to be ignored and her words erased by the men in power.

LEAVING THE GARDEN

In the story of Eve and Adam life comes from men, for God spawns all of creation, and He and the male creature father woman. The first woman subverts the male ownership of procreation, but she cannot successfully challenge a much longer-lasting effect of Eden: patriarchal structure, or, the rule of the father. The attempts of both Eve and Adam to undermine the authority of God have disastrous effects, and they are sent out of the garden as a result:

And the LORD God said, "Now that the human has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he may reach out and take as well from the tree of life and live forever." And the LORD God sent him from the garden of Eden to till the soil from which he had been taken. And He drove out the human and set up east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the flame of the whirling sword to guard the way to the tree of life (3:22-24).

Contrary to popular interpretation, Eve and Adam are not driven out of the garden solely because of their sinful transgression, they are not banished because they now possess sexual awareness. Instead, it is a combination of anger that they have acquired knowledge, and also fear of their future actions, as God jealously desires to be the only being who will live eternally. Furthermore, all of humanity is not banished from Eden, but only the "human." Milton's placement of the blame for causing humanity's fall from grace is a difficult move to justify in light of this section, as God curiously elides the

woman's role in eating, or indeed her entire existence. From this suggestive omission of the woman's past, present and future, it is clear who matters to patriarchy, who falls under the exclusive term of "the human" and who remains outside of that distinction. Already, the woman's body occupies the hinterland between human and inhuman. She does not fall under the category "human," and it is completely possible to forget to mention her fate at all.

Presumably, since Adam appears alongside her in the next chapter, she too has left Eden. The departure of man and woman from the garden is a crucial moment in Christian theology, for humanity is driven out of the place with fertile rivers and lush garden bounty, as a result of their "sin." They are no longer in the cradle of God's good will, but are forced to occupy barren land, left to their own devices. Regina Schwartz reads the expulsion of humanity as "a story of becoming alienated from a paradisaal land, of its fecundity made barren" (49). In response, one wonders, "why must the earth be barren if the woman and man are not there?"

Has the earth of Genesis, paradoxically, no autonomy, no ability to exist independently of human animals? Recalling that the trees in Eden are chosen on the basis of their aesthetic and nutritive qualities for the man, it is no surprise that the opening phrases of the Eve and Adam myth answer affirmatively:

On the day that the LORD God made earth and heavens, no shrub of the field being yet on the earth and no plant of the field yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not caused the rain to fall on the earth and there was no human to till the soil, and wetness would well from the earth to water all the surface of the soil, then the LORD God fashioned the human . . . (2:5-7).

No flora has been created prior to the humans, because “there was no human to till the soil.” In complete contradiction to the beliefs of indigenous cultures, as well as contemporary ecology, the earth of Genesis needs humans to flourish. Humans are not a sore upon its back, as some today argue, but the necessary precondition before other life can exist. In this light, the male earth creature is not only mother and father to woman, but to all flora and fauna as well.

Water preexists the man, however, for wetness wells from the ground, “to water the surface of the soil.” Water seems to have a special significance in Eden, for the mighty rivers connote bounty and fertile living:

Now a river runs out of Eden to water the garden and from there splits off into four streams. The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is goodly, bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli. And the name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through all the land of Cush. And the name of the third river is Tigris, the one that goes to the east of Ashur. And the fourth river is Euphrates (2:10-15).

Many readers, including myself, tend to skim over this section of the myth, for it seems like unnecessary description. Yet it is tremendously revealing, for the textual confusions it highlights and the significance of the topography of Eden. When the passage is actually read, immediately one notices that although this Edenic spot is supposedly the first place created by God, the first to be graced by a human and by plant life, there are named regions outside of this garden, with discovered natural resources of their own. But more important to this reading, the passage demonstrates the lush qualities of this piece of land, and that it is connected, via the life force of water, to other fertile regions.

Schwartz teaches that “as the myth tells it, being exiled from the land, from the community, and from God are virtually the same exile” (49). For when Eve and Adam leave Eden, they leave the garden where God strolls about, they leave the trees that were placed for the benefit of the earth creature and enter a land that the man must till and toil before he can gather a harvest, and they depart from the fertile nexus of rivers that connect them to other lush places. They are alienated from the land created for their pleasures, for their desire had challenged God’s boundaries. Also at play here is the idea that God will not have tamed non-human life for their benefit, and they must confront the wild. A garden implies neatness, order, and intention behind each plant that exists within the boundaries. But outside of this paradise, Eve and Adam must interact with “nature,” not a gardenworld. Adam must sweat to produce food, it is not hanging off the trees waiting to be eaten.

To Lucille Clifton, however, the departure of man and woman from Eden is not a tragic moment, but one where Eve takes a proactive step to lead her partner out of the site of their transgression. In “the story thus far,” Clifton de-emphasizes their leaving as a banishment, and celebrates the new opportunities it represents for the woman:

so they went out
 clay and morning star
 following the bright back
 of the woman

as she walked past
 the cherubim
 turning their fiery swords
 past the winged gate

into the unborn world
 chaos fell away
 before her like a cloud
 and everywhere seemed light

seemed glorious
 seemed very eden (84)

To Eve, the world is Eden, as she rejoices in her possibility to create in “the unborn world.” While Eve is forgotten in Genesis, in Clifton’s re-vision, it is Adam who follows her meekly as she illuminates the territory she enters. While Adam may have had possession of Eden, she has authority in her new world, and it is not a barren and dry one. Instead, lightness and gloriousness unfold before her, and if she is exiled from the community and from God, that is her strength: for God served the interests of the man, and their departure signals a new chapter for woman.

“HETEROCETERA” AND THE INSTITUTIONALIZED NORMS OF EVE AND ADAM

The rule of the Divine Father is not forgiving, it is not fluid and accommodating. God established strict boundaries between man and woman, human and animal, and these were challenged by all three beings. The differentiation between humans and animals was disregarded, and snake and woman discussed together how to defy the instructions of God. They have been cast out of Eden as a result; they are no longer the chosen ones. It has long been a central tenet of feminisms that patriarchy operates on a system of binaries that sharply divide, for example, self from other, man from woman, mind from body, nature from culture, and human from animal. The divisions which God erects in Eden, and the narrators uphold, are based on categorization of life on the basis of their bodies. Genesis explains these divisions amongst creation as it upholds the unified divine, who is singular and indivisible. When humanity crossed the gap these binaries create, they infuriated God, for He intended creation to suffer the rifts of such binaries, that tear apart woman and man, human and animal. Woman was created for man, animal was created for man. This assigns animals and women a position of inferiority, yet they rebelled against their caste. They did not challenge Adam, the intermediary, but went straight for the source of their degradation.

In a binary, one term has dominance over the other. This hierarchy of order underlies much of Western culture, and elements become associated by virtue of their supremacy, such as man, culture, the mind, and the human. Elizabeth Grosz usefully points out that binaries also group together those on the inferior plane and that their status as not part of the dominant sphere deprives them of any autonomy:

The problem of dichotomous thought is not the dominance of the pair (some sort of inherent problem with the number two); rather, it is the *one* which makes it problematic, the fact that the one can allow itself no independent, autonomous other. All otherness is cast in the mold of sameness, with the primary term acting as the only autonomous or pseudo-autonomous term. The one allows no twos, threes, fours. It cannot tolerate any *other*. The one, in order to be a one, must draw a barrier or boundary around itself (211 n. 1).

This boundary is not concrete, it shifts from time to time. What guarantees its preeminence is not which terms come to reside in the *one*, but that it rejects other groups. By way of example. Lynda Birke notes that “at various points, different classes of people have shifted from inferior status to claim inclusion in humankind –non Europeans of women, for example – but none of this shifts the underlying assumption; all it does is to widen the membership of the dominating group” (109).

In the Eve and Adam story, the *one* is God Himself, for He occupies the position of dominance, and that which is associated with him, namely Adam, has prominence on earth. The other is the material, the woman, and the snake. All that is not associated with Him is degraded and cast aside. Look at the banishment of humanity from the garden of Eden: it is only Adam whom the narrator deems worthy enough to mention. What about Eve? Since she appears in the next chapter, we assume she went along too, but what

about the snake? She is nowhere to be found in the narrative. In essence, the other is all that is not God or Godlike, leaving man and God free to coalesce, while the rest of creation carries on in subordination. The degraded might resist, such as Eve does on several occasions, but the dominating have secured for themselves the privilege to either punish or ignore defiance.

Another way of phrasing the divisions of binary thought is in terms of the subject and the abject. Butler explains that “[t]he abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject” (3). In other words, the “inferior” are needed to establish the supremacy of the “one.” By woman and animal being elided from being subjects in chapter 4, and 5 especially, they are reinforcing the dominance of men. Another example is that of the garden versus the wilderness, for the ability of God to send the first humans out of Eden into a world not waiting to cater to their every desire makes the original garden that much more luscious, and the wilderness is necessary to literally mark off the boundaries between the fertile and the infertile. Furthermore, the Book of Genesis is a tale of the chosen and unchosen as much as anything, starting with the first children, Cain and Abel, and the existence of ungrateful and disobedient people solidifies the chosen as that much more blessed.

The no man's land territory of the abject does not only constitute human subjects, but it also is assigned to the non-human. In Butler's theories, the concept of human itself is dependent on the concurrent regulation of the non-human:

It is not enough to claim that human subject are constructed, for the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less "human," the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the 'human' as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation" (8).

In Genesis, the non-human certainly hovers at the borders that divide it from the "chosen," as it is the snake who first plants the idea of eating and conveys the information of God's lie to the humans. Yet it is also the woman who resides in this less human category, for her male companion is referred to as the "human," such as in the passages describing his exit from Eden, while she is not mentioned at all. In concurrence with the methods of dualistic thinking, which requires a positive and a negative to highlight one another, Genesis not only produces human subjects, it outlines the necessity of the abject as well.

One function of the borders between human and non-human is to segregate humans from other animals, "to say that we as humans are not like animals; it is also to project to them an alter ego, to see them as alien. It is also to see them as part of the nature that humans must transcend" (Birke 12). In the Judeo-Christian creation myth, this process takes as its founding cue the difference of human bodies and the bodies of other animals, for embodiment represents the only differences between them. While women are seen as "somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men"

(Grosz 14), they still occupy the territory of human. Animals, however, are seen as nature itself. The wild is what Adam and Eve face as their exile, and it is also what spurns them on to eat of the tree. To be wild in this sense, then, is to be exiled from God, and this is the status that is forced to some degree upon women, and in full strength at non-human animals.

Perhaps those who most fully embody the position of the abject are those who are seen as remaining outside of the story altogether. One of the effects of a singular creation story, which produces two humans and one vocal animal, is to circumscribe who matters to God. To imagine that all of humanity stemmed from one couple is to disallow difference, for the “one” does not allow for the existence of the other. If a dualistic structure disallows for equality in difference, how do we read the other? In the cultural history of Genesis, those marginalized humans perceived to not have fallen inside the identities of the first man and woman must have alternative stories, authored by the dominant culture, that explain their existence.

This tradition has become most explicit in the efforts of racist Church doctrines to cast out all people of color from Eden, operating on the assumption that Adam and Eve simply had to be white. Butler remarks that “sex is not the only such norm by which bodies become materialized, and it is unclear whether ‘sex’ can operate as a norm apart from other normative requirements on bodies” (243), and issues of racial identity, or the color of one’s body, are especially prominent. One Christian tradition that “explains” the existence of black people defends the idea that the first black man was Cain, a result of

God's curse upon him (Copher 148-149). In contemporary Christianity, the Church of Latter Day Saints (the Mormon Church) has made this belief a part of its basic doctrine (149). Another tradition argues that blacks do not descend from Adam, but are part of a race created before Adam. Cain's wife came from this group of people, which retains the idea that Cain is the father of the black race (149). This explanation also takes care of a frequently pointed out textual incongruity: if Cain and Abel are the first and only children, where do their wives come from? Ideas that black people are altogether non-human also flourished, for "during the fifth and sixteenth centuries, this view took on accretions and ramifications that regard the 'Negro' as the beast of the field in Genesis 3:1ff, and even the tempter of Eve in the Garden of Eden" (150).

The process of "othering" that is a crucial function of binaries has allowed the white supremacists to cast out people of color, and blacks in particular, from being part of the same humanity as whites. The story of Genesis purports to describe the creation of all of humanity, not of particular types of bodies, yet this idea is too disturbing for those who would prefer to "other" people of color outside the boundaries of human. That all of humanity could have stemmed from just two people is simply not possible, as racists do not want to identify themselves with the targets of their hatred. To use the stories of Genesis as justification for this process of clamping the confines of the abject upon entire races of people is not only historical violence, but maintains a place in the Scripture of the world's largest growing Christian Church: the Mormons. Once I asked

two LDS missionaries how they could justify holding such a racist belief, but they only asked me with wonder, “But how do you explain why different races exist?”

A detrimental use of the abject as outlined in the story of Eve and Adam in contemporary popular culture is by homophobic individuals who wish to convince others that since Eve and Adam were (presumably) heterosexual, so must be everyone else. This can take on rather immature forms, such as the saying that flourished in my high school, “It’s Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” It is difficult to imagine that this statement has any persuasive powers, but it is repeated all the same, for Adam and Eve, by virtue of being the first humans, are the *one* that determines how God intends for humanity to interact. If God had advocated or even tolerated homosexuality, the argument goes, He would not have created a male and female couple. Sometimes this train of thought takes on more educated forms. Is there a hint of this philosophy in Mieke Bal’s summation of the suitability of man and woman for each other, as opposed to the man and the animals, “because it is the tension between the *same* and the *different* that creates sexuality” (322)? The heterosexual paradigm has tremendous power, and the Adam and Eve story is often seen as complicit with this agenda.

LOOKING TOWARD THE HINTERLANDS

While typically read as a misogynist story, other readings of the Eve and Adam story simultaneously exist, as indeed, they have for the last 800 or so years. An interpretation guided by the gender theory of Judith Butler uncovers a story that chronicles the inscription of material bodies by larger systems of cultural meaning. The body is not inert matter, nor it is not a biological given, but a complex system of materialized ideology. A remarkable aspect of this creation myth in Genesis is how dutifully the narrative elaborates on these points of 1990s gender studies, how one can witness God's fashioning of three beings out of charged material that already differentiates them as male, female or animal.

When the woman decides to eat from the tree, she is responding to the lure of self-awareness, and of self-identity, for she has taken no independent action in her new world. Born into a garden of plants and animals placed by God for the man's pleasure, and labeled according to the man's system of language, woman has had little chance to exert herself, a necessary process of identity formation. When the man first speaks, he assigns a bodily classification upon the animals; the first time his speech is recorded in the text, he applies a category to his body and to the woman's. This speech represents his emergence as a speaking being and a sexed body, a process that Butler asserts is the way

that one's sex and one's subjectivity are simultaneously produced. Woman's emergence as a self-recognized being is catalyzed by the bodily awareness that results from eating the apple of the forbidden tree. God's subsequent speeches to the animal, woman and man are more of an explanation of the consequences of their bodies rather than a new punishment crafted solely because of their transgression.

Historical feminists presented readings of the text that declared the temporal simultaneity of the man and woman, and by extension, their equality. Others such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Judith Sargeant Murray affirmed the goodness of God, and reassured that He would not produce an inferior being. Under God, they announce, woman must be on par with man. These women's interpretations and appropriations of the text to suit their own needs is characteristic of the process of reading, and especially of interpretation of the Bible. Thomas Hoyt Jr. maintains that different groups of people read the Bible for varying reasons and argues that the context of the reader of the Bible is a crucial consideration to make when trying to understand how the writing itself functions:

[b]y telling a story, one could create or destroy a world view of one culture and establish one more attuned to the monotheism of the ancient Israelites. This is all well and good, and important for interpretation; but it is also important to understand how stories function within the cultures of those who read the Bible today (25).

The Bible is not a static artifact, a historical document best viewed behind a glass in the archive room, but a living text consistently undergoing new interpretations. Feminists have employed the Adam and Eve story to speak for the worth of the fictional woman,

and by extension for existing women, and misogynists have seen it as evidence of woman's inherently sinful character. Yet with careful attention, the creation myth could be seen differently in contemporary culture. As Hoyt outlines, how a story is appropriated might be completely opposite of its original intention, but its use in describing a new world view cements the text as useful despite its origins.

For the purpose of contemporary struggles, the tale of Eve and Adam could facilitate a wider cultural understanding of western society's concepts of gender and the body. Remarkably, the story details the production of the gendered body in ways that challenge the ideas even of many contemporary feminists, demonstrating that the differentiating force of gender is not applied to a stagnant sex, but that the body is itself produced by social constructs. The steps that Genesis takes to outline the institutionalization of the material body by a strategic and subtle system of power presents an opportunity for the reader to resist this cultural practice. In regards to the dangers of propagating false conceptions of the body because of a complete lack of reflection and investigation into the socially-defined realm of the biological, Butler poses the question: "[a]nd how is it that treating the materiality of sex as a given presupposes and consolidates the normative conditions of its own emergence?" (10). For if it were a widely held belief that power's materializing effects shaped the differentiation between male, female and animal bodies, and that woman's status as inferior was understood as crucial motivation in her action to eat from the tree, perhaps there might be an

accompanying shift away from societal glorification of Eve's sin and shame and a movement toward an understanding of the interconnectedness of gender and biology.

To maintain that literature directly affects the society which it exists within is a bold statement, but one I think worth standing by. As a creation story, Adam and Eve's tale carries particular weight, and has specific ramifications on the culture that holds it canonical. Women in England were forbidden anesthesia during childbirth until the late nineteenth century, for example, on the grounds that women in Genesis were condemned to a painful birth and so their discomfort or suffering should in no way be alleviated (Lawton). Embracing a reading of the story which presupposes the equality of man and woman, and seeks to understand how embodied difference is embedded in the narrative as an effect of power might not sway any beliefs, but at the very least it could begin to dislodge interpretations that are harmful to women.

Beyond the production of the gendered body in the story, the narrative outlines the differentiation between creation as a fundamentally necessary aspect of existence. The placement of man, woman and animal in divergent realms is not the after-effect of the apple, but a physical reality grounded in the dirt and flesh that comprise their being. The divisions erected between the three earthly characters operate along the patterns of binary thought, which creates oppositions between man and woman, nature and culture, and human and animal. Binaries have often been seen by feminism and other theoretical schools as detrimental to an inclusive way of thinking, as it relegates one side the position of subject, and the opposite the outcast role of other. The Eve and Adam story discusses

these dualities as based on differences amongst bodies, a process which could be useful for creating awareness about the possibility for drastic social change when traditional notions of the body are stirred and shaken. Elizabeth Grosz maintains that binary thought:

can be more readily problematized by regarding the body as the threshold or borderline concept that hovers perilously and undecidably at the pivotal point of binary pairs. The body is neither – while also being both – the private or the public, self or other, natural or cultural, physical or social . . . This indeterminable position enables it to be used as a particularly powerful strategic term to upset the framework by which these binary pairs are considered (23).

If considered critically then, the body is a promising locus for social change. When the body is seen as both natural and cultural, for example, we can get past restrictive notions that have rendered women's bodies, which bleed monthly, store fat deposits for childbirth and lactate, as inferior because of their closeness to "nature" and other animals. All bodies are part of nature, as all bodies are socially regulated along gender and race lines, to name just two. An understanding of the position of bodies as disrupting binary systems could begin to challenge notions of the *one* and the abject that is defined as outside of the privileged norm.

Genesis, then, has been revalidated in this analysis of the role of the body in the story of Eve, Adam and the snake. Far from being tossed out as an incurably misogynist myth, Genesis 2:5- 4 has been reaffirmed for its insightful approach to the production of material bodies. This reading must be asserted alongside other readings which currently dominate most people's understanding of the story, and is bent toward catalyzing

accompanying cultural shifts. In speaking of changing the discourse of sexuality that will counteract the history of repression, Foucault cheers on the opening for liberatory action:

the opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervor of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights (86).

A similar jubilant attitude may be taken toward a project of shifting conceptions of the “garden of earthly delights” itself to embrace female bodies, animal bodies, and male bodies as cultural and social agents. Challenging hundreds of years of biblical interpretation that presents knowledge and sexuality as the products of sin, and shame and punishment as the immediate result, a reading informed by current gender theory embraces a new world view.

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