

**Out of this World: Surrealist Practice and  
Posthumanist Ethics in the Writing and Visual  
Arts of Elizabeth Bishop, Leonora Carrington and  
Dorothea Tanning**

Karen Eckersley

N0892378

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**Abstract**

This thesis argues that the surrealist aesthetics of Elizabeth Bishop, Leonora Carrington and Dorothea Tanning anticipate a posthumanist approach in a way that both revises women's relationship with Surrealism and contributes to contemporary feminist and ecological debates. I demonstrate how the surrealist sensibilities exhibited in their prose, poetry and visual art embody Rosi Braidotti's argument that feminism does not share humanist principles. I show how the three subjects deviate from the androcentricism that characterises a humanist positioning in work that recurrently exhibits posthuman themes of entanglement, becoming and metamorphoses. Chapter One explores the human-animal hybrid motif in Bishop's and Carrington's written and visual oeuvre explaining that it bodies forth both our interconnection to the non-human as well as our own inherent animality. Chapter Two develops this investigation of becoming-animal, examining what I describe as becoming-matter themes in the work of Bishop and Tanning. I demonstrate how the boundaryless visions that both evoke speak to new materialist thinking that horizontalises relations between human and non-human worlds. Chapter Three is underpinned by Braidotti's argument that Humanism is at its core Eurocentric examining how Bishop's and Carrington's Latin American work speaks to a more posthuman trajectory in its alignment with the philosophies of indigenous cultures. Chapter Four is driven by Donna Haraway's insistence that stories should no longer be underpinned by a belief in human exceptionalism. To this end I examine how Carrington and Tanning radically retell and defamiliarise traditional tales that are rooted in Western imagination and Christian narratives. Chapter Five argues that the liminal spaces exhibited in the work of all three practitioners eschew the borderlines of Humanism to interrogate instead oneiric and open-ended realms, thus resonating with Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia.

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## Publications

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'Fretful Seascapes: Confronting Dark Ecologies in Elizabeth Bishop's Poems of the Shore', *Gothic Nature: Haunted Shores*, Issue 3 (2022), 193-216.

*Forthcoming Winter 2022/Spring 2023:*

'Posthuman Destinations: Indigenous Cultures in Leonora Carrington's Mexican Oeuvre', *Romance Studies*.

'Encountering Female Human Animal Becomings in Leonora Carrington's Surrealist Hybrid Tales', *Beastly Modernisms: The Figure of the Animal in Modernist Literature and Culture*, edited by Alex Goody and Saskia McCracken and published by Edinburgh University Press.

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## Introduction: Surrealism's Commitment to 'the complete transformation of human values'

Whitney Chadwick's postulation that Surrealism's 'collective adventure' was 'committed to nothing less than the complete transformation of human values' is a provocative cue to begin an investigation into the ways in which women artists, who had connections to this movement, present a challenge to such values.<sup>1</sup> This thesis argues that Surrealism's commitment to achieve such a paradigm shift is realised most convincingly in the work of Elizabeth Bishop, Leonora Carrington and Dorothea Tanning which anticipates Rosi Braidotti's argument that 'feminism is *not* a humanism.'<sup>2</sup> I show how these three figures deviate from androcentric Humanism in their oeuvre which recurrently exhibits posthuman themes of entanglement, becoming and metamorphoses. In their art and literature women surrealists explode these patriarchal constructs in their alliance with non-human species, matter and space. Examining the intersection between posthuman thinking and women's Surrealism this thesis makes an original contribution to contemporary feminist and ecological debates about our place upon the planet. Bishop's, Carrington's and Tanning's recurrent communion with posthuman worlds and principles intimates an emphatic commitment to reconfigure Humanism – and thus 'human values' - in work that predominantly speaks to our implication within, and our inter-connection with, non-human terrains.

The urgent concerns of the environmental crisis that we currently face are presciently forecast by Leonora Carrington in her ecofeminist essay 'What is a Woman?' which she wrote whilst a member of Mexico's Women's Movement. First published in

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<sup>1</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2021), p.19.

<sup>2</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 'Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism', in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. by Richard Grusin (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp.21-48 (p.21).

1970, Carrington correlates an apocalyptic prediction regarding the demise of the planet with the actions of patriarchs whom she satirically labels as 'Our Masters'. The essay functions as both a critique of androcentric power, but more crucially voices a call to women to take action against it before the earth arrives at a point of irreversible collapse:

The idea that "Our Masters" are Right and must be loved, honored and obeyed is, I think, one of the most destructive lies that have been instilled into the female psyche. It has become most horribly obvious what these Masters have done to our planet and her organic life. If women remain passive I think there is very little hope for the survival of life on this Earth.<sup>3</sup>

The connections that Carrington makes here between the oppression of women and of the earth resonate strongly with the critiques of androcentricism articulated in the feminist posthumanist work of Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway. Her essay posits that preventing such a catastrophe demands female action in order to mitigate and overcome the ecological damage that androcentric tyranny wreaks upon the world and its inhabitants.

Carrington's treatise resonates with many of the issues highlighted at the recent COP26 meeting of the world's leaders, organised in an attempt to avert a climatic and environmental disaster.<sup>4</sup> Carrington's words uncannily anticipate a plea made by Angelica

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<sup>3</sup> Leonora Carrington, 'What is a Woman?' (1970), in *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp.372-375 (p.375). Whilst Carrington was no doubt channelling fears of an escalation of the cold war and so nuclear catastrophe at that time, the themes of abuse of power and threat of tyranny against the planet and its species speaks to the concerns that also ignite the climate debates of today.

<sup>4</sup> An analyses by Robert H.Cowie, Philippe Bouchet and Benoit Fontaine, published as an article in journal *Biological Reviews*, confirms that the sixth mass extinction caused by humans is currently underway. His report explains that since 1500 the Earth may have lost up to one tenth of its two million known species. Full report is open access: [The Sixth Mass Extinction: fact, fiction or speculation? - Cowie - 2022 - Biological Reviews - Wiley Online Library](#) [accessed 5/2/2021].

Ponce, executive director of the Plurinational Authority for Mother Earth in Bolivia. She argued:

The world as designed by men has destroyed many things. The world should begin thinking like women. If it was designed by a woman, it would end violence against women and children. We want to be in the corridors of power and take part in decisions at international level to end this struggle of climate justice [...] As indigenous women, we live day-by-day the cruel reality of climate change in our land.<sup>5</sup>

Ponce's words of warning here share parallels with Carrington's feminist rhetoric over five decades earlier which both critiques the patriarchal violence that induces environmental suffering but also intimates an ambition for women to play a greater role in mitigating androcentric impact. Moreover, Ponce's words resonate with the posthuman principles we witness in the women surrealists' work discussed in this thesis, where female figures join forces with non-human species in tales and visions that actively challenge humanist doctrine. Her call to action is also a conspicuous rejection of the female passivity so prized by the male surrealists, recurrently symbolised by their *femme-enfant* visions, and demonstrated by their accompanying belief that women were a conduit to their own unconscious experience.<sup>6</sup> Parallels can also be drawn between Carrington's essay 'What is a Woman?' and the work of another feminist posthumanist thinker, Donna Haraway, who in

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<sup>5</sup> Damian Carrington ed., "'World designed by men has destroyed many things", Cop26 warned', *The Guardian* (Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021) ['World designed by men has destroyed many things,' Cop26 warned | Cop26 | The Guardian](#) [accessed 20/11/2021].

<sup>6</sup> In Chapter Five I show how the women surrealists' rewrite the way the male surrealists equate the unconscious with passivity and, in turn, the feminine. Carrington's and Tanning's work challenges their construction of a passive and feminine realm as the conduit to their own unconscious. In their oeuvre the workings of the unconscious and subconscious are exhibited as active and agentic spaces that have the capacity to unleash a feminist politics, enabling female identity.

*Staying with the Trouble* (2016), states that ‘Storying cannot any longer be put into the box of human exceptionalism.’<sup>7</sup> Indeed this thesis will examine the ways in which Bishop, Carrington and Tanning forge instead what Haraway might describe as ‘geostories’, thereby abandoning the tales told by ‘Species Man’.<sup>8</sup> Their ‘becoming’ narratives presciently align with Haraway’s call for ecologically balanced stories and speak to the tentacular living that more accurately depicts the entangled posthuman world that we live in rather than a hierarchical and individualist one where man arbitrarily positions himself upon a speciesist throne.

There is growing recognition of the role Surrealism has to play in engendering a greater ecological awareness as the world plunges into environmental precarity. Donna Roberts notes that whilst key developments in Surrealism occur before the dawn of an ecological consciousness in the twentieth century, she argues that ‘the broadly political ideals of surrealism represent a critical vigilance that can be related to much more recent philosophical and political formations of ecological thought.’<sup>9</sup>

Kristoffer Noheden further argues that since the 1920s nature has been a ‘central concern of Surrealism’. He explains that surrealists have ‘countered Cartesian hyperseparation with a combination of naturalistic knowledge, occult nature philosophy, poetry and creative speculation about the secret workings of nature’.<sup>10</sup> He cites André Breton’s philosophising in particular suggesting that he envisaged surrealist thinking and

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<sup>7</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), p.39.

<sup>8</sup> Haraway coins ‘geostories’ as a counter to the male master narratives that place man at the centre of all, *Staying with the Trouble*, p.49. She argues that ‘geostories’ forge a more ecologically balanced picture that places the human within the milieu of the non-human.

<sup>9</sup> Donna Roberts, ‘The Ecological Imperative’ in *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, ed. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p.217. Roberts further explains ‘surrealism’s key concerns can be seen as a reconsideration of the very question of nature developed by the Enlightenment: further analysing humankind’s place within, or distinction from, the natural world and how both liberty and necessity have a basis in nature’, p.219. The essay provides an illuminating overview of Surrealism’s relationship with the natural world although its focus concentrates predominantly on examples by male practitioners.

<sup>10</sup> Kristoffer Noheden, ‘Toward a Total Animism: Surrealism and Nature’, *The Routledge Companion to Surrealism*, ed. Kirsten Strom (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2023), p.60.

practice as imagining a world beyond human exceptionalism. Indeed, Breton equated the horrors of World War II with, as Noheden explains it, an ‘excessive belief in rationalism’ – a rationalism which had ‘underpinned the technological destruction’ witnessed during the conflict.<sup>11</sup> Despairing at the state of the world during and following the war Breton surmises that the challenge lies in trying ‘to convince man that he is not necessarily *king* of creation that he prides himself on being.’<sup>12</sup> Breton demonstrates how the surrealist movement was seeking other ways of relating to the world. Opposing human exceptionalism and its dualisms was key to such a project. Siding with nature and exploring it was a means to navigate beyond the way that ‘Man prides himself on being the chosen one of creation’, as Breton details in his 1944 essay *Arcanum 17*.<sup>13</sup> Restoring the human as nature’s kin involved emphasising the unconscious and the imagination. As Noheden further explains, to explore the unconscious was for the surrealists an ‘investigation of humanity’s hidden intimacy with nature, in which corporeal and mental intersect’.<sup>14</sup> Such intersections speak to the entanglements I investigate in the women surrealist subjects’ work across this thesis. They recall what Jacqueline Chénieux-Grendon terms as a sort of ‘integration’ at play in Surrealism which refuses cultural divisions.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, a key so-called ‘integration’ I consider is the human-animal cross-over that we witness in Carrington’s and Bishop’s oeuvre.

Noheden looks to Carrington as well in his environmentally focused study of her novel, *The Hearing Trumpet*, which I also discuss in Chapter Four. Looking to the work of Timothy Morton, Noheden explains that in the novel, Carrington ‘evades privileging human

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<sup>11</sup> Noheden, ‘Toward a Total Animism’, p.56.

<sup>12</sup> André Breton, *Prolegomena To A Third Surrealist Manifesto Or Not* [1942], *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p.291

<sup>13</sup> André Breton, *Arcanum 17: With Apertures Grafted to the End*, translated by Zack Rogow, (Green Integer, 2004), p.55.

<sup>14</sup> Noheden, ‘Toward a Total Animism’, p.56.

<sup>15</sup> Jacqueline Chénieux-Grendon, *Surrealism*, translated by Vivian Folkenflik (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1990), p.4.

consciousness in favour of recognizing that subjectivity extends far beyond humanist conceptions of self-identity.<sup>16</sup> Key to redefining Cartesian concepts of Humanism is to reframe human experience as one that is shared rather than individualised. Noheden explains Carrington's approach here in a way that aligns with my own study:

The human-animal co-existence she [Carrington] presents is at once an imaginary affair, and a suprarational attempt at creating a new ecological thought, an anarchist flash of gnostic light that illuminates possibilities conveniently repressed by a patriarchal civilization predicated upon the doctrine of human exceptionalism.<sup>17</sup>

Themes of 'co-existence' as Noheden defines them resonate with the arguments I make about the way in which the women surrealists exhibit visions of interconnection and entanglement. Their eschewal of human exceptionalism is the underlying principle of their work – a principle which Noheden notes in *The Hearing Trumpet* as a disruptor to 'patriarchal, Christian domination over women and animals'.<sup>18</sup> Whilst Noheden acknowledges André Breton's own ambitions to redefine a Humanism underpinned by Cartesian foundations, like him I turn to the work of the women surrealists to most convincingly challenge the patriarchal trajectory of humanists' androcentric belief system. The animal turn in modernism resonates with the concerns of the burgeoning field of the environmental humanities and, as I have signposted, a growing interest in the non-human

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<sup>16</sup> Kristoffer Noheden, 'The Grail and the Bees: Leonora Carrington's Quest for Human-Animal Coexistence' in *Beyond Given Knowledge: Investigation, Quest and Exploration in Modernism and the Avant-Gardes*, ed. Harri Veivo, Jean-Pierre Montier, Françoise Nicol, David Ayres, Benedikt Hjartarson and Sascha Bru (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), p.250.

<sup>17</sup> Noheden, 'The Grail and the Bees', p.252.

<sup>18</sup> Noheden, 'The Grail and the Bees', p.242.

in surrealist work. Effie Rentzou has considered the impact of surrealist periodical *Minotaure* and its presentation of human-animal relationships, and in particular the hybrid:

[The title] referred directly to the Minoan mythological cycle, showing a generalized fascination with the half-man, half-bull monster, as fascination materialized on the magazine's covers. Each one of these covers was an interpretation of the Minotaur by a prominent artist<sup>19</sup>

Rentzou explains how the magazine sought to reverse the dualisms established by Greek Cartesian culture explaining that by 'designating the Minotaur as a symbol of universality, a different Greece is evoked, an imaginary space in which the human and the non-human, man and animal, meet and release unpredictable and uncontrollable energies.'<sup>20</sup>

Importantly, Rentzou notes that the minotaur does not function as mere symbolism in the magazine but rather that the animals in articles within the *Minotaure* defy 'anthropomorphism, while approaching the animal not as the "other" or opposite of human, but as a continuation of the human.'<sup>21</sup>

I pick up the themes introduced here by Rentzou but whilst she focuses more upon the work of the male practitioners I turn to focus exclusively on the women writers and painters with connections to the surrealist movement. I show how there is a profound ecological feminism at work in the oeuvre of these women surrealist practitioners that brings surrealism further into a dynamic conversation with contemporary environmental readings of modernist work. As much as Breton's rally against human exceptionalism speaks to the environmental philosophy intimated by Bishop, Carrington and Tanning, their

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<sup>19</sup> Effie Rentzou, 'The Minotaur's Revolution: On Animals and Politics', *L'Esprit Createur*, 51.4 (2011), 58-72 (p.59).

<sup>20</sup> Rentzou, 'The Minotaur's Revolution', p.61.

<sup>21</sup> Rentzou, 'The Minotaur's Revolution', p.61.

lived experience as women and investment in materially inflected visions translates these ambitions beyond symbolism and rhetoric to demonstrate most viscerally that the non-human world is our undeniable kin.

Throughout this thesis, examples from the work of all three writers and artists will show that there is indeed a correlation between their surrealist praxis and feminist posthuman philosophies. To this end I demonstrate the extent to which women's Surrealism is a viable mode for critiquing androcentrism and, crucially, the ways in which it bodies forth a feminist cartography that has the potential to circumnavigate it. More specifically Bishop's, Carrington's and Tanning's portrayal of non-human worlds and our intrinsic entanglement within them shows how such a focus is a potentially fruitful mechanism for collapsing divisive humanist dualisms that threaten the planet. Finally, I show throughout this thesis how the posthuman politics recurrently exhibited in their work both rewrites women's place in the surrealist canon but also, most importantly, the way in which their work speaks to and resonates with our environmental crisis today. I posit that not only does their work anticipate the climate catastrophe that we have created as a species but most importantly, offers human-non-human tales of entanglement that have the capacity to signpost us towards a more balanced, ecological milieu instead. In their surreal spaces we witness a world where life forms are in a perpetual process of exchange, and interchange, rather than discrete parts; an interactive dynamic that Haraway highlights: 'The world is a knot in motion[ ...] There are no pre-constituted subjects and objects, and no single sources, unitary actors, or final ends.'<sup>22</sup> This interconnected model reimagines humanity's place on earth in the context of an anthropogenically induced environmental crisis, demonstrating the way in which their surrealist oeuvre has the potential to offer valuable contributions to contemporary ecological debates.

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<sup>22</sup> Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Others* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), p.6.

### **Carrington, Bishop and Tanning and their Surrealist Connections**

Surrealism was a movement interested in integrating the divisions and exclusions that had allowed humans to lay claim to superiority, as Chénieux-Grendon describes. She notes that it was catalysed by the imperative to ‘revolt’ arguing that after ‘the rupture and bloodshed of World War One, [...] the movement launched a wave of global contestation’ driven by an impulse to question humanity and hold it to account.<sup>23</sup> In this way it was a twin enterprise seeking to both critique, whilst thirsting for a new aesthetic and politics for humanity in the wake of such worldwide annihilation:

if Surrealism is a machinery for integration, it is also, in the same impulse [...] a machinery for negating. Surrealism negates everything implied by the divisions and prohibitions on which the majority culture structure is founded: negating ready-made “orders”, denying the pertinence of codes [...] Surrealists therefore suspect everything that organizes the sense of things, the direction of things, in speech and in time, especially any kind of taxonomy<sup>24</sup>

Eschewing taxonomy, as Chénieux-Grendon notes was then part of a movement of revolt and rebellion. Noheden suggests that the Surrealist attraction to nature more broadly thus ‘encompasses revolt against exploitation’ as well as an attentiveness to ‘the appearance and behaviours of animals, plants, and minerals including their interaction.’<sup>25</sup> Bringing together Chénieux-Grendon’s analysis of a surrealist momentum of revolt and integration and Noheden’s argument that a turn to nature was both a political statement and practical strategy is a fruitful introduction to my focus upon the women subjects explored in this

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<sup>23</sup> Chénieux-Grendon, *Surrealism*, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Chénieux-Grendon, *Surrealism*, p.5.

<sup>25</sup> Noheden, ‘Toward a Total Animism’, p.54.

thesis. Their project was very much one that circumnavigated the dictates of humanist taxonomy; I suggest that their position as women surrealist practitioners enables them to intimate a more robust and convincing critique of a Humanism that has patriarchal values at its core, as Braidotti highlights. Indeed, such androcentric cultural values have meant that their work has been marginalised in the past but as academic fields of enquiry examining posthuman feminist thinking gain traction, it is a timely moment to examine the impact that their non-human visions effect. Noheden's scholarship on surrealist ecologies draws the lines of connection between Surrealism's opposition to Cartesianism in a way that resonates with my investigations.<sup>26</sup> However, my study is one exclusively focused on the women subjects arguing that their marginalisation aligns them with the non-human world in a way that makes their post-anthropocentric art and writing most convincing. I acknowledge that nature was also a preoccupation of their male contemporaries, but I highlight their kindred focus upon the non-human better draws attention to humans' intrinsic entanglement with the natural world – an entanglement that is key to the survival of all species as we confront the sixth extinction event.

After being viewed through the vortex of their male contemporaries or being neglected altogether Women's Surrealism is now a burgeoning field of academic enquiry as I have stated. Art critic Whitney Chadwick has played a vital role in bringing women's Surrealism into focus. Her fresh insight into their oeuvre in *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985) was a catalyst for further investigations that still has resonance today and its recently revised and updated edition speaks to the growing interest in this field of study. Chadwick both puts the women surrealists on the map but also provides a valuable cartography of their art that explains their relationship with the movement, their misrepresentation by their male peers and, most significantly, how they forged a surrealist

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<sup>26</sup> Noheden discusses Surrealism's opposition to Cartesian thinking in 'Toward a Total Animism', p.56.

aesthetic of their own. They were depicted in some male surrealist art circles as either *femme-enfant* or *femme-sorciere*.<sup>27</sup> Chadwick highlights how the women surrealists challenged these reductive categories by rewriting them. Her study underlines the women artists' problematic relationship with the male surrealist circle which was dominated by its leader André Breton. She explains the misrepresentations that they had to endure, and how their own aesthetic was only fully enabled once they stepped outside of this pervasive, and often misogynistic circle:

Almost without exception, women artists viewed themselves as having functioned independently of Breton's inner circle and the shaping of Surrealist doctrine. Many of them were younger than their male colleagues; most of them were just embarking on their lives as artists when they first encountered Surrealism and would do their mature work after leaving the group. Their involvement was defined by personal relationships, networks of friends and lovers, not by active participation in an inner circle dominated by Breton's presence.<sup>28</sup>

As Chadwick intimates here, the women artists did not view themselves as conduits to facilitate their male contemporaries' work but rather considered themselves as agents of their own creative destinies. Carrington explained that she 'didn't have time to be anyone's muse' and, as critics have noted, her work demonstrated a confident power of its own in

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<sup>27</sup> According to André Breton the *femme-enfant* denoted a woman-child who through their own naivete connected with their own unconscious and could therefore act as a guide for man who could not access it by himself. To Breton, Carrington embodied this figure, but she refuted this label: 'I never considered myself a femme enfant like André Breton wanted to see women. Nor did I want to be understood by this', Jane Perlez, 'Woman in the News: Leonora Carrington; Surrealism Lives', *The New York Post*, Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December 1975.

<sup>28</sup> Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.16-17.

Mexico once separated from fellow surrealist, and lover, Max Ernst.<sup>29</sup> The male surrealists were aware of the work of their female counterparts and even encouraged their artistic contributions, but none of the women were ever officially listed as members of the original movement and neither had they signed the manifestos. Rather, they experienced a marginalisation despite of, or even because of their often close, personal relationships with the men in the group.

In her preface to *The Militant Muse: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism* (2017), Chadwick explains Roland Penrose's dismissive view of the women surrealists during an interview. Despite having had close relationships with two women surrealists, Valentine Penrose and Lee Miller, he asserts that the women 'weren't artists', adding that although 'Of course the women were important [...] but it was because they were our muses.'<sup>30</sup> Some of the women, like Leonor Fini, deliberately distanced themselves from the movement not wishing to be associated with Breton's homophobia and recurrently misogynistic depictions of women. Indeed, the concepts and principles of Surrealism often actively subordinated the image of woman in their art employing the female as a mediator of nature and the unconscious, where the *femme-enfant* was deployed as muse and object of male desire. Gwen Raaberg explains the women surrealists' predicament:

The concept of "woman" objectified by male needs was in direct conflict with the individual woman's subjective need for self-definition and free artistic expression. The women writers and artists who chose to work

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<sup>29</sup> Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.78.

<sup>30</sup> Whitney Chadwick, 'Preface', in *The Militant Muse: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2017), pp.7-15 (p.9).

within the framework provided by surrealist principles thus found their situation marked by contradictions inherent in these very principles.<sup>31</sup>

Raaberg's analysis here seeks to challenge the ways in which women's Surrealism had been historically perceived as a peripheral off-shoot of the male movement, providing valuable new insights that frequently engender a feminist politics. As Raaberg outlines, the women artists' embroilment within the movement presented them with a predicament but also, more affirmatively, gave them the liberating tools with which to forge their own aesthetics. As Chadwick explains further, whilst some male surrealists appropriated Surrealism's tools to subordinate women, the mode did, at the same time, have an emancipatory power for the female artists who sought it for its political potential to both liberate and enable them:

Surrealism publicly challenged vanguard modernism's insistence on "art for art's sake." But Surrealism also battled the social institutions – church, state, and family – that regulate the place of women within patriarchy. In offering some women their first locus for artistic and social resistance, it became the first modernist movement in which a group of women could explore female subjectivity and give form (however tentatively) to a feminine imaginary.<sup>32</sup>

Surrealism's conflict with 'social institutions' identified the revolt that its practitioners were embroiled in and in this example how it provided women with an opportunity to examine the topic of female identity from a female perspective. One of the most recent areas of

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<sup>31</sup> Gwen Raaberg, 'The Problematics of Women and Surrealism', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg (London: The MIT Press, 1995), pp.1-10 (p.2-3).

<sup>32</sup> Whitney Chadwick, 'An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors,' in *Mirror Images Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. by Whitney Chadwick (London: The MIT Press, 1998), pp.2-35 (p.5).

study, which continues to examine these themes of how Surrealism enabled the women artists' autonomy, has been Chadwick's investigations into their relationships with each other. *The Militant Muse* documents their friendships together and how their alliances often forged creative and productive new artistic directions. Her second Chapter 'The Two Leonors' details Carrington's friendship with Leonor Fini and their correspondence between 1938-41. Their letters detail not the world of the male surrealists in Paris, 'nor the one in which women propel the male imagination' but instead, as Chadwick explains, a 'harrowing mental universe that parallels and intersects with a real world in which a young woman fights loss and terror through an epistolary relationship with a dear friend.'<sup>33</sup> Most significantly Chadwick explores how Carrington 'transforms grief and fear into art.'<sup>34</sup> In this way she develops the themes of independence and autonomy she introduced in her earlier analysis, but this time investigating how friendships between female figures of Surrealism forged a new surrealist aesthetic as they confronted a war-torn Europe together.

Whilst Carrington, Tanning and Bishop did not have such relationships with each other, their connections to Surrealism, and their anticipatory posthuman politics, unite them in a way that bring them into conversation for the first time. All three were practitioners during the modernist, and post-modern period producing art and literature between the 1930s, right up until the early twenty-first century in the case of Tanning. Both Tanning and Carrington are most conspicuously tied to Surrealism in their early careers, presenting their work in exhibitions endorsed by Breton, as well as conducting, at different times, close personal relationships with Max Ernst. Their work was featured in *Exhibition by 31 Women* (1943), curated by Peggy Guggenheim at her Art of the Century Gallery in New York. Catriona McAra, who has a special interest in feminist aesthetics and surrealist legacies in contemporary practice, recently reprised this event at the Sedona Arts Centre in

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<sup>33</sup> Chadwick, *The Militant Muse*, p.13-14.

<sup>34</sup> Chadwick, *The Militant Muse*, p.14.

Arizona. Her exhibition there in 2020 featured work by both Carrington and Tanning along with four other surrealist women artists who appeared in the original event.<sup>35</sup> McAra's scholarship, which has considered both Tanning and Carrington, observes that it is surprising these two artists have not been brought into conversation together with greater focus and frequency, given the parallels between their surrealist oeuvre. Whilst this thesis seeks to address the gap that McAra identifies in academic scholarship regarding Carrington and Tanning as a collective, their divergent politics does, at least at first, appear to forge a clear line between them. Whilst Carrington was overt about her feminist principles as I have already identified, Tanning was forthright in her refusal to be automatically interpolated into a feminist framework, even eschewing the label 'woman artist' as this frank statement to art scholar Mary Ann Caws makes clear:

as someone, a human someone, who has chosen art, the making of it, the dedication to it, the breathing of it, this artist has pursued with a high heart that great aim; and has utterly failed to understand the pigeonholing (or dove-coterie) of gender, convinced that it has nothing to do with qualifications or goals.<sup>36</sup>

Tanning made this statement to Caws to publish in her book *Surrealism and Women* (1991), emphasising her explicit refusal to be tied to any categorisation as a woman artist. In fact, she boldly exclaims, 'Women artists. There is no such thing – or person.'<sup>37</sup> This decision to distance herself from a female gendered position and thus anything that casts her within

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<sup>35</sup> These other artists were Leonor Fini, Hedda Sterne, Sonja Sekula and Hazel Guggenheim.

<sup>36</sup> Dorothea Tanning, 'Statement' (3<sup>rd</sup> December 1989), in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg (London and Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991), p.228.

<sup>37</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Dorothea Tanning* (Tate Exhibition Catalogue), (London: Tate Publishing, 2019), p.22.

feminist politics does place Tanning at odds with Carrington, who was consistently an outspoken critic of the patriarchy that she felt had attempted to constrict her, and all women, throughout her life. But as this thesis argues, Tanning's art and literature consistently displays a feminist aesthetic. Like Carrington, Tanning reimagines the domestic sphere but rather than brewing up cultish, mythological scenes to induce alchemical transformations as the former does,<sup>38</sup> Tanning often borrows from Gothic tropes to rewrite female experience in the way that several scholars have noted.<sup>39</sup> Tanning rewrites the male surrealists' penchant for the *femme-enfant* figure, releasing her from her muted position in the form of often darkly subversive figures. Paintings such as *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943) and *Children's Games* (1942) for example evoke a mood of dark terror, where the anarchic desires of pubescent girls threaten the staid stillness of the home sphere, transmogrifying it into a sort of fantastical underworld. Art historian Alyce Mahon, who curated the 2019 Tate Exhibition on Dorothea Tanning, explains that the reconfigured *femme-enfant* in these works stages her as 'a figure of sexual curiosity, perhaps more of a Lolita than an Alice figure.'<sup>40</sup> Tanning empowers these *femme-enfants* in her paintings, unleashing them as forces not 'inhibited by society's expectations and moral codes.'<sup>41</sup> Like Carrington she harnesses the surrealist method to her advantage, using it, as Mahon describes to deconstruct 'the female muse into her fetishistic parts'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Susan L. Aberth's *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2010) pays considerable attention to Carrington's interests in alchemy and magic. In Chapter 4 entitled, 'The Alchemical Kitchen: Domestic Space as Sacred Space' (pp.57-96), Aberth explores how Carrington employed them as metamorphic modes in order to transform a domestic sphere that had traditionally confined and subordinated women.

<sup>39</sup> Katharine Conley's *Surrealist Ghostliness* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013) dedicates Chapter 5 to 'Dorothea Tanning's Gothic Ghostliness' (pp.119-150), where she suggests that Tanning's work 'hums with an inner energy', adding that there is the hint of a 'ghostly and tactile third dimension' evident in both her two dimensional paintings but also her later soft sculptures, p.119. Victoria Carruthers' 'Dorothea Tanning and her Gothic Imagination' published in *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 5.1-2 (2011), pp.134-158, provides a fruitful introduction to the way in which the artist was influenced by the genre.

<sup>40</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Dorothea Tanning (Tate)* (London: Tate Publishing, 2019), p.26.

<sup>41</sup> Mahon, *Dorothea Tanning*, p.27.

<sup>42</sup> Mahon, *Dorothea Tanning*, p.19.

Whilst Ernst was a key influence for Tanning, as he was for Carrington, both artists increasingly gained attention in their own right. Along with an appearance at the *Exhibition by 31 Women* discussed, four of Tanning's works featured in the 1947 International surrealist exhibition at Galerie Maeght in Paris. She also received artistic acclaim in America with her work appearing at the Carnegie Institute's annual shows in 1941, 1944-1946 and in 1948. Whilst she was determined to assert her position that there is no such thing as 'women artists', she was, as Mahon explains 'determined to map her own artistic destiny in a surrealist circle all too often viewed by critics as promoting a passive role for women.'<sup>43</sup> Mahon's analysis of Tanning immediately brings her into conversation with the active feminist politics that Carrington advocates in 'What is a Woman?', where she similarly calls for women to empower themselves and refuse the expectations and moral codes dictated by a patriarchy driven by Cartesian humanist principles. As this thesis will show, taking action against male 'masters' often entails enacting a politics of transgression and refusal: this is demonstrated in Tanning's and Carrington's oeuvre, as well as Bishop's, and dramatised most persuasively in the way their protagonists decisively immerse themselves within a non-human milieu.

Bishop shares Tanning's refusal to identify overtly with a feminist politics but whilst Tanning has always acknowledged her ties to Surrealism, as did Carrington, Bishop had a more ambiguous relationship with the movement. Indeed, not only did she refuse to feature in any women's writing collections, she also did not wish to be situated within the context of the surrealists as she explains, at least initially, in her letters from 1946. In this example she attempts to distance herself from Max Ernst, a figure who indirectly yokes these three practitioners together:

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<sup>43</sup> Mahon, *Dorothea Tanning*, p.22.

Although many years ago I once admired one of Ernst's albums, I believe that Miss [Marianne] Moore is mistaken about his ever having been an influence, and since I have disliked all of his painting intensely and am not a surrealist, I think it would be misleading to mention my name in connection with his.<sup>44</sup>

However, almost twenty years after this statement Bishop concedes that her poem 'The Weed' was influenced by her reading of Ernst's set of prints *Histoire Naturelle* (1926), acknowledging that his 'frottage' method had made its mark upon her. The fact that she followed this acknowledgement by protesting that she had said 'too much' and that it was 'much better to keep people in the dark!' indicates how Bishop's relationship with Surrealism was both troubled and complex – even after the event.<sup>45</sup> However, Bishop scholar, Bonnie Costello, explains that the poet had unequivocal ties to Surrealism. She describes how Bishop 'looked to surrealism (more of the visual arts than poetry) for solutions to the problems of integrating symbolic rhetoric with the realism she sought for her poems.'<sup>46</sup> Costello adds that Bishop's decision to live in France immediately after college in 1934 was 'inevitably a decision to explore surrealism' and that her library with volumes by Apollinaire, Reverdy and Rimbaud attested to this. Bishop held onto several fliers for exhibitions at the Julian Levy Gallery in New York, demonstrating her interest in visual surrealist art, as Costello notes here:

de Chirico, Klee, and Ernst (all of whom she mentions in poems and letters) were even more important than the writers in suggesting ways of including

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<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, *One Art: Elizabeth Bishop Letters*, selected and edited by Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), p.135.

<sup>45</sup> Bishop, *One Art*, p.478.

<sup>46</sup> Bonnie Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.26.

several vanishing points (de Chirico), suspending figurative portraits in abstract space (Klee), and allowing associative play with objects (Ernst). Dream imagery and distortion are the most conspicuous features of this influence [...] When Bishop described 'Varick Street' to Anne Stevenson, she wrote: 'I use dream-material whenever I am lucky enough to have any and this particular poem is almost all dream – just re-arranged a bit.'<sup>47</sup>

The oneiric subject matter in surrealist visual art that so preoccupied Bishop, as identified by Costello above, points to a surrealist inheritance in her own work where her particular interest in the unconscious and dreams was shared by Breton who believed 'Surrealism is based upon the omnipotence of dreams, in the undirected play of thought'. In his *First Surrealist Manifesto* he said: 'I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak.'<sup>48</sup> Whilst Bishop likewise rejects these inherited dualisms and agrees that these concepts should not be viewed as contradictions, she does not share the idea that they should be resolved and fixed. Rather, her brand of Surrealism instead pivots upon 'facing the wrong way' where instead she troubles the boundaries between these presumed dichotomies and embraces the in-between-ness of dream-like spaces.<sup>49</sup>

We can see parallels again with Tanning who was similarly preoccupied by what she saw as unknown spaces, often forged in her work as portals and doorways. Such an in-between for Bishop characterises the 'always-more-successful surrealism of everyday life' where she wishes to 'catch a peripheral vision of whatever it is one can never really see

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<sup>47</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.27.

<sup>48</sup> André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p.14.

<sup>49</sup> This quotation is taken from Elizabeth Bishop's poem 'The Man-Moth', in *The Centenary Edition Poems Elizabeth Bishop* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011), pp.16-17, (p.16), l.29.

full-face but that seems enormously important.<sup>50</sup> Bishop has a way of looking at the world that defamiliarises the familiar and derails and distorts a reader's sense of reality – a preoccupation of Surrealism that she shares with Carrington and Tanning. In order to achieve this vertiginous impact upon the reader Bishop accretes close, observational detail layering it together in a poetic frottage. Her close Darwinian observations of the natural world are deployed in such a way that the seemingly ordinary is rendered as extra-ordinary as I have explained.

Bishop was not interested in Surrealism's automatic writing and firmly eschewed it, along with any of their deliberately experimental techniques. In this regard, she demonstrates further parallels with Carrington and Tanning who similarly did not exhibit this particular method in their work. Given that automatic writing was considered by Breton in his manifesto to be a practice that involved putting oneself in 'as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can' it is not surprising that Carrington at least, in her determination to forge an active and feminist approach, was not a proponent of this mode.<sup>51</sup> To be passive was of course a state that the male surrealists conflated with the feminine, hence their erotic interest in the *femme-enfant*; so to adopt a passive position in their practice was at odds with the active art and writing that Carrington, and Tanning wished to perform. As a poet with surrealist sensibilities rather than a conspicuous affiliation with the movement Bishop felt no such need to deliberately remove herself from their misogynistic practices. However, like Carrington and Tanning, she appropriated surrealist modes to articulate her own aesthetic, giving voice to a female identity, and in her example, a queer one. Whilst her method was not experimental in the manner of the male surrealists' examples of automatic writing, she does however take their cue in oneiric subject matter which, as Richard Mullen explains, describe 'the oddities of events or

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<sup>50</sup> Richard Mullen, 'Elizabeth Bishop's Surrealist Inheritance', *American Literature*, 54.1 (1982), 63-80 (p.64).

<sup>51</sup> André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (1924), p.29.

incongruities of detail which appear before her questioning gaze and which hint at some displaced meaning.<sup>52</sup> Whilst critics have noted that Bishop's surrealist visions are not always suggestive of a surrealist technique, Costello explains that her preoccupations with dream and sleep 'provide opportunities for manipulation of perspective and scale.'<sup>53</sup> This capacity to take a malleable approach to perspective and scale intimates Bishop's inherent surrealist sensibilities but also brings her into conversation with Tanning and Carrington who exhibit a similar propensity to present a world that is not skewed by humanist perspective. Janet Lyon, for example, notes Carrington's similar estrangement from what is considered normative in humanist accounts, countering such one-size-fits-all templates with a more flexible approach to Cartesian order:

In the Carringtonian milieu, this dissolution of scale is part of a larger fundamental condition: in this milieu, no life is slotted for sanctity or degradation in advance. No living thing deserves, *a priori*, to live or die more than any other living thing. [...] No body or manifestation of life has more value than another.<sup>54</sup>

Surrealist modes then are enabling for the women artists discussed in this project in their capacity to invert and distort, to shift humanist preconceptions and to facilitate a way of seeing differently. The work of Carrington and Bishop in particular shares this so-called 'dissolution of scale' as Lyon describes it forcing the androcentric eye/I to begin to see anew. The inclusion of Bishop in this thesis also enables us to consider how women's Surrealism focuses upon literature as much as visual art. Whilst her role as a poet is well

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<sup>52</sup> Mullen, 'Elizabeth Bishop's Surrealist Inheritance', p.78.

<sup>53</sup> Costello, *Questions of Mastery*, p.28.

<sup>54</sup> Janet Lyon, 'Carrington's Sensorium', in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde*, ed. by Jonathan P.Eburne and Catriona McAra (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp.163-176 (p.169).

established, the written work of Carrington and Tanning has received very little attention by comparison and is only now beginning to register more visibly within scholarship. To this end, this thesis discusses not just Carrington's and Tanning's visual art but their literature as well thereby countering the biased attention that the former has been subject to. It is true that an academic lens has turned increasingly towards women's Surrealism as an oeuvre outside the work of their male contemporaries over the last three decades but much of that focus has tended towards their paintings and visual art.<sup>55</sup> Comprehensive studies of their output, including Susan L. Aberth's book on Carrington, as well as Victoria Carruthers' more recent *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations* (2020), focus mainly upon the artists' visual output although some content is saved for their written work. With the exception of Penelope Rosemont's visionary *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (1998) and McAra's excellent *A Surrealist Stratigraphy of Dorothea Tanning's Chasm* (2016), very little scholarship has been exclusively devoted to women's surrealist literature. However, Anna Watz's *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration* (2020), seeks to address, and redress, these gaps in scholarship and brings written works into academic conversation in their own right. Here, Watz explains what she sees as the purpose and motivation for the book:

[...] *Surrealist Women's Writing*, then, proposes a strategic use of the term women's writing – one that aims to highlight a body of work that to date has been doubly marginalised – because surrealist women have historically

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<sup>55</sup> A number of exhibitions dedicated to women's surrealist art attests to this growing interest in their visual corpus set apart from their male contemporaries. Examples include the Dorothea Tanning exhibition at Tate Modern, London (2019), *Fantastic Women* at Schirn in Frankfurt (2020), *Dora Maar* at Tate Modern (2020).

attracted less attention than surrealist men and, also, because surrealist writing has received less consideration than surrealist visual art.<sup>56</sup>

Watz adds that she also wishes to ensure that the book foregrounds written work by women surrealists who have been more widely known as visual artists including Carrington and Tanning. In this way it is a study that resonates with Catriona McAra's monograph *A Surrealist Stratigraphy of Dorothea Tanning's Chasm* (2016), which argues that Tanning's visual output may be better understood when studied in tandem with the novel *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004) that she worked on throughout much of her career; the idea that to focus exclusively on the women surrealists' visual work is to miss the valuable and illuminating contribution that their written corpus adds. Watz continues to assert how a feminist politics is as redolent in the work of the women surrealists' written projects as it is in their visual oeuvre.

Not only this, some of the essays in Watz's volume signpost a turn towards the nature of the human and how some women surrealists intimate a wish to hold humanist politics to account - key themes explored in this thesis. Jonathan P. Eburne's chapter entitled 'Leonor Fini's abhuman family' for example draws upon Xaviere Gauthier's scholarship in order to speak to Fini's investment in a 'biopolitics modelled on the intimacies of the animal, vegetable, and mineral worlds.'<sup>57</sup> In his analysis he explores Fini's capacity to think *beyond* the human. Likewise, Jeannette Baxter's chapter 'Recasting the Human: Leonora Carrington's Dark Exilic Imagination' also interrogates the nature of the human in her study, examining how 'ontological boundaries between the animal and the

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<sup>56</sup> Anna Watz, 'Introduction', in *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration*, ed. by Anna Watz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.1-17 (p.7).

<sup>57</sup> Jonathan P. Eburne, 'Leonor Fini's abhuman Family', in *Surrealist Women's Writing*, pp.179-209, (p.181).

human are blurred'.<sup>58</sup> However, whilst the essay does touch upon a non-Cartesian appraisal of the human subject in Carrington's work, Baxter explains that she does so more as a comment upon how World War Two impacted upon an understanding of humanity as a culture, rather than how her surrealist writing contributes to an altered perception of our place as a species among others. This interrogation of how the women surrealists contribute to a more egalitarian and balanced comprehension of our place in the world among non-human others is a gap in scholarship that this project aspires to address, by both looking to their written and visual oeuvre.

It is productive to read these three writer-artists as a group who all shared connections to Surrealism. Whilst I acknowledge that both Bishop and Tanning were keen to distance themselves from the category of women and disliked any suggestion that they be inserted into women's art and writing categories, their recourse to Surrealism, together with a recurrent exhibition of posthuman ecologies in their oeuvre, is suggestive of a feminist aesthetic that unites them with Carrington. Moreover, this thesis demonstrates how Surrealism is in fact a mode that has the capacity to most effectively communicate our uncanny connection with a non-human world. I explore how Bishop's, Carrington's and Tanning's unique surrealist aesthetic is a method and strategy that most aptly communicates, and insists upon, our ties to the non-human world in the way that they each defamiliarise the familiar. They all harness the surrealist mode in order to underline our entanglement with non-human environments and species which in turn points to our own necessary potential for metamorphosis. I argue that such a becoming and shape-shifting praxis forges a feminist politics in its emphatic estrangement from a patriarchal, humanist orbit. Given the urgency of our environmental emergency I suggest in this thesis that a look towards the examples and visions of change that these three women subjects

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<sup>58</sup> Jeannette Baxter, 'Recasting the Human: Leonora Carrington's Dark Exilic Imagination', in *Surrealist Women's Writing*, pp.68-86 (p.73).

convey is therefore a timely and important one that brings their work into a current time frame, allowing an original lens through which to read their work. In the following section I will set out the posthuman frameworks I draw upon in this thesis, noting the way in which their preoccupations with themes of becoming, metamorphoses and entanglement speak to subject matter that recurrently occurs in the work of the three surrealist artists concerned.

### **Feminist and Posthuman Intersections**

If feminism is *not* a humanism, as Rosi Braidotti insists, then we must begin by establishing the ways in which these two positions have become estranged. Braidotti, Haraway and Karen Barad are key thinkers in propelling a posthuman feminism, which begins with their assessment that Enlightenment Humanism, as deigned by René Descartes, is a mode underpinned by patriarchy. They posit that this pervasive humanist thinking is one that does not include women, or non-human species, but presumes to speak for us. It persistently positions those outside of the male, white and European taxonomies as somehow diluted versions, or the necessarily subordinated *others* of Humanism. Moreover, and key to this thesis, these posthuman feminists suggest that this patriarchal Humanism is the fundamental catalyst of our climate emergency, where Man's myopic approach to the natural world has brought us to the point of crisis. Braidotti, Haraway and Barad do not however adopt a position that simply critiques the politics of androcentricism, categorising women reductively against their male counterparts in a manner that only reinforces such damaging and perpetual dualisms. Rather they seek to assert a new, and feminist, paradigm that has the capacity to rethink the human approaches to the environment that we are implicated within. Their creative and constructive configurations of posthuman feminism both depart from the fixity of humanist templates but more importantly etch new cartographies of a world that no longer orbits the androcentric figure, instead forging an

alliance with the natural world and seeking connections with those who have been similarly overlooked. It is an approach that resonates with Timothy Morton's coinage of 'ecological thought' which he describes as 'the thinking of interconnectedness.'<sup>59</sup> He argues that the 'mesh of interconnected things is vast, perhaps immeasurably so [...] Nothing exists all by itself, and so nothing is fully "itself".'<sup>60</sup> As such, a project of thinking more collectively and ecologically in the way that Morton calls for is a key ethics and praxis that I examine in this thesis.

Posthumanism is a burgeoning field of enquiry that has resonance in this moment as we seek out solutions to environmental catastrophe. It is ultimately an umbrella term for a number of strands of philosophical, and scientific thinking which all seek to question the centrality of the human. This includes the work of Animal Theory scholars, Derek Ryan, Kari Weil and Carrie Rohman who were all key speakers at the 'Beastly Modernisms' Conference at Glasgow University in 2019; an event that marked the animal turn in modernist studies, which in itself resonates with the surrealist oeuvre I explore in this thesis. Their animal-oriented lens demonstrates how posthuman thinking is not antihuman or nihilistic but rather functions as a strategic tool that has the capacity to help us operate in a more balanced manner as a species, where we take greater account for our actions towards our environment as well as non-human others. Ryan sums up how such posthuman thinking is a constructive, theoretical lens, rather than a reductive one in a way that speaks to the concerns of the women surrealists examined in this study: 'Posthumanism is still concerned with humanity, but it takes a critical stance towards humanism; it urges humans to respect and respond to non-human worlds, and to reject essentialist and hierarchical divisions between culture and nature.'<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p.7.

<sup>60</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p.15,

<sup>61</sup> Derek Ryan, *Animal Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.69.

Critical animal philosophers like Ryan, Weil and Rohman demonstrate how posthumanism is an affirmative trajectory for us to embark upon in so far as it rekindles our relationship with non-human others and thus offers an exit out of Humanism's hierarchical and speciesist stance. As Ryan further explains, posthuman approaches are 'invested in the imagining of alternatives, in affirmatively bringing non-human others into an ethical and political consideration.'<sup>62</sup> An emphasis upon reconfiguring our encounters with the non-human is a recurrent theme and preoccupation of the women surrealists examined here where we repeatedly witness humans and non-humans immersed in entangled relations. Furthermore, posthumanism and thus animal critical studies, not only direct us towards newly conceived relationships with non-humans pointing to our interconnection with them as fellow material beings, but also acknowledge the human species' own inherent animality.

To fully understand posthumanism's aims it is helpful to confront the Humanism that it directs us to reject. Braidotti, Haraway and Barad have seized upon posthumanism's political potential. They argue that its opposite number - Humanism - mistakenly presumes to represent a whole species when it is in fact speaking for, and to, a very marginal and biased group in the form of the white, Eurocentric male. Haraway distances herself as far as possible from a patriarchal Humanism and any terms that may imply its dominance. This is exemplified in her criticism of the ubiquitous signifier 'Anthropocene', arguing that the term's androcentrically skewed connotations only reinforce the human and non-human other dialectic. Instead, she calls for it to be replaced with a so-called Chthulucene inhabited by 'Chthonic ones', which she translates as 'beings of the earth', thereby pertaining to all species' collective belonging to one planet.<sup>63</sup> Posthuman thinking for all three figures demands a feminist orientation and thus a trajectory that moves away from

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<sup>62</sup> Derek Ryan, 'Following Snakes and Moths: Modernist Ethics and Posthumanism', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 61.3 (2015), 287-304, (p.299).

<sup>63</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p.2.

species man, and a very specific one at that. In *The Posthuman* (2013), for example, Braidotti likewise critiques the white, heterosexual, European Man who has been the totemic symbol for Humanism since the Enlightenment period arguing that he continues to be a pervasive presence that reductively consigns all outside of its parameters to a pejorative otherness:

At the start of it all there is He: the classical ideal of 'Man', formulated first by Protagoras as 'the measure of all things', later renewed in the Italian Renaissance as a universal model and represented in Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man [...] That iconic image is the emblem of Humanism as a doctrine that combines the biological, discursive and moral expansion of human capabilities into an idea of teleologically ordained, rational progress.<sup>64</sup>

Braidotti takes this Vitruvian model to task as the figure who has come to incorrectly symbolise Humanism's dominant subject position: one who is masculine, white, heterosexual, driven by reason and progress, and significantly, located within a European locale. In doing so, she not only signposts the way in which humanist thinkers have presumptuously ruled over non-human others, she also highlights how vast populations of the human species have been cast out and rendered voiceless by virtue of the fact that they do not conform to the categories of the Vitruvian male template. She argues for posthumanism as a framework that gives voice to not only other non-human species but also to the members of the human species who have been marginalised by Humanism's privileging of the European white male. The way in which Braidotti holds this Vitruvian figure to account reverberates with Carrington's attack on those she satirically labels 'Our

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<sup>64</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p.13.

Masters' in her essay 'What is a Woman?' demonstrating how her treatise is a prescient forecast of the feminist, posthumanism that Braidotti takes forward four decades later. In this way posthumanism is a framework that also speaks to post-colonial thinkers in its estrangement from Eurocentrism. Gloria Anzaldua takes issue with the 'Western Cartesian split point of view' that imposes an 'Anglo' culture upon non-Europeans who fail to adhere to Eurocentric humanist codes.<sup>65</sup> To this end, I investigate in this thesis how Carrington's and Bishop's relocation to Mexico and Brazil respectively represent not only a geographical shift, but more importantly a cultural and philosophical one. I consider how their immersion within these non-Eurocentric countries that were emerging from the machinations of colonial rule chimed with their own deliberate estrangement from Parisian Surrealism; where forging a new surrealist aesthetic resonated with the way in which Latin American countries were attempting to forge new, post-European identities. Most significantly I explore how Carrington's and Bishop's recourse to pre-patriarchal visions in their work whilst in Mexico and Brazil emphasises both a feminist politics but also the way in which their turn to indigenous culture is synonymous with posthuman ethics.<sup>66</sup> In *Posthuman Ecologies* (2019) Braidotti and Simone Bignall have compiled essays that include a study of the way indigenous philosophy and culture resonate with posthuman thinking, intimating the prescience of Bishop's and Carrington's turn to such approaches. In particular, Bignall's and Daryle Rigney's essay in the volume signposts the lines of connection between indigeneity and posthuman thought, highlighting how "more-than-

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<sup>65</sup> Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th edn (San Francisco: Aunt Lut Books, 2012), p.90-91. Anzaldua's Chicana perspective eschews the Eurocentrism that pervades colonialist discourse. This topic drives the discussion in Chapter Three.

<sup>66</sup> I argue in Chapter Three that neither Bishop nor Carrington slip into the trap of cultural appropriation in their turn to indigenous cultures in their work. Both women lived in Brazil and Mexico respectively, adopted by and immersed within the countries rather than harnessing indigenous practice for their own aesthetic pleasure. For example, Carrington was the figure chosen by the Mexican Government to create a mural that best reflected the country's national interests, marking its evolution away from its colonised past.

human” ways of knowing, being and acting have characterised Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology and ethology since time immemorial’.<sup>67</sup>

Whilst Braidotti’s posthuman positioning is rooted in philosophy, fellow posthuman thinkers Haraway and Barad, as well as Stacy Alaimo and Jane Bennett more often employ a scientific approach in arguing against humanist essentialism. They have been core proponents of posthumanism’s grounded and earthly new materialist framework, making the case for the mattering of matter by speaking to the entangled nature of all material phenomena. Their approaches underpin the universally compostable nature of all matter that similarly catalyses Haraway’s argument for ‘staying with the trouble’ to achieve a sustainable Chthulucene.<sup>68</sup> Barad explains, for example, that material phenomena are the primary ontological units that implicate us all, where whether human or non-human, ‘*matter comes to matter*’ by the way it interacts, or ‘intra-acts’, and becomes with each other.<sup>69</sup> This science foregrounds a more horizontal and biological dynamic between human and non-human others where our material ontology and make-up is highlighted as one that is shared with other species. Importantly, such a shared positioning implicates our own entanglement with all matter and so holds Humanism to account, grounding our species within a collective earthly and interconnected terrain. Carrington’s, Bishop’s and Tanning’s surrealist oeuvre repeatedly performs and demonstrates these inter-material entanglements in its rupturing of Cartesian boundaries to enable becoming and metamorphic ontologies. It anticipates Alaimo’s call for, and recognition of ‘trans-

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<sup>67</sup> Simone Bignall and Daryle Rigney, ‘Indigeneity, Posthumanism and Nomad Thought: Transforming Colonial Ecologies’, in *Posthuman Ecologies: Complexity and Process After Deleuze*, ed. by Rosi Braidotti and Simone Bignall (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2010), pp.159-182 (p.159).

<sup>68</sup> Haraway argues that remaining situated in the present and staying with the challenges of our times is the best course of action rather than being swept up in a nihilistic and apocalyptic futurism, or past. She explains, ‘staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings’, *Staying with the Trouble*, p.1.

<sup>69</sup> Karen Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter Comes to Matter’, in *Material Feminisms*, pp.120-154 (p.141). Italics are author’s own.

corporeal' modes: visions which speak to how all matter – human and non-human – is entangled and implicated together. Trans-corporeality is, in many ways, a key concept that communicates the hybrid human, non-human modes that we witness in the work examined in this thesis where such a vision embodies the active positioning that Carrington's feminist politics aligns with. Alaimo's trans-corporeal figures speak to nature's agentic powers and self-organising capacity, rewriting it beyond a passive, muted domain awaiting human inscription. This vision of the non-human world that exhibits an agency of its own, that speaks back, presents it as an ally of contemporary feminist ecologies; an active force that challenges Humanism's depictions of nature as a benign and passive realm. The way non-human nature emerges from its anthropocentrically allotted background position in the women surrealists' work examined here shows how, as Alaimo insists, it is 'always as close as one's own skin.'<sup>70</sup> Braidotti summarises this neo-materialist turn in feminist philosophy, providing an incisive introduction to its resonance with the surrealist work I investigate:

These explorations of embedded and embodied materialism result not only in a serious reconsideration of what counts as the 'matter' for materialist feminist thought. Emphasis on a Spinozist monistic allows us to move toward a dynamic, nonessentialist, and relational brand of material vitalism. This results in the dislocation of difference from binaries to rhizomatics, from sex-gender or nature-culture to processes of differing that take life itself, or the vitality of matter, as the main subject.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Stacy Alaimo, 'Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature', in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.237-264 (p.238).

<sup>71</sup> Braidotti, 'Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism', p.34.

The becoming animal themes that signpost posthuman thinking in the women's surrealist work investigated in this project is further developed in the becoming matter symbols that are similarly exhibited. It is a dynamic that collapses Humanism's binaries to forge conspicuous rhizomatic modes and patterns instead as Braidotti outlines above. The vitality of matter, emphasised in Bishop's poetry and across the broad spectrum of Tanning's paintings, has gained traction in recent posthuman thinking and is elucidated by both Barad and Bennett. Barad outlines what she labels as a posthuman performativity as a core foundation that has the potential to rewrite the humanist imperative. Like Alaimo's transcorporeal frameworks, she highlights the illusory nature of bodily boundaries arguing that *'All bodies, not merely "human" bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity – its performativity.'*<sup>72</sup> Barad's 'performativity' speaks to the agency of all matter whilst her coinage of the term 'intra-activity' is a pivotal one that underpins much of the analysis I conduct in this thesis. She argues that all material phenomena intra-act together and as a part of each other rather than interacting as separate beings. She demonstrates how the concept of subject and object are arbitrary humanist constructs where there are in fact no pre-existing objects but rather equally material entities that merge and (re)emerge through their intra-actions together. As a result, there is an ongoing differential becoming that recurrently takes place as human and non-human matter intra-acts in ongoing, collective entanglements.

This liveliness of bodies, nature, both human and non-human is equally applicable to non-organic forms as Bennett argues in her influential book *Vibrant Matter – A Political Ecology of Things* (2010). Barad's so-called posthumanist performativity applies to what Bennett coins as 'Thing-power'; a dynamic that speaks to the neo-materialist frameworks that signpost a posthuman ontology and approach. She explains how such 'Thing-power' can draw attention to the efficacy of objects in excess of human meanings arguing that it is

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<sup>72</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.152. Italics are author's own.

therefore a ‘good starting point for thinking beyond the life-matter binary.’<sup>73</sup> Moreover, she suggests that the way in which things cross over is equally applicable to the human species, highlighting the ‘extent to which human being and thinghood overlap.’<sup>74</sup> Crucially such an awakening to the agential ontology of things and matter is a cue to think beyond the human as Bennett insists where such encounters can ‘chasten my fantasies of human mastery’, thus highlighting the ‘common materiality of all’.<sup>75</sup> To return to Derek Ryan, this approach underpins posthumanism’s core project which aspires to dislodge the human species from a supremacist throne of its own making. Bennett’s work also signposts the themes of entanglement which underpin a posthuman project and which I argue are exhibited throughout the work of the women surrealists examined here. As Bennett adds an ‘attentiveness to matter and its powers [...] can inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin [...] in a dense network of relations.’<sup>76</sup> This ‘network’ precisely embodies the dynamics that I investigate in the women’s surrealist work studied in this thesis where such entangled intersections between human and non-human life as well as organic and inorganic phenomena surge to the fore. Crucially, I explore how this spectrum of affirmative posthumanist frameworks are anticipated by the women surrealists in a way which both enables an exit from the male surrealist circle but also more topically, resonates with contemporary ecological thinking that alerts the human species to environmental catastrophe.

The arguments of this thesis are advanced in the following five chapters, each of which are underpinned by the resonant themes of becoming, metamorphoses and entanglement. These key motifs are established in Chapter One, “‘I was born a female human animal’’: Encountering Human-Animal Hybridity in the Surrealist Work of Leonora

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<sup>73</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p.20.

<sup>74</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.4.

<sup>75</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.122.

<sup>76</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.13.

Carrington and Elizabeth Bishop.’ I show how the entangled ontologies of Bishop’s and Carrington’s surrealist hybrids counter Humanism’s speciesist stance in a way that anticipates a more balanced, and thus posthuman milieu. Animal-human hybridity is a signature element of women surrealists’ work but also lends itself to a feminist posthuman analysis, opening up critical perspectives that have yet to be fully explored. Drawing upon Carrington’s ‘What is a Woman?’ (1970) essay I posit her painting *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)* (1937-38) is a totemic introduction to the themes of an agentic nature and human-animal hybridity. Employing this painting as a cue I explore her short stories ‘The Debutante’ and ‘As They Rode Along the Edge’, discussing them in conversation with Haraway’s concept of geostories which counter the boundaries of patriarchal, master narratives. Turning to her early and most surreal oeuvre I consider how becoming animal motifs in Bishop’s poems ‘The Man-Moth’ and ‘The Riverman’ resonate with Carrington’s work, suggesting further that Bishop’s identification with such posthuman outsider figures has the potential to intimate her own queer sexuality. The chapter is underpinned by Braidotti’s feminist interpretation of Gilles Deleuze’s ‘becoming animal’ framework; one that turns away from a Cartesian mode of stasis and superiority to consider instead our own inherent animality that signposts our connection to non-human space and species.

The second chapter reads Bishop’s poems ‘The Monument’ and ‘The Weed’ alongside Tanning’s *Daphne* (1943), *Woman Artist, Nude, Standing* (1985), *On Avalon* (1987) and *Crepuscula glacialis (var., Flos cuculi)* (1997), to take the becoming animal mode one step further. Drawing upon Stacy Alaimo’s postulation that matter is ‘the vast stuff of the world and of ourselves’ it argues that Bishop’s and Tanning’s surrealist work exhibits the metamorphic and entangled motifs that underpin such new materialist understanding.<sup>77</sup> My analysis is driven by Alaimo’s trans-corporeal frameworks and Barad’s

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<sup>77</sup> Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), p.1.

so-called intra-actions. I posit that Bishop's and Tanning's work demonstrates both theorists' belief that we are all implicated in a dense network of matter that neutralises human supremacy. To focus on the becoming matter motif in the women surrealists' work is to sustain the overarching feminist themes of this thesis, where to recognise how matter is '*not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency*' resonates with Carrington's rhetoric in 'What is a Woman?'<sup>78</sup> A so-called 'doing' echoes the call to action that Carrington implores women to take, where to be active whether in a political sense as women subjects – or in a new materialist sense, as lively matter – is to challenge a patriarchal and humanist status quo.

Chapter Three, 'Posthuman Destinations: A Feminist Rewriting of Surrealism in Latin America', is underpinned by the postulation that Humanism is a Eurocentric enterprise that privileges European geography and culture over others in the same way as it positions white, heterosexual men as superior over women, non-white and non-human others. I argue that rather than be reductively confined by a Humanism empowered by Europe's axis of influence, both Carrington's, and Bishop's work undertaken during their time in Mexico and Brazil, is galvanised by the fact that their cultures and geographies are estranged from humanist principles. Whilst there has been considerable interest in Latin American Women's Surrealism by scholars such as Dawn Ades and Chadwick, as well as Susan L. Aberth, a focused study on how this oeuvre exhibits posthuman ethics in its distance from European culture has yet to be investigated. I turn to Gloria Anzaldúa's call to turn away from Cartesian thought and become immersed in the soil of Latin America as a cue in this chapter arguing that it resonates with Braidotti's eschewal of Eurocentric Humanism. To this end I consider how Carrington synchronises her work with the subject of Mexico's indigenous and ancient cultures, employing it as a route out of colonial Spanish rule in Mexico. Her larger-than-life Goddess figures and pre-patriarchal ecologies align with

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<sup>78</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.151. Italics are author's own.

Bishop's own posthuman economies of scale in Brazil where her experiments with non-anthropocentric perspectives located in gynocentric realms are galvanised in her Brazilian poetic vistas. I contend that Bishop forges liminal spaces in her Brazilian poetry where ontologies exhibit a slippage between water and land, as well as the domestic and cosmic, thereby giving voice to a posthuman and queer politics catalysed by Latin America's growing estrangement from Eurocentric Humanism.

Chapter Four places Carrington's novel *The Hearing Trumpet* (1976) and Dorothea Tanning's *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004) at the forefront of my argument that both reconstruct patriarchal grand master narratives in a way that brings them into a more ecologically balanced and posthuman landscape. Entitled 'Radical Retellings: Rescripting the Anthropocene and Making it Strange in *The Hearing Trumpet* and *Chasm: A Weekend*', the chapter examines how Carrington and Tanning reconfigure Christian tales embedded in Western thought considering how they deploy humour and violence respectively as defamiliarising, feminist tools to refocus the androcentric lens. I suggest they anticipate Haraway's call for a turn to 'geostories, to Gaia stories, to symchthonic stories' which undo what she casts as a 'myth system associated with the Anthropos' where the 'stories end badly.' Rather, in these surreal narratives we witness instead how 'Man plus Tool does not make history' and instead we awaken to tales that tell of, and imagine, a more ecologically aware milieu that resonates with a feminist politics.<sup>79</sup>

Chapter Five is equally concerned with becoming modes and movements, arguing that the subjects' work forges enabling and posthuman portals that construct a disconnect from humanist orbits of reason and rationality.<sup>80</sup> Entitled 'Crossing Over into a Heterotopic

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<sup>79</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p.49.

<sup>80</sup> In *The Posthuman*, Braidotti identifies how Enlightenment Humanism dictates a pervasive rationalism as its ruling principle, synonymous with ideas of progress and an unshakeable certainty about 'the almost boundless capacity of humans to pursue their individual and collective perfectibility', p.13. She adds, 'Humanism historically developed into a civilizational model, which shaped a certain idea of Europe as coinciding with the universalizing powers of self-reflexive reason',

Posthuman Beyond', Chapter Five reads Carrington's *Down Below* (1944), Bishop's Parisian poems and Tanning's *Children's Games* (1942) and *Hotel du Pavot, Chambre 202* (1970-73) in conversation with Michel Foucault's concept of Heterotopias, suggesting that it amplifies their posthuman politics. I argue that the non-rational spheres explored by the women surrealists resonate with Foucault's idea of heterotopic space which is typically marginal, transitional or fantastical, and yet still traceable to a real, geographical place. Rather than depicting these liminalities and transitional states as ones which embody passivity as the male surrealists would believe, in the women surrealists' oeuvre we witness instead how an occupation of these non-rational dreamscapes is in fact an active positioning that empowers female protagonists. This is particularly notable in Carrington's surrealist memoir *Down Below* (1944) where she eschews the reductive confines of a madhouse in Santander to instead inhabit an irrational, surreal underworld of her own making. The representation of a 'posthuman beyond' is more subtle in Bishop's poetry but no less effective in work that exhibits her recourse to liminal space slipping between conscious and unconscious experience in a way that explodes the boundaries of Humanism. Bishop's oneiric portals that take the audience on an odyssey beyond humanist constraints is a praxis that further aligns her with Tanning's doorway motif in her surrealist art. Whilst other critics have signposted the way Tanning employs this symbol as an emancipating manoeuvre in her work, I argue that it also signposts an anticipatory posthuman ethics in its capacity to take the viewer beyond a rational and visually mappable world.

Seizing upon Chadwick's postulation that Surrealism was driven by a determination to rewrite human values this thesis will present how the posthuman modes and philosophies exhibited in the work of the women writers and artists here both repositions women's place within the movement's canon whilst at the same time contributing to

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p.13. Thus 'Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart', p.15.

contemporary environmental debates. Given that, as Claire Colebrook explains, the 'Anthropocene' constructs a sense of 'something like man as such, the human as such, [which] emerges from an inscriptive technological trajectory that does not include all humans, and certainly not all life' it is a timely moment to examine how surrealist practitioners demonstrate a capacity to question characteristically androcentric Humanism.<sup>81</sup> I will show across the five chapters how the overarching themes of becoming, entanglement and metamorphoses in the work of Bishop, Carrington and Tanning are key indicators of their prescient posthuman thinking and modes which upend androcentrism, signposting a contemporary feminism that recognises a kinship with non-human life. Importantly, I will stress the affirmative nature of this enquiry into how women's surrealist writing and art resonate with posthuman thinking, maintaining that not only does this oeuvre map our connection to non-human life but also how it forges a cartography that can provide solutions to the ecological emergency today. I will show how the surreal visions we repeatedly witness in the work of the practitioners examined here body forth the values of current environmental philosophy via active feminised and feminine figures; figures who cross species lines and express the human's vital kinship with non-human life enabling us to think with nature rather than against it as Enlightenment Humanism dictates.

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<sup>81</sup> Claire Colebrook, 'We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual', in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. by Richard Grusin (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp.1-20 (p.8).

## Chapter One

### 'I was born a female human animal': Encountering the Human-Animal Continuum in Women's Surrealist Praxis

Leonora Carrington's proclamation that she was born a 'female human animal' communicates her non-speciesist positioning in a way that demonstrates her belief in the animal heritage we share with non-human others.<sup>1</sup> Explaining that 'There are some faculties that we haven't admitted or recognised because we're frightened that somebody might think that we are also animals, which we are,' she articulates the foundational thinking that I draw upon throughout this chapter.<sup>2</sup> I propose that women surrealists' work is ensconced in Carrington's belief that we are part of an animal continuum as a species and, crucially, that this kinship with the animal world is enabling for a feminist politics in its estrangement from patriarchal Humanism. Karen Barad's postulate that "'Human" bodies are not inherently different from "non-human" ones"<sup>3</sup> is vividly evoked in women's surrealist art and writing where the animal is depicted as both 'myself and my kin.'<sup>4</sup> I posit the human-animal hybrid in the surrealist work of Carrington and Elizabeth Bishop demonstrates most palpably a belief in human animality and our interconnection with non-human others in a manner that communicates a feminist politics.<sup>5</sup> I suggest that the hybrid

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<sup>1</sup> Leonora Carrington, 'What is a Woman?' (1970), in *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp.372-375 (p.372).

<sup>2</sup> Hans-Ulrich Obrist, 'Interview with Leonora Carrington: An Approach to a Reality That We Do Not Yet Understand', in *Leonora Carrington*, ed. by Sean Kissane (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2013), pp.154-168 (p.160).

<sup>3</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p.153.

<sup>4</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, Foreword: 'The Rights of Things', Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, The Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp.ix-xiv (p.xiv).

<sup>5</sup> Hybrid modes abound in Surrealism. In 'Surrealism and Hybrid (Psycho-) Morphologies', Donna Roberts explains more broadly that 'hybridity in art has for a hundred years been in some way a reflection of the changing nature of human subjectivity in the modern age', *Henry Moore Institute: Online Papers and Proceedings* (19/3/2008) [Surrealism and Hybrid \(Psycho-\) Morphologies - Online papers - Research - Henry Moore Foundation \(henry-moore.org\)](https://www.henry-moore.org/research/surrealism-and-hybrid-psycho-morphologies) [accessed 10 March 2022]. Posthumanist frameworks have seized upon the potential of hybrid modes in fracturing the illusion

in their work is indicative of boundary transgressions but also the potential for a cross-species alliance that challenges Humanism's hierarchical stance towards non-humans. Most significantly I consider how the hybrid is a form that emphatically suggests transformation and adaptation; a totemic figure for the malleability of all subjects which threatens the strictures of humanist binaries. In this way the hybrid invokes posthuman, feminist themes of non-speciesism, becoming and entanglement. I begin with an analysis of the hybrid in Carrington's early short stories, investigating how the recurrent 'becoming animal' motif in her narratives is indicative of a feminist ecology that challenges androcentric frameworks, as well as the male surrealists' penchant for the passive *femme-enfant* figure. I examine the hybrid further in Bishop's surrealist poems 'The Man-Moth' and 'The Riverman', suggesting that her human-animal ontologies, rendered through a Darwinian lens, communicate a female identity politics aligned with Carrington's, as well as a means for expressing her lesbian sexuality.

### **Posthuman Frameworks and Hybrid Human-Animal Becomings**

Surrealist art and writing has exhibited a great deal of interest in the hybrid as I have previously discussed in the Introduction. Effie Rentzou makes this interconnected figure the focus of her study of the magazine *Minotaure* as I have outlined, arguing that 'What is at stake in *Minotaure* [...] rather than an antihumanist project, is the elaboration of a nonanthropocentric humanism.'<sup>6</sup> She explains that concepts of humanity and what it is to

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of a coherent human subjectivity and considered how such modes can reimagine a more interconnected and fluid model. For example, Donna Haraway argues that despite its technological foundations, the cyborg is an extension of human animality: 'The cyborg [...] appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed.' *Simians Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, 2nd edn* (New York: Free Association Books, 1992), p.152. This thesis concentrates upon the hybrid human-animal symbols that recur in much of women's surrealist art and literature – away from technology - arguing that they anticipate the non-speciesist frameworks that critical animal scholars such as Derek Ryan discuss, as well as the posthuman feminism that Rosi Braidotti calls for, in order to challenge Humanism.

<sup>6</sup> Effie Rentzou, 'Minotaure: On Ethnography and Animals', *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 67.1 (2013), 25-37 (p.33).

be human might be 'sabotaged' in the magazine, showing 'the possibility of a different configuration of the human, outside the dichotomies that underline and support our civilization'.<sup>7</sup> Rentzou cites Man Ray's photograph from 'Table of Contents of *Minotaure 7*' (1935) as an example of a disruptor exploring a potential 'symbiosis' between human and animal. However, I suggest here in this example that Man Ray perpetuates the combined exploitation of woman and animal in his vision of a minotaur's head composed of a naked women's torso. In this example he demonstrates how the male surrealists were in danger of turning to the animal to eroticise the female body, thus potentially further embedding the androcentric habit of imposing dualities and hierarchies that instil sexism and speciesism alike. Key to exiting humanist frameworks, which are underpinned by such patriarchal foundations, is to accept an animal genealogy in the manner that Carrington sets out. Her insistence that we are animals ourselves, as articulated in her essay quoted at the start of this chapter, presciently anticipates Rosi Braidotti's challenge to androcentric Humanism where she similarly posits hybrid modes as a way of holding its speciesist politics to account:

Neither "Man" as the universal humanistic measure of all things nor Anthropos as the emblem of an exceptional species can claim the central position [...] This shift marks a sort of "anthropological exodus" from the dominant configurations of the human – a colossal hybridization of the species. The decentering of Anthropos challenges also the separation of *bios*, as exclusively human life, from *zoe*, the life of animals and non-human

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<sup>7</sup> Effie Rentzou, 'The Minotaur's Revolution: On Animals and Politics', *L'Esprit Createur*, 51.4 (2011), 58-72 (p.68).

entities. What comes to the fore instead is a human-non-human continuum.<sup>8</sup>

Braidotti's posthuman feminist positioning above clearly aligns with Carrington's 'female human animal' stance highlighted in the introduction to this thesis where the species continuum Braidotti calls for us to acknowledge echoes the human-animal hybrids we witness in both Carrington's oeuvre and Bishop's poetry decades before. Braidotti foregrounds above how recognising the collision of human-animal ontologies that explode the boundaries between species is a key manoeuvre in 'decentering' an Anthropos that is driven by Humanism's representative 'Man'. Bishop's and Carrington's concern with an intermeshed culture of animality, which anticipates Braidotti's posthuman feminism, also suggests a kinship with Friedrich Nietzsche's earlier philosophies which critique Humanism's pervasive dictates. Crucially, Nietzsche explains that 'the animal must emerge again' in order to overcome the constrictions of civilisation that extinguish human animality to our species' creative cost.<sup>9</sup> This emergence of the animal to counter the inhibitive trappings of a civility that subordinates female subjectivity is a motif I investigate in Carrington's short stories in particular; I suggest that they echo Nietzsche's assertion that a speaking animal would say "'Humanity is a prejudice of which we animals at least are free.'"<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Braidotti's call for an 'anthropological exodus' resonates with

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<sup>8</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 'Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism, in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. by Richard Grusin (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2017), pp.21-48 (p.26).

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.26. Rather than deny our animality in the manner of Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, Nietzsche suggests that by embracing it we become liberated. He posits that culture should be conceptualised differently, recognised as embedded within nature: 'If we speak of *humanity*, it is on the basic presumption that it should be that which separates man from nature and his mark of distinction. But in reality, there is no such separation: natural characteristics and those called specifically "human" have grown together inextricably. Man, at the finest height of his powers, is all nature and carries nature's uncanny dual character in himself', Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Homer's Contest', in *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, trans. by Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.174.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.162. Cary Wolfe takes up this theme of human-

Nietzsche's suggestion that embracing our inherent animal ontology is in some way an emancipating manoeuvre. She further suggests that the adoption of a cross-species position frees the human from humanist dictates whilst also enabling a closer connection to one's own sexuality; a mode that speaks to Bishop's employment of human-animal hybrids in order to communicate a repressed lesbian identity, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter. To this end, Braidotti explains that:

The process of trans-species nomadism, or morphological hybridity is loaded with sexuality in that it entails the erasure of and the transgressing of bodily boundaries. This explosion of the civilised confines of one's 'self' reasserts some raw corporeality of the subject.<sup>11</sup>

Braidotti's vision of morphological hybridity here is anticipated decades earlier in Carrington and Bishop's surreal cross-species figures which are strategically deployed against Humanism and thus also express a feminist politics. Their human-animal hybrids, which 'explode' the boundaries of human subjectivity, anticipate Braidotti's development of Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's theory of 'becoming animal', resonating with Nietzsche's call for an emergent animality. Braidotti's insistence that the 'becoming animal' mode has the potential to 'scramble the master-code of phallogentrism' thereby 'loosening its power over the body' furthers their thinking in a manner that has the potential to provide original feminist readings of the human-animal hybrid in the women surrealists'

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animality and Man's pernicious claims to supremacy in *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*. He explains that the human in its entirety is intrinsically animal, even the parts that we presume define us as not animal: 'the other-than-human resides at the very core of the human itself, not as the untouched, ethical antidote to reason but as part of reason itself', p.17. In this way Wolfe echoes Carrington's belief in the human species' inherent animality.

<sup>11</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 128.

work.<sup>12</sup> This ‘loosening’ enables what Braidotti harnesses for the feminist subject as ‘changes and transformation’ thereby eschewing the humanist ‘Being in its classical modes’ which, conversely, serves to affirm pervasive androcentrism.<sup>13</sup>

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari explain ‘becoming animal’ as a process of intensive and affective encounters between humans and non-humans. This process involves casting off majoritarian modes of thought (including humanist principles) and instead moving towards what they describe as ‘minoritarian’ positions in order to embrace a potential unfettered by humanist dichotomies.<sup>14</sup> What is most pertinent is that it is about a process or movement *towards*, rather than arriving at an actual destination point; a praxis exhibited most conspicuously in Bishop’s nomadic human-animal speakers as we will see. The ‘becoming animal’ is always in flux in a manner that mirrors the hybrid human-animal’s ontological ambiguity, thus forging a creative space for the feminist voice. Such an enabling mode casts off rigid Cartesian frameworks that repeatedly, and reductively, position women and animals as Man’s lesser *Others*. Braidotti identifies ‘becoming’ as a positioning that is necessarily liminal as she explains here: ‘We live in permanent processes of transition, hybridization and nomadization, and these in-between states and stages defy the established modes of theoretical representation.’<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p.124.

<sup>13</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> Braidotti further explains that ‘All becomings are minoritarian [...] and necessarily move into the direction of the “others” of classical dualism’, *Metamorphoses*, p.119.

<sup>15</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p.2. Braidotti takes her cue from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who imagine *becoming*, and more specifically ‘becoming animal’ as a continuum that necessarily circumnavigates any ‘established modes.’ They explain, ‘To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs’, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p.13.

Braidotti eschews fixed ontological categories here, viewing *becoming* processes as an opportunity for so-called ‘minoritarian’ others in the emancipating gap that exists outside of humanist classifications and thus ‘theoretical representation.’ In this way notions of human and animal are ruptured and replaced with a sliding continuum which dislodges Cartesian epistemologies. Thus, androcentric Humanism’s illusion of fixed subjectivity is unsettled in a manner that could accurately describe the women surrealists’ hybrid figure who is in flux, neither fully adhering to humanity or animality. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, ‘a line of becoming has neither beginning, nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination[...]it is the in-between’.<sup>16</sup> They explicate such a mode emphatically in their analysis of Franz Kafka’s literature where they posit that there is ‘no longer man or animal’ imagining instead a ‘circuit of states’ at ‘the heart of a necessarily multiple or collective assemblage.’<sup>17</sup>

In this Chapter I draw upon Braidotti’s reading of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s ‘becoming animal’ modes, suggesting that her posthuman lens illuminates Bishop’s and Carrington’s hybrid forms, which embody their concept of a ‘collective assemblage’. This ‘becoming animal’ mode, which is always in transition and characterised by its own corporeal flux, also resonates with Darwinian natural histories that have been taken up by contemporary feminist ecological theory. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, Charles Darwin’s work ‘provides a dynamic and open-ended understanding of the intermingling of history and biology [...] and a complex account of movements of difference, bifurcation, and becoming that characterize all forms of life.’<sup>18</sup> Bishop’s hybrid human-animals intimate a kinship with Darwin’s studies, specifically his fascination with a bodily rhetoric and

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<sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London, New York: Continuum, 2000), p.293.

<sup>17</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, p.22.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigations for a Possible Alliance’, in *Material Feminisms* ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.23-51 (p. 28).

biological forms which trace human and animal intermingling and heritages, thereby bringing her work into conversation with Carrington's. These hybrids also speak to her recourse to the human-animal figure as a coded means of expression for her own lesbian sexuality, giving voice to an identity that was necessarily closeted by the heteronormative culture of the early twentieth century.

Donna Haraway's call for stories of 'sympoietic multispecies', outlined in the Introduction, emblematises the 'becoming-animal' principles that underpin Carrington's and Bishop's hybrid human-animal narratives, where their audience is brought into close proximity with not only other animal species, but crucially their own animal heritage that Darwin's genealogy of mankind brings to the fore.<sup>19</sup> In this way, I argue that their hybrid configurations and Darwinian forms serve as posthumanist visions which forge a feminist politics, thereby kaleidoscopically re-imagining an androcentric Anthropocene.

### **Carrington's Hybrid Tales**

As examples of posthumanist, 'tentacular' living, the hybrid forms that populate Leonora Carrington's short stories provide rich foundations for exploring the human-animal continuum foregrounded in women surrealists' work.<sup>20</sup> Collected and republished in 2017 to coincide with the centenary of her birth, these stories are preoccupied with the interconnections between humans and animals and most significantly the human species'

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<sup>19</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), p.49. Haraway correlates the annihilation of the natural world with the singular ego of Cartesian man who subordinates and denigrates all who fall outside of his epistemological category in a manner that mirrors Carrington's concerns in 'What is a Woman?' Not only are there parallels between both writers' calls to refuse such a tyrannical system, but they are also similarly aligned in the creative, posthumanist approach they propose in order to circumnavigate it.

<sup>20</sup> Haraway explains that an androcentric 'History must give way to geostories, to symchthonic stories'. She imagines such stories to be realised in examples of 'tentacular living and dying in sympoietic multispecies string figures', *Staying with the Trouble*, p.49. In this way, she foregrounds an interconnected web that implicates all species, human and non-human, thus eschewing Humanism's hierarchical and bounded foundations.

inner animality, fusing dark magical spheres with an untamed, natural world.<sup>21</sup> Kristoffer Noheden's scholarship on Carrington's motifs of co-existence explore such interconnections as I outline in the Introduction to this thesis. In his most recent essay he suggests that Surrealism's 'attraction to nature' encompassed a 'revolt against exploitation' but also an 'attentiveness to the appearance and behaviour of animals, plants, and minerals, including their interaction.'<sup>22</sup> Carrington's recurrent hybrid human-animals reconfigure humanist modes in three ways that speak to the surrealist modes of 'revolt' and 'interaction' that Noheden identifies: first, we witness how female figures' recourse to their own animality marks a rebellion against Humanism's expected codes of civility within the domestic sphere. Second, the hybrid is suggestive of mirrored ontologies across species lines and the capacity for alliance between all animal worlds in the sense that Haraway posits in her call for a sympoietic approach.<sup>23</sup> Third, the hybrid forges a space for metamorphosis and malleable identities: key modes for redressing the androcentric humanist template and, moreover, aligning with Braidotti's principle that, most importantly, feminism 'has do with change.'<sup>24</sup> Significantly, in the hybrid's capacity for transfiguration we witness most persuasively a figure that embodies the 'in-between-ness' of Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming animal' that is fruitful for feminist ecologies.

The story that encapsulates most redolently Carrington's use of the hybrid human-animal figure is the opening tale from the most recently published collection, entitled 'The

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<sup>21</sup> All stories discussed in this Chapter are from this most recent publication of Carrington's short stories *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington* with Introduction by Kathryn Davis. (St.Louis: Dorothy Project, 2017). The final three stories, 'The Sand Camel', 'Mr. Gregory's Fly' and 'Jemima and the Wolf' are published for the first time in this collection.

<sup>22</sup> Kristoffer Noheden, 'Toward a Total Animism', p.54.

<sup>23</sup> In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway defines 'Sympoiesis' as 'making-with'. She adds: 'Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company', p.58. In other words, she argues that we are all beings of the earth and thereby connected in a web that implicates us all, whether human or animal. I suggest that her call for 'geostories' that include 'sympoietic multispecies' are presciently anticipated by Carrington's own hybrid tales which serve as a posthuman alternative to those dictated by 'Species Man', p.49).

<sup>24</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (Chichester: Columbia university Press, 1994), p.183.

Debutante'.<sup>25</sup> Written between 1937 and 1938, it can be read as an auto-fiction of sorts in that it describes a debutante ball of the kind that Carrington herself reluctantly attended in 1935 when presented at the court of King George V. The narrative opens with the female protagonist requesting that her hyena friend take her place at the ball deemed a rite of passage, thus marking her entry into adulthood and her eligibility for marriage. The hyena agrees enthusiastically, and they decide that a disguise is necessary in order for the animal to dupe the guests into believing she is a young, human woman. The narrator describes their relationship as a close and egalitarian one; a reciprocal dynamic featuring two characters who have much to learn from each other and both closely aligned, despite their differing species:

When I was a debutante, I often went to the zoo. I went so often that I knew the animals better than I knew the girls of my own age. Indeed it was in order to get away from people that I found myself at the zoo every day. The animal I got to know best was a young hyena. She knew me too. She was very intelligent. I taught her French, and she, in return, taught me her language.<sup>26</sup>

In the vision of this human and animal creature communicating and learning from the other via differing languages, we witness Carrington's disavowal of Descartes' presumption that only humans have access to linguistic communication and also how nature and culture are interchangeable in the manner Nietzsche suggests. The fact that the human protagonist finds greater kinship with the non-human animal and that the hyena penetrates the

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<sup>25</sup> 'The Debutante' was first published in André Breton's *Anthologie de l'Humour Noir* in 1950. A translation of this Anthology can be read in André Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, trans. by M. Polizzotti (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Leonora Carrington, 'The Debutante', in *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington*, trans. by Kathrine Talbot and Anthony Kerrigan (St.Louis: Dorothy Publishing Project, 2017), pp.3-7, (p.3).

cultured sphere of the debutante ball, forges a hybrid, boundless space where nature and culture become muddled and blurred. Such an overlap is established in the short story on the opening page where the narrator makes it clear that she feels greater kinship with the hyena than she does with other human girls her age, adding that ball culture leaves her in 'a state of great distress'.<sup>27</sup> The animal space of the zoo serves as a refuge for the protagonist who finds kinship and familiarity in the company of the hyena – not as a pet, but as a fellow young female trapped and caged within an exploitative system that subordinates them both as female and animal.

Of all Carrington's written oeuvre, 'The Debutante' has received the most scholarly attention. Critical commentary on the story has focused upon its feminist potential where academics draw attention to the subversive, and extreme nature of the protagonists' actions as a symbol of protest against the conventions that a young woman must adhere to. My reading shares other critics' concerns with this overarching theme but channels attention more specifically towards the politics that the topic of human-animal hybridity engenders. Whilst Tara Plunkett has discussed the feminist potential of Carrington's hybrids, I consider more specifically how they are not only a vehicle of protest but also visions that aptly register the way in which an exploitation of women and animals alike speak to a culture that has resulted in an environmental crisis.<sup>28</sup> In other words,

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<sup>27</sup> Carrington, 'The Debutante', p.3.

<sup>28</sup> As Anna Watz explains, "'The Debutante' is typically read as a re-enactment of Carrington's own ball, in which she, instead of reluctantly complying, lets her insurgence triumph.' 'Identity Convulsed: Leonora Carrington's *The House of Fear* and *The Oval Lady*', in *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration*, ed. by Anna Watz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.42-67 (p.59). Katharine Conley explains that 'Through the character of the hyena, [Carrington] expresses her rage against society's expectations of young women', *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (Lincoln, NE/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p.51. Tara Plunkett considers the potential feminist politics of the hybrid form, explaining 'The resulting hybrid body – a hyena in a ball gown paired with a flayed human visage, paints a humorous and very dark picture of how society wishes young women to repress certain beastly impulses', "'Melusina after the scream": Surrealism and the Hybrid Bodies of Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 95:5 (2018), 493-510 (p.502). Kirsten Strom considers the significance of the animal in Carrington's oeuvre, examining it through a Darwinian lens. She explains that in 'The Debutante', 'there is a strong, and perhaps uncanny sense of the two females as being

Carrington's human-animal hybrids suggest a reclamation of human-animal alliances in order to confront and rewrite the annihilation of the natural world; a destruction caused by patriarchal leaders whose power rests upon their puppeteering of women and non-human animals. Carrington's recourse to the animal figure thereby is not only an act of symbolism, but more so an assertion that women and non-human animals share a kinship that is both ontological and cultural. As a young woman in upper middle class society Carrington would have been paraded under the gaze of suitors in the same way as the hyena of the story is exhibited at the zoo. As well as confirming their alliance the narrator's alignment with the hyena also serves to confront and counter the exploitative system of seasonal balls that leaves her feeling as trapped and subordinated as a caged animal; an experience that Carrington herself details in an interview with Paul de Angelis in 1997:

So I went through the season, in London, the royal garden party, which is tea in a tent at Buckingham Palace, and you go round with a teacup. You have a different dress for that, very expensive. Then you go to Ascot, the races, and you're in the royal enclosure. And, if you please, in those days, if you were a woman, you were not allowed to bet [...] So I took a book. I mean, what would you do?<sup>29</sup>

This example makes clear that Carrington perceived her own situation as a young woman shut within the 'royal enclosure' as akin to an animal's imprisonment within a zoo, subordinated according to a culture of civility for man's pleasure and convenience. By aligning the narrator with a hyena in 'The Debutante', she not only creates a human-animal

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like but different', *The Animal Surreal: The Role of Darwin, Animals, and Evolution in Surrealism* (New York, Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), p.81.

<sup>29</sup> Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2010), p.19-20.

alliance but also forges a politics of refusal and transgression that denies a phallogentric system and rebelliously overrides it in an act of visceral violence as the denouement demonstrates. When the hyena disguises herself in human clothes in the story, she also kills and eats the maid, tearing off her face and wearing it at the ball as a disguise. The hyena thereby becomes a hybrid creature wearing a human mask; an ambiguous and shifting ontology that mirrors Carrington's debutante character as one who longs to embrace her own animal heritage but is forced to conceal it beneath a mask of civility and restraint. Both hyena and human character embody the 'morphological hybridity' Braidotti imagines as a vehicle for escaping the humanist boundaries of the self which confine them. Their ontological interchangeability is communicated through the hyena's representation of the narrator's own true, inner wild desires that she too must mask beneath a cultured appearance in order to assimilate. In the short story we witness however what Nietzsche would describe as the emergent animal where in allowing her animal heritage to surface in the hyena hybrid, the narrator is afforded a form of release that allows her to escape the patriarchal strictures of ball culture. Such a release is dramatically conveyed in the hyena hybrid's swift departure from the ball: 'And with one great bound, it disappeared through the window' (p.7).

It is significant that Carrington chooses to align herself with a hyena as a totemic figure; an animal often labelled as untameable and characterised by an overpowering odour that is repellent to other species. In 'The Debutante' it is the hyena's smell rather than looks which betray her animality at the ball; her uncontainable odour is suggestive of the human protagonists' own inner wildness which similarly cannot be repressed, concealed or tamed, and highlights the repugnance with which any exposure of female sexuality and desire is held by so-called civilised culture. As Carrington makes clear in her interview with De Angelis, the woman is merely a passive other in the courtship ritual,

currency to be 'sold to the highest bidder.'<sup>30</sup> In portraying the hyena hybrid as her creaturely alter ego and so connecting with her wild heritage, she frees the human protagonist from the ritual misery of the debutante ball which imprisons her inside a repressive culture, subordinating women in the same manner as an animal. The conspicuous femaleness of the hyena is a deliberate move which takes Carrington's sense of kinship with non-human animals beyond the world of oedipalized pet. As Kirsten Strom explains in a way that resonates with Carrington's narrative, such an identification is 'projected beyond the familial relations of a domestic companion and into the realm of the wild.'<sup>31</sup> In this way, Carrington's connection to the hyena signposts how she harnesses the hybrid as an emblem of release but also marks how she underlines a sense of her own, animal ontology, thereby resonating with Barad's insistence that human and non-human bodies are inherently similar.

Whitney Chadwick describes Carrington's kinship with nature in her work as a creative path away from woman's designated role as passive other and dependant, explaining that it enabled her to forge an autonomous space of her own: 'Carrington's animals identify the instinctual life with the forces of nature. The hyena belongs to the fertile world of night; the horse becomes an image of rebirth into the light of day and the world beyond the looking glass.'<sup>32</sup> Carrington's narrator obeys the 'instinctual life' in aligning herself with the animal and her own inner wildness in 'The Debutante' assuming a hybridised identity in tandem with the hyena in order to eschew presuppositions about her 'dependence on a man'. Chadwick further suggests that such an alliance with the animal presents a challenge to the male surrealists' *femme-enfant*:

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<sup>30</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, p.20.

<sup>31</sup> Kirsten Strom, *The Animal Surreal: The Role of Darwin, Animals, and Evolution in Surrealism* (London: Routledge, 2017), p.82.

<sup>32</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2021), p.96.

As symbolic intermediaries between the unconscious and the natural world, they replace male Surrealists' reliance on the image of the woman as the mediating link between man and the "marvellous," and suggest the powerful role played by Nature as a source of creative power for the woman artist [...] Carrington also suggests a redefinition of the image of the *femme-enfant* from that of innocence, seduction, and dependence on man, to a being who through her intimate relationship with the childhood worlds of fantasy and magic is capable of creative transformation through mental rather than sexual power.<sup>33</sup>

A flight from a feminised nature, where woman is type-cast as either *femme-enfant* or doting mother, is one rejected by many other women surrealists as Chadwick intimates above. Other artists and writers connected to the movement, including Remedios Varo and Leonor Fini, also searched for other modes with which to articulate their own gender and sexual politics.<sup>34</sup> The hyena tearing off her human face and eating it in 'The Debutante' is a transgressive act of refusal akin to the politics Carrington espouses in her 'What is a Woman?' essay where the human narrator eschews humanist civility and culture by embracing her own 'forces of nature'. The hyena's and human's interchangeable, hybrid ontologies also speak to Carrington's appropriation of a mode that is indicative of a possible human-animal alliance. The hybrid thereby creatively distances woman from subordinated role as 'mediating link' between man and the marvellous and instead

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<sup>33</sup> Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.96.

<sup>34</sup> In her foundational work, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Whitney Chadwick notes that a number of women surrealists looked beyond Freud to natural history searching for a broader view of nature that incorporated the rich complexity of the female voice, often eschewing the biological maternal in favour of the anomalous and monstrous. I suggest that Carrington's own wild nature is channelled through her hybrid becoming animals including the hyena and horse figures exhibited in her short stories which deny patriarchal power in their visceral, dynamic ontologies.

positions her within the sphere of female, animal nature. In this way Carrington's debutante is no longer a 'Being in its classical mode' but a 'circuit of states' as Deleuze and Guattari imagine, providing a portal out of Cartesian trappings. I posit that aligning with animal genealogies via hybrid figures is a key surrealist strategy in rupturing androcentric, humanist frameworks. It is one that I identify later in this Chapter in Bishop's animal poems 'The Man-Moth' and 'The Riverman', examples that are imbued with movement and transfigurative potential via her creative criss-crossing between human-animal spaces in ways that mirror Carrington's artistic praxis. First, I examine Carrington's representation of hybridity through her visual work in *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)* (1937-38), produced at the same time as her short story 'The Debutante.' I explore how her hybrid human-animal in this early painting further exhibits themes of boundary transgressions, entanglement, becoming and metamorphosis that are key strategies in challenging androcentric Humanism. It is an example that further establishes the ways in which Carrington's work anticipates a posthuman feminism, thereby acting as a navigational tool with which to explore the hybrid human-animal in her contemporaneous short story 'As They Rode Along the Edge.'



**Figure 1.1** *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)* (1937-38), Leonora Carrington © Estate of Leonora Carrington/ARS, NY and DACS, London 2023

Carrington painted her *Self-Portrait* during the same period in which she wrote 'The Debutante' and whilst it is not a violent confrontation in quite the manner of the short story, Carrington's portrait is the narrative's visual complement. Here we witness how Carrington harnesses, in Chadwick's words, the 'instinctual life' in the figure of the hyena and the horse of the painting which appears as both a wild version outside the window and a toy rocker inside.<sup>35</sup> The hyena lactates in a manner that mirrors the woman of the painting's own sexual awakening and in this way also recalls Chadwick's assertion that she represents the 'fertile world of the night'. Whilst not directly presented as hybrids, there is a sense that the human's and animal's ontologies collide in the mirroring of their bodies via

<sup>35</sup> Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (2021), p.96.

a shared mane of hair, wild eyes and anticipatory poses. The hyena's eyes are a piercing blue whilst Carrington's exhibit a fiery amber glow, as if challenging the viewer to an altercation that eschews the passive female role of the *femme-enfant*. She sits upon the very edge of her chair as if about to leap into action whilst the hyena stands with a paw raised suggesting that they are united by their agentic dynamic. Moreover, the hyena figure appears to draw out Carrington's inner wildness, emblematic of Nietzsche's emergent animal, and their psychic interconnection is manifest in the manner that they are turned toward one another, as if in synthesis. This is emphasised by Carrington's fingers pointing toward the hyena as if she is an extension of her own ontology creating an energised, virtual space infused with potential between them. In this way they evoke a politics of species egalitarianism that speaks to Braidotti's and Haraway's posthuman feminist frameworks, as well as representing what Deleuze and Guattari would describe as a 'collective assemblage', discussed above.

As in 'The Debutante', neither character takes centre stage in the painting: both Carrington and hyena occupy an off-centre situ, eschewing the presumed supremacy of the human and thus demonstrating that there is not one unilateral subject dominating the painting despite its title *Self-Portrait*. The mobility observed by Aberth in the painting is suggestive of egalitarian principles between species, catalysed by the implicit whirl of the painting's different components. The painting embodies what Deleuze and Guattari would describe as the 'circuit of states' that I argue underpin Carrington's hybrid human-animal continuum. Aberth states that: 'These four elements (hyena, woman, rocking horse and window) create a rotating compositional circle, leading the eye to travel from one to the next over and again as if caught in a visual vortex.'<sup>36</sup> The motion that Aberth describes here points to Carrington's shifting, metamorphic praxis in her work where identities coningle and spaces become unstable, meaning that none of the elements dominates the scene.

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<sup>36</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, p.30.

Such movement privileges nature's cyclical dynamic over the linear chronology presumed by humanist epistemologies. In the same way that the hyena dives out of the window in 'The Debutante', so too is there a sense that the painting's rocking horse is poised to gallop away and become a wild version outside. Boundaries are transgressed in this swirling 'vortex' as the wild hyena confronts the domestic space and the rocking horse is poised to follow its untamed twin outside; a mode which recalls the transitory in-between-ness of Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming animal.' I suggest that these metamorphic catalysts straddle all the elements of the painting where Carrington's ontological parallels with the hyena imply that she too will spill over into an untameable exterior space. In this way, the painting unsettles the boundaries that humanist philosophy depends upon.

In Carrington's work examined thus far we witness how her female characters turn to 'becoming animal' hybrids in order to avoid the reductive trappings of humanist modes. In a development of Nietzsche's belief that Humanism can in fact embody the very worst of humanity and should be eschewed in favour of a more sanguine animality, Deleuze and Guattari similarly posit becoming animal as a strategy in response to the cruelty of tyrannical humanist practice. They discuss this in a study of Franz Kafka's literature, but it is a framework that I suggest could equally apply to Carrington's prescient, posthuman modes:

To the inhumaness of the 'diabolical powers', there is the answer of a becoming- animal: to become a beetle, to become a dog, to become an ape, 'head over heels and away,' rather than lowering one's head and remaining a bureaucrat, inspector, judge or judged. All children build or feel these sorts of escapes, these acts of becoming-animal.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, p.12.

In Carrington's short stories such 'diabolical powers' are manifest: the oppressive forces of upper middle-class conventions that compel young women to be exploited in 'The Debutante'; the violent tyranny of Lucretia's father who takes pleasure in his daughter's torture in short story, 'The Oval Lady'.<sup>38</sup> Deleuze and Guattari's acknowledgement of children's significance in connecting with human animal ontology is clear in Carrington's writing, particular in 'The Oval Lady', where Lucretia's youth enables her to entwine with her animal genealogy more readily as she is not fully assimilated with the male symbolic order. For Carrington these diabolical powers are equally ascribed to all purveyors of the Bible and any religious followers as she explains in her later essay 'The Cabbage is a Rose' (1975). Here, Carrington critiques the gaps in history that do not take account of wider human and non-human experience. In particular, she challenges the Bible's claim to represent humanity, denouncing its permissive misogyny and speciesism: 'The Bible, like any other history, is full of gaps and peculiarities'. She adds that there is 'so much Dogmatism to clear aside before anything makes sense, and we are on the point of destroying the Earth before we know anything at all.'<sup>39</sup> The anti-religious thinking that Carrington espouses here is similar to Deleuze and Guattari's critique of 'diabolical powers' and is an illuminating complement to her surrealist short story 'As They Rode Along the

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<sup>38</sup> Whilst the hyena may lend itself to an idea of hybrid as transgressive and rebellious given its untameable reputation and borne out in the violence of 'The Debutante', the equine figure is one more suggestive of alliance and communion in Carrington's oeuvre. In the introduction to her story collection *House of Fear* (1989) Carrington explains her identification with horses perceiving them as a complementary co-species that stir her imagination: 'A horse gets mixed up with one's body...it gives energy and power...I used to think I could turn myself into a horse.' Such a mindset, which suggests that the human and animal become one body together in a becoming manoeuvre that recalls Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal, is portrayed in Carrington's short story 'The Oval Lady' (1937-38) where the human character Lucretia becomes entangled with her rocking horse Tartar. Whilst not entirely a written representation of Carrington's *Self-Portrait*, the narrative is suggestive of elements of the painting in that the rocking horse becomes animated and entwined with the ontologies of others. In the narrative the teenage Lucretia wishes only to be with Tartar saying 'let's make believe we're all horses' estranging her from a tyrannical father figure who insists she should have outgrown such childish practices. By investing in her imaginary games and fantasy with Tartar, Lucretia morphs towards an equine state as she abandons herself to childlike wonder, thereby escaping the constraints of the domestic landscape that her father consigns her to.

<sup>39</sup> Leonora Carrington, 'The Cabbage is a Rose' (1975), in *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp.375-377, (p.376).

Edge' (1937-40); a tale immersed in a sphere of animal assemblages that counters dogmatic, church culture. Carrington's critique of religion is rooted in her perception of its dismissive subordination of women and animal species. In this example, she communicates her disdain for its disparaging rhetoric towards women: 'I do not know of any religion that does not declare women to be feeble-minded, unclean, generally inferior creatures to males, although most Humans assume that we are the cream of all species. Women, alas; but thank God, Homo Sapiens!'<sup>40</sup>

In this satirical critique, Carrington clearly ascribes religion to a similarly tyrannical humanist mode; one which views women as the lesser of the human species and therefore easily relegated to the same fate as all other subordinated animal life. In a challenge to such reductive roles, Carrington sketches alternative ontologies in the form of an animal assemblage that includes a female human animal hybrid in 'As They Rode Along the Edge'. As a result, the characters confront and reframe the essentialist practices of religious tyrants in a manner that radically embodies Haraway's call for stories of 'sympoietic multispecies', introduced earlier. I consider how the seemingly human-animal hybrid protagonist is emblematic of one of a number of so-called 'multispecies' which thereby rewrite and reconfigure the histories repeatedly dictated by what Haraway describes as 'Species Man'.<sup>41</sup>

This story was written between 1937-40 and thus belongs to the same time frame as her *Self-Portrait* and 'The Debutante'. On the opening page we are introduced to the hybrid protagonist Virginia Fur only after meeting an assemblage of 'fifty black cats and as many yellow ones'.<sup>42</sup> Carrington points the reader to Virginia's conspicuous animality via her smell that is so potent, 'one couldn't really be altogether sure that she was a human

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<sup>40</sup> Leonora Carrington, 'The Cabbage is a Rose', in *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), p.376.

<sup>41</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p.49.

<sup>42</sup> Carrington, 'As They Rode Along the Edge', pp.39-56 (p.39).

being' (p.39). This repugnant odour recalls the hyena's 'very strong smell' in 'The Debutante', a feature of her wildness that ultimately cannot be concealed. Virginia Fur's name alone speaks to an animal heritage, and she is presented as a bewildering ensemble of human-animal characteristics: 'Her name was Virginia Fur, she had a mane of hair yards long and enormous hands with dirty nails; yet the citizens of the mountain respected her and she too always showed a deference for their customs' (p.39). Virginia's 'dirty nails' situate her as an earth(l)y being, one who embraces the uncleanliness that Carrington suggests all religion ascribes to women in her essay 'The Cabbage is a Rose' as discussed above. Aside from her nails and her bestial name, her 'mane of hair' aligns her with equine characteristics that Carrington herself exhibits in her self-portrait. It is also suggestive of a feline genealogy speaking to Carrington's own love of cats as well as an inherent lion-like power and strength. Virginia's 'enormous hands' also suggest that she transgresses and overrides anthropocentric proportion and scale.

In many ways the narrative is conceived as a quest where Virginia, accompanied by an extraordinary menagerie of animals, seeks revenge for the murder of her boar lover at the hands of Saint Alexander. Situated in the wilds of forests, lodged within the mountains, it is the setting of a multitude of animal species and hybrid life in a rich ecosystem that exhibits the sympoietic balance of the kind that Haraway envisages. This vibrant assemblage of life is threatened by the appearance of Alexander who wants Virginia Fur to 'enter the Church' so that he can 'win your [Virginia's] soul' (p.41). He wishes to sacrifice her, promising that she will be rewarded with a 'beautiful spot' in his graveyard 'right next to the statue of the Holy Virgin' (p.41). With no intention of conforming to Alexander's religious regime Virginia instead fills her bag 'with holy plates' and escapes with one hundred cats behind her (p.44). It is significant that this episode, where Alexander espouses his religious rhetoric, is followed by a scene of seduction where Carrington presents Virginia's soon to be boar lover, Igame, whose attraction to her is prompted by

her hybrid animality. His name suggests an audacious embrace with disgrace and dishonour in its etymological relations with ignominy. Rather than lie dead in St Alexander's graveyard next to the 'Holy Virgin', the ironically named Virginia would rather lie in bed with Ignose; a feeling that he shares as this example conveys: 'He admired most her fruity smell and her long hair, always full of nocturnal animals. He decided she was very beautiful and probably a virgin. Ignose rolled in the mud luxuriously, thinking of Virginia's charms' (p.45).

The significance of smell is highlighted again in this short story and is a key defining characteristic of Carrington's protagonists as seen in 'The Debutante'. Virginia's 'fruity smell' acts as an aphrodisiac to Ignose, whilst Alexander's human odour by contrast is described as 'sickening' (p. 40). Human and humanist figures are relegated to the periphery in the tale, while those who display their animality are central to its concerns as the vibrancy of Ignose and Virginia's courtship suggests. St Alexander wants to 'win' Virginia and take her like a trophy; Ignose is instead generous in his affection for her explaining that his 'body is exploding with love' (p.47). Carrington presents their bestial sexuality as an affirmative life force thereby transgressing religious humanist codes that insist upon denial, ritual sacrifice and empty symbolism. St Alexander's cold and inert churchyard, stone statues and 'Flowers of Mortification' are contrasted with the vivacity of animal life stirred by the spectacle of Virginia and Ignose's courtship (p.42). The stillness of St Alexander's church is replaced with the intense colour and bestial dynamic pulsing between the lovers in a scene which highlights Virginia's wild animality:

she spat into the stewpot and put her lips into the boiling liquid and swallowed a big mouthful. With a savage cry she brought her head back out of the pot; she jumped around Ignose, tearing her hair out by the roots; Ignose stood up, and together they danced a dance of ecstasy. The cats caterwauled and stuck their claws into one another's necks, and then

threw themselves in a mass onto Ignose and Virginia, who disappeared under a mountain of cats. Where they made love (p.47).

This scene is a swirling vortex akin to the rotating elements that Aberth discusses in her analysis of Carrington's *Self-Portrait* which similarly captures Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a 'circuit of states' as I argued earlier. The courtship episode is imbued with movement energised by the animal dynamics at play between Virginia and Ignose but also the caterwauling cats who play a part in the ceremony of the couple's love making. Carrington's hybrid protagonist appears to experience a further wild metamorphosis after she ingests the 'boiling liquid' and is complemented by the vivacity of animal life stirred by the spectacle of Virginia and Ignose's courtship (p.47). Now firmly distanced from the inert space of St Alexander's church, Virginia is both an energised and, importantly, an energising force whose wild vivacity spills over immanently, casting a spell upon those around her. This transformation is not coerced in the manner that Alexander's church rhetoric would effect; the wilder metamorphosis is instead enabled through Virginia's own free will by pursuing her own emergent animal instincts in the way Nietzsche calls for.

The tale's denouement is catalysed by Ignose's death, slain by human hunters at St Alexander's request. For this act Virginia and a collective human-animal assemblage seek revenge and set about interrupting a convent meal where the religious party intend to feast on the boar's meat. In this way it is a staged intervention that redresses humanist power whereby Virginia's hybrid human-animal and her creaturely community challenge the androcentric dictates that St Alexander and his church represent. She descends upon the religious meal accompanied by a copious, wild menagerie of co-species motivated by the same sense of injustice and the need for redress: 'The door crashed open and all the beasts of the forest entered crying, "Kill him, kill him.'" In the turmoil that followed one

could barely make out a human form sitting on a wheel that turned with incredible speed, who shouted with the others: “Kill him!” (p.56).

The revenge that the animals and Virginia seek is symbolic of all the species' confrontation with the domineering speciesism of humanist practice exhibited in St Alexander's religious moralising and, in Derridean terms, his carnophallogocentric meal.<sup>43</sup> In the tale Carrington sweeps human characters and their humanist practices to the periphery and replaces them with a non-speciesist framework; the sympoietic landscape celebrated by Haraway which recognises animals as our kin. The fact that Virginia can hardly be made out as a 'human form' suggests that not only has she fully embraced her animal ontology, she is also, most importantly, very much one among an assemblage of life, not poised over others upon an anthropocentric throne. Carrington thus etches an animal milieu overriding humanist perspectives and forging malleable scales that rupture human's presumed centrality. Her casual dismissal of St Alexander demonstrates this refusal of hierarchy; instead, she conjures unstable, shifting, and metamorphic realms that do not prioritise one body or species over another. This is suggestive of a feminist politics in that it eschews what Braidotti dismisses as the habit of casting “Man” as the gold standard by which we define ourselves.

I suggest that what Braidotti proposes as the need for 'anthropological exodus', discussed earlier, is precisely what Carrington facilitates in the final pages of 'As They Rode Along the Edge' in the characters' quest for revenge and move towards an animal kinship, synonymous with Braidotti's call for a 'hybridization of the species'.<sup>44</sup> In the examples of

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<sup>43</sup> Jacques Derrida “‘Eating Well”, or the Calculation of the Subject’, ed. by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy, in *Who Comes After the Subject* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp.96-119. Derrida explains the term ‘carnophallogocentrism’ as one which highlights the way in which subjectivity is most specifically the privilege of meat-eating men, implying ‘carnivorous virility’ and species supremacy, p.113). In *Animal Rites* Cary Wolfe explains that eating animals facilitates a ‘transcendence of the human [...] by the killing off and disavowal of the animal’, p.66.

<sup>44</sup> Braidotti, ‘Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism’, p.26. I introduced Braidotti's key concepts which underpin her feminist posthumanist framework in the introductory section of this Chapter.

the debutante and Virginia Fur we witness how a posthuman, vitalist feminism is enabled in the vision of their positions upon a 'human-non-human continuum' which refuses to valorise Humanism as the exception. What emerges in this continuum of hybrid visions is a movement of always becoming, as well as conspicuous entanglements across subject and species lines. As Braidotti further explains in a praxis that could describe Carrington's characters, "'Becoming"[...]is about affinities and the capacity both to sustain and generate inter-connectedness.'<sup>45</sup> I suggest that in the vision of Carrington's hybrid, such open-ended praxis is fully harnessed and enabled, fostering feminist politics that escape Humanism's reductive, fixed parameters. In the following section I will demonstrate how Elizabeth Bishop's hybrid figures in her poetry align with the posthuman feminist politics exhibited by Carrington, exploring how they similarly demonstrate an affirmative rupture of humanist boundaries. Taking this mode as a cue, I consider more specifically, how Bishop's particular interest in Charles Darwin is manifest in her human-animal poetry. I investigate how the naturalist's study of such strange, evolutionary figures resonates with her own sense of outsiderhood as a lesbian woman, arguing that her trans-species hybrids catalyse an explosion of Humanism's heteronormative parameters.

### **Elizabeth Bishop's Darwinian 'Becoming-Animal' Figures**

Bishop's hybrid human-animal figures, conjured through accretive description, are cues to perceive the world anew in a non-anthropocentric manner as I argue in the following analysis. One of the many letters Elizabeth Bishop wrote to her friend Robert Lowell locates her relationship with nature and her own position as a nature poet, thus providing a provocative place to begin a posthumanist analysis of her hybrid animal poems and the way in which they communicate an anthropological exodus. Moreover, the letter brings Bishop into conversation with Carrington's feminist ecologies in a way that has not been

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<sup>45</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p.8.

explored before. In this particular letter, written in 1951, she casts judgement upon her own poetic praxis after reading through the contents of her collection *A Cold Spring* (1955): 'On reading over what I've got on hand I find I'm really a minor female Wordsworth – at least, I don't know anyone else who seems to be such a Nature Lover.'<sup>46</sup>

This extract reveals both Bishop's love of the natural world but also her own sense of marginalisation, where she concludes that she is a mere 'minor female' writer in the context of Wordsworth's gigantic stature. Bishop also demonstrates in the letter an awareness that being a 'Nature Lover' situates her as an outsider figure and that she finds herself alone in the sense of kinship she feels with the natural world. Whilst this may at first appear to be an example of Bishop's tendency towards self-doubt as she confronts being in the shadows of Wordsworth, I suggest that it also has the potential to open up a dialogue with Deleuze's and Guattari's affirmative 'minoritarian' other. As a lesbian poet who thus occupies such a 'minoritarian' position, Bishop enables a human-animal continuum that decentres the egotism of the poet's voice. Her poetry, characterised by its reticent speakers located upon a periphery, marks an exit from the Anthropos in its surrealist method that innovates a way of seeing differently. She fosters landscapes that defamiliarise the familiar in their ontological reboots demonstrating that there is no being *outside* nature for any species as Carrington similarly exhibits in her hybrid human-animal narratives. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, Bishop was not an overt feminist in the manner of Carrington. In fact, she eschewed labels altogether refusing to appear in female-only anthologies. Such a refusal was in keeping with a writer who deliberately obfuscated her persona to the outside world as Priscilla Paton explains:

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<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, *One Art Elizabeth Bishop: Letters, Selected and Edited*, ed. by Robert Giroux (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p.222.

Identity is difficult to fathom with a writer initially known for discretion and objective description, who shied away from literary cliques and grandstanding [...] Bishop scholars have noted her troubled sense of self which emerges in the poetry through resistance to a dominant 'I' [...] and 'closeting' of sexual desires'.<sup>47</sup>

Responding to scholars' discussion of Bishop's refusal to explicitly identify with a specific subjectivity or politics, Marilyn May Lombardi insists that it was an understandable act as it was 'consistent with her lifelong aversion to systems of polarization, exclusion and subordination.'<sup>48</sup> She adds that Bishop's refusal to be categorised in any way demonstrates her decision to 'cloak and recloak her own flesh, to cross-dress, displace or otherwise project her most intense feelings into a variety of poetic protagonists.'<sup>49</sup> Lombardi adds that this enabled Bishop to 'escape stifling categorization and conventional definitions of identity.'<sup>50</sup> Thus, hybrid creatures reveal themselves as enabling motifs for a poet who never felt that she belonged within cultural norms due to a separation from her parents as a young child, and her lesbian sexuality. As a result, I propose that her instinctive connection with nature in the form of human-animal hybrids, bodies forth a posthumanist ethics which enables her to express her own sense of female otherness. Lois Cucullu notes that feminist thinkers were initially reluctant to investigate any potential feminist politics in Bishop's work due to their own quest for 'an essential unitary self, albeit a female one.' She adds:

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<sup>47</sup> Priscilla Paton, "'You are not Beppo": Elizabeth Bishop's Animals and Negotiation of Identity', *Mosaic* 39.4 (2006), 197-213 (p.198).

<sup>48</sup> Marilyn May Lombardi, 'Prologue: "Another Way of Seeing"', in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Geography of Gender*, ed. by Marilyn May Lombardi (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp.1-13 (p.6).

<sup>49</sup> Marilyn May Lombardi, 'The Closet of Breath: Elizabeth Bishop, Her Body and Her Art', in *Elizabeth Bishop The Geography of Gender*, pp.46-69 (p.47).

<sup>50</sup> Lombardi, 'The Closet of Breath: Elizabeth Bishop, Her Body and Her Art', p.47.

Portraits of unique and autonomous female individuals are lacking in Bishop's poetry. Moreover, her carefully guarded personal life and her eschewal of confessional poetry (one important source of 'female' representation) made Bishop suspect as a model. Taken together, these help explain why feminist critics have largely ignored or simply dismissed Bishop's poetry.<sup>51</sup>

It is necessary to look to Adrienne Rich in order to see the beginnings of fruitful feminist readings of Bishop's work, a lesbian writer who herself moves away from the habit of seeking a 'unitary self' that inadvertently aligns female writers with a patriarchal literary tradition, as Cucullu goes on to argue. Key to positioning Bishop's poetry within a feminist context is her recurrent exploration of outsider figures who, according to Rich, offered her a way of communicating, and releasing, her repressed, queer female identity:

In particular I am concerned with her experience of outsiderhood, closely – though not exclusively – linked with that essential outsiderhood of a lesbian identity; and with how the outsider's eye enables Bishop to perceive other kinds of outsiders to identify, or try to identify, with them.<sup>52</sup>

Rich observes here not only Bishop's depiction of and interest in the outsider figure, but also the way she attempts to connect with others like herself. This instinct to interrelate is an important one that breaks out of the parameters of humanist individualism and is potently suggested in the dual ontologies of Bishop's hybrid creatures. Furthermore, the

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<sup>51</sup> Lois Cucullu, 'Trompe l'Oeil: Elizabeth Bishop's Radical "I"', *Textual Studies in Literature and Language*, 30.2 (Summer 1988), 246-271 (p. 247).

<sup>52</sup> Adrienne Rich, 'The Eye of the Outsider: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop', *Boston Review* 8, (April 1983), 15-17 (p.16).

alterity and alienation experienced by such hybrid figures both mirror and convey Bishop's own feelings of outsiderhood in her position as a lesbian woman in the mid-twentieth century. Rich points to Bishop's method as one which is encoded with the perceptions and understated protest of 'outsiderhood' enabling her to explore marginality, power and powerlessness and thereby assert a sexual politics beyond phallogentric confines.<sup>53</sup> Lombardi's readings of Bishop similarly emphasise her 'strategies of concealment', intimating that in her early work she 'cloaks her own sexuality' 'under the guise of animal courtship.'<sup>54</sup> Bishop conveys her own sexual politics most palpably in her hybrid animal ontologies which conjure 'encoded' visions of outsiderhood, thereby circumnavigating patriarchal border lines. Whilst not explicitly indicative of rebellion and transgression in the manner of Carrington's more overtly feminist hybrid figures, Bishop's metamorphic creatures do however share their potential for alliance and a totemic capacity for transformation. In this way her hybrids do not conform to humanist heteronormative modes, but instead perform as outsider figures who find voice and agency in their alliance with the natural world. In shifting perspectives towards the nature-bound outsider, I suggest that Bishop forges a different way of looking; a mode of seeing through the lens of radical, sexual alterity in a way that is fruitful for her own sexual politics.

I contend that Bishop's positioning of hybrid creatures upon a human-animal continuum is indicative of such alterity in that they do not correlate with any boundaries, least of all phallogentric, humanist ones and further demonstrate her surrealist sensibilities. Indeed, as Noheden explains the 'Surrealist belief that poetry can function as a bridge between humans and nature took on a particular urgency during and following World War II'.<sup>55</sup> Breton himself takes issue with the human species' habit of a taxonomical

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<sup>53</sup> Rich, 'The Eye of the Outsider', p.16.

<sup>54</sup> Lombardi, 'The Closet of Breath', p.59.

<sup>55</sup> Kristoffer Noheden, 'Toward a Total Animism: Surrealism and Nature', *The Routledge Companion to Surrealism*, ed. by Kirsten Strom (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2023), p.56.

approach to the world arguing that ‘The very idea of “three kingdoms” – animal, vegetable and mineral – is the height of absurdity.’<sup>56</sup> The hybrid’s boundlessness in Bishop’s poetry demonstrates a figure most emblematic of the outsider in its estrangement from the humanist and taxonomic register that Breton rallied against, and is thereby a coded, manifestation of Bishop’s lesbian sexuality. I suggest that the affirmative posthumanist stance they exhibit is suggestive of a female sexual politics which finds scope in the freedoms of the becoming animal configuration, and recalling the surrealists’ concept of poetry as a bridge between human and nature. In this way her poetics are indicative of how ‘All becomings are minoritarian [...] and necessarily move into the direction of the “others” of classical dualism.’<sup>57</sup> Braidotti explains the fruitfulness of the becoming animal model in a way that complements my posthumanist reading of Bishop’s praxis in the next section of this chapter. The ways in which Braidotti’s so-called ‘morphological hybridity’ serve to explode ‘civilised confines’ is manifest in Carrington’s short stories discussed earlier in this Chapter.<sup>58</sup> However, Bishop’s trans-species figures similarly overwhelm the pejorative categories of humanist civilisation, decentring it in a coded manner in order to assert a similarly aligned politics to Carrington’s; one that, at the same time, gives voice to a repressed female and, in her example, lesbian experience.

Key to positioning Bishop as a poet whose work is suggestive of radical gender and sexual politics is recognising her great sense of kinship with the naturalist Charles

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<sup>56</sup> André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, translated by Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: MFA Publications, 2002), pp.44-46.

<sup>57</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p.119.

<sup>58</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p.119. I discuss this quotation in full in the introductory section of this Chapter.

Darwin.<sup>59</sup> Bishop was an ardent admirer of Darwin and his writing, even describing him as her ‘favorite hero, almost’.<sup>60</sup> Bishop scholar Jonathan Ellis explains that the reticence suggested by ‘almost’ is indicative of a poet who ‘didn’t like to associate herself with any author, school of thought or literary tradition too firmly’ and recalls Lombardi on Bishop’s refusal to explicitly pledge allegiance to a specific cause.<sup>61</sup> Susan McCabe proposes that Bishop would have found Darwin’s transformational figures with their sexual and aesthetic deviation from anthropocentric norms far more ‘amenable’ than Freud’s who was so dominant in how writers of the early and mid-twentieth century understood sexuality and gender: ‘I argue that Darwin’s vivid presentation of slow transitions over extended geological time, peculiar forms, gradual adaptations, and transitional states held out a less binary model than Freud’s female homosexual’.<sup>62</sup> It is also important to note that Surrealism itself emerged in the wake of what Noheden describes as ‘the twin “Copernican revolutions” of evolutionary biology and psychoanalysis, both of which struck blows to an earlier anthropocentric view.’ As Noheden adds, the surrealists understood the Darwinian awakening to the fact that ‘humans *are* animals’ and that ‘the difference between humans and other life-forms being one of degree and not kind.’<sup>63</sup>

In this second section of the chapter, I suggest that McCabe’s reference to Darwin’s ‘peculiar forms’ and ‘transitional states’ chimes with Bishop’s hybrid creatures ‘The

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<sup>59</sup> Bishop read *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839), visited Darwin’s home in England and studied his journey to the Galapagos. Bishop’s much discussed preference for the surrealism of everyday life is a mode she perceived in Darwin’s work whose absorption with the crystalline details of natural history left her imagining him ‘sliding giddily off into the unknown’; a praxis mirrored in her own poetics. Featured in a letter Bishop wrote to Anne Stevenson on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1964, and included in *Elizabeth Bishop: Poems, Prose and Letters*, ed. by Robert Giroux and Lloyd Schwartz (New York: The Library of America, 2008), p.861.

<sup>60</sup> Bishop, *One Art: Elizabeth Bishop*, p.544.

<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Ellis, ‘Reading Bishop Reading Darwin’, in *Science in Modern Poetry: New Directions*, ed. by John Holmes (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp.181-193, (p.185).

<sup>62</sup> Susan McCabe, ‘Survival of the Queerly Fit: Darwin, Marianne Moore, and Elizabeth Bishop’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 55.4 (Winter 2009), 547-571 (p.548). McCabe adds that ‘Darwin offered these poets a way of reading desire beyond Freud’s “masculine” woman who refuses to identify with the normative mother’s domesticated and passive role’, p.548.

<sup>63</sup> Noheden, ‘Toward a Total Animism’, p.54.

Riverman' and 'The Man-Moth', who whilst named as men, do not pertain to any fixed ontology and radically deviate from patriarchal parameters. Rather, they are examples of what McCabe describes as Darwin's 'array of possible embodiments' that encourage Bishop to 'bypass Freud's human-centred Oedipal structure', instead providing a vision of nature 'filled with attractive anomalies and "originals"'.<sup>64</sup> Such anomalies give voice to Bishop's queer sexual politics which, whilst not as strident as Carrington's feminism, are implicitly resonant in her 'becoming animal' poems. In aligning herself with Darwin's natural histories, I propose that Bishop's animal hybrid poems challenge humanist projections of a feminised nature and thus feminine roles thereby eluding anthropocentric habit of connecting morality with a passive natural world. Rather, in the space of Bishop's hybrid animal poems, nature is agentic and brimming with 'peculiar forms', forging a dynamic sphere that gives voice to a lesbian identity normally stifled by phallogentric Humanism. Elizabeth Grosz's essay 'Darwin and Feminism' (2008) further explains how Darwinian approaches may provide feminists with new ways of thinking about nature, corporeality, temporality, and modes of metamorphoses, thus forging inter-connections between nature and culture that are enabling:

[Darwin's] work develops an anti-humanist [...] which refuses to assume that the temporal movement forward can be equated with development or progress. His work affords us an understanding of the productivity, the generative surprise, that the play of repetition and pure difference [...] effects the becoming of species.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> McCabe, 'Survival of the Queerly Fit', p.548.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 'Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigations for a Possible Alliance' in *Material Feminisms* ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.23-51 (p.28).

In this example Grosz demonstrates how feminists can appropriate Darwin's corporeal modes to forge a posthumanist space. She proposes that Darwin's 'open-ended understanding' of the entanglement of differences provides 'anti-humanist' sensibilities which give voice to a spectrum of feminisms and by implication, the outsider figures who populate Bishop's poems.

A letter Charles Darwin wrote to Thomas Huxley is productive for bringing Bishop's work into dialogue with Carrington's. Establishing the human animal's heritage in appropriately surreal terms, Darwin presents a genealogy for the human species which may well have come as a shock to Cartesian thinkers but is a fruitful place to pursue a study of animality in Bishop's poetry: 'Our ancestor was an animal which breathed water, had a swim bladder, a great swimming tail, an imperfect skull, and undoubtedly was a hermaphrodite. Here is a pleasant genealogy for mankind.'<sup>66</sup> In this scientific and yet seemingly extraordinary vision, teaming natural history with the surreal in the manner that Bishop encompasses in her poetry, we witness the human species as undoubtedly animal in ontology but also one predisposed to adapt, shift and transform; one who is a de-familiarised familiar both distant in its strangeness and yet proximately connected and kin. This is what Grosz describes as an affirmative 'anti-humanist' understanding of ontology, ascribing plurality and diversity to all life forms in a way that is fruitful for the feminist and lesbian identity. Darwin's hermaphrodite ancestor is an example of the 'generative surprise' that Grosz extols, indicative of how a Darwinian approach is facilitative for feminist thinkers and non-heteronormative identities; it aptly describes the 'becoming animal' hybrids that populate Bishop's poems. In the same way that Carrington forges an animal milieu that eludes anthropocentric categories, Bishop's work similarly straddles transitory borderlands which are characterised by slippages and movement across human-

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<sup>66</sup> Astrida Neimanis, Quoted in *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), p.109.

animal ontologies. Many of her poems are located at the waterside, slipping across spaces that traverse land and water, embodying hybridised spheres and eluding epistemological mappings. In these liminalities I suggest that Bishop's work is situated outside of phallogentric, fixed boundary lines and espouses anomalous ontologies indicative of a radical sexual politics.

My analysis of how Bishop's hybrid animal poems communicate a posthuman, feminist politics akin to Carrington's, concentrates on her early surrealist work 'The Man-Moth' followed by an exploration of her waterside hybrid in 'The Riverman'. In particular, I consider how Bishop attributes a plasticity to gender roles where, to borrow from McCabe, the man-moth exhibits a potential queer male mothering and Bishop, as a lesbian poet, demonstrates how queer writers 'thrive as creators', not propagators.<sup>67</sup> In the vision of the animal hybrid, I also consider how Bishop ruptures the boundaries of a patriarchal, Cartesian identity forging space for a radical sexual politics that exhibits a slippage across the nature/culture divide. Bishop's fusion of natural and cultural phenomena often reading the natural world through para-text and Darwin's natural histories attests to a further hybridisation in her poetry, speaking to the malleability and alliance necessary in enabling a post-anthropocentric thinking. Furthermore, these analyses consider how Bishop tilts rational, humanist perspectives in her kaleidoscopic, oneiric spaces which exhibit a maternal presence, thereby affirmatively reorienting an agentive nature within a female sphere.

'The Man-Moth', from Bishop's first poetry collection *North and South* (1946), immediately situates the reader within a hybrid realm both in the blurring of human-animal ontologies and in the way she transmogrifies the cityscape into a twilight, insect underworld. The volume took Bishop a decade to complete, and its poems were written

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<sup>67</sup> McCabe, 'Survival of the Queerly Fit', p.568. McCabe further argues that the queer identity thrives as a creator by 'drawing on materials from literary, mythic, naturalist, and personal sources', p.568.

during a period when Bishop's own surrealist sensibilities were manifest. In 'The Man-Moth's' overlap she explores a nature which mingles a sense of masculine and feminine but also the rational and irrational, obfuscating categories and plunging the reader into an unquantifiable space. The poem, published in 1936, was inspired by a misprint for 'mammoth' in the *New York Times* which Bishop makes reference to at the bottom of the page.<sup>68</sup> In this way I suggest she further blends dichotomies, where in combining the facts of a newspaper report with the art of poetry, she forges a further hybridised thinking. In her essay 'Bishop and the Natural World' (2014), Susan Rosenbaum suggests that, 'Not coincidentally, the "man-moth" is the mechanically induced offspring of a "mammoth," an extinct prehistoric mammal, with one theory of its extinction involving overhunting by man.'<sup>69</sup> Such a mistake demonstrates how human error, exemplified in the mistype, inadvertently cancels out the mammoth species and underlines the thoughtless, almost incidental manner in which man exploits animals to the point of their annihilation.

Although the title 'The Man-Moth' points to a gendering of the moth, Bishop immediately casts any phallogocentric perspectives to the periphery explaining that 'The whole shadow of Man is only as big as his hat.'<sup>70</sup> Recalling Nietzsche, it is the animal that emerges most palpably in the poem where the moth's insect ontology surges to the fore in the freneticism of his resounding physicality. Suggestive of a posthuman, feminist politics in its decentring of human perspective, it is a praxis that is mirrored in Carrington's short stories and brings the writers into conversation. Bishop unravels anthropocentric points of reference in a poem that conjures a creature in a high state of alert as he attempts to

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<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, 'The Man-Moth', in *The Centenary Edition Poems Elizabeth Bishop* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011), p.16-17. Bishop explains in a footnote to the poem's title that Man-Moth is a 'Newspaper mis-print for "mammoth."'

<sup>69</sup> Susan Rosenbaum, 'Bishop and the Natural World', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop* ed. by Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.62-78, (p.72-3).

<sup>70</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth', p.16, l.3.

traverse buildings, driven by animal instincts as he propels himself into a cityscape,  
exposing his vulnerability:

But what the Man-Moth fears most he must do, although  
he fails of course, and falls back scared but quite unhurt.

Then he returns  
to the pale subways of cement he calls home. He flits,  
he flutters, and cannot get aboard the silent trains  
fast enough to suit him.<sup>71</sup>

The Man-Moth's decision making is driven by a sense of urgency and the need to survive; he is in a constant state of transition, not just in his hybridised mode, but in the propulsions of his tenacious bodily movements described as 'flits' and 'flutters'. Bishop establishes the creature as an outsider in the way that his movements are inconvenienced by train speeds which do not 'suit him', and in her choice of poetic form. Constructed in six, eight-line stanzas, it is significant that Bishop opens each one with a line that stretches out halfway across the page. Jonathan Ellis suggest that this formatting is indicative of an irregular heartbeat; whilst I agree that this could be suggestive of an inability to assimilate, and off-beat difference, I add that visually it points to the man-moth's vulnerability and his potential exposure when he surfaces in an anthropocentric, city realm. Bishop's explanation that he 'pays his rare, although occasional, visits to the surface' is borne out in the isolation of the first line of each stanza indicative of his radical alterity.<sup>72</sup> It invokes a sense of his own feelings of exposure in this city space whenever he emerges. As a closeted

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<sup>71</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth', p.16, ll.23-28.

<sup>72</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth', p.16, l.10.

lesbian, who repressed her own sexual identity for the majority of her life, the man-moth's apparent vulnerability and sense of exposure when he surfaces is suggestive of Bishop's own reticence about revealing herself. The man-moth's appearance exposed in the middle of the page at each stanza opening, points to the risky precarity of standing out or becoming present when exhibiting an ontology that spills outside of humanist norms. It explains why he instinctively retreats to gloomy, dark liminal spaces and recalls the way Bishop depicts her own lesbian relationship with Brazilian architect Lota de Macedo Soares in the poem 'Song for the Rainy Season' from *Questions of Travel* (1965).<sup>73</sup>

The man-moth's insect hybridity is significant in its dynamic movement, bodying forth Deleuze's and Guattari's 'becoming animal' but with greater significance in the image of insect otherness – a mode that mirrors the radical alterity of the hyena discussed in Carrington's 'The Debutante'. In a development of their 'becoming animal' modality for feminist purposes, Braidotti discusses the potency of the becoming insect figure, describing how entomological creatures embody radical otherness but also underlining the significance of their capacity for transformation. In their metamorphic potential she suggests they confront and challenge androcentric modes that reductively narrow humanist perceptions of the natural world:

Insects exacerbate the human power of understanding to the point of  
implosion. Tiny miniatures, they exercise the same immense sense of

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<sup>73</sup> In this poem Bishop describes their situation together as 'our small shadowy/life!' intimating that cultural outsiders, including those in non-heteronormative relationships, must reside in the darkness and make only oblique appearances when safe – as the man-moth does. Whilst not a surrealist poem, it is indicative of how Bishop portrayed and perceived her life as a lesbian woman, where references to being 'hidden' and 'high fog' are further examples of Bishop's method of coding and concealing in order to express her own sexuality. It is also significant that Bishop does not perceive herself and Macedo Soares as isolated individuals in the poem describing how their 'shadowy life' mirrors those of non-human animals often reviled by humans. These include 'silver fish, mouse,/bookworms,' and most importantly 'big moths' whose collective residence in the Brazilian home with Bishop and Macedo Soares is described as a 'membership'. 'Song for the Rainy Season', *The Centenary Edition Poems Elizabeth Bishop*, pp.99-100.

estrangement as dinosaurs, dragons or other gigantic monsters.

Improbable morphological constructs, they challenge and titillate and are hybrid par excellence. Other qualities that make insects paradigmatic are their power of metamorphosis, the parasitism, the power of mimetism or blending with their territory and environment and the speed of movement [...] it dwells between different states of in-between-ness, arousing the same spasmodic reactions in humans as the monstrous, the sacred, the alien.<sup>74</sup>

'The Man-Moth' has the potential to widen the scope of 'human understanding' and perspective in its positioning as an outsider; a position that Adrienne Rich sees as emblematic of Bishop's mode of expression for a queer identity. Its explicit capacity for transformation in its corporeal shift from caterpillar to winged creature also speaks to a tremulous ontology that continually eludes fixed categories and is thereby akin to Bishop's own eschewal of labels. Braidotti notes how such an apparently alien creature emblematises the potential empowerment that a position of alterity can facilitate: such 'paradigmatic' abilities of metamorphosis demonstrate how Bishop's man-moth operates as a totemic figure for ontologies registering outside of androcentrism, including Bishop's own queerness, where criss-crossing human boundary lines is an enabling manoeuvre. Further slippages occur in Bishop's poetics where the man-moth can at moments appear as proximately familiar to the human in the manner that he lives and breathes, negotiating his way around the cityscape before returning home as all species must. But at the same time, whilst he does appear in certain moments as a humanoid, commuter figure aboard the train, Bishop immediately re-establishes him as a radical outsider figure, alerting the reader

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<sup>74</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p.149.

to the fact that he 'always seats himself facing the wrong way' as if embracing his own difference.<sup>75</sup>

Just as the ties recur beneath the train, these underlie  
his rushing brain. He does not dare look out the window,  
for the third rail, the unbroken draught of poison,  
runs there beside him. He regards it as a disease  
he has inherited the susceptibility to.<sup>76</sup>

In orienting himself 'the wrong way' there is a suggestion of him returning to Darwinian evolutionary roots, away from this anthropocentric realm. Yet, he also fears his entomological heritage, hinting at his perilous vulnerability as he 'dares not look out of the window' and the dangers below; the suggestion that he 'has inherited a susceptibility to' falling into harm's way. The third rail speaks to an indeterminacy, indicative of Bishop's eschewal of heteronormative dialectics and further underlining the man-moth's position as an outsider figure who does not and cannot conform.

Such ontological slippages, pointing to an insect otherness that Bishop finds kinship with, is similarly manifest in the geographic and virtual spaces of the poem. Bishop conjures a realm veiled by night and characterised by transformations and shadows where a hybrid creature led by all its senses exists within a liminal space. Although situated within a cityscape, Bishop immediately defamiliarises and estranges the reader from it; she etches a landscape allied with the moon, whose light is described as 'queer [...] on his hands'.<sup>77</sup> Any clear delineation of this space is repeatedly thwarted; it is 'neither warm nor cold' and the

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<sup>75</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth', p.17, l.29.

<sup>76</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth', p.17, ll.35-39.

<sup>77</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth', p.16, l.7.

'temperature impossible to record in thermometers.'<sup>78</sup> In this way Bishop ushers the reader into an oneiric, in-between space more akin to a dream than a conscious reality where the man-moth's eye is 'all dark pupil,/an entire night in itself'.<sup>79</sup> In fact, the man-moth's experience is distanced, or removed somehow where he dreams 'recurrent dreams' and must 'keep/his hands in his pockets, as others must wear mufflers'.<sup>80</sup> The intense strangeness of the man-moth's experience and the landscape within which he operates is suggestive of a dreamscape; one that mirrors Bishop's own reflections upon Darwin's natural history studies which she reveals in a letter to Anne Stevenson:

There is no 'split.' Dreams, works of art (some) glimpses of the always-more-successful surrealism of everyday life, unexpected moments of empathy (is it?), catch a peripheral vision of whatever it is one can never really see full-face but that seems enormously important. I can't believe we are wholly irrational – and I do admire Darwin – But reading Darwin one admires the beautiful solid case being built up out of his endless, heroic observations, almost unconscious or automatic – and then comes a sudden relaxation, a forgetful phrase, and one feels the strangeness of his undertaking, sees the lonely young man, his eyes fixed on facts and minute details, sinking or sliding giddily off into the unknown.<sup>81</sup>

Bishop's sense of kinship with Darwin and the 'strangeness of his undertaking' is manifest in this letter where there are clear parallels between her perception of his method and her own poetic praxis. In the same way that she imagines him homing in upon 'facts and

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<sup>78</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth', p.16, ll.7-8.

<sup>79</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth', p.17, ll.42-43.

<sup>80</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth'. p.17, l.40.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted by Anne Stevenson, *Elizabeth Bishop* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), p.66. It is taken from a letter from Bishop to Stevenson dated 8<sup>th</sup> January 1964.

minute details' which segue towards an 'unknown', Bishop similarly accretes molecular descriptions in a manner that exhibits the sense of an hallucination; as if by looking more closely, narrow, anthropocentric perceptions are kaleidoscopically exploded. A slide towards an othering of our perceptions is forged in 'The Man-Moth' where in observing the creature with a Darwinian eye the poem's speaker similarly sinks towards a liminal, surreal space that cannot be epistemologically mapped in Cartesian terms. Bishop creates the sense of the man-moth being conjured as if from a dream, where the unconscious explosively erupts. Appropriating Darwin's method enables Bishop to body forth the figure of a repressed outsider: through a Darwinian lens, the moth hybrid thrives by breaking out from reductive, Cartesian divides which delineate an arbitrary 'split'. As Grosz explains, such an approach is a fruitful one for a spectrum of feminist thinkers in its acknowledgement of a 'complex account of the movements of difference [...] and becoming that characterize all forms of life.'<sup>82</sup> Far from being essentialist in the manner of Cartesianism, Darwin's natural histories facilitate an open-ended mode of study that acknowledges and celebrates a spectrum of experiences and ontologies in the way that Bishop's man-moth embodies.

The twilight world of the man-moth, characterised by darkness and nebulous space, is at times a spectral one colliding the rational and irrational together, thus invoking posthumanist frameworks. Maintaining my assertion that Bishop conjures a dreamscape I further propose that it is, at times, a haunted one in a way that fosters the sense of a female presence. I propose that the moth's preoccupation with the topic of his birth, attests to the fact he is haunted by a maternal presence; a spectre that feminises the city space he resides within:

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<sup>82</sup> Grosz, 'Darwin and Feminism', p.28.

he climbs fearfully, thinking that this time he will manage  
 to push his small head through that round clean opening  
 and be forced through, as from a tube, in black scrolls on the light.<sup>83</sup>

Bishop's choice of language here is suggestive of the birth process, but it may also intimate the arrival of a new hybrid species wrestling its way into the world, attempting to adapt to its new environment in a manner that would have fascinated Darwin. Bishop's own lesbian identity is similarly a bifurcation from heteronormative Humanism; an identity, which in 1936, would have been perceived as an alien species. References to 'tunnels' and 'subways' further suggest the man-moth is recurrently haunted by the maternal birth canal speaking to his biological ties with the mother who looms large in his consciousness. In the same way as the mammoth became endangered and extinct, there is the suggestion that the man-moth too is a precarious species haunted by the spectre of a future extinction, potentially explaining why he repeatedly returns to the scene of his birth. In this way an alliance with the female resonates with Carrington's call to refuse the patriarchal 'Masters' as rulers and instead look to 'Mother Nature' as an affirmative, enabling force.<sup>84</sup>

The man-moth exhibits a fractious quest for a sense of belonging; a nomadic creature who furtively and urgently skirts around the peripheries of the cityscape seeking connection in a seemingly nebulous void that repeatedly eludes him. In the way that Tina Barr posits I suggest that the institutionalisation of Bishop's mother when she was a child

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<sup>83</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth', p.16, ll.19-21.

<sup>84</sup> Tina Barr explains that the reoccurrence of moths and butterflies in Bishop's work attests to a desire to forge a connection with the feminine: 'I want to suggest a reading in which, in the unconscious symbolic language of certain poems, Bishop refers to moths and other insects, such as butterflies, as attendant to the evocation of feminine attachment, however equivocal its origins. Bishop alludes to various women who were important to her while symbolically invoking the originating object of her primal desire. The moths and other insects that were part of her early childhood in Nova Scotia surface and recur as materials, as pastiche.' 'Insects as Emblems of Affection: Symbolic Displacement in Selected Poems by Elizabeth Bishop', *Harvard Review*, no.16 (1999), 46-55 (p.48).

manifests itself in the man-moth figure where the creature's search for darkness and underground tunnels is indicative of a desire for maternal re-attachment. Her sense of kinship with the butterfly/moth metamorphic mode provides a facilitative escape route from her sense of loss but also, feelings of imprisonment inevitably experienced by lesbian identities trapped within the heteronormative culture of the early and mid-twentieth century.

In the final stanza of the poem the speaker and the man-moth co-mingle in a generative encounter facilitated by the man-moth's feminisation. The speaker's intent to epistemologically categorise the creature with his invasive flashlight is thwarted when the moth 'closes up' his 'all dark pupil' to humanist appropriation. Instead, the man-moth precipitates a more egalitarian dynamic by offering up the gesture of a tear:

Then from the lids

one tear, his only possession, like the bee's sting, slips.

Slyly he palms it, and if you're not paying attention

he'll swallow it. However, if you watch, he'll hand it over,

cool as from underground springs and pure enough to drink.<sup>85</sup>

The emotion suggested by a tear marks an exit from the controlled rationalism of male Cartesian thinking and echoes Carrington's reference to the potential of unchaining 'emotional power' in order to elude the clutches of patriarchal masters.<sup>86</sup> Bishop's poem exhibits a feminised praxis further in the tear's comparison to a 'sting' where in entomological species, the ovipositor can double as sting, and egg laying mechanism, further alluding to a female and maternal sphere. Given that the man-moth is identified

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<sup>85</sup> 'The Man-Moth', p.17, ll.44-48.

<sup>86</sup> Carrington, 'What is a Woman?', p.374.

primarily by his maleness there is the suggestion of a queer male-mothering at work where the moth's tear conveys nourishment in its comparison to a spring; a mode that McCabe reads as akin to Darwinian natural histories that embrace difference and ontological overlap:

Darwin is a pivotal alternative to Freud in the modernist quest to recast sexual culture. His notions of sexual inheritance and artificial selection clarify what I call the queerly fit in a poetic, aesthetic and sexual sense. [...]The transitional state of [Marianne] Moore's and Bishop's voices, personas and animals provide, like Darwin's sense of 'plastic' forms, necessary counterbalance to Freud's demoralized domestic mother whom the female child apparently must identify with if she is to become a woman, properly, in the normative rituals of marriage and childbirth, or rather in the masochistic, passive position Freud so deftly described.<sup>87</sup>

The man-moth embodies Darwin's image of 'plastic forms' in his 'transitional' hybrid state but also in his 'recast' of 'sexual culture' that exhibits both female and male gendering. His handing over a 'tear' presents him as a 'creator' rather than a 'propagator' forging an interspecies connection through the vibrancy of encounter, recalling human-animal interactions in Carrington's tales. The speaker's invitation to 'watch' the man-moth in a Darwinian sense rather than relegate him to the shadows of entomological otherness enables a border-crossing, thereby undoing the dominant configuration of the human in favour of a 'colossal hybridization of the species.'<sup>88</sup> Bishop's final line, where the speaker compares the gesture of the man-moth's tear to being 'cool as from underground springs

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<sup>87</sup> McCabe, 'Survival of the Queerly Fit', p.568.

<sup>88</sup> Braidotti, 'Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism', p.26.

and pure enough to drink', is indicative of female nurturing but also of relief in a 'becoming' that signals the fruitfulness of cross-species encounters. The spillage of bodily fluid from one body to another forges an alliance that fosters a 'becoming animal' ontology, indicative of a posthuman ethics which explodes Cartesian parameters in the manner that Braidotti ascribes to posthuman identities:

Processes of becoming [...] are not predicated on a stable, centralized Self who supervises their unfolding. They rest rather on a non-unitary, multi-layered, dynamic subject. The posthumanist approach to differences is the chosen strategy to express this vision of the subject. Becoming woman/animal/insect is an affect that flows [...] it is a composition, a location that needs to be constructed together with, that is to say in the encounter with, others.<sup>89</sup>

The watery border crossing between the man-moth and human speaker fosters a posthumanist 'becoming' that is fruitful for Bishop's coded sexual politics which in the momentary inter-species encounter, attempts to capture 'full face' what seems 'enormously important'. Bishop's becoming animal hybrid is a shifting reference point for the otherness of Bishop's identity politics. A Darwinian perspective gives voice to a lesbian identity in such a way that it can emerge from its own reticence, allowing the outsider figure to surface in her poetry. By feminising the man-moth with the symbol of the tear and his own allegiance to a maternal presence, Bishop's poem fosters a 'becoming-animal' politics that creatively spills outside of Humanism's reductive parameters and forges a space for the radical alterity of her own sexual identity.

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<sup>89</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p.118.

Developing this examination of the becoming animal motif in Bishop's poetry and how it exhibits a posthumanist ethics that chimes with Carrington's feminist ecologies, I investigate her first Amazonian poem 'The Riverman', published in the *New Yorker* in 1960 after her own trip to the Amazon. From her later collection *Questions of Travel* (1965), written during her fifteen years in Brazil, the poems trace the transitory borderlands between home and travel, exhibiting Bishop's quest for a sense of belonging but also her perpetual interest in the geographies of elsewhere. Like 'The Man-Moth', 'The Riverman' similarly draws upon other texts, attesting to McCabe's idea of the 'queerly fit' employing 'literary, mythic, naturalist and personal sources' in order to create rather than propagate. An anthropologist's study entitled *Amazon Town* (1958) by Charles Wagley is the text identified as the inspiration for this Brazilian poem, rather than a newspaper report cited in 'The Man-Moth'. Wagley's study details a man in a remote Amazonian village with ambitions to become a witch doctor/medicine man called a *sacaca* who works in tandem with the water spirits. Bethany Hicok explains that Bishop draws most of the details for her poem from Wagley's 'From Magic to Science' chapter where he describes the spiritual life of the Tupi-speaking Indians and their relationship with Catholicism and Shamanism.<sup>90</sup> Whilst he suggests that these two belief systems once existed concurrently in the Amazon village, he later observes that the community is, in fact, in transition and that, 'Nowadays people profess, at least, that they do not want their children to become pages [medicine men].'<sup>91</sup> Bishop's poem is based upon one such medicine man in training called Satiro who is given voice in Wagley's interview. In this way Bishop's protagonist is immediately established as an outsider figure both in the manner that he wishes to exit his human world

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<sup>90</sup> Bethany Hicok, *Elizabeth Bishop's Brazil* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2016) Hicok provides a detailed description of Wagley's influence upon Bishop's 'The Riverman', p.124.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Wagley, *Amazon Town: A Study of Man in the Tropics* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p.229. Wagley goes on to explain that the 'page is persecuted by the authorities, called "pagan" by the padre, and publicly criticized by the upper class', p.229.

to join the watery community of river spirits but also in his ambition to become a counter-cultural figure in the form of a *sacaca*. As Wagley explains, those who wished to be shamanic medicine men were ‘persecuted by the authorities’ and ‘publicly criticized by the upper classes’. Hicok posits that Bishop’s fascination with the riverman figure is an example of her preoccupation with outsiders:

Given Bishop’s attraction to cultural outsiders, it is not surprising she is drawn to Satiro, but her identification with this man and her choice of dramatic monologue to tell the story also has the effect of immersing her readers in the Riverman’s non-Western world view right from the beginning<sup>92</sup>

Citing Wagley’s ethnography before the ‘The Riverman’ Bishop explains that the river dolphin of the poem is believed to have supernatural powers. Luandinha is described as a river spirit with lunar associations whilst the *pirarucu* is a fish that weighed as much as 400 pounds. Bishop thus establishes at the outset that this poem features a melee of outsider figures who co-mingle together in a non-anthropocentric and non-Western space. Non-western geographies and indeed non-Eurocentric mappings more specifically are subjects I explore in Bishop’s and Carrington’s surrealist work in Chapter Three. Bishop weaves a poem of inter-related textualities and cultures, dissolving divisions in the appropriately liminal space of the river. Bishop immediately establishes the poem’s setting as one of an assemblage rather than human individuals, a poem interested in encounters reminiscent of Carrington’s human-animal narratives. Written during Bishop’s time in Brazil with lesbian lover Lota de Macedo Soares, it was well received by her friend Robert Lowell who told her it reminded him of a dream she had mentioned: ‘I wouldn’t worry about the Amazon poem

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<sup>92</sup> Hicok, *Elizabeth Bishop’s Brazil*, p.125.

– it's the best fairy story in verse I know. It brings back an old dream of yours, you said you were a mermaid scraping barnacles off a wharf pile. That was Maine, not Brazil.<sup>93</sup>

Lowell's praise for Bishop's poem acknowledges its oneiric qualities aligning it with the atmosphere of 'The Man-Moth'; his reference to the 'mermaid' demonstrates how the hybrid animal figure was a recurrent one in Bishop's mind – in both her poetry and dreams. Lowell also brings to the fore Bishop's North American heritage in his reference to Maine, speaking to the poem's transnational atmosphere which further ruptures cultural and geographical delineations. On this theme, Lorrie Goldensohn observes that the poem conveys a 'first person compound of Brazilian legend from within North American diction and feeling', adding that it 'touches on central thematic preoccupations' with 'estrangement and communality'.<sup>94</sup> Such estrangement is frequently experienced by Bishop's speakers who recurrently occupy the position of an outsider as discussed in the analysis of 'The Man-Moth'. However, the theme of 'communality' that Goldensohn describes manifests itself in the process of 'becoming animal' in 'The Riverman', where inter-species encounters draw him out of his peripheral mode.

Set at night in a scene exhibiting the similarly shadowy qualities of 'The Man-Moth', Bishop situates the speaker within a 'river mist' where he must tune in to all of his senses in order to navigate his way. Although identified as male, like 'The Man-Moth', 'The Riverman' is affirmatively estranged from androcentrism and can be read as a figure who channels Bishop's own dream life and experience of living in Brazil. In its fairy tale qualities Bishop stirs an atmosphere of enchantment, and as Barbara Page explains, a sense that she is 'no longer a mere visitor' in Brazil, but instead fully immersed in a way that mirrors the

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<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell, *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*, ed. by Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton (London: Faber and Faber: 2008), p.321.

<sup>94</sup> Lorrie Goldensohn, *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry* (Oxford and New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p.208.

riverman's own journey.<sup>95</sup> As a result, Bishop's experience as an outsider with her North American roots and queer identity finds voice in the Riverman's fantasy tale of cultural and ontological assimilation.

This analysis suggests that the hybrid figure of the riverman is cast in the mould of a posthuman becoming animal, always in progress and process, in flux on a watery journey towards an imagined destination. As with 'The Man-Moth' and the hybrids of Carrington's short stories, it is the riverman's inherent animality that surfaces most patently as he responds to the calls of the dolphin who leads him to the water, away from his 'house/forgotten on the bank.' Cast as a peripheral figure at the opening of the poem, he is instinctively drawn to the water, invited to join the rivery world that entices him away from his human roots. As well as acknowledging this becoming process, I also suggest that the poem exhibits a zoopoetic praxis in its crystalline attention to the bodily poesis of the river's animals via the poem's form, recalling Bishop's kinship with Darwinian modes. The riverman's own careful attentiveness to the flora and fauna of the riverways before plunging into its murky depths are emphasised in Bishop's zoopoetic writing and recalls her reflections upon Darwin similarly sliding giddily in to the unknown. Bishop's own forensic observations of animal life demonstrate how, as Aaron M. Moe argues in *Zoopoetics* (2014), 'an attentiveness to animals shapes the making of human poetry', thereby dissolving species lines and humanist cartographies. Moe explains that zoopoetic roots lie in the 'impulse or instinct to "imitate"'.<sup>96</sup> He suggests that this is a key practice for learning from,

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<sup>95</sup> Barbara Page, 'Home, Wherever That May Be', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. by Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.124-140, (p.135).

<sup>96</sup> Aaron M. Moe, *Zoopoetics: Animals and the Making of Poetry* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014), p.6, p.7. Moe further explains that the starting point for zoopoetics is 'the process of discovering innovative breakthroughs in form through an attentiveness to another species' bodily poesis.' p.10. Defining the etymological context of zoopoetics he adds, 'First, zoopoetics focuses on the process by which animals are makers. They make texts. They gesture. They vocalize[...] The second focus of zoopoetics emerges out of the first. It exposes how the gestures of animals – and the vocalizations embedded in those gestures – have shaped the making of human poetry', p.11.

and about, another species and their way of life - vital concerns of the riverman who longs to join the watery community and become one among other animal species in his wish to be a *sacaca*. The poem begins with precisely such a mirroring, where a kinship is immediately struck between riverman and dolphin:

I got up in the night  
 for the Dolphin spoke to me.  
 He grunted beneath my window,  
 hid by the river mist,  
 but I glimpsed him – a man like myself.<sup>97</sup>

Bishop's recurrent similes in the poem, beginning where the speaker perceives the dolphin as 'a man like myself', establishes lines of connection and mimesis across species, closing the gap imposed by Cartesian thinking. This kinship is not demonstrated through anthropocentric language or the visual; instead, the dolphin grunts and the riverman achieves merely a glimpse of him in the mist. There is, however, enough of an instinctive connection drawn that Bishop aligns them through simile. I suggest she recurrently deploys this mode of figurative language to further bring together human and nature, exploring both how a manmade world attempts to mirror nature and also as a means of expression for her own sense of outsiderhood. I contend that similes are an especially fruitful tool in drawing connections between human and animal life, where they etch a descriptive likeness without empirically dictating a fixed comparison in the manner of metaphor. Similes have the power of suggestion that is conducive to an affirmative ethics in their distance from the more essentialist dictates of metaphor where a poet insists that

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<sup>97</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, 'The Riverman', in *The Centenary Edition Poems Elizabeth Bishop* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011), p.103-107, (p.103), ll.1-5.

something *is* something else. Deleuze and Guattari explain in their analysis of Kafka's animal literature that 'Metamorphosis is the contrary of metaphor', adding that 'There is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the word.'<sup>98</sup> Such a 'distribution of states' is captured by Bishop's simile writing which takes account of differences at the same time as acknowledging potentially open-ended lines of immanence between them.

Exhibiting a kinship with Deleuze's and Guattari's eschewal of metaphoric essentialism, Bishop's similes instead open portals towards a spectrum of possibilities rather than settling upon a fixed position where one element is compared to just one other and foreclosed to any other connections. In this way, it is a praxis conducive to communicating her own queer sexual identity, which is stifled by fixed Cartesian binaries. For example, the river serpent, Luandhina, is described as having 'big eyes green and gold/like the lights on the river steamers' thereby suggesting that the animal, spirit and anthropocentric realms have the potential to fuse and comingle.<sup>99</sup> In this quotation, the steamer's lighting recalls the magical serpent's eyes, aligning nature and human culture. Bishop details the similarities between these two opposing spheres and so draws them together, but she avoids fixing them as metaphorical binaries where one simply signals another. Rather, in her use of simile, she indicates how they share a likeness but implies that there may be other connections to be made. Such a plurality of perspectives is a key posthumanist position which encourages lines of immanence to be drawn between multiple entities; in this way it is a strategy which eschews the humanist preoccupation with binary categories and thus forges a space for Bishop's non-heteronormative identity politics. I also suggest that Bishop's lesbian identity is intimated by the vision of Luandhina herself who clearly intoxicates the speaker with her cinematic appearance, dressed in

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<sup>98</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, p.22.

<sup>99</sup> Bishop, 'The Riverman', p.105, ll.43-44.

‘elegant white satin’ and eyes compared to jewels.<sup>100</sup> The moment that she intimately ‘blew cigar smoke’ into the riverman’s ears and nostrils is erotically charged and they appear to understand each other via a bodily rhetoric that overrides the primacy of spoken language.<sup>101</sup> Identifying likenesses and so stirring connections towards other species and kinships is a key practice for a poet when creating zoopoetic writing. Moe underlines the importance of gestures and signals in creating such inter-relations positing that an attentiveness across species lines enables the poet and observer to both learn from, and imitate other ontological beings:

many species participate in the process of discovering innovative imitations through an attentiveness to another’s gestures and vocalizations. Innovative imitations of gestures contributed to the evolution and emergence of animal-rhetoric, and they helped shape the evolution of poetry and poetics in the Euro-American tradition.<sup>102</sup>

In the course of the poem the hybrid riverman is learning to be like others; he is attempting to assimilate with the ‘gestures and vocalizations’ he observes among the river life community and in turn he explains how they begin to respond and reciprocate with him, where fish begin ‘swerving as I swerve.’<sup>103</sup> In the same way that Bishop employs similes to suggest multiple connections across species and landscapes, she also shapes her poem in a manner that mirrors the movement of the riverman and his animal alliances, where her elongated stanzas eddy and swirl in watery shapes:

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<sup>100</sup> Bishop, ‘The Riverman’, p.104, l.42.

<sup>101</sup> Bishop, ‘The Riverman’, p.104, l.49.

<sup>102</sup> Moe, *Zoopoetics*, p.7.

<sup>103</sup> Bishop, ‘The Riverman’, p.106, l.132.

When the moon burns white  
 and the river makes that sound  
 like a primus pumped up high –  
 that fast, high whispering  
 like a hundred people at once –  
 I'll be there below,  
 as the turtle rattle hisses  
 and the coral gives the sign,  
 travelling fast as a wish,  
 with my magic cloak of fish<sup>104</sup>

Bishop suggests the whirling current of the river in the shape of her poetic line but also in the poem's call to engage the auditory senses. Its sibilant sounds in the 'whispering' and 'hisses' are suggestive of the water's rushing movement demonstrating how, as Moe posits, '*listening* becomes most crucial, for it directs readers to where the first stirrings of *poiesis* begin.'<sup>105</sup> Bishop repeatedly underlines the significance of gestures and signs in 'The Riverman' where human language is not an exclusive channel of communication, knowledge and understanding. The riverman appears to take the dolphin's cue without any words being transferred between them, and as I identify, Luandhina compliments him 'in a language I didn't know' but 'understood' despite not having learned it yet.<sup>106</sup> Instead, the river creatures communicate and express themselves in a series of gestures and signs which eschew the primacy of human language. In this watery realm, the 'coral gives the sign' and worms/with tiny electric eyes' turn on and off.<sup>107</sup> In this way Bishop conjures the

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<sup>104</sup> Bishop, 'The Riverman', p.106, ll.122-131.

<sup>105</sup> Moe, *Zoopoetics*, p.93.

<sup>106</sup> Bishop, 'The Riverman', p.104, l.48, l.51.

<sup>107</sup> Bishop, 'The Riverman', p.106, l.129, l.116.

river creatures via the rhetoric of the body; a rhetoric that the riverman also begins to exhibit as he adapts, displaying how it is a mode that is shared across all species.

Moe explains that such bodily rhetoric exhibited in signs and gestures, 'did not merely precede language, it is the source out of which language emerged.'<sup>108</sup> In this way he suggests that by harnessing and manifesting a bodily rhetoric in the space of the poem, arbitrary boundary lines between binaries of mind/body, language/gesture, human/animal can be dissolved. Both 'The Riverman' and 'The Man-Moth's' emphasis upon signs and gestures over linguistics speaks further to a human-animal continuum showing how, as Moe argues, 'Poetry is not a monospecies event.'<sup>109</sup> The significance of bodily rhetoric as a means of communication was also noted by Darwin in his book *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) where he refers to the emblem gestures of a wide range of animals. Darwin posits that speech is not something that estranges humans from animals because speech is not confined to the mouth in the manner that Cartesian thinkers imagine. Rather it can take place in many other parts of the body as recurrent signs and gestures manifest in 'The Riverman' and 'The Man-Moth' demonstrate.

### **Conclusion**

Darwin's studies and Bishop's sense of kinship with them, demonstrate their mutual fascination with all species as adaptive entities who respond to the cues of the environment and creatures with whom they exist. The examples I discuss in this chapter all exemplify the fruitfulness of the 'becoming animal' mode for feminist thinkers demonstrating how confronting our inherent animality is a strategy for circumnavigating patriarchal Humanism. The role of corporeal agency is key to this mode where language as a linear representational tool cannot convey the full spectrum of all species' experience. As

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<sup>108</sup> Moe, *Zoopoetics*, p.15.

<sup>109</sup> Moe, *Zoopoetics*, p.24.

a result, Darwin's metamorphic body is a practical and symbolic motif in effecting an anthropological exodus in the manner that it embraces a wider continuum of our animal experience. Hicok suggests that what the riverman learns on his watery journey, for example, has implications beyond himself, thereby overriding humanist individualism:

Knowledge is a gift the riverman can share with his community; it is non-alienating and non-Western [...] from the warm depths of the river [...] a kind of ecologically deep knowledge that might make us want to preserve and protect. Again, Bishop places her readers [...] in an ethical relation with the subjects she wants them to know.<sup>110</sup>

Such an ecological 'deep knowledge' connects the present with ancestral genealogies reminding us of our creaturely heritage that Darwin presents as 'an animal which breathed water' in his letter to Thomas Huxley. It also aligns Bishop's eco-poetics with Carrington's animal narratives where knowledge and understanding are forged in encounters with human and non-human others, immersing protagonists within nature rather than operating in dialectic opposition to it.

Bishop's and Carrington's hybrid figures and sensibilities forge a feminist posthuman cartography which points to our kinship with animal natures as a route beyond androcentric frameworks. These metamorphic forms symbolise how all creatures are, as Barad explains, bodies in the making, not bodies made. In Carrington's hybrid stories, refusing anthropocentric culture is manifest where transgressive female protagonists are empowered by their fusion with other animal species and most significantly, their own animal heritage. As well as serving as an act of rebellion or revolt, I have suggested that the hybrid human-animal is indicative of alliance. It is an example of what Jacqueline Chénieux-

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<sup>110</sup> Hicok, *Elizabeth Bishop's Brazil*, p.129.

Grendon describes as Surrealism's purpose of *'integration'*, demonstrating how a recognition of our own kinship with the animal world has the potential to forge a more egalitarian approach across all species thereby dislodging Cartesian presuppositions about human supremacy.<sup>111</sup> In this way, her surrealist work, together with Bishop's, signposts the human species towards a more balanced ecological world that we can aspire towards decades later. As Braidotti contends, 'hybrids as figures of radical interspecies relationality [...] blur categorical distinctions [...] in attempting to redefine a program of feminist justice.'<sup>112</sup> In their embrace with 'becoming animal' hybrid modes, Bishop and Carrington do not merely exit a patriarchal Anthropos to achieve 'feminist justice', they kaleidoscopically circumnavigate it, forging instead a balanced, ecological posthuman realm that anticipates contemporary feminist politics. In this way they signpost the connections this thesis makes between the female surrealists' feminist liberatory project and contemporary environmental debates. Such interconnective motifs and symbols of integration are examined further in Chapter Two where I continue an exploration of the becoming momentum in the subjects' work by focusing upon their surrealist visions of all matter's necessary entanglement.

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<sup>111</sup> Jacqueline Chénieux-Grendon, *Surrealism*, p.4

<sup>112</sup> Braidotti, 'Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism', p.28. Here, Braidotti articulates such a blurring of categorical distinctions as those which fall into the boundaries of 'human-nonhuman, nature-culture, male-female, oedipal-nonoedipal, European-non-European', p.28.

## Chapter 2

### Becoming Interconnected: Multiplicity and Materialism in the

### Surrealist Oeuvre of Elizabeth Bishop and Dorothea Tanning

Stacy Alaimo's postulation that '*Matter*' is 'the vast stuff of the world and of ourselves' immediately speaks to the themes of entanglement that underpin this thesis.<sup>1</sup> Chapter Two investigates the extent to which women surrealists' oeuvre anticipates such new materialist modes where their earthly, interconnected visions develop the becoming animal themes explored in Chapter One. I argue that the material entanglements manifested in their work speak to a feminist ecology which presciently forges a posthuman landscape. Focusing upon Elizabeth Bishop's poetry and Dorothea Tanning's paintings, I explore how they communicate the liveliness and inter-action of all phenomena, displacing Cartesian presumptions about matter's inertia. Rather, in their surrealist configurations, I examine how they signpost the agentic vibrancy of all matter, implicating the human as phenomenon within a contingent network of material assemblages. More specifically, I suggest that Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeal mode is a productive framework with which to read the new materialist interconnections exhibited in Bishop's and Tanning's surreal landscapes. It is an approach that considers how all entities are intermeshed in an ongoing entanglement of relations across boundaries and is suggestive of what Noheden identifies as 'the Surrealist resistance to dualism, human domination and hyperseparation [that] forms part of an ecological outlook.'<sup>2</sup> In these cross-overs, which occur between human and more-than human materialities, I argue that Bishop and Tanning exhibit an 'ethics that is not circumscribed by the human but is instead accountable to a material world that is

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<sup>1</sup> Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Kristoffer Noheden, 'Toward a Total Animism: Surrealism and Nature', ed. by Kirsten Strom (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2023), p.59.

never merely an external place but always the very substance of our selves and others.’<sup>3</sup> As a result, I explore the extent to which their materialist cartographies evoke a feminist perspective in their disconnect from androcentric presumptions that nature and matter are blank spaces awaiting human inscription.

### **A Materialist, Feminist Framework**

Whilst Carrington’s female protagonists persistently exhibit an empowering interconnection with nature in the manner discussed in Chapter One and developed here, feminism has not always found an easy kinship with the natural world. Alaimo highlights how the ‘bodiless flight’ that feminists have historically taken from nature has relegated female identity to the weak half of the nature/culture binary.<sup>4</sup> Typically, ‘men mark their own transcendent subjectivity by separating themselves from the natural world’,<sup>5</sup> allocating women to a misogynistic realm of ecological otherness. In striving to disentangle themselves from the presumed inferior space of the natural environment and its matter, feminists have sought political estrangement from such women-nature alignments, eschewing the supposition that the female gender is innately closer to nature. Alaimo and Susan Hekman further explain:

Materiality, particularly that of bodies and natures, has long been an extraordinarily volatile site for feminist theory – so volatile, in fact, that the guiding rule of procedure for most contemporary feminisms requires that

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<sup>3</sup> Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.158.

<sup>4</sup> Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (London: Cornell University Press, 2000), p.10.

<sup>5</sup> Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground*, p.3.

one distance oneself as much as possible from the tainted realm of materiality by taking refuge within culture, discourse, and language.<sup>6</sup>

As Alaimo and Hekman highlight here, post-modern feminists have turned to social constructionist models to escape the subordinating effects of the woman-fused-with-nature trope in their belief that 'the further we progress from nature, the closer women will be to liberation.'<sup>7</sup> Whilst ecofeminists of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as more recent environmental feminists have attempted to highlight the significance of nature, materiality and the more-than-human for articulating a female politics, mainstream theory has repeatedly sided with culture over nature.<sup>8</sup> This is a result of fearing that any 'alliance between feminism and environmentalism could only be founded upon a naïve, romantic account of reality'.<sup>9</sup> Alaimo's exploration of women's troubled relationship with nature attests to how feminists have recurrently distanced themselves from this domain in order to enter the male defined sphere of human subjectivity, rationality and culture.

To circumnavigate the Cartesian dividing lines which have traditionally conflated women with nature as passive other, Alaimo and new materialist thinkers such as Karen Barad and Jane Bennett, propose a reappraisal, and thus redefinition of nature and matter, rather than be bound by humanist dogma which fails to acknowledge matter's agentic

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<sup>6</sup>Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, 'Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory', in *Material Feminisms*, pp.1-19 (p.1).

<sup>7</sup> Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground*, p.5.

<sup>8</sup> French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term ecofeminism in her book *Feminism ou la Mort* (1974) where she blames a masculinist culture for excessive population growth and environmental damage. Ecofeminism of the 1970s critiques a patriarchal world view propagated by modern science which separated nature and culture; a division which they posited had qualified the domination of nature and oppression of women. Key ecofeminist text by Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978) articulates a woman's voice in tandem with nature in response to a patriarchal voice that she characterises as oppressive. New Materialist thinkers, however, warn that this positioning risks further reinforcing the dichotomous terrain of nature/culture; a reversal practice which fails to investigate the entangled materiality of both terms.

<sup>9</sup> Alaimo and Hekman 'Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory', in *Material Feminisms*, p.4.

force as well as its interconnection with culture itself. Instead of taking flight from nature and matter, Alaimo posits that feminism can instead ‘affirm multiple alliances and articulations, deconstructions and reconstructions of this discursive terrain’ thereby travelling ‘beyond the false dichotomy of rejecting “nature”’.<sup>10</sup> Discussing this material turn in feminism, Alaimo notes how scholars within three key areas of feminism – feminist corporeal theory, environmental feminism, and feminist science studies – ‘have all been working to conceptualize innovative understandings of the material world’;<sup>11</sup> conceptualisations which abandon Cartesian definitions of matter where the human’s supposed ‘*cogito*’ is identified as ‘ontologically other than matter’<sup>12</sup> and thus superior.<sup>13</sup> Alaimo and Susan Hekman argue that a focus on matter is, in fact, a vital contributor to a broad spectrum of feminist philosophies via its disconnect from androcentric Humanism:

The emerging theories of materiality developed in material feminisms are crucial for every aspect of feminist thought: science studies, environmental feminisms, corporeal feminisms, queer theory, disability studies, theories of race and ethnicity, environmental justice, (post-) Marxist feminism, globalization studies, and cultural studies.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground*, p.136.

<sup>11</sup> Alaimo, ‘Trans-corporeal Feminism and the Ethical Space of Nature’, p.242.

<sup>12</sup> Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, ‘Introducing the New Materialisms’, in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp.1-43 (p.8).

<sup>13</sup> As Coole and Frost explain, many of our ideas about materiality are mired in a Cartesian understanding; matter defined as a ‘corporeal’ and ‘inert’ substance, thus quantifiable and measurable and of an ‘unambiguous ontology’ entirely separate from Humanist thinking posited as outside of matter in human’s possession of a superior ‘*cogito*’. The Introductory chapter to *New Materialisms* details the move from materialism to new materialism. pp.1-43. In his *Discourse on Method* (1637), Descartes affirmed his belief in a dualistic relation of humans to nature, announcing an ambition for humans to become ‘lords and masters of nature’. Cited in Donna Roberts, ‘The Ecological Imperative’, *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, ed. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: and New York: 2016), p.217.

<sup>14</sup> Alaimo and Hekman, ‘Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory’, in *Material Feminisms*, p.9-10.

In this chapter I deploy Barad's 'intra-actions', Alaimo's 'trans-corporealities' and Bennett's 'Thing-Power' as powerful new materialist strategies to illuminate the extent to which Bishop's and Tanning's surrealist visions exhibit a posthumanist thinking, thus building upon the 'becoming animal' mode. I examine what I define as a feminist ecology of matter-ing in Bishop's and Tanning's work: one which recognises and harnesses the agentic potential of nature and matter, overlooked by humanist approaches, without enacting a politics of reversal that simply reinforces the nature/culture binary. I suggest that this feminist ecology bodies forth what Donna Roberts describes as the 'surrealists' affirmation of the continuities between man and nature'; continuities which she views as 'responding to dominant conservative ideas in political economy that naturalize principles of survival, accumulation and competition over other factors of life.'<sup>15</sup> I consider how such new materialist modes speak to a matter-ing that mutually implicates culture *and* nature; what Donna Haraway posits as 'knowledge' that is '*always* an engaged material practice and *never* a disembodied set of ideas', thereby horizontalizing relations across all phenomena rather than hierarchically situating them in a humanist manner.<sup>16</sup> As a result, this study explores the extent to which the new materialist visions exhibited in Tanning's and Bishop's oeuvre intimate their abandonment of humanist dictates to convey an implicit feminism. The prescient New Materialism in their work, effuses the sense that 'Identity is a phenomenal matter [...] not an individual affair', and is palpable in the entangled plurality of their subject matter, situated within both cultural and natural contact zones.<sup>17</sup> Whilst Bishop and Tanning both exhibit a wariness and indeed weariness of any kind of conspicuous identity politics, refusing to be labelled as women artists or join feminist

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<sup>15</sup> Roberts, 'The Ecological Imperative', p.218.

<sup>16</sup> Donna Haraway, 'Morphing in the Order: Flexible Strategies, Feminist Science Studies, and Primate Revisions', in *The Haraway Reader* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), pp.199-222 (p.199-200).

<sup>17</sup> Karen Barad, 'Nature's Queer Performativity', *Qui Parle*, 19.2 (2011), pp.121-158 (p.125).

movements, I posit that their immersion in becoming matter modes and locations exhibits, and contributes to, an implicit feminist, and posthuman politics.

A central tenet of new materialist thinking is that 'matter' is plural and self-organising, shifting between nature and culture, the animated and automated, bodies and their environments. In Barad's words, matter is 'a dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations, rather than a property of things',<sup>18</sup> advocating a posthuman account that questions the given-ness of human and non-human categories altogether. She underlines instead how 'The world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which "mattering" itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities.'<sup>19</sup> Referring to what she coins as 'intra-activity', Barad argues that not only is the human species comprised of phenomenal matter, where we inhabit the natural world as much as a cultural one, but that we are also implicated in the universe's ongoing 'becoming'; a becoming that is signalled by our continually evolving dynamic with multiple phenomena around us:

Phenomena are entanglements of spacetime-matter, not in the colloquial sense of a connection or intertwining of individual entities, but rather in the technical sense of 'quantum entanglements,' which are the (ontological) inseparability of agentially 'intra-acting' components. The notion of *intra-action* (in contrast to the usual 'interaction,' which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) marks an important shift, reopening and refiguring foundational notions of classical

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<sup>18</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), p.224.

<sup>19</sup> Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', in *Material Feminisms*, pp.120-154 (p.135).

ontology such as causality, agency, space, time, matter, discourse, responsibility, and accountability.<sup>20</sup>

Barad dispels with Humanism's 'classical ontologies' in her intra-active and posthumanist visions, where the foregrounding of all phenomena's materiality - including the human's - enables the feminist identity to emerge from the nature/culture trap altogether. The concept of intra-action is central to Barad's New Materialism and refers to the movement invoked via encounters between bodies in a process of becoming different. In the context of her work, the term 'entanglement' refers 'not simply to be[ing] intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence.'<sup>21</sup> Entanglement, therefore, indicates how entities are always relational and how such relationality is fundamental to the constitution of entities.

Alaimo similarly wishes to distance feminism from the nature/culture dualism. Key to reconfiguring a Cartesian appraisal of matter and nature is to view it as something agentic that 'acts' where 'those actions have consequences for both the human and non-human world.'<sup>22</sup> She reimagines human ontology as a dynamic one and implicates its resonance with nature and culture, rather than simply one or the other. In conceptual thinking that introduces the material slippages examined in this chapter, Alaimo proposes a 'trans-corporeal feminism', which is best understood as a map of transit, tracing the 'routes from human corporeality to the flesh of the other-than-human and back again'.<sup>23</sup> Alaimo's modes of entanglement emphasise the porosity of all bodily boundaries, threatening the

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<sup>20</sup> Barad, 'Nature's Queer Performativity', *Qui Parle*, 19.2 (2011), pp.121-158 (p.125).

<sup>21</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.ix.

<sup>22</sup> Alaimo and Hekman, 'Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory', in *Material Feminisms*, p.5.

<sup>23</sup> Alaimo, 'Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature', in *Material Feminisms*, p.253.

presumed inherent wholeness of the human and fracturing the hierarchical frameworks of Cartesian models. She explains this as a potential strategy for feminist thinkers:

Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment.' It makes it difficult to pose nature as a mere background for the exploits of the human, since 'nature' is always as close as one's own skin [...] By emphasizing the movement across bodies, trans-corporeality reveals the interchanges and interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human.<sup>24</sup>

Such 'interchanges and interconnections' are manifest in the entangled bodily visions of the women surrealists' work discussed here and recall Chénieux-Grendon's characterisation of Surrealism as a 'machine for *integration*'.<sup>25</sup> They unsettle androcentrically mapped Cartesian boundary lines and harness a kinship with nature and lively matter; not simply as a passive refuge from humanist phallocentrism, but as a dynamic and kaleidoscopic space providing a portal out of its reductive confines.

This chapter's exploration of agentic materiality in women's Surrealism extends to a study of culture, objects and things, as well as human and non-human nature. Most specifically I suggest that Jane Bennett's concept of 'Thing-Power' resonates with the artists' subject matter, where the supposed *inanimate* exhibits itself as *animate* in a manner that re-evaluates human centrality and supremacy. Bennett's study focuses upon

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<sup>24</sup> Alaimo, 'Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature', in *Material Feminisms*, p.238.

<sup>25</sup> Jacqueline Chénieux-Grendon, *Surrealism*, translated by Vivian Folkenflik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p.4.

assemblages of seemingly random vibrant materials that are catalysed by their shifting interactions (or intra-actions) - with other entities and agencies. She explains the vivacity of shifting material components whilst on a walk by the river, suggesting that co-mingling between diverse entities infuses each item with new life in a way that the anthropocentric eye is habitually blind to:

When the materiality of the glove, the rat, the pollen, the bottle cap, and the stick started to shimmer and spark, it was in part because of the contingent tableau that they formed with each other, with the street, with the weather that morning, with me [...] I caught a glimpse of an energetic vitality inside each of these things, things that I generally conceived as inert.<sup>26</sup>

Bennett's tableau of objects, reconfigured as animated matter, demonstrates a lively landscape, 'aquiver with virtual force.'<sup>27</sup> This vital materialist lens brings into focus a post-Cartesian approach, which in turn, 'can inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin [...] in a dense network of relations'.<sup>28</sup> Acknowledging the connected materiality that is inherent across all phenomena has the potential to 'horizontalize the relations between humans, biota, and abiota', thereby dissolving phallogocentric humanist hierarchies which myopically conflate female subjectivity with a presumed inert material landscape.<sup>29</sup> The way in which the women surrealists depict materiality as a dynamic force is an enabling feminist mode which dispels with the myth of matter's passivity,

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<sup>26</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p.5. Bennett adds, 'In this assemblage, objects appeared as things, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by semiotics', p.5.

<sup>27</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.57.

<sup>28</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.13.

<sup>29</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.112.

reconfiguring the nature/culture binary to become a shifting continuum that privileges no singular material entity over another. It also speaks, more broadly, to the surrealist movement's preoccupation with the object, both as a material entity, and as an epistemological provocation. Krzysztof Fijalkowski explains its importance to Surrealism here:

While the actual or potential materiality of the object in surrealism guarantees its pertinence, this object tends to present an open, mobile category of being, one in process rather than fixed in its meaning: an enigma, a doorway'.<sup>30</sup>

Fijalkowski's analysis is an appropriate cue to discuss Dorothea Tanning, whose preoccupation with doorways has been documented. More specifically, I begin my analysis with Tanning's nature paintings suggesting that her human-non-human entanglements speak most palpably to a new materialist and thus, feminist ecology. I examine how her paintings exhibit a sense that, as Barad insists, 'things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties', and thereby conjure a trans-corporeal fusion between female identities and natural landscapes similar to those witnessed in Bishop's poetry discussed later.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, there is a tangible mobility at work in Tanning's oeuvre both in reference to her more concrete objects but also her organic visions, demonstrating Fijalkowski's reference to the 'potential materiality' at work in surrealism. Whilst I acknowledge the eco-feminist heritage that such thinking draws upon, where nature is harnessed as an

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<sup>30</sup> Krzysztof Fijalkowski, 'The Object', *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, ed. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), p.195.

<sup>31</sup> Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', p.131. Barad draws upon the work of physicist Niels Bohr arguing that his 'philosophy-physics [...] poses a radical challenge not only to Newtonian physics but also to Cartesian epistemology.' She adds that Bohr 'calls into question the related Cartesian belief in the inherent distinction between subject and object, and knower and known', p.131.

empowering force for the female identity, I argue that Tanning's art exhibits more conspicuously, a new materialist approach, reinforcing it as a praxis which dispenses with Humanism's dichotomous insistence upon nature versus culture.

### **Female-Nature-Matter-Entanglements in Dorothea Tanning's Visual Art**

Acknowledging that Tanning 'does not classify herself as a Surrealist, nor has she suggested any other title', Paula Lombard explains that nonetheless, she exhibits many parallels with her female contemporaries.<sup>32</sup> Here she establishes lines of connections between these artists in their shared eco-feminist genealogies:

Dorothea Tanning's imagery is linked not only in a simultaneous time frame with the work of Leonor Fini, Leonora Carrington, Frida Kahlo and Remedios Varo, but, also shares their use of plants, animals, metamorphic beings and the female image, combining elements of nature with the human life cycle.<sup>33</sup>

Lombard's analysis indirectly identifies the lines of transit between early eco-feminisms and new materialist thinking in Tanning's work which chimes with the themes I later discuss in Bishop's poetry. She explains how nature gives voice to a 'female archetype' whilst at the same time implicitly recognising new materialist strategies - suggested in her reference to a 'vast energy' in the surrealist work that 'enliven(s) objects that normally appear dormant'.<sup>34</sup> These are modes which speak to both Bennett's definition of a 'Thing-Power', but also

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<sup>32</sup> Paula Lombard, 'Dorothea Tanning: On the Threshold to a Darker Place', *Woman's Art Journal*, 2.1 (1981), 49-52 (p.52).

<sup>33</sup> Lombard, 'Dorothea Tanning: On the Threshold to a Darker Place', p.50. Lombard adds, 'Mythic creatures appear in environments where a vast energy seems to enliven objects that normally appear dormant. Images of flowers, eggs and mirrors are called upon to represent and reflect the presence of the female archetype. Altered states of consciousness become interchangeable with reality,' p.50.

<sup>34</sup> Lombard, 'Dorothea Tanning: On the Threshold to a Darker Place', p.50.

Barad's intra-active praxis where an already agentive entity catalyses another in the ongoing process of their intrinsic entanglement. I posit that Tanning's surrealist visions of the natural world, which assert a kinship between botanic life and female corporealities, embody Alaimo's suggestion that 'Feminist theories, politics, and fictions [...] can "play nature" with a vengeance by deploying discourses of woman and nature in order to subvert them'. In doing so, Alaimo argues that such discourses and visions, 'can destabilize the nature/culture divide while constructing feminist alliances with postmodern natures'<sup>35</sup> – a praxis that I argue Tanning deploys in her surrealist landscapes. In the following analysis, I examine Tanning's early painting *Daphne* (1943), arguing that it exhibits trans-corporeal motifs and 'intra-active' entanglements which speak to a new materialist feminism.



**Figure 2.1** *Daphne* (1943), Dorothea Tanning © ADAGP, Paris and

DACS, London 2023

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<sup>35</sup> Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground*, p.136.

*Daphne* depicts the vision of a female figure entangled with a laurel tree in a way which recalls Lombard's observations upon the shared subject matter of the women surrealists, signalling a thematic spillage between their works. It is a painting which captures the iconographies explored by Tanning during this period, speaking to her fascination with fairy tale and Gothic tropes, as well as her familiar recourse to literary and cultural references. As Victoria Carruthers explains, Tanning frequently explored themes of nature versus nurture in her visual art, often forging female figures who burst out of domestic realms via magical motifs of metamorphoses.<sup>36</sup> Tanning's preoccupation with a collision between worlds, described by Carruthers here, provides a fruitful introduction to her early visual art, as well as the way it can be aligned with new materialist thinking:

Many of the pictures from the 1940s, and indeed early 1950s, illustrate Tanning's exploration of the way in which the natural world collides with the so-called 'civilised' world, creating breaches in the fabric of our everyday reality into which slip imaginings of the other-worldly or 'unnatural'.<sup>37</sup>

Such 'breaches' are indicative of Tanning's recurrent trans-corporeal modes exhibited in her painting *Daphne* where a young woman is in the process of organic transformation, thus criss-crossing ontologies. The painting details a young woman whose thighs are

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<sup>36</sup> Victoria Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations* (London: Lund Humphries, 2020). Discussing Tanning's self-portrait, *Birthday* (1942) for example, Carruthers suggests that the painting is forged as a 'fusion of nature and a product of nurture/culture', p.27. The painting weaves together fantastical elements with components of a grounded, natural world. Tanning wears a skirt of brambles that reach towards the floorboards. However, a closer look reveals that the bramble tendrils are in fact a maelstrom of female bodies entwined together. This earthly and yet fantastical image is complemented by the hybrid creature poised at her feet, in many ways a non-human accomplice that recalls the hyena featured in Leonora Carrington's *Self-Portrait*, discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>37</sup> Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations*, p.31.

entwined with, and become, the long, sinewy roots of the laurel tree. The top third of the painting is dominated by golden, fairy tale hair which surges upwards as if flowing in the direction of a watery current. The purple fabric of her clothing suggests a regal heritage but is also of a texture which mirrors the smooth roots of the tree with which she is entwined. It is a human-non-human entanglement, and an intra-action where botanic life and the human speaker become bound with one another in an enabling dynamic. As Carruthers explains, there is the suggestion in the painting that ‘to be human is to be at once both flora and fauna, an inseparable part of nature.’<sup>38</sup> Further motifs of hybridity and trans-corporeal slippages are also manifest in the manner that the image alludes to the Daphne figure of Greek mythology; a Naiad nymph who is transformed into a laurel tree by her earth Goddess mother Gaia in order to escape the predatory pursuits of god Apollo. By drawing upon this Greek mythical heritage, there is the sense of a cultural cross-over but also a maternal presence being evoked with its motifs of nurturance and replenishment. In the work of Bishop and Tanning discussed, I suggest that the maternal figure is not merely a background spectre situated in a confined temporal, past space but one who drives and creates in tandem with nature; an iterative and kinetic force that speaks to a feminist New Materialism rather than representing nature as a passive refuge for female identities. In the example of Greek mythology’s Daphne, there is the implication that the under-water world of nature provides a safe haven from the seductive advances of Apollo. However, Tanning conjures a woman empowered by such a union rather than one who becomes subordinated and categorised as hunted prey, forging the natural landscape as an emancipating and enabling space.

Tanning invokes the shared ontologies of the Daphne figure and this nature in the mirrored swirls and textures of their corporealities implicating them as collective and lively matter which ‘intra-act’ together, showing how bodies ‘enhance their power *in or as a*

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<sup>38</sup> Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations*, p.31.

*heterogeneous assemblage*.<sup>39</sup> Daphne is presented as an on-going force or process like the generative natural world with which she is entangled, where she is mobile and inter-relational rather than rooted and static. The granular detail of the mossy foliage which rises behind her speaks to the agentic significance of all matter and chimes with Bishop's insistence that an anthropocentric lens be refocused to notice the detail at hand, as I will discuss later. In the same way as this botanic life surges around the female figure, her hair swirls agentively in a lively manner appearing to be a force in its own right. Hair as a transformative entity is a recurrent motif in Tanning's work, symbolising subversion and rebellion as well as erotic power, in the way that paintings such as *Children's Games* (1942) and *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943) attest to. In these works, the female figures' supernatural intensity is in part charged by hair which appears to be electrified, thereby empowering them and so threatening the domestic realm which oppresses their identities. Carruthers explains the power of hair as a symbol in Tanning's work in a way which chimes with New Materialism's insistence upon the body's agentic potential for a feminist politics:

Hair is considered potent, sensual, bodily and even dangerous, in the sense that for women, it must be covered in order to show respect to God in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths. It has played a central role, too, in cultural narration [...] In all cases, hair is indicative of a subversive potential, associated with a sense of wild abandon and monsterish transformation. It has simultaneously come to signify something that is both desirable and dangerous, uncontrollable and uncontained.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.23

<sup>40</sup> Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations*, p.47.

Daphne's hair is depicted as a force which is 'uncontrollable and uncontained' in the way that Carruthers describes, surging on whilst intra-acting with the natural currents with which it co-mingles. It is also presented as something desirable and beautiful, recalling Rapunzel's locks thrown down from the tower in which she is imprisoned. There is the sense, however, that Daphne is not trapped, like Rapunzel, but is in fact liberated by this agentive landscape which brims with lively matter. She is not a figure planning to meet a prince as Rapunzel does, but one who finds resonance in her trans-corporeal communion with the natural world; a material landscape that erases the nature/culture binary which Humanism insists upon. In this vision Daphne is not passive prey to be consumed by Apollo, but dynamic intra-active matter who takes a trans-corporeal, material fusion with her environment as her cue; a vision that I suggest Tanning develops further in her later, more abstract painting, *On Avalon* (1987).



**Figure 2.2** *On Avalon* (1987), Dorothea Tanning © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2023

Whilst Tanning's *On Avalon* was completed forty-four years after *Daphne*, it retains the themes which pre-occupied her in the early part of her career and demonstrates a continued interest in subject matter which similarly fascinated fellow women surrealists. It is a clear example of her move towards abstraction but shares with *Daphne* the new

materialist motifs of trans-corporeality and transformation as well as the fusion between human and botanical life, in spite of the decades which pass between the two works. During an interview with artist Alain Jouffroy in 1974, Tanning refutes his suggestion that her body of work can be categorised into three linear periods, speaking to her belief in the boundarylessness of her oeuvre. This stance, described below, intimates Barad's notion of a spacetime mattering, overriding humanist chronology:

I don't see any real divisions. Every one of my paintings is a step on the same road. I see no break or detour, even temporary. The same preoccupations have obsessed me since the beginning, the same surfaces, indelible stains...My pictures – and, lately, my sculptures – are always part of the same search.<sup>41</sup>

Not only does Tanning overthrow any anthropocentric concepts of a linear temporality here, she also communicates a tangible materiality in references to 'surfaces' and 'indelible stains' articulating an art that speaks to a tactility beyond the visual, and thus recalling the material traces Bishop evokes in her frottage rendering of 'The Monument', explored later. The surfacing materiality that emerges over time in her art, speaks to how an entity's evolutionary markers, forged via its intra-actions with other matter, cannot be erased but always have a way of bursting forth, regardless of human interference. It communicates the idea that 'Matter is always already an ongoing historicity' as Barad insists and is therefore open-ended as Tanning's reference to an ongoing 'search' further suggests.<sup>42</sup> Such material, temporal seepages speak to a boundlessness in Tanning's work, where phenomenal overlaps are palpable; her paintings and sculptures do not sit in neat,

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations*, p.7.

<sup>42</sup> Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', p.139.

anthropocentric categories, but rather exhibit shared moments of transition. In this way, we witness how a material border crossing occurs, not just within individual works like *Daphne* and *On Avalon*, but rather is exhibited across her oeuvre suggesting Tanning's prescient awareness of a new materialist continuum. Such a mind-set, which over-rides the epistemological tendencies of Humanism, conflates with Bishop's own Darwinian praxis as we will see and attests to the slow evolution of bodily materialities. In this way, I argue that there is no phenomena which magically erupts out of a vacuum in their work; rather, that its ontology is part of the wider materiality within which it is embedded. Seams and boundaries are exposed as anthropocentric fictions which delineate in a way which both stifles and subordinates those outside of their phallogocentric parameters. This stance communicates a feminist New Materialism in their oeuvre and erupts most explosively in the melding continuities of Tanning's abstract visions.

*On Avalon* portrays the most vivid, visual example of a trans-corporeal female mode, as though Tanning dispenses with boundaries altogether in the latter part of her career. Dismissing the discernible seams between human and the non-human, Tanning forges a mistier slippage across them, where pulsating female corporeal forms meld with the wild swirls of white poppy heads which dance out of an inky night sky. These metamorphic and dynamic figures, intimated by Tanning's tremoring, urgent brushstrokes, are conspicuously indistinct from one another with their faceless identities inferring a collective and entangled anonymity, dispensing with Humanism's identity politics to enable a new materialist, feminist one. The poppy heads of the painting are as auto-poietic as the humans' corporeal bodies, thereby conflating the agency of all matter – human and non-human – and speaking to what Braidotti terms as entities 'endowed with intelligent flesh and an embodied mind'.<sup>43</sup> It is a thinking that situates the brain as embodied matter as

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<sup>43</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 'Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism', in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. by Richard Grusin (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp.21-48, (p.39).

much as the rest of human corporeality, and so communicating Braidotti's sense of an inherent 'ontological relationality.'<sup>44</sup> The fact that Tanning replaces the human heads with botanic life is an affirmative dismissal of humanist rationality as the driving force of all life forms, instead prioritising the agentic thrust of nature and matter in this dynamic scene. In the same way as we witness the evolution of the monument as a process in Bishop's poem examined later, so too does Tanning describe the materiality of the painting itself as an ongoing project; one which exhibits a 'Thing-Power' in its own metamorphic malleability. In the following interview, Tanning describes the process of painting *On Avalon* in a way that mirrors the agentic praxis she conjures within the subject matter of the picture itself:

I began in 1984 to paint on a large canvas, in greens and whites, something I felt about those spirits, which may have been flowers but also novas, tears, omens, God knows what, contending or conniving with our own ancestral shape in a place I'd give anything to know. During the painting of the picture, a matter of three years, it went through a number of transformations.<sup>45</sup>

Tanning's deliberate obliqueness regarding what she calls the 'spirits' of the painting, speaks to her malleable and thus new materialist approach to identity, perceiving it as a term in flux by nature of its ongoing enmeshment with a shifting environment. The 'transformations' that Tanning speaks of characterise both *On Avalon*, but also, the whole body of her visual art which recurrently portrays female figures and identities in the process of transition. In *On Avalon* Tanning conveys an open-ended relationship with her

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<sup>44</sup> Braidotti, 'Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism', p.39.

<sup>45</sup> Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations*, p.207.

painting, where whilst she acknowledges the white swirls could be flowers, they could also be anything from ‘tears’ to ‘omens’ eventually concluding they could be in fact ‘God knows what’. Key to emphasising Tanning’s new materialist approach is the fact that she suggests that the flowers contend or connive with ‘our own ancestral shape’ speaking to an entanglement that thrusts the painting outside of humanist boundary lines which separate human and matter, and arbitrarily confer human identity as the ruling principle. In another interview, featured in *Bomb*, in Autumn 1990, Tanning makes her eschewal of identity politics even clearer, insisting that ‘Women artists. There is no such thing – or person’.<sup>46</sup> Instead, she believes that it is her art that articulates all there is to know, explaining in her autobiography, ‘Doesn’t the paint say it all?’<sup>47</sup> Both Tanning and Bishop, trouble the boundary lines that define such categories in their art, thereby forging and reconfiguring Cartesian identities in the way that Alaimo proposes. They move forward with a feminist project which does not necessarily name itself. Key to unsettling such boundary lines is recapturing a sense of kinship with nature’s, and matter’s agency, not as a passive refuge which reaffirms a dichotomous humanist approach but as a dynamic and kaleidoscopic space providing a portal out of anthropocentric confines. The hybrid figures’ smudgy assemblage in *On Avalon* speaks to Tanning’s dismissal of a humanist identity politics. Deprioritising a Cartesian fixation with subjectivity is a facilitative manoeuvre enabling overlooked, material ontologies in the more-than-human world to emerge in her art. Tanning’s belief that ‘Every thing is in motion’ and that ‘behind the invisible door (doors), another door,’ is realised in *On Avalon* where the seamless connectivity forged between all matter in her painting attests to her belief that ‘There is no showing who one *really* is.’<sup>48</sup> Rather, like Bishop’s materialist approach to the monument, so too does Tanning perceive

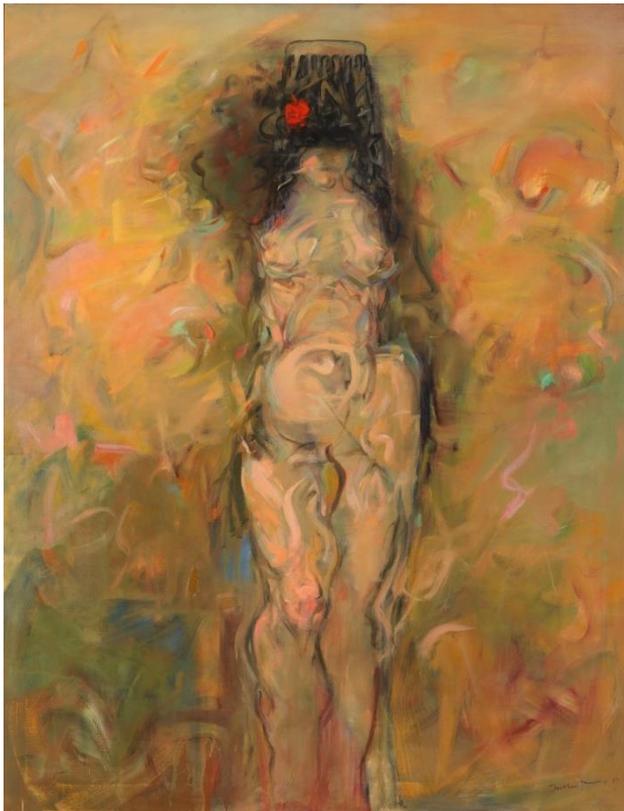
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<sup>46</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Dorothea Tanning Tate* (London: Tate Publishing, 2019), p.22.

<sup>47</sup> Dorothea Tanning, *Between Lives: An Artist and her World* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), p.326.

<sup>48</sup> Tanning quoted in Mahon, *Dorothea Tanning Tate*, p.15.

the white flowers and human figures not as discrete, autonomous forces but agents implicated in a wider, entangled materiality; the dark background an affirmative portal that speaks to the agentic unpredictability of a material landscape that dethrones Cartesian presumptions about human's hierarchical control over all nature and matter. In this way Tanning conjures trans-corporeal contact zones where matter collides and intra-acts in unpredictable ways; where her work speaks to Bennett's vibrant matter, which conveys the 'sense of a strange and incomplete commonality with the out-side'.<sup>49</sup> She simulates a vital materialist approach that anticipates Bennett's calls to 'treat non-humans – animals, plants, earth, even artifacts and commodities – more carefully, more strategically, more ecologically' in an implicitly feminist manoeuvre.<sup>50</sup>



**Figure 2.3** *Woman Artist, Nude, Standing* (1985-87), Dorothea Tanning © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2023

<sup>49</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.17.

<sup>50</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.17-18.



**Figure 2.4**

*Crepuscula glacialis (var., Flos cuculi)* (1997), Dorothea Tanning © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2023

The final paintings I examine in this chapter, *Woman Artist, Nude, Standing* (1985-87) and *Crepuscula glacialis (var., Flos cuculi)* (1997) can be read in tandem with *On Avalon* with their shared themes of anonymous identities exhibiting a palpable materiality. Like the figures of the larger, earlier painting, the female in *Woman Artist* is naked, her nudity indicative of a raw elemental force rather than symbolising eroticism and vulnerability in the manner of the male surrealists' *femme-enfant* depictions. A visual evocation of Tanning's description of woman as 'fire at the earth's center' in the earthly ochres of her palette, her loose brush strokes create the sense of colours spilling over from the female form and thus bleeding into the landscape.<sup>51</sup> Her metamorphic work forges a materialist locale in the suggestion of inner and outer spaces collapsing, thereby dissolving humanist dichotomies which insist upon the separation of the human from the natural world. The female figure's head, face and eyes in *Woman Artist*, are obscured by a shadowy mantilla hat where Tanning typically foregrounds the subject's anonymity and usurps humanist

<sup>51</sup> Tanning, *Between Lives*, p.333.

rationality for a more corporeal heritage. The hat features a blood red poppy fused upon it, recapitulating Tanning's flower motif that functions not as aesthetic accessory but rather a raw, agentic force that empowers and animates the female subject in their kindred alliance. The flower motif, seen here and in *On Avalon*, is also taken up again in Tanning's last twelve paintings where the female body becomes enfolded in floral visions. In *Crepuscula glacialis* (var., *Flos cuculi*) (1997), for example, flesh and petal meld, where, as Alyce Mahon suggests, the spectator is enticed 'into new spaces which both open out and look in at once' conjuring trans-corporeal visions.<sup>52</sup> *Crepuscula glacialis* explores further Tanning's depiction of the flower as a symbol of transformation and metamorphosis and is therefore fruitful in the manner that she articulates its resonance with the female form, developing themes exhibited in *On Avalon* and *Woman Artist*. In this later painting, one of a series of twelve designed for each month of the year, Tanning melds female corporeality with the velvety petals so completely, that they are an entirely interchangeable and seamless ontology. A further eruption of boundary lines is suggested in the painting's name *Crepuscula glacialis* (var., *Flos cuculi*) (1997), indicative of the liminal space of twilight, speaking to Tanning's fascination with the collision between temporalities and so etching an other-worldly space which functions in the gaps between human timetabling.<sup>53</sup> Like the vision in *On Avalon*, *Crepuscula glacialis* thrusts evocatively out of an inky background, indicative of a birth, resonating with the dark spaces of Bishop's 'The Weed', as we will see

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<sup>52</sup> Mahon, *Dorothea Tanning Tate*, p.30.

<sup>53</sup> Translated as *Frozen Twilight (Ragged Robin)*, the painting features as one of twelve floral canvases in Tanning's book *Another Language of Flowers* (New York: George Braziller, 1999). Each painting is accompanied by a poem written by a different poet including contributions by James Merrill and Adrienne Rich. *Crepuscula glacialis* is accompanied by a poem of the same title by W. S. Merwin:

I open before you  
the time of the cuckoo  
the vision of the dew  
the white when the day is new  
the brightness it passes through  
the shadow it turns into  
at the hour of the echo  
from behind the mountain

later. The fleshly contours and non-uniformity of the petals and skin override any romanticised vision of a predictable and tidy nature that can be choreographed by the human hand, speaking instead to the agentic liveliness of its material make-up. The shadowiness of this trans-corporeal form visibly tracing a cartography that oscillates between human and non-human, conjures an unsettling vision of nature; one that, like Bishop's 'The Weed', discussed later, speaks to its power and strength rather than a passivity which humanist models have insisted upon. In this way Tanning and Bishop do not perform the 'feminist flight from nature' which only embeds its associations with passivity and abject matter, but rather cultivates its reconfiguration in a recognition of its agentic, material ontology. It is thus freed it from its anthropocentrically perceived background position which similarly renders female identity as peripheral and is instead thrust into the foreground to become the dominant focus of the painting.

The blurred lines of these paintings point to a slippage between human and non-human which anticipates Bennett's assertion that 'An actant never really acts alone', where its 'efficacy or agency always depends upon the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces'.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Tanning's praxis overrides the phallogocentric leanings of Humanism towards a more balanced ecology which gives voice to a feminist politics. Tanning's title of *Woman Artist, Nude, Standing* for example, is further indicative of her posthuman approach to subjectivity /identity, where the provocative anonymity of the woman artist speaks to her belief that there is 'no knowing who one really is'. Her namelessness is a liberating force which enables new modes of becoming rather than being anchored to a singular category or name. Furthermore, Tanning's enigmatic title subverts typically hierarchical humanist dynamics by placing the artist herself upon the easel rather than behind it. Tanning thwarts humanist power dynamics, speaking to the fluid interchangeability of artist and audience, subject and object, whilst

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<sup>54</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.21.

decentring author/artist. Such a praxis anticipates Barad's postulation that there does not 'exist a divine position for our viewing pleasure located outside the world. There is no absolute inside or absolute outside.'<sup>55</sup> Rather, in Tanning's examples, the artist and author become matter amongst matter where an audience is a key component in the life cycle of a work. Tanning was, in fact, keenly aware of her audience and the fundamental role it plays in the many possible perceptions and manifestations of her art, as she explains in her memoir *Between Lives* (2001):

[...] a mutation has taken place. You have not painted in a vacuum. You have been bold, working for change. To overturn values. [...]

The viewer is caught in a net from which there is no escape save by going through the whole picture until he comes to the exit. My wish: to make a trap (picture) with no exit at all either for you or for me.<sup>56</sup>

In this example, Tanning describes how a painting enables a border crossing, inviting the viewer to become a lively, entangled agent in the life of the work in the same way as Bishop suggests 'we watch the monument closely' in her poem, 'The Monument' which I turn to now. In this example, the poet pushes the structure's 'artist-prince' out of his dominant role to be reconfigured instead as one of the constituent components in its life cycle. Marking a radical exit from a humanist orbit, Tanning's example above positions the author and artist as material phenomenon within a contingent tableau of other matter in the same way as we witness the creator decentralised in Bishop's early, surreal poem. Whilst Tanning's paintings may forge a more palpable new materialist orientation in their explicit visual evocations, I argue that Bishop's subtler poetic intimations, nevertheless,

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<sup>55</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.377.

<sup>56</sup> Tanning, *Between Lives*, p.326, p.327.

similarly speak to the entanglements and trans-corporeal themes that engender this contemporary framework.

### **New Materialist Becomings in Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry**

In a journal that Bishop kept during and after college between 1934 and 1937, she reflected upon the purpose and methods for poetry writing in a way that resonates with the new materialist concerns of this chapter, providing an apt introduction to the subject matter of 'The Monument':

It's a question of using the poet's proper materials, with which he's equipped by nature, i.e., immediate, intense physical reactions, a sense of metaphor and decoration in everything – to express something not of them – something, I suppose, *spiritual*. But it proceeds from the material, the material eaten out with acid, pulled down from underneath, made to perform and always kept in order, in its place [...] The other way – of using the supposedly 'spiritual' – the beautiful, nostalgic, the ideal and *poetic*, to produce the *material* – is the way of the Romantic, I think – and a great perversity.<sup>57</sup>

Bishop's journal entry here establishes how her poetry of description can be read as a form of New Materialism, where she zooms in upon the world's constituent parts in a way that decentres humanist perspectives. In her work, the Romantic, transcendent male gaze that loftily prizes human vision over all else, is dismissed for an eye which observes life's material configurations in all its sizes and forms. As Bonnie Costello explains, 'Bishop

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Bonnie Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.3-4.

attempts in her poetry to loosen the relation between the eyes and an imperious or transcendental “I” that would master or possess what it sees by ordering it around a center.<sup>58</sup> As Costello emphasises, Bishop makes clear her instinct that poetry begins with an inversion of the Romantic method, displacing self-serving ‘spiritual’ reflections to interrogate instead, the ‘material eaten out with acid’ first and foremost. Her journal reveals her desire to drill down into the earth’s componentry, mining beneath Humanism’s surface representations in order to uncover a more tangible essence. Such an approach anticipates New Materialism in its displacement of androcentrism’s habit of wishing to master the earth for its own purposes, appropriating nature for both convenience but also to suit the romanticists’ visions.

Susan Rosenbaum notes how Bishop’s fascination with the details beneath are indicative of a feminist perspective which challenges the sweeping epistemologies of post-war, patriarchal culture. In her essay ‘Elizabeth Bishop and the Miniature Museum’ (2005) she includes Bishop’s ‘Gallery Note’ written for friend and former poetry student Wesley Wehr to accompany his exhibition of watercolour miniatures in 1967. Whilst never published, it signposts Bishop’s preference for a diminutive, rather than anthropocentric lens:

Why shouldn’t we, so generally addicted to the gigantic, at last have some small scale works of art, some *short* poems, *short* pieces of music [...] some intimate, low-voiced, and delicate things in our mostly huge and roaring, glaring world? But in spite of their size, no one could say that these pictures are ‘small-scale.’<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bonnie Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.6.

<sup>59</sup> Bishop, ‘Gallery Note’ for Wesley Wehr extract in Susan Rosenbaum’s ‘Elizabeth Bishop and the Miniature Museum’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 28.2 (2005), 61-99 (p.61).

Bishop's dismissal of a 'glaring world' speaks to her interest in the molecular and her capacity to find meaning beyond mainstream, human-centred epistemology. Rather, she articulates a more grounded method that purposely evades anthropocentric methodology and so attempts at mastery. Rosenbaum explains this miniaturist praxis here in terms that suggest Bishop's posthuman approach to the arts: 'Bishop manipulates scale to bring into focus a miniaturist gaze, which in its overly close or exaggerated attention to detail, denaturalizes and critiques the acquisitive perspective and didactic practices associated with the museum.'<sup>60</sup>

Investing in the granular details to focus on the molecular and minor attests to the potential in Bishop's new materialist approach to question institutionally defined, humanist frameworks. Rosenbaum further explains, Bishop's detail 'thus threatens the notions of an aesthetic ideal, of the sublime, and the organic whole' and so disrupts the order 'of the museum, in which seeing is equivalent to knowing and possessing.'<sup>61</sup> I suggest that Rosenbaum speaks to Bishop's materialist approach where her distillation of entities into their component fragments draws attention to the smallest of matter in a manner which overrides humanist habits of mastery and 'acquisitive perspective' towards the earth. Rather, Bishop's capacity to appraise the world through a diminutive lens demands that the human species recognise the component details of an agentive landscape and our enmeshment within it as fellow material beings; in this way she points to a more grounded position which challenges both the lofty overview of the Romantic approach that she critiques in her journal, but also the sweeping aphorisms of humanist epistemologies and

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<sup>60</sup> Rosenbaum, 'Elizabeth Bishop and the Miniature Museum', p.72.

<sup>61</sup> Rosenbaum, 'Elizabeth Bishop and the Miniature Museum', p.80. Rosenbaum also notes how zooming in upon granular details acts as a disruptive tool in Bishop's writing; one which speaks to her surrealist inheritance. She explains, 'becoming mired in and disoriented by an overly close attention to details becomes and strategy of defamiliarization and transformation in Bishop's work', p.80. Rosenbaum adds that both Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), pp. 154-155, and Susan Stewart's *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.88 notes the resonances between miniaturist description and the surreal.

patriarchal culture. Rather, Bishop's poetic position is one that insists the writer expresses 'something not of them', distancing herself from androcentric identification in a way that conveys a feminist ecology. These themes recall the coded politics of her animal hybrids and provide an apt introduction to her poem, 'The Monument'.

Published in Bishop's first poetry collection *North and South* (1946), 'The Monument' exhibits new materialist sensibilities primarily in the glimpses of Max Ernst's frottage technique which surface in its lines.<sup>62</sup> Bishop owned an early copy of Ernst's *Histoire Naturelle* (1926) which contained a volume of his prints exhibiting the frottage method. Bonnie Costello notes that the source of 'The Monument' can be identified in Ernst's 'False Positions' frottage more specifically, which 'depicts two long, narrow fretted cylinders, ambiguously juxtaposed on a horizontal, striated base.'<sup>63</sup> The monument itself, whilst not specified, may have been inspired by the Pilgrim Monument in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where Bishop spent the summer in 1938, staying in a small fishing shack. Frottage appealed to her as a method for rendering tightly detailed and textured surfaces, thereby communicating her fascination with the dynamic between what can be seen and touched. As well as painting her own water colours she also made several frottages, speaking to her interest in producing art, as well as critiquing it.

'The Monument' intimates what Bennett describes as the 'curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act'<sup>64</sup> and points to the materiality of all matter, where human encounters with supposed inert phenomena – including a statue – have the

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<sup>62</sup> The frottage technique involved creating landscapes by rubbing on paper over wood so that the grain creates a graphic process and effect.

<sup>63</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.220. The ambiguity of the frottage effect would have undoubtedly appealed to Bishop's own equivocal sensibilities. Costello explains its potential double-meanings: 'In one sense frottage represents an extreme mimesis – art as a literal impression of nature, a sort of fossil, breaking down the distance between sign and thing, making the sign a literal trace of the thing. But the representational aspect of this image separates it from its natural origins, yielding to imaginative invention,' p.222.

<sup>64</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.6.

potential to ‘chasten [...] fantasies of human mastery’.<sup>65</sup> In this poem Bishop deploys atomic description, deftly accruing the details of the monument and its setting and building the poetic image in such a way that she simulates the process of its construction. It oscillates between a meditation on the nature of art and the art of nature, where two speakers stand as apparent onlookers observing the unknown structure that looms out at sea. Critical scholarship to date has alluded to ‘The Monument’s’ tangible materiality but not yet considered how a new materialist lens may open it up to further readings. Several scholars have focused upon Bishop’s allusions to literary and artistic heritages in the poem. Peggy Samuels, for example, explains how Bishop’s ‘response to the visual arts and to criticism of the arts becomes a significant part of the story of her composition of poems’.<sup>66</sup> Like Costello, she recognises the inherent traces of Ernst’s frottage technique emanating from ‘The Monument’ arguing that the method appealed to her ‘because it literally brings the materiality of the world into the art object.’<sup>67</sup> Costello, also highlighting the influences of frottage in the poem, suggests that the monument itself ‘exemplifies the artichoke-like unfolding of the life of a work, its making, its beholding and its history.’<sup>68</sup> Crucially, she identifies how Bishop addresses the limits to human mastery intimated by the overarching theme of the monument’s material decomposition: ‘The decaying monument simply acknowledges a boundary to human aspiration.’<sup>69</sup> In this way she also speaks to the metamorphic themes of the poem where we witness how ‘Art exists in a process, to which certain attitudes are preliminary.’<sup>70</sup> Such indeterminacy, both in terms of time and

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<sup>65</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.122.

<sup>66</sup> Peggy Samuels, ‘Bishop and Visual Art’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. by Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.169-182 (p.169). Samuels suggests that Bishop’s compositional method shares a kinship with the practice of painters. She explains, ‘Like the Impressionists and Postimpressionists in their use of the canvas, Bishop uses the poetic text itself as a surface or field in which to arrange the divergent and decentred meeting of the materials of mind and world’, p.173.

<sup>67</sup> Samuels, ‘Bishop and Visual Art’, p.180.

<sup>68</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.219.

<sup>69</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.219.

<sup>70</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.219.

materiality, is a topic that Siobhan Phillips notes in Bishop's work, suggesting that her letter writing 'support[s] Bishop's tendency toward a reportage that keeps faith with its subject by remaining open to change'.<sup>71</sup> Citing 'The Monument' specifically as an example of such 'reportage' she explains that its metamorphic qualities are communicated in the way it 'begins its looking with "Now" and continues via self-correction.'<sup>72</sup> Whilst the scholarship discussed here does not include direct references to New Materialism in Bishop's work, it does begin a conversation about a discernible tangibility and provisionality in her poetry and speaks to its particular resonance in 'The Monument' via the poem's frottage legacy.<sup>73</sup>

In the opening stanza below, Bishop etches lines of material immanence between building her own poem and the monument's construction process, forging a cultural and materialist cross-over which speaks to Barad's 'intra-active' modes that permeate the poem, as well as the topic of art's ontological status. Two onlookers gaze out at an unnamed monument which is described in both a precise, and yet epanorthotic manner by the speaker:

Now can you see the monument? It is of wood  
 built somewhat like a box. No. Built  
 like several boxes in descending sizes  
 one above the other.  
 Each is turned half-way round so that

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<sup>71</sup> Siobhan Phillips, 'Bishop's Correspondence', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. by Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.155-168 (p.157).

<sup>72</sup> Phillips, 'Bishop's Correspondence', pp.157-158.

<sup>73</sup> New materialist readings could also be applied to Bishop's 'Poem' from *Geography III* (1976). It is an ekphrastic work: a meditation on the ontology of art whilst speaking to a painting's own materiality, mirroring the themes of 'The Monument.' Bishop employs the painting as a vehicle that prompts reflection upon the fact that the nature of memory does not elevate it as an instrument of human supremacy. More so, the painting grounds the speaker and its creator, privileging the materiality of the world it seeks to portray over human mastery.

its corners point towards the sides  
of the one below and the angles alternate.  
Then on the topmost cube is set  
a sort of fleur-de-lys of weathered wood.<sup>74</sup>

The speaker's opening line, asking if a companion can 'see the monument?', is a provocative one which spills beyond whether it is simply in their line of sight. Rather, Bishop prompts the speaker to begin to register the structure differently in this poem; to see it for what it is, materially beyond an anthropocentrically anchored cultural configuration which prematurely claims a monopoly upon its meaning. In this opening stanza and throughout the poem, the poet is fostering a new receptivity to the monument, adopting a lens that escapes humanist appropriation by focusing upon the monument's material agency as well as the vitalism of its granular details. Not only does Bishop identify the agentive potential of these components, she also alludes to their entangled co-existence where they are connected by their tactile proximity to each other. Her use of simile also draws parallels between them, intimating materialism's multiplicity over humanist individualism. Moreover, the cultivation of receptivity and awareness that Bishop communicates in her poem has the capacity to over-come the sense of self that characterises attempts at human mastery, giving way instead to a mode that experiences matter as generative and agentive first and foremost. This is precisely the way the speaker of 'The Monument' expresses their experience of the structure, challenging rational reflections about its cultural symbolism for a materially driven configuration which zooms in upon its contingent parts. Bishop conveys how the construction is an assemblage of equally important components, grasping 'each individual case from all sides', swerving to

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<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, 'The Monument', in *The Centenary Edition Poems Elizabeth Bishop* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011), pp.25-27, (p.25) ll.1-9.

correct an initial assertion of its singularity towards recognising its material multiplicity as ‘several boxes.’ Her method of epanorthosis further unsettles the supposed fixity of the monument as well as any presumptions of androcentric mastery, where she playfully deviates from initial observations. Such flux in the speaker’s ponderings emphasises how the monument itself is subject to change according to the shifts of light, which in turn impact upon the poet’s perceptions, implicating them in what Barad would term an ‘intra-active’ dynamic. Its material and intra-active potential, which emphasises a more-than-human ontology, is further underlined in Bishop’s description of its ‘weathered’ appearance. In this way it is etched as a metamorphosing entity, prey to the temporal and meteorological elements which spill beyond any humanist presuppositions of mastery or control. As a result, Bishop situates it not as a separate unit but one enmeshed in a collective, wider environment, speaking to an entangled mode:

A sea of narrow, horizontal boards  
 lies out behind our lonely monument,  
 its long grains alternating right and left  
 like floorboards – spotted, swarming-still  
 and motionless. A sky runs parallel,  
 and it is palings, coarser than the sea’s:  
 splintery sunlight and long-fibred clouds.<sup>75</sup>

So proximate and alive is the material agency of the wooden monument that the speaker imagines its grainy effect spilling over into the sky and sea space, where clouds are ‘full of glistening splinters’ and the sea becomes a series of ‘horizontal boards.’ Bishop’s ‘a sky’, rather than one preceded by the definite article, demonstrates how it is both an evolving,

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<sup>75</sup> Bishop, ‘The Monument’, p.25, ll.24-30.

shifting phenomenon itself, as well as a space that eludes the concrete permanence that the anthropocentric eye attaches to it. The paradoxical 'swarming still' of the sea speaks to the illusory appearance of the monument's own stasis which Bishop shatters via her lively evocation of the structure. In this way the subject matter of Bishop's poem resonates with Bennett's argument that there is 'no point of pure stillness' in a materialist landscape.<sup>76</sup> Bishop's recurrent sibilance in the 'splintery sunlight' and 'glistening splinters' conveys a textured effect to her language, thereby creating a material resonance between poetic form and subject matter, pointing to a further spillage across phenomena. The tactility of this landscape, suggested by 'coarser' sky, and 'long fibered clouds', speaks to Bishop's synaesthetic praxis which enmeshes the sensorial experience. Similarly, the second speaker of the poem observes that the 'dryness in which the monument is cracking' even inflects the quality of the air, now described as one that is 'eroded' as it is breathed in. In this knotted assemblage, Bishop evokes a poetry inflected by Ernst's frottage technique; a method which involved using the floorboards to make a series of rubbings with a pencil. In this example, Ernst describes how in the process of making these drawings, he becomes aware of transformations within the material being studied, but also how this perception triggers a consciousness of other objects and matter around him:

I emphasize the fact the drawings thus obtained steadily lose, thanks to a series of suggestions and transmutations occurring to one simultaneously [...] the character of the material being studied – wood – and assume the aspect of unbelievably clear images of a nature probably able to reveal the first cause of the obsession or to produce a simulacrum thereof. My curiosity being thus aroused and marvelling, I was led to examine in the same way, but indiscriminately, many kinds of material happening to be in

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<sup>76</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.57.

my field of vision – leaves and their veins, the unravelled edges of sackcloth, the palette-knife markings on a ‘modern’ picture, thread unrolled from its spool, &c., &c.,<sup>77</sup>

In this account, Ernst explains a method which Bishop recapitulates in her poem speaking to its cultural and material heritage; one where, as details accrete, the speaker’s awareness of the ‘many kinds of material happening’ in the world becomes heightened and intense. He also intimates a ‘Thing-Power’ where a list of seemingly inert objects, including the ‘leaves and their veins’ and ‘the unravelling edges of a sackcloth’, appear to radiate an agentic energy which catalyses his own art. In the same way that Ernst’s own lens of perception prompts a post-anthropocentric awareness of a wider spectrum of intra-acting material occurrences as he draws, so too does Bishop’s poetic eye forge an increasingly shifting picture as she details overlapping, and material entities that spill beyond the borders of the monument itself. This preoccupation with the materiality of the monument’s existence indicates that the speaker does not quest for definitive proof of its historical purpose but rather, playfully obfuscates any precise meaning. Instead, she becomes lost in how the structure infuses the landscape in which it is set in a manner that similarly inflects the second speaker’s perceptions. When asked ‘what can it prove?’ the first speaker intimates that the monument is not about proof of anything, repeatedly eluding epistemological mappings in a way that recalls Rosenbaum’s analysis of Bishop’s circumnavigation of a ‘glaring’ museum culture. In this second stanza, Bishop demonstrates how the second speaker begins to perceive the monument in a more materialist manner, suggestive of Bennett’s argument that supposedly inert objects are in fact ‘vivid entities not entirely reducible to the context in which (human) subjects set them’.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ernst is quoted in Richard Mullen’s essay, ‘Elizabeth Bishop’s Surrealist Inheritance’, *American Literature*, 54.1 (1982), 63-80 (p.66).

<sup>78</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.5.

An ancient promontory,  
 an ancient principality whose artist-prince  
 might have wanted to build a monument  
 to mark a tomb or boundary, or make  
 a melancholy or romantic scene of it...  
 'But that queer sea looks made of wood,  
 half-shining, like a driftwood sea.  
 And the sky looks wooden, grained with cloud.  
 It's like a stage-set; it is all so flat!  
 Those clouds are full of glistening splinters!  
 What is that?'

It is the monument.<sup>79</sup>

Bishop is repeatedly ambiguous about the monument's origins, hypothesising that 'an artist-prince' 'might' have wished to build it. She ponders upon its possible purpose as 'boundary' or 'tomb' in a non-committal manner which aligns with Bennett's insistence that matter and objects have meaning that spills beyond an anthropocentric context. Bishop overrides humanist epistemologies, de-centring the significance of the artist-prince and so male authorship. This incarnation of the structure does not allow for Cartesian and thus phallogocentric grandstanding, and so avoids glaring epistemologies. Rather than emphasise anthropocentric preoccupations with 'didactic practices', authorship and channelling sentiment in a 'melancholy or romantic scene', Bishop's monument is characterised, instead, by its material composition as the second speaker's emphatic observations express. They primarily notice the finer details of the landscape in which it is embedded, as though it is camouflaged by its material entanglements with a 'sea made of

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<sup>79</sup> Bishop, 'The Monument', p.25-26, ll.35-46.

wood' and 'glistening splinters'. Rather than imposing itself upon the landscape as a marker of Humanism's power, it is the monument's overlap with the immediate environment which harnesses the attention of the poem's second speaker, whose question about what it is becomes secondary to the more pressing drama of its material entanglements. In this way Bishop conjures a structure that does not stand as a symbol of humanist conquest, but a component within a material assemblage, thus speaking to Bishop's implicit feminism that mines for the 'material eaten out with acid'.

In the final stanza Bishop emphasises how the monument's materiality has the capacity to forge new lines of immanence towards other entities, both human and more-than-human, speaking further to Bennett's concept of a 'Thing-Power, as well as the way 'intra-actions' between phenomena are an ongoing process. Part of the monument's capacity to impact upon the viewer is the way Bishop conjures it as an entity with the ability to harness imagination. This further demonstrates how matter's dynamism is a force which implicates and entangles the human species materially and culturally. In this stanza, Bishop etches a vision of not only what the monument may currently be, but also what it could further become:

The bones of the artist-prince may be inside  
or far away on even drier soil.  
But roughly but adequately it can shelter  
what is within (which after all  
cannot have been intended to be seen).  
It is the beginning of a painting,  
a piece of sculpture, or poem, or monument,  
and all of wood. Watch it closely.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Bishop, 'The Monument', p.26-27, ll.74-81.

The 'artist-prince', mentioned earlier in the second stanza, is similarly given only a passing reference here; his whereabouts vague and imprecise as if not of consequence. Of greater concern is the monument's future capacity to shapeshift, where Bishop's reference to a 'beginning' is significant, speaking to its open-ended ontology, rather than trapping the structure into the realms of a finite, linear humanist history. In this way it is evoked as an on-going force, projected as a 'sculpture, or poem, or monument', malleable both in its physical materiality as an entity 'all of wood' but also in its ability to stir the viewer's imagination to potentially become other art forms. The monument's malleable state, both in its exposure to temporal and meteorological elements as well as its evolving perceptions in the eye of the viewer, iterates how an entity - human or non-human - is never fixed on account of its interactions with the other forces and phenomena it is perpetually entangled with. Bishop's monument exhibits precisely the 'intra-active' dynamisms that Barad discusses in her essays on quantum entanglement showing how overlapping phenomena displace anthropocentrically conceived notions of a fixed, classical ontology. Bishop's final imperative that we 'Watch it closely' further etches the monument's mobile character where the spectator is now urged to 'Watch' it, rather than simply 'see' it, as if it is on the move. In this way her poetically forged structure speaks to new materialist visions and revisions and is a prescient evocation of Barad's insistence that 'Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentic, not a fixed essence or property of things.'<sup>81</sup> This is precisely the oscillating movement that characterises Bishop's poem where the monument's material elasticity - both as a cultural and physical entity - demonstrates both a 'Thing-Power' that horizontalizes human-non-human relations, but also the extent to which the human species is embedded within a materialist landscape rather than situated above it upon a hierarchical throne. It is a positioning which is pertinent to 'The Monument' but also connects to Bishop's poem 'The Weed' - a work

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<sup>81</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.137.

which moves from concepts of 'Thing-Power' towards a female-nature entanglement, thereby speaking to Alaimo's trans-corporeal feminisms. As will be discussed below, Bishop's visions of such corporeal materiality and its capacity for metamorphosis speak to our agentive entwinement with nature itself and is a key marker of a feminist ecology at work.

Also published in her early collection *North & South* (1946), Bishop's oneiric and most conspicuously surrealist poem 'The Weed' sees the speaker dreaming that 'dead and meditating' a weed bursts forth from her heart. The poem establishes the porosity of boundaries between humans and nature and recalls the themes exhibited in Tanning's floral paintings. Critical scholarship draws attention to the overt surrealism at work in this poem as well as the way in which Bishop navigates an often-vertiginous path between inner and outer worlds. This theme is prefaced in one of Bishop's diaries where she describes how drops of rain across the window refract the way in which she sees world outside, forging a surreal imaginary:

I went to look out, but could not. Instead I realized I could look into the drops, like so many crystal balls. Each bore traces of a relation or friend: several weeping faces slid away from mine, water plants and fish floated within other drops; watery jewels, leaves and insects magnified<sup>82</sup>

Here we witness an exchange between inner and outer spaces, where the drops of rain transmogrify the way in which Bishop sees the outside through the glass; it thus prompts a metamorphosis of her own inner reality. As Costello explains here, 'The self is projected into the world and, conversely, the mutable world enters the domain of the self.'<sup>83</sup> Other

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<sup>82</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.60. Costello includes this diary entry from Notebook, Vassar Rare Books and Manuscripts.

<sup>83</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.60.

critics note such a convergence in the poem 'The Weed' which shares these themes of entanglement and metamorphosis signposted in her diary. Kristin Hotelling Zona explains that writing poetry, for Bishop, probed the 'often discomforting nature of the self as it is shaped through interaction with the world.'<sup>84</sup> Both Costello and Victoria Harrison note the themes of ambiguity and ambivalence in 'The Weed'. Harrison argues that such themes are the consequence of Bishop's troubled personal relationships at the time. She explains that Bishop was haunted by her mother's death whilst trying to navigate the path between Marianne Moore's considerable influence upon her writing and asserting her own poetic voice. She further argues that the result is an unsettling and equivocal poem: 'The subject is surreal, the pronouns ambiguous, the poem's sympathies in all positions and none; Bishop renders the emotions of these relationships disturbing.'<sup>85</sup> Costello concentrates more upon the way in which the 'The Weed' is influenced by George Herbert's poem 'Love Unknown'; a religious work that is revised into a secular and psychological drama.<sup>86</sup> Whilst I agree that such personal turmoil may indeed underpin this complex poem, I wish to draw attention to the outer world in which they play out. I pursue the ambiguities and entanglements noted by other critics where 'Bishop binds the mental to the corporeal' to suggest that 'The Weed's' porous boundaries intimate new materialist sensibilities.<sup>87</sup> Costello begins to speak to this orientation in her analysis of Bishop's poem 'Songs for a Colored Singer' from *North & South* (1946) which she suggests shares parallels with 'The Weed': '[...] while the poem remains, like "The Weed" highly figurative, it insists on locating feeling and identity within

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<sup>84</sup> Kristin Hotelling Zona, 'Bishop: Race, Class, and Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. by Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.49-61, (p.49).

<sup>85</sup> Victoria Harrison, *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 51.

<sup>86</sup> Bishop was an avid reader of George Herbert. 'The Weed' is modelled on 'Love Unknown' (1633), where the speaker's heart experiences various tortures until it eventually proves its moral worth in a Christian tale of sacrifice and redemption. Bishop's speaker in 'The Weed' similarly endures several trials but does not receive Christian justification in return.

<sup>87</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.59.

the world, not the isolate self.<sup>88</sup> Here, Costello begins to ground 'The Weed' in a way that introduces how the poem is in fact rooted in a materially tangible terrain, despite its surreal symbolism. I suggest that the speaker's intermeshing with a weed becomes a lively and agentive contact zone showing how human and the non-human are engaged in a trans-corporeal dynamic. Moreover, there is the sense in the poem that, as Moira Gatens explains, human identity 'can never be viewed as a final or finished product as in the case of the Cartesian automaton, since it is a body that is in constant interchange with its environment.'<sup>89</sup> Beginning in a mode of stillness, where the heart is 'cold', all is 'frozen' and 'unchanged', the poem's mood shifts as a weed explosively stirs both the psychological and natural landscape to life in this opening stanza, speaking to Gatens's belief in the entanglement of body and environment:<sup>90</sup>

A slight young weed  
 had pushed up through the heart and its  
 green head was nodding on the breast.  
 (All this was in the dark.)  
 It grew an inch like a blade of grass;  
 next, one leaf shot out of its side  
 a twisting, waving flag, and then  
 two leaves moved like a semaphore.<sup>91</sup>

The weed of the poem is immediately characterised by the vital dynamism of its urgent movements, thereby contrasting with the seeming stillness and singularity of the human

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<sup>88</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.59.

<sup>89</sup> Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (New York, Routledge, 1996), p.110.

<sup>90</sup> Bishop, 'The Weed', *The Centenary Edition Poems Elizabeth Bishop*, pp.22-23, (p.22), ll.3, 5, 7.

<sup>91</sup> Bishop, 'The Weed', p.22, ll.15-22.

speaker at the beginning. The poetic landscape shifts from one of inertia, to one imbued with fractious mobility, where the weed is ‘twisting’ and ‘waving’, constantly surging on. Like the monument, it is a processual entity identified by its component parts of ‘stem’, ‘leaf’ and ‘nervous roots’ in a description which anthropomorphises it in order to bring human and non-human into closer proximity. Bishop’s comparison of the leaves to a ‘semaphore’ intimates its communicative powers, establishing it as an inter-connecting force which thereby implicates other matter, including the human speaker with which it is entangled. Bishop’s reference to the weed ‘nodding on the breast’ and the whole process taking place ‘in the dark’ is suggestive of a maternal presence. It effuses an agentic, feminised nature with which the female speaker finds a kinship; themes which are similarly evoked in other Bishop poems such as ‘The Moose’ in *Geography III* (1976).<sup>92</sup> The man-moth’s gesture of a ‘tear’, providing nurturance and replenishment, is echoed in ‘The Weed’, simulating the image of motherly sustenance. It further blurs the boundaries between human and natural phenomena, etching a feminist ‘trans-corporeal’ dynamic that forges the natural world as an active realm rather than a passive one. The darkness, as in the underground tunnels described in ‘The Man-Moth’, speaks to a birth, re-iterating the sense of an empowering mother-nature dynamic, creating and sustaining life and thus evoking the materiality of all bodies – human and non-human. I argue, however, that this is not the passive mother nature trope as propagated by patriarchal Humanism, where both the natural world and women are aligned together as passive entities awaiting male inscription and thus signification. Rather, the mother figure hinted at in Bishop’s poem is not a background spectre but an agentic power that speaks to the feminist New

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<sup>92</sup> Vicki Feaver explains that ‘The Moose’ is a poem where Bishop is able to ‘reclaim the nurturing space of the lost mother’ – a theme which resonates with the spectral, material traces I discuss in relation to ‘The Weed’, ‘Elizabeth Bishop: The Reclamation of Female Space’, in *Elizabeth Bishop Poet of the Periphery*, ed. by Linda Anderson & Jo Shapcott (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 2002), pp.87-102 (p.100). It also recalls Victoria Harrison’s comments upon the way the poem’s complexities are the result of the troubled relationships Bishop experienced, including the grief she suffered following the death of her mother.

Materialism highlighted by Alaimo. In this way the semantics of birth that permeate 'The Weed' demonstrate how women are powerful emblems and catalytic agents of the life cycle. Thus, Bishop is not simply reproducing the traditional mother-nature alignment, but rather she is redefining nature, and women's relationship to it, communicating it as a dynamic where matter is the force that underpins all life forms.

Themes of an agentic materiality are suggested in the sense of a haunted landscape that Bishop conjures in the poem, where her early references to death and the 'grave', as well as the darkness, may express spectral traces of Bishop's own mother from whom she was estranged at five years old. This haunting presence is also indicative of the more-than-human world where the speaker's immersion in spectral spaces and oneiric landscapes demonstrates how phenomena rupture temporal boundary lines drawn up by Cartesian humanists – a theme I investigate further in Chapter Five. In the same way as the wood grains show through Ernst's frottage images and Bishop's monument, so too is there a sense of a maternal trace in 'The Weed', where a mother figure's power continues to surface in the dynamic between nature and speaker. Identifying the materialist feminist dimensions of this poem, I argue in Alaimo's and Hekman's terms that Bishop's poem exhibits a materialist feminism in the way that it 'demands profound – even startling – reconceptualizations of nature',<sup>93</sup> where it is an agentic force that empowers female identities, rather than relegates it to the subordinated half of a nature/culture dichotomy. Rather than distancing herself from nature, in this poem Bishop reconfigures nature as precisely the innovative and agentic force that new materialists argue for. In doing so, she avoids the 'treacherous quicksand of misogyny' that an androcentric binary alignment with culture over nature only reinforces whilst speaking to the materiality of both.<sup>94</sup> Bishop's

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<sup>93</sup> Alaimo and Hekman, 'Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory', in *Material Feminisms*, pp.1-22 (p.5).

<sup>94</sup> Alaimo and Hekman, 'Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory', in *Material Feminisms*, p.4.

semantics of maternity that fuse with the natural world, speak to women's and nature's shared powers, thus rewriting them in terms that negate their patriarchal designations as passive, and, manipulable.

The weed embedding itself within the human body suggests that it surfaces from its anthropocentrically allotted background position, thrusting itself into the realms of human consciousness and speaking to all matter's iterative entanglement. Such dynamic reconfigurations depict the criss-crossing slippages which occur between human and environment, where the weed's and the human speaker's shifting materialist ontologies spill over to forge new becomings, as similarly seen in 'The Monument'. In the same way that the structure in that poem is imagined in the new guise of a poem or painting, so too does the vision of the weed and human speaker in this poem begin to metamorphose and evolve in fertile new directions:

The rooted heart began to change  
 (not beat) and then it split apart  
 and from it broke a flood of water.  
 Two rivers glanced off from the sides,  
 one to the right, one to the left,  
 two rushing, half-clear streams,  
 (the ribs made of them two cascades)  
 which assuredly, smooth as glass,  
 went off through the fine black grains of earth.<sup>95</sup>

The weed exhibits what Barad describes as an affirmative posthuman performativity where its many 'intra-actions' demonstrate that it does not operate in a sealed vacuum. Whilst

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<sup>95</sup> Bishop, 'The Weed', p.22, ll.28-36.

the human speaker is a nurturing force for the weed as discussed, so too does the weed foster growth in a reciprocal dynamic, reconfiguring humanist frameworks of Cartesian individualism and speaking, instead, to nature's agentic plurality and fertility. Emphasising the significance of the 'fine black grains of earth' in a line which recalls Rosenbaum's essay on Bishop's investment in granular detail, the poem again points to the collective materiality of all matter – including the microscopic - as well as botanic life that is relegated to otherness in its anthropocentric categorisation of 'weed.' Rather than dismissing these grains of earth and the weed to the realm of a passive, subordinated nature to be androcentrically choreographed, Bishop's poetics instead forge them as powerful, catalysing forces where 'a flood of water' erupts and streams gather pace to become 'cascades.' This watery world is conjured as a vital and borderless space, where the weed's agentic materiality reveals it as a metamorphosing entity that recurrently fuses with other phenomena in trans-corporeal visions. The oscillating and unpredictable shifts in the weed's movements speak to an instability that is similarly exhibited by the human speaker, pointing to world that operates beyond the illusion of a pre-ordained human mastery over nature. The speaker is both dreaming, but also meditating; she is in a 'grave' or a 'bed'. The incidental rhymes eschew any clear patterning and so emphasise the sense of an unpredictable material agency of both the human speaker and more-than-human world which are aligned in their erratic materiality. It is a praxis which resonates with what Bennett identifies as a 'primordial swerve', recognising that the 'world is not determined' and 'that an element of chanciness resides at the heart of things.'<sup>96</sup> The synchronous and symbiotic relationship which exists between the human speaker and the weed, becomes heightened in the final section of the poem where an increasingly trans-corporeal dynamism enables the speaker to begin to see differently, through what I posit is a prescient, new materialist lens:

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<sup>96</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.18.

A few drops fell upon my face  
 and in my eyes, so I could see  
 (or, in that black place, I thought I saw)  
 that each drop contained a light,  
 a small, illuminated scene;  
 the weed-deflected stream was made  
 itself of racing images.<sup>97</sup>

The water from the weed's leaves, now 'fringed with heavy drops', continues to evoke the sense of botanic life's fertility and its capacity to provide sustenance for the human speaker. This is apparent not just in a physical, corporeal sense but also in the way that Bishop arranges her lines to place emphasis upon the fact that the drops enter her eyes so that she 'could see', implying a shift of perspective and so a posthuman awakening. Themes of birth, iterated earlier in the poem in Bishop's reference to a flood of water, return here with drops upon her face indicating a sort of posthuman baptism, where the poem's opening reference to a humanist ego in death gives way to a more entangled becoming. In seeing anew, Bishop further estranges the speaker from the epistemic habits of the 'glaring' anthropocentric world, instead returning to themes of diminution, as if to reconnect with an earthly essence of more 'small, illuminated scenes.' In this molecular, materialist vision from line 47 of the poem, she depicts the stream itself as a series of 'racing images' thereby composed of a collage of miniatures in the same way she portrays the sea in 'The Monument' as comprising of 'horizontal boards' rather than one mass surface:

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<sup>97</sup> Bishop, 'The Weed', p.23, l.40-46.

a small, illuminated scene;  
 the weed-deflected stream was made  
 itself of racing images.  
 (As if a river should carry all  
 the scenes that it had once reflected  
 shut in its waters, and not floating  
 on momentary surfaces.)<sup>98</sup>

The entanglement of human and non-human spaces is emphasised here, where brackets indicate the inner thoughts of the poet beneath exterior observations in the same way as the river itself contains scenes below and beyond what is captured upon its 'momentary surfaces.' Brackets also highlight the spontaneous agency of the speaker's reflections, resonating with the agentic intensity of the river's own forward propulsions, operating outside of androcentric mastery. Bishop's poetics here suggest that the speaker processes her thoughts synchronously with the river's own everyday happenings, entwined in a current of scenes which overlap and co-mingle together as lively matter. The river's agency speaks to a spatiality which reconfigures a linear approach to life's processes for a more rhizomatic one that captures non-chronological slippages and divergences. Bishop suggests that a compendium of scenes and happenings can be traced through the river's history, forging it as a collective assemblage of vibrant matter that muddles epistemically carved categories of time and space in its fluid landscape. As a result, Bishop conjures the river as a living entity akin to human matter, one that implicates the speaker within it as a similarly vibrant ontology. Bishop suggests that there is the sense that the speaker is 'recomposed' by the weed whilst also enabling its own growth; she serves as fertile and dynamic ground

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<sup>98</sup> Bishop, 'The Weed', p.23, ll.44-50.

on which it can flourish, where even in death, human corporeality is a metamorphosing and affective entity, as this final stanza suggests:

The weed stood in the severed heart.  
 'What are you doing there?' I asked.  
 It lifted its head all dripping wet  
 (with my own thoughts?)  
 and answered then: 'I grow,' it said,  
 'but to divide your heart again.'<sup>99</sup>

In this final section of the poem, Bishop evokes a disaggregated body entangled in a knotty, trans-corporeal assemblage, where the collective ontologies of weed and speaker are intimated in the vision of the weed now dripping wet with her 'own thoughts?' In this line there is the sense that these two entities – human and non-human – are interchangeable compost, moving forward in a reciprocal dynamic that implicates all matter.<sup>100</sup> In this way Bishop communicates a new materialist approach where, as Alaimo insists, 'the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world'.<sup>101</sup> In this posthuman space, which indicates Bishop's implicit feminist politics, we see how 'The Weed' demonstrates that there 'is no absolute inside or absolute outside'.<sup>102</sup> 'The Weed' therefore is a poem which speaks to Barad's 'intra-actions' where matter is constantly enfolded in ever becoming reconfigurations, thereby affirmatively distanced from Cartesian thinkers' propensity for

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<sup>99</sup> Bishop, 'The Weed', p.23, ll.51-56.

<sup>100</sup> In her introduction to *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), Donna Haraway posits that all material entities 'become-with each other' in what she coins as 'hot compost piles'. Describing this process as a 'kind of material semiotics', she explains how this mode is 'always situated, someplace and not noplac, entangled and worldly.' She describes all the planets' habitants – human and non-human - as, 'mortal earthlings in thick copresence', p.4.

<sup>101</sup> Alaimo, 'Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature', in *Material Feminisms*, p.238.

<sup>102</sup> Barad, *Meeting The Universe Halfway*, p.377.

human individualism. In the process of Bishop's poem, we witness how 'Matter's dynamism is inexhaustible, exuberant, and prolific', thereby embodying vitalist modes which characterise the feminist ecologies of the surrealist work I have examined in this chapter.<sup>103</sup> Such fruitful intra-actions are precisely what take place between the weed and human speaker showing how all matter is agentic and dynamic, overriding any humanist perceptions about our environment, or nature, being an inert space.

### Conclusion

Bishop's and Tanning's revision of the woman-nature alignment marks the starting point for this chapter. Both conjure open-ended and collective material assemblages, not just in the body of their paintings and poetry but also in how they perceive the viewer or reader who becomes a non-hierarchical component of their surrealist landscapes. Their work intimates new directions in feminist thinking, where, as Alaimo describes, a trans-corporeal approach enables a space where 'corporeal theories and environmental theories meet and mingle in productive ways'. This, in turn, demonstrates the 'entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual.'<sup>104</sup> This is the generative approach which characterises Bishop's poetry and Tanning's paintings, where their motifs and themes of entangled matter not only expose humanist binaries of nature and matter as fictive, but more so, collapse them altogether, forging a material feminist space which overwrites the myopic delineations of an androcentric Humanism. Bishop's and Tanning's invocation of the natural world speaks to an entangled material-discursive praxis, one that exhibits a prescient feminist, and new materialist thinking. Whilst the women surrealists' work is often located within the natural world, I have argued that these are spaces which exhibit slippages between nature and culture in the way that new

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<sup>103</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p.170.

<sup>104</sup> Alaimo, 'Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature', in *Material Feminisms*, p.238.

materialists highlight, rather than enforcing humanist binaries further by simply reversing them. As a result, this chapter demonstrates how Bishop's and Tanning's intra-active, metamorphic praxis, which recurrently entangles trans-corporeal female figures with more-than-human phenomena, evokes a material feminist approach that foregrounds the mattering of matter. Chapter Three takes the grounded ecologies exhibited here as a cue in the way it focuses upon both Carrington's, and Bishop's geographical relocation to Latin America. Looking in particular to their turn towards indigenous culture as a focus which moves away from Eurocentric Humanism, I consider how their writing and art, set within earthly and often gynocentric terrains, furthers posthuman themes of entanglement and becoming which underpin the thesis as a whole.

### Chapter 3

#### Posthuman Destinations: A Feminist Rewriting of Surrealism in Latin

#### America

In *Borderlands/ La Frontera* Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldua insists that we ‘stop importing Greek myths and the Western Cartesian point of view’, and instead ‘root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul of this continent.’<sup>1</sup> Her calls to abandon a Cartesian perspective via an immersion in the earthy terrains of Latin American soil resonates with Rosi Braidotti’s departure from Humanism’s Eurocentric bias. Anzaldua’s critique echoes how Braidotti highlights Humanism’s umbilical tie to white Europe: a geography perceived as the birthplace of self-reflexive reason, and the civilisational ideal which all humankind must adhere to. In the same way as Humanism stands as a template built upon the white, androcentric male thereby consigning women to otherness as discussed in Chapters One and Two, it similarly presents itself as geographically limited, located within the specific physicality and culture of Europe’s borders. In this chapter I show how Elizabeth Bishop’s and Leonora Carrington’s Latin American work exhibits a palpable disconnect from such Eurocentric Humanism. I demonstrate that their oeuvre resonates with Tony Davies assertion that ‘All Humanisms, until now, have been imperial’, thereby invoking a specific human mode ‘in the interests of a class, a sex, a race, a

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<sup>1</sup> Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), p.90. Anzaldua, like Carrington, equates the destruction of Earth with the subordination of women and calls for a turn away from a white ‘Anglo’ point of view that leads us towards violence and futility. Instead, she points to the fecundity of the land and cultures of Latin America in reorienting white human exceptionalism in a treatise that espouses the philosophy that underpins this chapter. She explains, ‘By taking up *curanderismo*, Santeria, shamanism, Taoism, Zen and otherwise delving into the spiritual life and ceremonies of multi-colored people, Anglos would perhaps lose the white sterility they have in their kitchens, bathrooms, hospitals, mortuaries, and missile bases. [...] Let us hope that the left hand, that of darkness, of femaleness, of “primitiveness,” can divert the indifferent, right-handed, “rational” suicidal drive that, unchecked, could blow us into acid rain in a fraction of a millisecond’, p.90-91.

genome'.<sup>2</sup> Building on this perspective, Braidotti adds that 'feminism is resolutely antihumanist to the extent that it rejects Eurocentric humanism in the light of its "methodological nationalism."<sup>3</sup> This framework underpins my analysis where I demonstrate how the post-Eurocentric direction of travel in Bishop's Brazilian, and Carrington's Mexican oeuvre forges a posthuman feminist politics. In the first section of this chapter, I examine now Carrington's own feminist exploration of a pre-patriarchal past coincides with Mexico's deliberate reconnection with its indigenous heritage; one where Goddess figures emerge and a non-Eurocentric culture of myth, magic and death is evoked, anticipating an ecologically balanced milieu. Carrington's larger than life Goddess figures and pre-patriarchal ecologies chime with Bishop's play with scale in Brazil where her experiments with non-anthropocentric perspectives located in gynocentric realms are catalysed by her relocation to Latin America. In the second section of this chapter, I argue that the shift towards the southern hemisphere exhibited in her poetry, evokes queer ecologies where her speakers' intimate entanglement with primordially depicted geographies in Brazil enables her to articulate her lesbian identity in a less coded manner.

### **Posthuman Geographies: A Surrealist Odyssey Beyond Eurocentric Space.**

The Eurocentric ideology that underpins Humanism is a pervasive myth in the way that Anzaldúa intimates and has, as a result, set in motion a long-established dialectical dynamic which subordinates those who fall outside of its geographical and cultural axes. Braidotti explains here the problem with this 'Universal Humanism' in a way that sets up my analyses of Bishop's and Carrington's Latin American work:

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Davies, *Humanism* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.141.

<sup>3</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 'Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism', in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. by Richard Grusin (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp.21-48 (p.25). Braidotti's eschewal of such nationalism in her quest to move beyond Eurocentric Humanism speaks to Dawn Ades' insistence that Surrealism is about geographies, not nationhood. It thereby further demonstrates the way in which the movement has the capacity to think beyond the human in its mobile iterations of space, place and geography.

The Eurocentric paradigm implies the dialectics of self and other, and the binary logic of identity and otherness as respectively the motor for and the cultural logic of universal Humanism. Central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of ‘difference’ as pejoration. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart.<sup>4</sup>

Such a constricted notion of what constitutes the *human* catalyses the posthuman agenda in its purpose to widen Humanism’s myopic parameters. Synchronising feminist causes with a post-Eurocentrism, Braidotti explains how feminism is, in fact, one of the ‘precursors to posthuman thought’.<sup>5</sup> In this way she views feminist thinking as a mode which sets out to reconfigure the discriminatory unitary categories of Humanism; a mode based upon what she casts as ‘Eurocentric, masculinist, anthropocentric and heteronormative assumptions’. She argues that investing in a feminist politics is a strategy that has the potential to unravel Eurocentric templates which relegate all outside its parameters to otherness:

A primary task for posthumanist feminist theory therefore is to steer Europe toward a posthumanist project of ‘becoming minoritarian’ or becoming-nomad, which entails resistance against nationalism, xenophobia, and racism – bad habits of the old imperial Europe,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p.15.

<sup>5</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2019), p.48.

<sup>6</sup> Rosi Braidotti, ‘Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism’, p.25.

Such 'bad habits' which further cement an androcentric idea of the human subject within Humanism, need to be problematised, questioned and over-turned. Braidotti proposes instead a strategy for transforming its myopic hegemony. Her argument for 'becoming' modes, outlined in Chapters One and Two and which shake off a past rooted in the 'violent aspects of European Humanism', takes particular issue with the violence enacted to secure 'colonial domination'.<sup>7</sup> She puts forward instead a posthuman ontology which embraces immanent relations of 'and/and' rather than dialectical oppositions of 'either/or' that characterises the colonialist narrative.<sup>8</sup> Braidotti's vision abandons the dichotomies of Eurocentric Humanism versus Non-European Other for an interconnected model of 'becoming-subjects-together' in a way that I suggest is anticipated by the women surrealists explored in this chapter.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it recalls the becoming praxes examined in this thesis so far. Dislodging Eurocentric Humanism from its throne begins with 'Displacing the centrality of Anthropos within the European world view', thereby exploding 'a number of boundaries between "Man" and environmental or naturalized "others": animals, insects, plants and the environment.'<sup>10</sup> Braidotti imagines a new framework which casts Eurocentric Humanism to the periphery in favour of a more entangled, accountable posthuman mode, echoing the motifs of interconnection explored in Chapters One and Two and providing the foundational thinking which propels the current chapter:

To start accounting for the human in posthuman times, I suggest to carefully ground the statement 'we humans'. For 'we' are not one and the same. In my view, the human needs to be assessed as materially embedded and embodied, differential, affective and relational [...] For the

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<sup>7</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p.63.

<sup>8</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p.67.

<sup>9</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p.73.

<sup>10</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p.10.

subject to be materially embedded means to take distance from abstract universalism. To be embodied and embrained entails decentring transcendental consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

In this chapter, I consider how the locatedness of women surrealists within Latin America further emphasises and highlights such an embodied mode, particularly in the way that Carrington's work exhibits Mexican indigenous philosophies which are culturally distanced from Eurocentrism. Both she and Bishop exhibit what Susan Stanford Friedman would call a 'locational feminism' that considers and gives voice to the multiplicity of feminist perspectives across a breadth of geographies, as I discuss later in this chapter.<sup>12</sup>

Posthumanist thinkers have acknowledged the significant potential of indigenous philosophy in helping to recalibrate a Eurocentric Humanism. Although academics such as Nigel Clark have warned against simply aligning indigeneity with the primordality of the earth as a strategy in destabilising colonial narratives, I suggest that there are clear examples of how such philosophies have the potential to explode the myth of Europe as Humanism's gold standard.<sup>13</sup> Such thinking is invested in precisely the 'differential, affective and relational' approach that Braidotti posits as a foil for Eurocentric Humanism. To understand how indigenous philosophies chime with and anticipate posthumanist ecologies it is fruitful to observe the first principle of the Treaty binding The United League of Indigenous Nations:

The creator has made us part of and inseparable from the natural world around us. This truth binds us together and gives rise to a shared

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<sup>11</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p.11.

<sup>12</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p.5.

<sup>13</sup> Nigel Clark, 'Aboriginal Cosmopolitanism', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32.3 (2008), 737-44, (p.739).

commitment to care for, conserve and protect the land, air, water and animal life within our usual, customary and traditional territories.<sup>14</sup>

This principle speaks to the post-Eurocentric Humanism that Braidotti outlines where the Indigenous nations commit to an egalitarian and collective stance rather than a divisive one. The above statement exhibits an understanding of the balance and care required in response to the world and nature rather than viewing it and its peoples as a resource to be mined in the manner of colonial imperialists. Simone Bignall and Daryle Rigney identify more explicitly how posthuman and indigenous philosophies align:

posthumanism describes features also at the heart of internationally shared Indigenous conceptualisations of their humanity as being constituted in inextricable relations with the non-human world. Such philosophies include a refusal of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism; a genealogical and constructivist account of identity; and an acknowledgement of species interdependence and co-substantial intersubjectivity in interactive ecologies shared by human and non-human beings.<sup>15</sup>

These principles are precisely the ones identified in the work of the women surrealists in Chapters One and Two.<sup>16</sup> Understanding how indigenous philosophy eschews the

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<sup>14</sup> Simone Bignall and Daryle Rigney, 'Indigeneity, Posthumanism and Nomad Thought: Transforming Colonial Ecologies', in *Posthuman Ecologies: Complexity and Process after Deleuze*, ed. by Rosi Braidotti and Simone Bignall (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), pp.159-182 (p.161).

<sup>15</sup> Bignall and Rigney, 'Indigeneity, Posthumanism and Nomad Thought', p.159.

<sup>16</sup> Principles of interconnection and entanglement underpin Chapters One and Two. I argued in Chapter One that recurrent hybrid modes in the work of Carrington and Bishop speak to such inherent interconnections between species as well as our own animal ontology, demonstrating the intrinsic relations between humans and non-humans. Chapter Two similarly investigated how matter is the foundation of all ontologies' existence - animate and inanimate – pointing to a rich and

essentialism of a western-conceived human exceptionalism is a powerful tool in forward-thinking posthumanism. It also speaks to the importance of a cultural specificity that a universal Humanism rooted in Europe recurrently overlooks. Jodi Byrd further explains how indigenous approaches play a role in recalibrating European Humanism:

indigenous critical theory could be said to exist *in its best form* when it centers itself within indigenous epistemologies and in the specificities of the communities and cultures from which it emerges and then looks outward to engage European philosophical, legal and cultural traditions in order to build upon all the *allied* tools available.<sup>17</sup>

Such an approach helps to generate a wider understanding of expansive ecologies, geographies and cultures beyond the Eurocentric Humanism that has historically cast groups as colonised and the colonisers. As I will explain later, Carrington's contributions to, and role within, the periodical *S.NOB* is particularly emblematic of a more interconnected and expansive approach that was indicative of contemporary thinking among writers and artists in Mexico, and Latin American more widely. As Jonathan P. Eburne and Catriona McAra discuss, the journal *S.NOB* situated 'emergent experimental writing, film and visual art from Mexico in dialogue with European avant-garde movements', demonstrating how Carrington's work there was interested in generating a broader cultural exchange.<sup>18</sup> The location of indigenous cultures within a pre-patriarchal past is a temporality that resonates

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composite continuum that implicates all entities as collective beings of the Earth. Such principles, and indeed, such irrefutable laws of physics, challenge Humanism's presumed exceptionalism and demonstrate how the themes discussed in the first two chapters align with the philosophies espoused by indigenous cultures.

<sup>17</sup> Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p.xxx.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan P. Eburne and Catriona McAra 'Introduction', in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde*, ed. by Jonathan P.Eburne and Catriona McAra (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp.1-16 (p.4).

with both Bishop's and Carrington's work where entangled ecologies evoke gynocentric realms which, in turn, forge a posthuman, feminist politics, distanced from the divisive and imperialist version of Europe that Braidotti holds to account.

I begin my analysis of women's surrealist work by examining how Carrington's Mexican mural *El Mundo Magico de Los Mayas* (1963) chimes with indigenous philosophies via an art which evokes balanced ecologies and the Goddess culture of a pre-patriarchal past. Taking the egalitarian principles of this totemic work as a cue I investigate how Carrington's recourse to the Goddess motif, located in ancient Aztec culture in Mexico, serves as a vehicle to assert a feminist voice in tune with the country's own quest for a post-Eurocentric identity. Specifically, I analyse how her political engagement with Mexico's women's liberation movement is symbolised in the poster she created for their cause, *Mujeres Conciencia* (1972). Drawing upon Mexico's ancestral past it reconfigures western tales of dominance over those outside of European Humanism's vortex of power. To this end, I consider how Carrington's work is further estranged from Eurocentric thinking via what Jonathan P. Eburne describes as Mexico's 'Culture of Death.' Far removed from Europe's nihilistic and individualist understandings, I examine how Carrington's short story writing exhibits the belief that death is a state entangled with life and one that triggers processes of recirculation and regeneration – a Mexican belief that speaks to Braidotti's posthuman concept of death as 'life beyond the ego-bound human.'<sup>19</sup> As I will demonstrate, Carrington's work during this period exhibits an anticipatory posthuman approach to death which recalls the new materialist readings of women surrealists I conducted in the previous chapter. Braidotti's 'vitalist materialist view' of death is indicative of the becoming themes that underpin this thesis as a whole and speaks further to indigenous culture's approach to death as we witness in Carrington's Mexican work. Braidotti explains further:

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<sup>19</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.133.

Posthuman death theory as a vital continuum could not be further removed from the notion of death as the inanimate and indifferent state of matter [...] Death is the becoming-imperceptible of the posthuman subject and as such it is part of the cycles of becoming, yet another form of interconnectedness, a vital relationship that links one with other, multiple forces.<sup>20</sup>

Here, Braidotti's discussion of the posthuman account of death aligns with visions of death as a return to the soil as depicted in Carrington's Mexican oeuvre which draws upon indigenous culture's understanding of the process. A vitalist, materialist vision removed from what Braidotti labels as Humanism's typically 'Christian affirmation of Life or the transcendental delegation of the meaning and value system to categories higher than the embodied self', we witness instead a grounded appraisal of death in her Latin American work.<sup>21</sup> Yet, it is not a nihilistic vision of a termination but rather a mode that anticipates Braidotti's more sanguine and posthuman understanding of death. We observe further becomings and interconnections as the human organism is an 'environmentally bound subject [...], plugged into and connected to a variety of possible sources and forces.'<sup>22</sup>

### **Mexican pasts and posthuman futures in Leonora Carrington's surrealist oeuvre**

Leonora Carrington arrived in Mexico in 1943, scarred by her experiences of war-torn Europe and the mental breakdown she had suffered as a result. Her hospitalisation and the cruelty she endured at a sanatorium in Santander, Spain are documented in her surrealist memoir *Down Below* (1944) which I turn to in Chapter Five. They are events she eventually

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<sup>20</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.137.

<sup>21</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.138.

<sup>22</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.139.

escaped from after an opportunistic marriage to Mexican Renato Leduc which enabled her passage to the country André Breton labelled the 'Surrealist place *par excellence*'.<sup>23</sup> In many ways, Carrington's arrival in Mexico marked an emancipation of sorts: she was free of her father's dominance and similarly liberated from her relationship with Max Ernst. This romance was a dynamic that Carrington always spoke of positively, but at the same time, it placed certain constraints upon her as a woman more than twenty years his junior, thus typecasting her as a 'femme-enfant'. Only once she was separated from Ernst and his influence did her work begin to assert a confident power of its own, as her Mexican oeuvre demonstrates.

Carrington was one of a number of European émigrés who sought refuge in Mexico in the early 1940s, including Remedios Varo - a close friend and creative counterpart. Although Mexico welcomed European émigrés to the country during World War Two it was in fact a landscape in the throes of seeking a new post-revolutionary identity that would distance it from the European colonial powers which had suppressed it.<sup>24</sup> This new investment and celebration of a non-westernised Mexico saw artists such as Frida Kahlo, and husband Diego Rivera, seeking to portray a new Mexicanidad, eschewing the colonial inflections of its recent past. However, Kahlo's turn away from Spanish imperialism

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<sup>23</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years 1943-1985* (The Mexican Museum San Francisco: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), p.9.

<sup>24</sup> In the fifteenth century Spanish explorers arrived in the continent of America. They were ordered by the Crown to turn the state of Mexico into a Spanish colony overcoming ancient civilisations through force and by making the Mexican peoples assimilate with Spanish language and culture, thereby denying their own. This so-called conquest endured for three hundred years with Mexico eventually recognised as an independent republic in 1821. The later Mexican revolution, staged as an operation to overthrow dictator Porfiro Diaz, took place between 1910 and 1917. He had been in power since 1877 thereby violating the principles and ideals of the Mexican Constitution of 1857. The revolution highlights the plight of native American cultures who had been long overlooked. Artists such as Frida Kahlo played a role in mapping the identity of these cultures, and in particular channelled the identities of the women of these marginalised cultures. Dawn Ades discusses this in her essay 'Orbits of the Savage Moon: Surrealism and the Representation of the Female Subject in Mexico and Postwar Paris', in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. by Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1998), pp.106-127 (p.108).

extended to a wish to distance herself from the western modernist art movement, including Surrealism as she explains here:

Some critics have tried to classify me as a Surrealist; but I do not consider myself a Surrealist...I detest Surrealism. To me it seems a manifestation of bourgeois art. A deviation from the true art that the people hope for from the artist...I wish to be worthy, with my paintings, of the people to whom I belong and to the ideas which strengthen me.<sup>25</sup>

Kahlo's counter-story to Spanish Imperialism, which she perceived as bound up with Europe's modernist art movement, embraced a Mexican nationalism that returned to pre-Columbian ancestors, including the Aztecs.<sup>26</sup> The recurrent motif of the goddess figure Coatlicue emerged in her work - an Aztec, serpent skirted Goddess, adorned with a necklace of skulls who embodied Mexican culture's investment in the intimate relations between life and death. As Janice Helland explains, so-called Mexicanidad focused upon 'traditional art and artifacts, uniting all *indigenistas* regardless of their political stances', circumnavigating Spanish colonial powers which had compromised Mexico's sense of identity.<sup>27</sup> It is into this revolutionary and creative landscape that Carrington found herself

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<sup>25</sup> Janice Helland, 'Aztec Imagery in Frida Kahlo's Paintings: Indigeneity and Political Commitment', *Woman's Art Journal*, 11.2 (Autumn, 1990 - Winter, 1991) 8-13 (p.12). Kahlo's eschewal of European Surrealism teeters on the vitriolic in this example cited by Janet A. Kaplan: 'They make me vomit. They are so damn "intellectual" and rotten that I can't stand them anymore...I'd rather sit on the floor of the market of Toluca and sell tortillas, than have anything to do with those "artistic" bitches of Paris', *Unexpected Journeys: The Art and Life of Remedios Varo* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), pp.87-88.

<sup>26</sup> Kahlo's turn against Surrealism and her wish not to be subsumed into the movement is borne out by her desire not to be appropriated, as though a commodity. André Breton's account of his visit to Mexico in 1938 speaks to his perception of the country as one which he could potentially claim and appropriate for himself, suggesting that Kahlo was correct to be wary. His account, published in the journal *Minotaure* (1939), assesses Mexico as, 'Red soil, virgin soil impregnated by the most generous blood...At least one country is left in the world where the wind of liberation has not dropped', cited in Dawn Ades, 'Surrealism in Latin America', in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. by David Hopkins (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons incorporated, 2016), pp.177-196 (p.184).

<sup>27</sup> Janice Helland, 'Aztec Imagery in Frida Kahlo's Paintings', p.8.

after experiencing the turmoil of war-torn Europe. Less interested in spending time with European émigré circles, she instead began to explore the culture and geography of Mexico's post-revolutionary identity finding kinship with its culture of magic, myth and recent reconnection with its ancestral past. Both she and Remedios Varo found inspiration in the Mexican marketplace in particular, as Janet Kaplan explains:

They found Mexico a fertile atmosphere where magic was part of daily reality: traveling herb salesman would set up on street corners with displays of seeds, insects, chameleons, special candles, seashells, and neatly wrapped parcels with such mysterious labels as 'Sexual Weakness' - all used for the practice of witchcraft by the *curanderas* (healers), *brujas* (witches), and *espiritualistas* (spiritualists), who outnumbered doctors and nurses. Mexico proved a vibrant influence on Varo and Carrington, for whom the power of spells and omens was already very real.<sup>28</sup>

As Kaplan outlines here, Mexico suited Carrington, not because she was intoxicated by its otherness in the manner of Breton and his circle of European émigré, but because it was a magical world with which she was already synchronised.<sup>29</sup> She was not therefore appropriating Mexicanidad for her own purposes but rather engaging with it in a way which chimed with her own sense of kinship with the alchemy, magic and goddess figures. Such an approach is one she discusses with reference to her own Irish heritage which resonates

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<sup>28</sup> Janet Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys*, p.96.

<sup>29</sup> While it is true that the European surrealists of the 1920s and 1930s were already interested in the occult and magic due to its perceived connection with the irrational and unconscious worlds, Carrington's immersion in Mexico galvanised a more feminist trajectory. Whitney Chadwick explains: '[...]it was in Mexico that she [Carrington] defined a relationship to the ancient healing arts that was not circumscribed by Surrealism's belief in a childlike sorceress as the medium for male creative liberation,' *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years 1943-1985* (The Mexican Museum San Francisco: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), p.13.

with Mexico's ancestral roots; one which she learned about through her maternal grandmother which she outlines here: 'My love for the soil, nature, the gods was given to me by my mother's mother who was Irish from Westmeath, where there is a myth about men who lived underground inside the mountains'.<sup>30</sup>

Carrington's awakening to this entwinement of soil and nature, pre-patriarchal gods and magic via her grandmother's tales are themes which resonate with the pre-colonial past that Mexico was attempting to recover. It is precisely the subject matter that the Mexican Government wished to celebrate in a mural it commissioned for Mexico City's new Museum of Anthropology in 1963. By the 1960s, following successful exhibitions in the country, Carrington was well-known in Mexico and the Government chose her as the artist to create a mural that captured its post-colonial and post-revolutionary identity, overriding the European conquests and appropriations it had endured in recent history.<sup>31</sup> Recognising Mexico's post-European direction of travel as well as her natural inclination towards the magic and ecologies of a pre-conquest culture meant that Carrington chose to base the painting *El Mundo Magico de los Mayas* (1963) on the belief system of the Chiapas Indians who were descendants of the Ancient Maya people. She drew upon the ancient Mayan text *Popul Vuh* combined with trips to Chiapas where she stayed with Swiss anthropologist Gertrude Blom who introduced her to traditional Chiapas healers, known as *curandos*.<sup>32</sup> In

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<sup>30</sup> Carrington further explains: 'My grandmother used to tell me we were descendants of that ancient race that magically started to live underground when their land was taken by invaders with different political and religious ideas. They preferred to retire underground where they are dedicated to magical and alchemy, knowing how to change gold', Aberth, *Leonora Carrington Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, p.12.

<sup>31</sup> Carrington painted the mural in her studio in Mexico City using casein paints on curved wooden panels. It was installed in the Chiapas section of the city's Museum of Anthropology and was then later moved to Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital of the Chiapas State in the late 1980s.

<sup>32</sup> The practice of *curanderismo* is a Mexican healing tradition that encompasses the use of alternative therapies and medicines including acupuncture and homeopathy. It is grounded in the belief that illnesses have both natural and supernatural causes. Anzaldúa cites the practice as one of the potential ways of navigating our way out of what she calls an homogenous Anglo 'sterility' towards a more interconnected and broader understanding of the belief systems and cultures that also constitute our species, *Borderlands* p.90-91. Carrington's time with the Chiapas Indians was an immersive one. Chadwick explains that 'Carrington's knowledge of and respect for traditional

this way Carrington forges a painting cut adrift from European bias, turning towards images and philosophies that chime with Mexico's indigenous ancestry, but which also anticipate a posthuman approach. It is a syncretic work: one that not only melds Mexican's rich ancestral cultures together but also merges with Carrington's own visionary symbols where magical and mystical animals – seen in her earlier work in Europe - blend with Mexico's own iconographies.



**Figure 3.1** *El Mundo Magico de Los Mayas* (1963), Leonora Carrington © Estate of Leonora Carrington/ARS, NY and DACS, London 2023

The earthy colours of *El Mundo Magico de los Mayas* highlight its magical components as if Carrington wishes to draw attention to both a grounded ecology as well as an other-worldly cosmos. Spanning four metres by two metres, it is a vibrant multi-verse of human and more-than-human ontologies depicting a dynamic and cultural locale unfettered by a Eurocentric influence. The painting is populated by indigenous animal life, articulating the

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healing arts inspired such trust that the *curanderos* shared with her their healing lore and permitted her to attend their ceremonies,' *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years*, p.23.

Chiapas belief that people are born with an animal companion who stays with them throughout their life, a perspective that Carrington shared and exhibited frequently in her artwork and writing, as discussed in Chapter One. The lower strata of the painting depicts an underworld where animals live in apparent harmony, overseen by a jaguar god on the left and suggestive of their foundational relationship to the overall scene that speaks to an animal heritage.<sup>33</sup> A flock of owls wind their way down to the ceiba tree rooted within this foundational section of the painting; it is a tree that was sacred to the Mayan people because they considered it a conduit of communication between the three levels of the earth, thereby suggestive of the entanglements that Indigenous cultures live by. Above this animal underworld, Carrington etches tiny human figures, derailing an anthropocentric approach and speaking to a wider agentive power beyond humanist hierarchies and choreography. The *curandos* or Chiapas healer in the small house beneath the rainbow is not privileged either, painted as one tiny detail in an amalgam of human-animal components that brim within the painting. Those which are of larger stature are the white sheep on the left of the landscape, deemed sacred to the Chiapas people, as well as the striking turquoise blue serpent who infuses the painting with magic, distancing it from the institutionalised religious practices embedded within Eurocentricism. Such a magical, other-worldly approach is further demonstrated in the entanglements exhibited in the painting where an animal underworld operates concurrently with the day-to-day bustle and custom of the Indian people above ground. Carrington embraced the Mexicans' belief in the re-circulation of life celebrated in cultural events such as *Día de los Muertos* where life and death are recognised as entangled phenomena rather than binary opposites in the manner presumed by European thinkers. Jonathan P. Eburne explains this inter-connective approach here:

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<sup>33</sup> Jaguars are indigenous to Mexico and are the only extant member of the genus *Panthera* which are native to the country. Significantly, in Pre-Columbian Central and South America, the jaguar was seen as a symbol of strength and power.

the experience of death featured in Carrington's work from this period is no longer the death envisaged by postwar European philosophers – as limit, as dissolution, as absolute disappearance – but a death recast in terms of a pre-Columbian funerary culture that figures it as a mode of recirculation.<sup>34</sup>

Eburne outlines above how Carrington's oeuvre speaks to a continuity, where the cult of life becomes inseparable from the cult of death invoking instead cosmological systems that intervene between Humanism's presumed being and nothingness. His analysis of such earthly, entangled visions in Carrington's work here resonates with Braidotti's posthuman theory on death discussed earlier, where she suggests that human life, and death, are in fact a 'creative synthesis of flows, energies and perpetual becoming.'<sup>35</sup> *El Mundo Magico de Los Mayas* exhibits precisely such a 'synthesis' in the plethora of magical motifs and themes which emanate from its scenes, where the serpent is a deity, whilst the rainbow which soars between the church and the Indian house with the curandos, acts as a bridge between the two mediums, alluding to the earth mother. These motifs mark cultural cross-overs and forge a co-mingling between belief systems and human-animal ontologies. They estrange the work from the divisive praxis of European colonisation to present a more harmonious posthuman vision of life cycles across species and cultures. The diverse beliefs of the peoples populating the painting are presented as a dynamic collective, where Carrington portrays these differing religions and practices as a continuum instead of binary opposites.

Whitney Chadwick observes this representative entanglement in her commentary on Carrington's *The Mexican Years* Exhibition: 'Pre-Christian and Christian images mingle,

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<sup>34</sup> Jonathan P. Eburne 'Leonora Carrington, Mexico, and the Culture of Death', *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, 5.1-2 (2011), 19-32 (pp.20-21).

<sup>35</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.131.

much as they do throughout Chiapas; the forest of crosses on the hillside, for example, represents Chac, who later merged with Christ in popular belief.<sup>36</sup> Such a fusion of seemingly dichotomous forces, where pre-Christians and Christians are presented upon a continuum, is further signified in the rainbow bridging the scene as well as the co-appearance of the sun and the moon drifting alongside each other in a burnt umber sky. In this way, Carrington further muddles the categories that European Humanism pivots upon, unsettling temporality itself in the way that *El Mundo Magico de Los Mayas* appears to elude any sense of chronological time. Whilst the swooping of the owls and the stirring of the underworld creatures speak to a nocturnal time frame, the daily routines of the Chiapas allude to a diurnal clock. Seemingly supernatural creatures traverse between mortal and immortal spaces both within the underworld section of the mural and those drifting amongst the snow-peaked mountains. The serpent is feathered, speaking to Carrington's hybrid modes which are also suggestive of a slippage between worlds and are characteristic of Mexico's pre-conquest past, entangled with magical and mythical symbols. The hummingbird above the ceiba tree is a similarly multi-faceted entity where a god-like visage radiates light from its body, whilst its peacock blue wings are outstretched as if poised for take-off. There is a sense of connection between these diverse ontologies where the sacred sheep, serpent and hummingbird, as well as the supernatural beasts in the sky, all appear to be surging in the same direction despite their ontological diversity. Such a synthesis of ideas and beings that draw upon the rich tapestry of Mexico's pre-colonial past is an affirmative counter-story to the country's imperialist narrative, forging a realm which aligns with its indigenous principles that speak to a posthuman ethics. The rainbow motif is a significant touchstone in the mural acting as a bridge between worlds and functioning as a 'reference to the many-breasted, bearded earth mother.'<sup>37</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years 1943-1985*, p.26.

<sup>37</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years 1943-1985*, p.26.

Mexicans' recourse to magic and Goddess culture, symbolised by this rainbow bridge, was a key strategy in countering colonial narratives and I consider this movement further in Carrington's increasingly political involvement in the country. Indeed, the rainbow motif signposts the feminist momentum in Carrington's Mexican oeuvre. I now turn to consider this momentum in more detail.

The revolutionary spirit of Mexicanidad provided a framework for examining identity and gender and corresponded with Carrington's own feminist politics at the time. Tara Plunkett discusses the impact that Mexico had upon women artists during the 1950s and 1960s, considering how its 'geographical distance from the Parisian world' preoccupied the 'surrealist imagination'. She explains, 'Certain scholars have argued that in post-war Mexico, women artists such as Varo and Carrington finally found themselves with the freedom to develop an aesthetic that privileged the power of the female.'<sup>38</sup> Dawn Ades is one of the scholars that Plunkett alludes to. She contrasts the European male surrealists constructing a female identity to suit their own gaze with the Mexican feminists, who instead, 'invoked the Aztec goddess Malinalxochitl as a model of female independence and strength.'<sup>39</sup> This revolutionary feminist awakening in a country already attuned to the occult and marvellous provided fertile ground for a post-Eurocentric turn in Carrington's work which synthesised these elements in what I perceive as posthuman realms.

The feminist posthuman approaches identified in Carrington's *El Mundo Magico de los Mayas* are also manifest in the poster she designed in 1972 for Mexico's feminist movement. Two years before, Carrington wrote her feminist manifesto 'What is a Woman?' in Mexico, an essay in which she identifies herself as a 'female human animal' as I

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<sup>38</sup> Tara Plunkett 'Dissecting *The Holy Oily Body*: Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington and *El Santo Cuerpo Grasoso*', in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde*, ed. by Jonathan P. Eburne and Catriona McAra (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p.72.

<sup>39</sup> Dawn Ades, 'Orbits of the Savage Moon: Surrealism and the Representation of the Female Subject in Mexico and Postwar Paris', in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. by Whitney Chadwick (London: The MIT Press, 1998), pp.106-127 (p.108).

discussed in Chapter One. She designed and created the poster for Mexico City's women's liberation movement *Mujeres Conciencia* as a visual realisation of her manifesto's content, demonstrating how this Latin American location galvanised her increasingly political stance. Visions of magical Goddess cultures, which feature in paintings such as *The Giantess* (1947), and her poster *Mujeres Conciencia*, speak to a Latin American feminism that found kinship in their totemic eschewal of patriarchal power. Gloria Orenstein discusses the repression of female figures in Surrealism in particular, and examines how employing visions of the Goddess in their work was a key strategy in reasserting an autonomous female identity:

In the coded works of these Surrealist women, feminist scholars can actually discover a new kind of concern with time, a reclamation of 8,000 years of lost history and an affinity with pre-patriarchal cultures in which the image of the Great Mother was revered as supreme creator of the universe.<sup>40</sup>

The Goddess motif is one that stands in opposition to patriarchal religious forefathers and European philosophers and appears as such in a number of Carrington's Mexican paintings in the manner that Orenstein describes. It speaks to Carrington's evolving feminism, galvanised by a Mexico embracing a growing sense of its own emancipation as it sought to unchain itself from European influence. Carrington's feminism from the 1950s to 1970s was increasingly refracted through a wider political engagement with Mexico's colonised peoples during this period, signalling further her estrangement from European male

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<sup>40</sup> Gloria Feman Orenstein, 'Reclaiming the Great Mother: A Feminist Journey to Madness and Back in Search of a Goddess Heritage', *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 36.1 (1982), 45-70 (p.48).

surrealist circles to forge art and writing that chimed with the post-Eurocentric principles of Latin America.<sup>41</sup>



**Figure 3.2** *Mujeres Conciencia* [Women's Awareness] (1972), Leonora Carrington © Estate of Leonora Carrington/ARS, NY and DACS, London 2023

*Mujeres Conciencia*, forged in earthly green hues, features two Eve figures presenting each other with an apple whilst a winged creature flies above them, recalling the rainbow deity that bridges *El Mundo Magico de los Mayas*. In Carrington's Mexican vision, situated in a pre-conquest locale, the apple does not signify sin but instead the sharing of knowledge

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<sup>41</sup> *Mujeres Conciencia* is a totemic example of Carrington's investment in the country's new political trajectory – a vision that chimes with the posthuman feminist ecologies she articulates in her essay two years before. Such posthuman feminist ecologies where women and nature unite as a powerful force that has the potential to reconfigure phallogentric, humanist hegemony recalls Stacy Alaimo's materialist feminism discussed in Chapter Two. It speaks to a kinship between ancestral natures and contemporary feminist concerns in Carrington's Mexican oeuvre, as well as Bishop's Brazilian poetics examined later in the chapter, demonstrating how 'Feminist theories, politics, and fictions [...] can "play nature" with a vengeance by deploying discourses of woman and nature in order to subvert them'. In this way they destabilise the 'nature/culture divide whilst constructing feminist alliances with postmodern natures', *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (London: Cornell University Press, 2000), p.136.

between women in a gesture which eschews western religious epistemologies that impose androcentric dominance. Here the fruit symbolises fecundity rather than the forbidden, thereby fostering the themes of exchange, balance and growth that indigenous philosophies call for. As Catriona McAra and Jonathan P. Eburne observe, Carrington draws upon the 'broader iconography of the era' by employing the 'imagery of pre-Columbian religion to access alternative belief systems.'<sup>42</sup> Hierarchical perspectives, which characterise Eurocentric, humanist trajectories as well as western religious thinking, are rewritten via the circular symbols of Carrington's painting restoring balance between ontologies which have been historically subordinated by patriarchal rule. Her recourse to Goddess figures in Mexico's ancestral past to forge an ecological and feminist stance, is captured in the poster which features the sacred serpent from Aztec culture, Quetzalcotal. Most significantly, Carrington references the Aztec goddess Cihuacoatl in the inscription she wrote to accompany the painting:

Winged Cihuacoatl (snake woman)  
 Quetzalcoatl sacred serpent hermaphrodite  
 rises again in the tree of life where  
 Eve gives Eve back the fruit  
 of Wisdom  
 Women take back the original wisdom.<sup>43</sup>

Carrington's reference to Eve returning the fruit here reconfigures patriarchal myth, speaking to her belief that something vital has been taken from women. She intimates here

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<sup>42</sup> Catriona McAra and Jonathan P. Eburne, *Mujeres Conciencia [Women's Awareness]: Leonora Carrington's Agit-prop* (2019) <<http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/articles/mujeres-conciencia-womens-awareness-leonora-carringtons-agit-prop-by-catriona-mcara-and-jonathan-p-eburne/> [accessed 8 January 2021]

<sup>43</sup> McAra and Eburne, *Mujeres Conciencia: [Women's Awareness]: Leonora Carrington's Agit-prop*.

that Man's quest for possession of the Earth, which she outlines in her 'What is a Woman?' essay, also entails a loss of women's autonomy and voice. Eve giving back to Eve speaks to the theme of reciprocity evoked in her mural and most importantly the entanglement of women's rights with the Earth's. A feminism empowered by its kinship with Latin America's pre-conquest culture is further enabled in Carrington's reference to Cihuacoatl – a powerful midwife spirit who guards the souls of those who die in childbirth in Aztec mythology. According to this belief system, women in childbirth are considered to be soldiers in battle, thereby symbolising powerful images of both motherhood and fertility, speaking against western notions of a passive, mother earth.<sup>44</sup> In Aztec mythology, this mother figure is a formidable force both revered and feared in equal measure; an entity who works in tandem with the feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl, speaking to both Carrington's pre-occupation with hybrid forms as discussed in Chapter One, but also her interest in forging a sympoietic balance between ontologies. Recovering a dynamic of reciprocity between ontologies are key modes in disrupting the rapacious rule of 'Our Masters', as Carrington argues in 'What is a Woman?' and represents a move that is key to both women's emancipation and the recuperation of the planet itself. In this way Carrington's poster serves as powerful propaganda that unites those disempowered by a phallogentric order anchored by the mechanisms of Humanism as McAra and Eburne explain:

*'Mujeres Conciencia* is a work of agit-prop towards global overthrow of patriarchal systems: yet it is a call not to violence but to awareness [...]

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<sup>44</sup> Reconfiguring androcentric myths of a passive, mother earth is a theme discussed in Chapter Two where I argued that a new materialist lens enables a more agentive and empowering version of the kinship between women in nature in women's Surrealism.

Concentric and spiralling motifs recast the picture plane of male-dominated linear perspective as a field of recursion.<sup>45</sup>

The poster thus serves as an instrument of peace where a gynocentric realm symbolised by the reciprocal Eve figures bears out Carrington's hope in 'What is a Woman?' that a decision by 'Women of the world' 'to refuse war, to refuse discrimination of Sex or Race' would 'allow life to survive on this planet'.<sup>46</sup> In this vision Carrington eschews Humanism's imperialist foundations to instead emphasise 'other axes of analysis' within its categories in the manner that Braidotti's posthuman politics calls for.<sup>47</sup> As *Mujeres Conciencia* demonstrates, Mexico's quest for a post-imperial identity resonated with Carrington's own feminist politics where the country's recourse to indigenous belief systems served as a mechanism in asserting a post-Eurocentric voice.

Carrington's political engagement in Mexico is also demonstrated in her involvement with periodical culture where her written work similarly speaks to a prescient posthuman approach that is galvanised by her relocation to Latin America. Carrington participated in both the experimental theatre group 'Poesia en Voz Alta' in 1956 and 1957, as well as the journal *S.NO B* which published seven issues in 1962, originally conceived as a weekly journal.<sup>48</sup> Founded by Mexican writer Salvador Elizondo, *S.NO B* claimed to pursue 'la "destrucción" sistemática de los conceptos tradicionales de la "cultura"'.<sup>49</sup> It sought to

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<sup>45</sup> McAra and Eburne, *Mujeres Conciencia (Women's Awareness): Leonora Carrington's Agit-prop*.

<sup>46</sup> Leonora Carrington, 'What is a Woman?', in *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp.372-375 (p.374).

<sup>47</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), p.48.

<sup>48</sup> Carrington involvement in 'Poesia en Voz Alta' (Poetry out Loud) included designing the costumes and the set for Octavio Paz's only theatre work which was an adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Rappaccini's Daughter*. Carrington also published several plays of her own with the group including *La invención del mole (The Invention of Mole)*. Roni Unger describes how the group was originally conceived as a 'university-sponsored cultural project of poetry recitals', *Poesia en Voz Alta in the Theater of Mexico* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), p.13.

<sup>49</sup> Abigail Susik, 'Losing one's head in the "Children's Corner": Carrington's Contributions to *S.NO B* in 1962', in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde*, ed. by Jonathan P.Eburne and Catriona McAra (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017), pp.105-125 (p.108). Translates as,

explore new experimental, artistic avenues filtered through both a European and Latin American avant-gardist lens. In this way, Carrington played a key intermediary role as an artist who brought with her a European aesthetic heritage but had also worked in collaboration with Mexican intelligentsia, thereby establishing *S.NOB* as an eclectic and hybrid production. McAra and Eburne explain:

the expatriate Carrington became something of a figurehead for the *S.NOB* group's project. As received by a younger and mostly male Mexican cohort, Carrington was both a model for and collaborator with a Mexican artistic milieu that sought to distil a trans-temporal and transnational genealogy of radical aesthetic experimentalism.<sup>50</sup>

McAra and Eburne underline the eclectic nature of the periodical here and the fact that Carrington's European heritage helped to catalyse its cross-cultural premise. Its collaborators took pride in their experimental approach, both in its presentation via alternative formats and typography as well as through its provocative articles on topics of erotica, transnational culture as well as literature. *S.NOB* was an acronym for the Latin *sine nobilitate* [without nobility] thereby speaking to those who had wealth, but at the same time had no hereditary claim to aristocracy. Abigail Susik explains how the term 'becomes a punning oxymoron: these snobs disavow heritage but operate from a position of ironic intellectual authority.'<sup>51</sup>

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'The systemic "destruction" of traditional concepts of "culture"'. Elizondo was joined by assistant editor Emilio Garcia Riera and artistic director Juan Garcia Ponce.

<sup>50</sup> Catriona McAra and Jonathan P.Eburne, 'Introduction' to *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, pp. 1-16 (p.13). Susik also explains Carrington's key, intersectional role in the periodical: 'Carrington more than any other surrealist appears in *S.NOB* repeatedly as the "point" of connection between the European avant-garde and its cultural dissemination in Mexico', 'Carrington's Contributions to *S.NOB* in 1962', p.110. *S.NOB* was intended to display a forum of international cultures and ideas.

<sup>51</sup> Susik, 'Carrington's Contributions to *S.NOB* in 1962', p.108.

Carrington's contributions established her as an equal collaborator and peer of Mexican writers for *S.NO.B*. They demonstrate how her politics chimed with the country's own avant-garde aesthetics, distanced from a Eurocentric axis but also alluding to European, surrealist influence. Her story writing for the periodical was most often featured within a section entitled 'Children's Corner' but the tales were far from suitable for a younger audience. Dark and brutally concise narratives, including the freakishly titled 'Juan sin cabeza' [Headless Juan] in Issue Seven, they signpost Carrington's characteristic black humour and corporeal violence which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Four. In this subversive fairy tale, the protagonist Juan sees his head carried away by his large ears that metamorphose into wings. His mother is entrusted to reattach it with nothing but a piece of chewing gum. However, the night hour means that she cannot see what she is doing and so she makes the error of sticking her son's head on backwards. Apparently unfazed by Juan's disturbing new appearance, her advice is to not let his head escape again, after which we are assured that 'John was very careful.'<sup>52</sup> The boy's ears are grotesquely disproportionate to his body and once his head is disaggregated, we are witness to an even greater absurdity in its airborne spectacle. Juan is a sort of surreal cadavre exquis;<sup>53</sup> a

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<sup>52</sup> Leonora Carrington, 'Headless John', in *The Milk of Dreams* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2013), pp.4-9 (p.9). *The Milk of Dreams* is published in Spanish entitled *Leche del sueño* (2013). This volume includes five of the 'Children's Corner' works from *S.NO.B*. Gabriel Weisz, Carrington's son, explains that this small collection was not necessarily meant for children, like those stories in 'Children's Corner' but rather, the narratives were intended for 'imaginary children'. He explains, 'Each reader can build a unique relationship with the characters, because most belong to the dream dimension. The tales we find in this collection were thus not *for* children but rather *about* children as protagonists in these dreamlands. These tales serve as maps to navigate the inner lands of the imaginary.' Weisz further discusses how, for his mother, the 'imagination shifts toward becoming a way of positioning the self, a means to resist how the society of the many domesticates the lives of the few.' He further explains that humour, exhibited in these *S.NO.B* stories, later seen in *The Milk of Dreams* was a form of resistance along with an imaginary locus. He adds that, 'humour always took precedence over any other consideration', 'Shadow Children: Leonora as storyteller', in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde*, pp.126-140 (p.126).

<sup>53</sup> *Cadavre exquis* [exquisite corpse] was a collaborative drawing praxis innovated by the surrealists where one artist would draw something on a piece of paper, fold it over and then pass it onto another artist to continue the picture and so on. They focused on drawing parts of the body in what was intended as an instinctive and intuitive exercise resulting in bizarre visions that would not have been dissimilar to Carrington's strange corporeal manifestations in *S.NO.B*'s 'Children's Corner'.

posthuman, corporeally led ontology rather than a rational vehicle whose reconfiguration is suggestive of a move away from humanist reason, as well as the Mexican avant-gardists' predilection for experimentation. Indeed, much of *S.NOB* was governed by humour, albeit a darkly oriented one where the writers insisted that truth was best invoked in the context of frivolity.<sup>54</sup> In this way, we see how Carrington's contributions to 'Children's Corner' are in many ways playful, and indeed, feminist outings that seek to satirise what Susik identifies as 'the mainstream women's magazines of the period'; publications which focused upon the 'maternal roles of readers with sections devoted to children's entertainment'.<sup>55</sup> Carrington's 'Children's Corner' does not seek to convey a message to young readers but is more indicative of an anticipatory, posthuman positioning that questions the parameters of human normalcy via grotesque and surreal bodily reconfigurations. Tales often accompanied by monstrous hybrid forms eschew didactic storytelling to invoke instead violently rendered bodies that recall the human-animal slippages, discussed in Chapter One. Such modes gain traction in Carrington's Mexican orientation within *S.NOB* whose writers' 'black humour aesthetic' is catalysed by a post-World War Two context.<sup>56</sup> The war's aftershocks register as 'mortal violence and corporeal deformation communicated as a joke', as Susik argues, thereby speaking to the resonance Carrington found within Mexico's cultural geographies of the mid-century.<sup>57</sup>

Carrington's recourse to satire in her Mexican writing featured in *S.NOB*, speaks to both the Mexican avant-gardists' experimental aesthetic but also to the country's 'culture of death' which Jonathan P. Eburne draws attention to. It is a culture I discussed in the context of Carrington's mural and is similarly exhibited in her reference to Mexico's Aztec

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<sup>54</sup> *SNOB* statement of purpose explained that 'frivolity is also a path to truth' and as such the periodical 'dispenses with all superficially profound attitudes', cited in Susik's 'Carrington's Contributions to *S.NOB* in 1962', p.114.

<sup>55</sup> Susik, 'Carrington's Contributions to *S.NOB* in 1962', p.110.

<sup>56</sup> Susik, 'Carrington's Contributions to *S.NOB* in 1962', p.114.

<sup>57</sup> Susik, 'Carrington's Contributions to *S.NOB* in 1962', p.114.

midwife spirit Cihuacoatl on *Mujeres Conciencia*. It further disconnects Carrington's work from a Eurocentric orbit and consolidates her alignment with a Latin American indigenous thinking, invoking a cosmological system where life and death are intimately entangled rather than dichotomously opposed. Recurrent symbols of disaggregated bodies, monstrously reformed and fused together, are a dominant feature of Carrington's work in *S.NOB*, as discussed regarding 'Children's Corner'. Such visions of bodily disconnect and reconfiguration ground her Mexican oeuvre in a post-Eurocentric domain that re-imagines Humanism's relationship with death, as Eburne discusses here:

Informed by the midcentury Mexican avant-garde's reassessment of its pre-Columbian history, as well as by the European avant-garde's growing antihumanism, Carrington's midcentury work articulates an ethical project grounded in the sovereignty of an utterly impersonal system of continuity and recirculation consistent with the inevitability, as well as the fecundity, of death.<sup>58</sup>

Carrington's short story, 'De como funde un industria o el sarcofago de hule ['How To Start A Pharmaceuticals Business, Or, The Rubber Sarcophagus'], first published in Spanish in *S.NOB* Issue Three in 1962, exhibits the Mexican approach to death that Eburne identifies above.<sup>59</sup> It is a black comedy that disrupts Eurocentric economies of scale, speaking to *S.NOB*'s intention to launch an 'attack on the very notion of historical pedigree.'<sup>60</sup> It is a

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<sup>58</sup> Jonathan P. Eburne, 'Leonora Carrington and the Mexican Culture of Death', p.29-30.

<sup>59</sup> Carrington's 'How to Start a Pharmaceuticals Business, Or, The Rubber Sarcophagus' was originally published in Spanish in *S.NOB*, Issue 3, on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1962. It has also been published in English, trans. by Anthony Kerrigan in *The Seventh Horse and Other Tales* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988). Most recently it has been published in *Leonora Carrington: The Complete Stories*, trans. by Kathrine Talbot and Anthony Kerrigan (St. Louis: Dorothy Project, 2017), pp.170-178. This chapter includes quotations from this latest publication.

<sup>60</sup> Susik, 'Carrington's Contributions to *S.NOB* in 1962', p.108.

darkly humorous and surreal tale that emblematises the experimental foundations underpinning the periodical whilst also fusing together Surrealism's European influence with Mexican avant-gardist culture, bringing them into conversation in the way that its creators intended. It is a particularly fruitful tale to discuss in this Chapter because it melds strands of both cultures in a way that etches a post-Eurocentric milieu. It blends the political with the comical in a preposterously surreal send-up of a totemic European leader reimagined as a corporeally led figure, who in his deceased state, becomes a force for good.

Featuring 'Senora Carrington' as the narrator and protagonist it begins with her hosting a picnic, rather unusually, in a cemetery, organised for two professionals with whom she expects to do business. Set within the ruins of Mexico City, remnants of Aztec and Mayan culture co-mingle with a Cold-War era atmosphere in a manner that speaks to a Latin American and European cultural confluence, befitting of *S.NOB's* hybrid intentions. During their unconventional meal Senora Carrington wins a lottery prize which appears in the unexpected shape of a small 'India rubber casket.'<sup>61</sup> Inside the mystery box is a tiny mummy of Joseph Stalin 'the size of a toothbrush' which, when consumed, has medicinal properties to counter a variety of illnesses and conditions (p.176). More specifically it is the hair from Stalin's moustache that is noted initially as a potential 'treatment of Depression No. 20' (p.177). This financial jackpot enables Senora Carrington to create her own pharmaceutical company which produces "'Apostalin'" from Stalin's mummy (p.178). Beyond depression, Carrington's company, with the aid of Apostalin, can treat discomforts associated with, 'Whooping cough Syphilis Grippe Childbearing and other convulsions' (p.178). The range of ailments and conditions described here are appropriate to a tale that melds a breadth of cultures into a surreal melee. The narrative speaks to Mexico's

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<sup>61</sup> Carrington, 'How to Start a Pharmaceuticals Business', p.175. All future references to this story will be via in-text page numbers.

alternative concepts of death, functioning as a counter-story to Eurocentric nihilist or transcendental visions. Instead, the darkly comic Stalin mummy, not coincidentally reduced to tiny proportions as if to decentralise male European 'Masters', is repurposed in death and redistributed as a force for recovery.

Death as recirculation here emblematises the posthuman theory of death as Braidotti imagines it where Stalin's mummified corpse is not an 'indifferent state of matter', but rather 'part of the cycles of becoming' and 'yet another form of interconnectedness.'<sup>62</sup> Thus Stalin's metamorphosis into Apostalin in this particularly bizarre *S.NOB* story demonstrates 'the generative capacity of this life-death continuum' serving as a catalyst stretching out 'towards an endless cosmic energy'.<sup>63</sup> In this way Carrington is not merely satirising Stalin as a means of holding tyrannical male leaders to account, she is re-purposing him in an anticipatory posthuman manoeuvre drawing upon the ecological balance that underpins pre-Columbian cultures as well as her surrealist inheritance. As a result, the surreal melee we witness in 'De como funde un industria o el sarcofago de hule' forges a more balanced, if comical, re-generative vision.

In her entangled cosmos of indigenous culture, which highlights Goddess figures and the symbiosis of life and death, Carrington anticipates a posthuman, feminist position in the way that she steers thinking away from a Eurocentric, humanist orbit that exclusively privileges male colonial powers. Rather in Mexico, Carrington's feminism is galvanised by a country in the throes of forging a new post-Eurocentric identity and scale, finding impetus in its pre-patriarchal past and inter-connected indigenous cultural ties. A recourse to Latin America's pre-patriarchal cultures and geographies in order to communicate a feminist perspective and thereby intimate a precipitous posthuman approach is mirrored in Elizabeth Bishop's Brazilian oeuvre, as I explore now, further bringing these two writers

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<sup>62</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.137.

<sup>63</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.135.

into conversation in an original way. I further suggest that Bishop's relocation to Brazil prompts a more intimate poetic praxis, as if her orientation away from Eurocentric culture affords an opportunity to explode its recurrently heteronormative boundaries.

### **Questions of Scale in Elizabeth Bishop's Brazilian Poetics.**

Turning to Elizabeth Bishop's poetry I argue that her move to Brazil in 1951 enables a further posthuman shift in scale and perspective, where a focus upon the flora, fauna and peoples of this Latin American locale in her poetry intimates a feminist voice as well as a queer identity. I explore more specifically how Bishop exhibits a 'locational feminism', a term coined by Susan Stanford Friedman.<sup>64</sup> It is a position which 'encourages the study of difference in all its manifestations' as Friedman defines it without 'establishing impermeable boundaries that inhibit the production and visibility of ongoing intercultural exchange and hybridity.'<sup>65</sup> Friedman's feminist take on modernist cultural geographies illuminates how Bishop's poetry resists a 'unidirectional hegemony in which white/western people (always already) dominate people of color/nonwestern peoples'.<sup>66</sup> I suggest that Friedman's feminist mappings, which focus upon a spatial and locational approach to feminism, can play a role in highlighting Bishop's estrangement from the Eurocentric positioning of humanist thinkers. This is most pertinent in the way that her Brazilian poetry is so often situated within a liminal space. Friedman's study of a 'new geography of movement' and the connection sought between difference is of particular significance to a posthuman and post-Eurocentric reading of Bishop's work.<sup>67</sup> The recurrence of malleable borderlines and liminal space in her Brazilian poetry, speaks to a revision of Humanism's binary power dynamics that is enabling for the feminist speaker. In particular, I explore

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<sup>64</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p.5.

<sup>65</sup> Friedman, *Mappings*, p.5.

<sup>66</sup> Friedman, *Mappings*, p.6.

<sup>67</sup> Friedman, *Mappings*, p.68.

how a slippage between interior and exterior space as well as land and water in her Brazilian work speaks to liminality as a mechanism for change in the way that Friedman discusses. Her argument that such in-between spaces align with 'Dreams and visions' which ultimately can have 'powerful material effects' that 'serve as a force for resistance' resonates with Bishop's Brazilian work enabling a posthuman feminist and queer identity politics to emerge.<sup>68</sup>

For a poet who had been a virtual orphan since five years old - and who described herself as akin to the sandpiper of her poem 'preoccupied,/looking for something, something, something'<sup>69</sup> - it appears that for fifteen years Bishop may well have found Brazil to be a place as close to home as any. In Brazil, where botanic and animal life often appear to Bishop upon a surreal scale, I argue that she finds her own sense of place: a Latin American country populated by apparent outsider figures like her who contradict Humanism's cultural, heteronormative, and physical norms. In one of Bishop's early letters from Brazil to writer James Merrill, for example, she immediately shapes the country according to its other-worldly dimensions, energetically depicting it in a way suggestive of a children's fairy tale and recalling Carrington's predilection for myth and magic:

Things are very much out of scale, too, like a Rousseau – or out of our scale, that is. The 'Samambaia' mentioned at the top of the page is a giant fern, big as a tree, and there are toads as big as your hat and snails as big as bread & butter plates, and during this month butterflies the color of this page and sometimes almost as big flopping about – [...] But scenery aside, I

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<sup>68</sup> Friedman, *Mappings*, p.73.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, 'Sandpiper', in *The Centenary Edition Poems Elizabeth Bishop* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011), p.129, ll.16-17.

like living here very much and have a very nice place to live and nice friends.<sup>70</sup>

Bishop's fascination with these defamiliarised familiars is a recurrent theme in her Brazilian poetics: she encounters ontologies that are 'out of our scale' in a way that is enabling, invoking its geographies in often oneiric terms. This is a land that Bishop identifies via its ecologies. It is a place where she is excited by a sense that boundaries can become loosened and reconfigured, enabling her to articulate a more personal poetics, that in turn enacts a locational feminism. The malleable boundary lines she exhibits in her Brazilian poetry demonstrate how maps and mappings are active processes in the manner Friedman identifies, disempowering a phallogentric cartographic gaze that encodes subjects and identities. However, whilst maps can 'exercise power' as Jeremy Crampton and John Krygier explain, they are also a 'means of promoting change'<sup>71</sup> – one I suggest that Bishop's Brazilian poetry exhibits in its revision of colonialist mappings.<sup>72</sup> This post-Eurocentric shift of scale also pertains to temporality in Bishop's work. Northern Hemisphere timetables are recalibrated according to the rhythms of Brazil's botanic and meteorological life forces in the way that she speaks to in her letters: 'my Anglo-Saxon blood is gradually relinquishing its seasonal cycle and I'm quite content to live in complete confusion, about seasons, fruits, languages, geography, everything.'<sup>73</sup>

Bishop's long stay in Brazil was as unpredictable as the agentive flux of the country's natural landscapes, described in her letters above, recalling the materialist

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<sup>70</sup> Robert Giroux, *Elizabeth Bishop: One Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), p.303. It is worth noting here that in this letter Bishop articulates a sense of contentment living in Brazil as though she has found a sense of home which had long eluded her. The way in which she communicates a kinship with the Sandpiper of her poem where he is 'looking for something' clearly conveys this longing for a connection to place and space, which she seems to find at last in Brazil.

<sup>71</sup> Jeremy Crampton and John Krygier, 'An Introduction to Critical Cartography', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Cartographies*, 4.1 (July 2010), 11-33 (p.15).

<sup>72</sup> The surrealist upside down map of South America by Joaquin Torres-Garcia contributes an alternative non-colonialist mapping here: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/latin-america-modernism/constructivism/a/torres-garcia-inverted-america>

<sup>73</sup> Giroux, *One Art: Elizabeth Bishop*, p.243.

approach discussed in Chapter Two. Bishop had only intended a brief trip to Brazil as part of wider travel plans, but following a cashew nut poisoning, the architect and her soon-to-be lover, Lota de Macedo Soares, nursed her back to health before asking her to stay. In this act, Brazil planted itself in Bishop's mind as a place of kindness and nurturance and her early letters are full of enthusiastic and grateful references to the warmth with which she is treated as a guest in the country. It is an enthusiasm further fuelled by her fascination with Brazil's flora and fauna which she repeatedly describes in her letters.

Bishop's immersion in the country's cultural and geographical landscape is symbolised by the fact that Macedo Soares built her a studio lodged in the hillside. Nestled in the rocks, it overlooked a waterfall thereby bringing her poetics into immersive contact with the vibrant ecologies that so fascinated her. Bishop's fascination with this country had much to do with the way that its culture had begun to turn away from Eurocentric dominance. In *Brazil* (1962), which includes discussion of Brazil's architecture and its new innovations, Bishop celebrates the fact that it is a country which rejects European influences and notes in particular Roberto Burle Marx as an example of someone who created native gardens instead of appropriating European design.<sup>74</sup> She champions how he employs 'the wealth of native plants, and trees in all their exotic colors [...] and real rocks, instead of insipid or melodramatic statuary.'<sup>75</sup> Bethany Hicok explains how this shift away from European praxis embraced by Burle Marx and Lota de Macedo Soares, speaks to a new wave of Brazilian creativity which catalysed a fresh momentum in Bishop's own poetry writing:

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<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, *Brazil* (New York: Time Incorporated, 1962). This is a Life World Library publication that appeared on coffee tables in America. Bethany Hicok explains that Bishop's involvement in this series highlighted her role as someone who became 'an exporter of Brazilian culture into North America', *Elizabeth Bishop's Brazil* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2016), p.3. It was problematic however in that whilst it introduced American readers to Brazilian culture, politics and economics, it was skewed by 'the anti-Communist political stance of the United States', as Hicok highlights, p.3-4. At the same time, it demonstrates Bishop's instinct to communicate the Brazil she knew, and that had been overlooked, to a wider audience.

<sup>75</sup> Bethany Hicok, *Elizabeth Bishop's Brazil*, p.13.

In short, these architects were creating something new and Brazilian in Brazil, not imitations of European style. The same could be said for Bishop, Brazilian landscape and architecture and particularly Macedo Soares's modernist house and the life they built there opened up new poetic vistas in Bishop's work.<sup>76</sup>

It is important to note that Bishop does not simply appropriate Brazilian culture for her own purposes thus becoming another coloniser; rather, the 'new poetic vistas' that Hicok describes in her work above are visions entangled with the culture and nature of Brazil as her studio nestling in the hillside symbolises. In this way she is not simply an interloper extracting Brazil's natural resources to her own end but more a visitor who becomes enmeshed in such a way that mirrors her own poetic sensibilities, forging a new and more intimate landscape in the space of her writing. In *Mastery's End: Travel and Postwar American Poetry*, Jeffrey Gray adds that Bishop's Brazilian poetry eschews the colonising habits of European modernists explaining how she 'helps us understand travel in postmodernity - neither as conquest, nor as pilgrimage,' suggesting instead that she expresses the experience as 'decentered' in which 'neither the travelling subject nor the visited site are stable entities.'<sup>77</sup> It is an approach which echoes Friedman's 'locational feminism', recognising modernist geographies as ones which are mobile and malleable. As I will show first, Bishop's interest in Brazilian indigenous culture is evoked in a way that articulates its kinship with non-human life, furthering it from the appropriating dynamics of European colonisers. To explore how Bishop's sense of home is brought closer in the landscapes of Brazil I then demonstrate how she views its agentive, pre-patriarchal landscapes as non-human spaces which enable her to express her lesbian identity more

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<sup>76</sup> Bethany Hicok, *Elizabeth Bishop's Brazil*, p.13.

<sup>77</sup> Jeffrey Gray, *Mastery's End: Travel and Postwar American Poetry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p.25.

freely in its distance from Eurocentric Humanism's fixed ideals of white heterosexuality. I suggest that Bishop's evocation of primordial natures in Brazil speaks to her sense of the country as a gynocentric realm which is an enabling space for female queer desire whilst also conveying female power, recalling Carrington's subject matter in Mexico. As Cassandra Laity explains, because Bishop 'inserts a "differently" sexed/gendered relation to geologic forces and materialities' she thereby counters 'the neglectful patriarchal anthropos currently scarring our planet' and so circumnavigates the Cartesian dictates prized by European culture.<sup>78</sup>

Bishop's poem 'Brazil, January 1, 1502' puts indigenous cultures on the map in a way that signposts how her Latin American oeuvre resonates with Carrington's. It is a work which speaks to the prevailing durability of this wild space, thus troubling the markers of European colonialism and in turn anticipating a posthuman feminism via its focus upon indigenous women. It is included in Bishop's *Questions of Travel* (1965), a collection which is dedicated to her lover Lota de Macedo Soares, and meditates upon notions of home, travel and the time. More specifically, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502' reimagines the day Portuguese colonisers anchored at Guanabara Bay in Brazil and claimed the country as part of their growing empire. Bishop does not lodge the poem in a distant past but instead retraces the steps of the European colonisers through her speaker who appears to evoke the landscape in the same manner that the colonisers may have experienced it. In this poem Bishop highlights the recurring humanist habit of conquest, initially implicating the modern speaker with the colonisers' desire to procure and possess this land in the manner she communicates a shared intoxication with it. The first two lines in fact suggest that the nature they encountered would not have been so different from a contemporary reader's, bringing these two time zones and cultures into conversation in a manner that asserts

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<sup>78</sup> Cassandra Laity, 'Eco-Geologies of Queer Desire: Elizabeth Bishop's Love Poetry and Charles Darwin's Beagle Geology Travel Narratives', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 10.3 (2016), 429-449 (p.429).

parallel temporalities, eschewing Humanism's chronological approach for a spatial one.

Bishop sketches out a land deemed so idyllic upon the moment of the colonisers' arrival that it is articulated as a painting, an out of scale world recalling Bishop's early letters about

Brazil:

monster ferns,  
 in silver-gray relief,  
 and flowers, too, like giant water lilies  
 up in the air – up, rather, in the leaves -  
 purple, yellow, two yellows, pink,  
 rust red and greenish white;  
 solid but airy; fresh as if just finished  
 and taken off the frame.<sup>79</sup>

The 'monster ferns' and 'giant water lilies' speak to a post-Eurocentric skewing of scale, where Bishop upends and distorts perspectives as if to expand and challenge the perimeters of humanist horizons. Her ekphrastic description here, does however, speak to the European colonisers' presumption that they can choreograph their own version of this country, shaping it according to their will as if it is a painter's canvas. It is thus constructed as a space that can be captured before being carried off like a painting upon a frame.

Bishop hints at this theme in her epigraph from Kenneth Clark quoted as '...embroidered nature...tapestried landscape.' However, this seemingly benign and passive realm, forged initially as a virginal space of new beginnings, belies the durable strength of Brazil's ancestral geographies which prove that its initial appearance as a conquerable space is in

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<sup>79</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', p.89, ll.8-15.

fact an illusion.<sup>80</sup> Bishop foreshadows the darker side of an other-worldly realm that confounds the Europeans' initial impressions in glimpses of out of scale foliage and ancient flora that both pre-dates and ultimately post-dates their sojourn into its wild territories. It is a fact made clear in the opening stanza when its physicality dominates the mind of the contemporary speaker as much as she imagines it inspired awe in the colonisers four centuries before.

The spell of this Edenic vista where 'big symbolic birds keep quiet'<sup>81</sup> and a 'blue-white sky'<sup>82</sup> envelop the scene is broken when Bishop asserts that 'Still in the foreground there is Sin',<sup>83</sup> where a 'simple web' threatens to ensnare the interlopers in a reversal of power-politics.<sup>84</sup> I argue that Brazil's ancient topographies and ecologies are the defining feature of this landscape. Bishop describes how 'rocks are worked with lichens', speaking to nature's agentive power in the way that indigenous philosophies highlight.<sup>85</sup> It is a power that ultimately endures beyond the machinations of the European colonialists' rapacious intent, thus out-manoeuvring the neatly drawn lines of imperialist narrative, as well as the imagination of the contemporary speaker who is initially over-awed by this locale.

The violent way that the would-be conquerors are portrayed as a people who equate a procurement of the land with a procurement of its women intimates Bishop's growing feminist voice in the poem, where androcentric ambitions to appropriate land and animals is the same as appropriating its peoples. Whilst the poem begins with the possibility of an alignment between the colonisers and the contemporary speaker, who are collectively enraptured by Brazil's ecologies, Bishop introduces a divergence of perspectives as the colonisers' 'old dream' of possession is thwarted by the Indian women who

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<sup>80</sup> Such beginnings are signalled by Bishop's opening 'Januaries' which refers to Brazil's Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>81</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', p.89, l.21.

<sup>82</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', p.89, l.16.

<sup>83</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', p.89, l.24.

<sup>84</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', p.89, l.16.

<sup>85</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', p.89, l.26.

ultimately elude them. As Guy Rotella explains, Bishop's speaker becomes estranged from the colonialists as the poem progresses where she 'does not attempt to take possession of the scene', thereby contrasting with the Portuguese invaders who are '[c]onfident that their cultural assumptions were divinely warranted facts,' as the final stanza suggests.<sup>86</sup> Here, Bishop implicitly critiques the colonisers' belief that the subordination of the land equates to the subordination of the women, noting how the Europeans' religious beliefs appear to underpin and catalyse their cause, noting disparagingly that they are 'Christians, hard as nails'.<sup>87</sup>

Directly after Mass, humming perhaps  
 L'Homme arme or some such tune,  
 they ripped away into the hanging fabric,  
 each out to catch an Indian for himself –  
 those maddening little women who kept calling,  
 calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)  
 and retreating, always retreating, behind it.<sup>88</sup>

The violence of the colonisers is expressed in their ripping away at the 'hanging fabric'. What they perceive as the foliage that they must clear in order to claim the land for themselves is an act of imperial destruction that is at odds with Bishop's own prescient, posthuman understanding of the provisional nature of human knowledge. Bishop's focus

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<sup>86</sup> Guy Rotella, *Reading and Writing Nature: The Poetry of Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and Elizabeth Bishop* (Boston: Northeastern Press, 1991), pp.224-225.

<sup>87</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', p.90, l.37.

<sup>88</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502, p.90, ll.47-53.

upon their Christian ties speaks to a patriarchal religion similarly critiqued by Carrington in her paintings where the magic and Goddess figures stand as a counter-story to its oppressive dictates. The 'humming' after mass provides a soundtrack that suggests their acts of conquest are endorsed by a religion that prizes male power over nature and women. It shows how Bishop recapitulates Carrington's own critiques where, as Costello argues, "'Christians" [...] repeat the brutal sacrifice in the name of which they march.'<sup>89</sup> However I argue that Bishop's poem speaks to a land that rises up to confront and override these colonial powers where, whilst the men are 'hard as nails', they are also 'tiny as nails' in the context of this vast and ancient realm.<sup>90</sup> It is a terrain that operates according to the beats of its own ancestral rhythms, further suggestive of Bishop recalibrating Eurocentric humanist scale. As she intimates, their attempt to master this landscape is already outdated and outmoded; one which corresponds to 'an old dream of wealth and luxury/already out of style when they left home-'.<sup>91</sup> Rather, in this pulsating space of giant leaves, 'massy rocks' 'lichens' and even 'sooty dragons' there exists a realm that cannot be dimmed or muted by the rapacious act of the European coloniser.<sup>92</sup> As Costello explains, it is a poem, together with 'Arrival at Santos' from the same collection, which examines the 'persistence and self-defeat of the colonial mentality.'<sup>93</sup> Like the refuge of the crack in the rocks for the giant snail, which I discuss next, the indigenous women similarly find sanctuary in Brazil's ancient ecologies in this poem, 'retreating' into the folds of its canopies in a space that offers protection. Bishop also conjures new visions of possibility in a manner that chimes with Braidotti's call to recognise posthuman ontologies of difference; where the indigenous women are alive within nature, speaking to the inseparability of the human species and the natural world, highlighted by the Indigenous Nations Treaty. As

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<sup>89</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.148.

<sup>90</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', p.90, l.38.

<sup>91</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', p.90, ll.44-45.

<sup>92</sup> Bishop, 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', p.89, ll.25-26.

<sup>93</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.129.

Costello explains, 'The tapestry does not veil nature (imagined as heathen female to be pursued and subjugated) but absorbs its invaders' whose rapacious brutality is diminished by the scale and power of this ancient landscape that defeats them.<sup>94</sup> Thus, it is a cautionary portrait of humanist power that indigenous philosophies warn against – a power that can only result in 'self-defeat' as Costello highlights. In this way Bishop's journey into a colonialist past intimates the enduring validity of the indigenous peoples' more balanced approach that explodes the boundaries of Eurocentric Humanism, anticipating a posthuman perspective that has resonance for the contemporary reader. Bishop's immersion in these tropical spaces, which rewrite the colonialist narrative, express an entangled intimacy with Brazil's geography and culture. Her sense of connection with this land finds voice via its ancient and mysterious ecologies which circumnavigate the mappings of European conquerors. The way that the indigenous women of this poem escape colonialist appropriation via their enabling sense of kinship with Brazil's ecologies speaks to the themes of entanglement that are recapitulated by the non-human animals in Bishop's prose poem 'Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics', which I turn to now. I further consider how the subject matter of colonial conquest of land and indigenous peoples, seen in 'Januaries', is extended to concentrate upon a further theme of subjugation enacted by humans, but this time to non-human animals.

'Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics' from *Bishop's New and Uncollected Work* (1969) is articulated as three monologues evoking the experiences and geographies of the 'Giant Toad', 'Strayed Crab' and 'Giant Snail'. Like the insect figure of the man-moth and many of the wild figures who populate Carrington's animal assemblages discussed in Chapter One, these creatures belong to an other-worldly, primordial space with a physicality that is 'out of scale' to the human eye. The toad, crab and snail are all non-human animals who can transition between land and water, slipping between them and often teetering upon the

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<sup>94</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.148.

borders between the two. They exhibit what Friedman would describe as a 'migratory feminism'.<sup>95</sup> She considers it to be a mode that is bodied forth most emblematically in Anzaldua's *Borderlands* via its resistance to 'fixed and rigid boundaries'.<sup>96</sup> I argue here that Bishop performs a similar slippage across boundaries in the characteristically liminal space of this prose-poem, where her amphibious and aquatic creatures navigate a path between land and water, criss-crossing borders. The way that these non-human figures explode boundaries speaks to the post-Eurocentric themes I focus upon in this poem, where epistemological mappings, so important to colonialist rhetoric, becomes redundant in such overtly liminal space.

The opening monologue 'Giant Toad' immediately conjures a creature whose physicality is engulfed by a sense of its own excess where he is 'too big, too big by far'<sup>97</sup> and his bulging eyes hurt and 'see too much', recalling Bishop's letter to James Merrill about Brazil's toads being 'as a big as your hat'.<sup>98</sup> Bishop articulates the toad in surreal terms both described as being 'like a boxer' but also characterised as an 'angel in disguise' owing to his 'Big wings of poison' that speak to his corporeal powers.<sup>99</sup> Everything about the toad is expressed as gargantuan, where Bishop reconfigures the scale of this amphibian usually defined in more diminutive terms by the anthropocentric eye. Bishop further distorts humanist scale and perspective in the creature's verbal prowess, situating the reader in a dark fairy-tale sphere of talking animals, recalling Carrington's short stories. Despite the apparent alterity of his ontology both in his stature and his amphibious makeup with a potent poison that 'could break through', Bishop anthropomorphises the toad in a way which suggests the poet's own sense of kinship with him.<sup>100</sup> His strange disproportions

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<sup>95</sup> Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, p.102.

<sup>96</sup> Friedman, *Mappings*, p.100.

<sup>97</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Toad', in 'Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics', p.163, l.1.

<sup>98</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Toad', p.163, l.3

<sup>99</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Toad', p.163, l.23, l.25-26.

<sup>100</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Toad', p.163, l.27.

prompt a call for 'Pity' in the opening line.<sup>101</sup> This is most palpable in the following lines where the toad speaks of the cruelty he experiences at the hands of children:

I live, I breathe, by swallowing. Once, some naughty schoolchildren picked/  
me up, me and my two brothers. They set us down again somewhere and  
in our mouths they put lit cigarettes. We could not help but smoke them,  
to the end. I thought it was the death of me, but when I was entirely  
filled with smoke, when my slack mouth was burning, and all my tripes  
were hot and dry, they let us go. But I was sick for days.<sup>102</sup>

In these lines Bishop presents the giant toad not as a member of a homogeneous species or a Cartesian machine, but as a living, sentient being who, as well as suffering physically, shares the same fears as a human does. This seemingly alien creature in the wilds of Brazil's watery landscape lives and breathes, exhibiting a vulnerability that is prey to the cruelty of others. The bullying that the toad endures, not dissimilar to the way the indigenous women of 'Januaries' are exploited, becomes more immediate in Bishop's method of anthropomorphising him which she does by highlighting his family ties, suffering and sickness. In detailing him through an anthropomorphic lens, Bishop attests to the ties between species and so brings us in closer proximity to creatures that have been traditionally relegated to an alien order. She thereby pays attention to difference in the manner posthuman philosophy calls for. Kari Weil contends that anthropomorphism can be a fruitful praxis in rewiring speciesist attitudes and moving Humanism on from assumptions rooted in a male Eurocentrism:

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<sup>101</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Toad', p.163, l.1.

<sup>102</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Toad', p.163, ll.17-22.

On the one hand, as a process of identification, the urge to anthropomorphize the experience of another, like the urge to empathize with that experience, risks becoming a form of narcissistic projection [...]

On the other hand, as a feat of attention to another and of imagination regarding the other's perspective, this urge is what brings many of us to act on behalf of the perceived needs and desires of an other/animal.<sup>103</sup>

Weil's explanation of anthropomorphism as a strategy demonstrates how it has the capacity to over-ride the humanist habit of alienating those who fall outside of its geographical and cultural boundaries. In this way it troubles divisive Cartesian boundaries anchored upon European versus non-European other. Bishop's articulation of this Brazilian amphibian is an example of 'a feat of ... imagination regarding the other's perspective', thereby shifting anthropocentric perceptions out of their myopic essentialism. It demonstrates a posthuman contact zone where difference collides but also finds common ground exhibiting Friedman's belief in the fact that a 'Passion for difference exists in symbiotic relation to a passion for mixing.'<sup>104</sup> Bishop does not wish to obliterate difference but in a way that brings her further into conversation with Friedman her work asserts a 'move through and beyond it to the spaces of encounter', thus highlighting key 'processes of syncretism and intercultural hybridity'.<sup>105</sup>

The toad's close attention to his landscape speaks to his entanglement with his environment and recalls the motifs of interconnection we witness in Carrington's Mexican mural, where human and non-human life appear enmeshed with their surroundings. He is keenly aware of the other creatures around him where he notes how both he and the snail

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<sup>103</sup> Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2012), p.19.

<sup>104</sup> Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, p.74.

<sup>105</sup> Friedman, *Mappings*, p.102.

'go travelling the same/weathers'<sup>106</sup> and warning the crab to 'Beware' suggestive of a sympoiesis that is absent in human exceptionalism.<sup>107</sup> The toad is immersed within the meteorological and temporal shifts of this watery space that he is enfolded within; the landscape itself is a similarly metamorphosing phenomena which combines with his own physicality to present the world through a different lens. Bishop conjures this space as a paradoxical otherworldly familiar, both steeped in mist and yet navigable through the anthropomorphic steering of the toad's verbosity. There is a surreal beauty in its agentic entanglements, as these lines from the opening of the poem convey:

The mist is gathering on my skin in drops. The drops  
run down my back, run from the corners of my downturned mouth,  
run down my sides and drip beneath my belly. Perhaps the droplets on  
my mottled hide are pretty, like dewdrops, silver on a mouldering leaf?  
They chill me through and through. I feel my colors changing now, my  
pigments gradually shudder and shift over.<sup>108</sup>

The strangeness of the mist subsumes into the makeup of the toad, agentially combining with his own ontology in a manner which speaks to entanglements discussed in Chapter Two. This *paying attention* in order to *become with* the supposed otherness of the environment is an important mode in Bishop's Brazilian poetry, where her experience as an alienated lesbian woman in Europe and the United States finds connections within the surreal geographies of Brazil's natural world. It is a space where she is 'content to live in complete confusion', upending the seasonal and botanical cycles she has been accustomed to, thereby reconfiguring humanist scale. Such a muddling is further suggested in the

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<sup>106</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Toad' in 'Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics', p.163, l.13-14.

<sup>107</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Toad', p.163, l.29.

<sup>108</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Toad', p.163, ll.4-9.

liminalities that the three creatures repeatedly traverse. For example, the giant toad describes his aim to get 'beneath that overhanging ledge',<sup>109</sup> whilst the snail observes 'steep escarpments'<sup>110</sup> and his place within a 'certain crack' in the rocks.<sup>111</sup> Each appears to nomadically hop from one watery space to the next where Bishop creates the sense that they are perpetually on the move in their dynamic interrelationship with the land and water. The crab being described as 'strayed' is a significant example, attesting to a roving, migratory character with which Bishop identifies. He skirts pools, temporary spaces themselves which metamorphose according to the weather conditions. They are home to mini-beasts like 'waterbugs' whose 'skittering' is indicative of the urgency of their movements.<sup>112</sup>

Costello describes how Bishop harnesses her own nomadic sensibilities as 'the opportunity for invigorating vision.'<sup>113</sup> She further discusses how Bishop depicts travel as an enabling mode: 'If travel is an inevitable condition of mind and experience, it can be a means to free ourselves from a parochial view of the world, to heighten sensation and invention.'<sup>114</sup> Whilst Bishop scholars have discussed her quest for home in her status as a virtual orphan as well as her searching for 'something' intimated via the sandpiper of her poem, it is clear in this example that she was energised by the experience of travel. Although she lived in Brazil for fifteen years, within that time frame she still travelled frequently within the country as well as taking several trips to the United States. In this way she embodies the mobile and open-ended locational feminisms that Friedman discusses which articulate diverse voices of difference. These feminisms are 'not parochially limited to a single feminist formation' but instead take as a founding principle 'the multiplicity of

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<sup>109</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Toad', p.163, l.10.

<sup>110</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Snail', p.165, l.15.

<sup>111</sup> Bishop, 'Giant Snail', p.165, l.33.

<sup>112</sup> Bishop, 'Strayed Crab', p.164, l.21.

<sup>113</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.128.

<sup>114</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.128.

heterogeneous feminist movements and the conditions that produce them.<sup>115</sup> The shifting, hybrid spaces of the 'Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics' that Bishop describes free the speakers from their predated and subordinated position in a way that aligns with the open-ended feminisms that Friedman proposes. Bishop's malleable spaces in this poem that speak to her own inherent nomadism, conjures a realm that enables creatures more at home within permeable boundaries than fixed ones. Such hybridity, recalling the trans-species alliances discussed in Chapter One, is also emphasised in the form of these monologues as prose-poems, forging a further entangled dynamic that eludes linear and singular taxonomies.

Bishop's immersion in these tropical spaces, which rewrite the colonialist narrative, expresses an entangled intimacy with Brazil's geography and culture. Her sense of connection with this land finds voice via its ancient and mysterious ecologies which circumnavigate the mappings of European conquerors. This is intimated via the liminal ontologies and entanglements of the creatures in 'Rainy Season; Subtropics' but is also reiterated in the way that the indigenous women of 'Brazil, January 1, 1502' escape colonialist appropriation in their kinship with their ecological locale. I now turn to consider how such entangled inter-relationships with these out of scale and post-Eurocentric ancestral landscapes forge a more intimate approach in Bishop's writing; one that enables her to express a queer identity, which in turn, resonates with posthuman philosophies of becoming and difference. Focusing specifically upon her home with Lota in Brazil I consider the poems 'Song for the Rainy Season' and 'The Shampoo' as works which exhibit queer ecologies via Bishop's hybrid domestic and pre-patriarchal natural space. It is a sphere where inner and outer worlds merge across boundless landscapes, a theme signposted in the liminalities of 'Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics'. I demonstrate how such open-ended space eschews humanist cartographies in a way that gives voice to a lesbian identity and posthuman feminism.

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<sup>115</sup> Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, p.5.

‘Song for the Rainy Season’, also from *Questions of Travel* (1965), was written in the early days of Bishop’s relationship with Lota de Macedo Soares, and introduces themes of intimacy that resonate in this phase of her work. Published in 1960, although the first and fourth stanza were written in 1954, it focuses upon the domestic interior of Samambaia but also opens it up to a communal ‘membership’, as if the intimate happiness that swells in this Brazilian setting between Bishop and Soares similarly catalyses the contentment of all others in its presence.<sup>116</sup> Hicok suggests that the poems written ‘during her first decade in Brazil [ ...] use the landscape and the architecture of the house to examine her “marriage” to a Brazilian woman and the home they made in the country’.<sup>117</sup> In this way Hicok alludes to a locational feminism where Bishop’s queer identity politics are enabled in this Latin American space. Several critics also note ‘Song for the Rainy Season’ as a love poem, described by Thomas Travisano as ‘this hotbed of surprising intimacies’<sup>118</sup> while Barbara Page explains that Bishop’s ‘habitual personification of nature suffuses house, cloud, and creatures with erotic warmth.’<sup>119</sup> I argue that this opening stanza speaks to a personal poetics not seen before in Bishop’s oeuvre, where Samambaia’s Brazilian locale releases an intimate voice, hitherto suppressed, coded or denied:

Hidden, oh hidden  
  
in the high fog  
  
the house we live in,

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<sup>116</sup> Barbara Page, ‘Home, Wherever That May Be’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. by Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.132. Page introduces the historical context of this poem.

<sup>117</sup> Hicok, *Elizabeth Bishop’s Brazil*, p.10. Hicok cites the poems ‘Song for the Rainy Season’, ‘Electrical Storm’, ‘Foreign-Domestic’ and ‘The Shampoo’ as examples of Bishop’s work that conduct such an examination.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas Travisano, *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1988), p.149.

<sup>119</sup> Page, ‘Home, Wherever That May Be’, p.133.

beneath the magnetic rock,  
  
 rain-, rainbow-ridden,  
  
 where blood-black  
  
 bromelias, lichens,  
  
 owls, and the lint  
  
 of the waterfalls cling,  
  
 familiar, unbidden.<sup>120</sup>

The gynocentric themes of Carrington's Mexican oeuvre discussed earlier are recalled here in Bishop's Brazilian home, as both a protective and creative realm in its ancient ecological entanglements with 'bromelias' and 'lichens'. It is a poem which, as Hicok argues, articulates Samambaia's 'open and modern architecture as a structural framework for thinking about dwelling and difference'.<sup>121</sup> This melded indoor/outdoor space eludes all binary dichotomies instead embracing 'the mildew's/ignorant map' that cannot be delineated and thus enables those who have been silenced by an androcentric Humanism that privileges Europe.<sup>122</sup> The way that the 'House and garden become continuous with each other' speaks to an enabling liminality that Bishop locates in this Brazilian setting, recalling themes of entanglement explored in Chapter Two that implicate the proximate commonality of seemingly diverse ontologies.<sup>123</sup> Such in-betweenness and interconnectedness are likewise anticipatory posthuman modes in the manner that Braidotti indicates. Bishop's intimate relationship with Brazil forges it as a posthuman

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<sup>120</sup> Bishop, 'Song for the Rainy Season', p.99-100 (p.99), ll.1-10.

<sup>121</sup> Hicok, *Elizabeth Bishop's Brazil*, p.21.

<sup>122</sup> Bishop, 'Song for the Rainy Season', p.100, ll.39-40.

<sup>123</sup> Hicok, *Elizabeth Bishop's Brazil*, p.21.

realm and provides an apt introduction to her most personal of poems 'The Shampoo'. I argue that this poem articulates most emphatically both a feminist and queer identity politics with a speaker who expresses her desires via a Brazilian ecology affirmatively estranged from Humanism's Eurocentric, heteronormative dictates.

'The Shampoo', one of Bishop's first poems written in Brazil and published in *A Cold Spring* (1955), is a work which speaks to the new poetic vista that Hicok describes in her poetry as a result of her unexpected Latin American relocation. An initial draft, entitled 'Gray Hairs' speaks to the poem's subject matter, concerned with the surprise Bishop and her lover Lota experience when they discover they have noticeably aged a decade after having first met in New York.<sup>124</sup> Alluding to the homely domesticity of Bishop's newfound love with Macedo Soares whilst also intimating an eroticism, it marks a departure from the more restrained and veiled poetics discussed in Chapter One where Bishop's hybrid creatures obliquely reference her sense of alterity as a lesbian in a coded manner. So intimate is the poem that it was in fact rejected by the *New Yorker* in 1953 for being 'too personal'; a mode not readily associated with Bishop's poetics.<sup>125</sup> Written at Samambaia in the studio Macedo Soares built for Bishop, it is a poem conjured out of the Brazilian landscape itself. It is fused with cultural references where the poet describes washing her lover's hair in an allusion to the country's head-rubbing custom. As Victoria Harrison argues 'The natural setting of this poem is less a metaphor than companion to the relationship between women', demonstrating the complementary and catalytic role that Brazil's geography had to play in Bishop's most enduring lesbian relationship.<sup>126</sup> The poem opens in Brazil's still forming, ancestral past describing lichens as paradoxical 'still explosions',

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<sup>124</sup> Page, 'Home, Wherever That May Be', p.126. Page briefly discusses the journey of the poem from 'Gray Hairs' to 'The Shampoo', noting how 'the gray has transmuted into "shooting stars in your black hair"' in the final version, p.126.

<sup>125</sup> Hicok, *Elizabeth Bishop's Brazil*, p.19. Hicok explains how in 'The Shampoo' Bishop 'creates a world of artistic dwelling and intimacy', p.19.

<sup>126</sup> Victoria Harrison, *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 71.

immediately establishing this landscape as an orgiastic and ancient space. The intimacy of the hair washing between the lesbian couple is fused with the geology and botany of the Brazilian landscape both queering and sexing this agentive space as one which catalyses female desire and situates it outside of the heteronormativity that a Eurocentric, Cartesian Humanism dictates:

The still explosions on the rocks,  
 the lichens, grow  
 by spreading, gray, concentric shocks.  
 They have arranged  
 to meet the rings around the moon, although  
 within our memories they have not changed.<sup>127</sup>

In this opening stanza Bishop speaks to a resonance between the lichens spreading in 'concentric shocks', and the slow appearance of grey unveiling itself in her lover's hair over time. I suggest that she similarly synchronises this Brazilian landscape's seismic activity in reference to 'shocks', thereby alluding to geological movements and eruptions that resonate with the explosion of female desire implied in this poem. The agentive and unpredictable force of such movements is conveyed in an anticipatory mode that Bishop employs where her 'dear friend' is described as 'precipitate'<sup>128</sup> and the dash in the final line precedes the sexual release suggested by '- Come'.<sup>129</sup> This push and pull of desire mirrored in Brazil's geological shifts are intimated in the elasticity of Bishop's lines speaking to the

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<sup>127</sup> Bishop, 'The Shampoo', p.82, ll.1-5.

<sup>128</sup> Bishop, 'The Shampoo', p.82, ll.9-10.

<sup>129</sup> Bishop, 'The Shampoo', p.82, l.17

gradual formations of lichens over time, like the grey in her lover's hair, but also to the sudden eruption of orgiastic pleasure captured in the 'explosions' as well as the release of the final line:

The shooting stars in your black hair  
 in bright formation  
 are flocking where,  
 so straight, so soon?  
 -Come, let me wash it in this big tin basin,  
 battered and shiny like the moon.<sup>130</sup>

The force of their non-heteronormative relationship cannot be mapped according to humanist scales and perspectives but rather is articulated within a wider cosmic sphere as the above example communicates. Bishop's fondness for the metaphysical poets is demonstrated in her appropriation of the conceit, where her relationship with Macedo Soares, is in part, articulated via the cosmos and back again. However, unlike the metaphysicals' approach, time is 'amenable' in this poem, where Bishop constructs a temporal vortex that celebrates and embraces the ageing process rather than combating it, thereby decentring humanist chronology.<sup>131</sup> The ageing female's body, denied in favour of the youthful *femme-enfant* in the male circles of Europe's Parisian Surrealism, is given agentic power in this poem as Bishop re-indexes presumptions about women's desires and

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<sup>130</sup> Bishop, 'The Shampoo', p.82, ll.13-18.

<sup>131</sup> André Marvell's poem 'To His Coy Mistress', *The Metaphysical Poets* ed. and selected by Helen Gardner (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), p.250-252 warns of 'Times winged Charriot hurrying near' (l.22), opening with the urgent issue of time passing, 'Had we but World enough, and Time,' (l.1). The race is on for the speaker to procure his lover's 'long preserv'd Virginity' (l.28) before she is ravaged by age and penetrated by 'Worms' instead (l.27). Bishop presents instead an embrace with slow, deep time as though the more profound markers of an ancient temporality, seen in her predilection for lichen imagery, are more appropriate signposts for the longevity of her own lesbian relationship.

beauty and the march and marks of time. In this way she challenges fixed androcentric ways of 'associating beauty and nature' in the manner that Costello observes.<sup>132</sup>

Humanism's chronological approach to time, which disempowers women as they age, is eschewed further in the cyclical *abacbc* scheme that returns in each stanza, complementing a poem that eludes linearity in favour of circles. Instead, the reader is directed to rings around the moon and circles in both Lota's hair and the shapes of the lichens. In this way it is a poem that expresses most redolently an intimate entanglement of all life forms: its cyclical momentum speaks to themes of connection and continuity that recall the indigenous philosophies Carrington shares in her Mexican oeuvre, thereby anticipating posthuman thinking that destabilises a Euro-centred scale. Bishop's perception of 'out of scale' ontologies in Brazil is also suggested via the speaker's references to the moon in this poem, as though her relocation to the southern hemisphere challenges anthropocentric recourse to the diurnal clock. Rather, this is a poem that bends Humanism's temporal parameters simulating an enabling vortex that gives power to Bishop's non-heteronormative speaker. Most significantly it is a poem of immersion where Bishop's sense of inclusive belonging with the disparate creatures and primordial metamorphosing forms of this liminal landscape, forges a poem that for the first time does not equate love with loss as Jonathan Ellis observes.<sup>133</sup> Instead of loss it is a poem of excess and fertility, with Bishop equating the ever-concentric circles of the lichen with the greying of her lover's hair. It is a liminal, ancient landscape that forges a feminist and queer identity, perhaps finding the 'something' she yearns for in its recurrent evocation as a posthuman vision, distanced from Eurocentric Humanism.

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<sup>132</sup> Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, p.74.

<sup>133</sup> Jonathan Ellis, 'Aubade and Elegy: Elizabeth Bishop's Love Poems', *English* 60.229 (2011), 161-179 (p.167).

## Conclusion

Bishop and Carrington do not simply refuse Eurocentric humanist mappings; rather I have contended that their Latin American locales enable new posthuman vistas in creative work that is in synthesis with their own evolving feminist politics. They forge a pathway out of European Humanism's discriminatory and reductive praxis, speaking to both Friedman's locational feminism and Anzaldúa's call to 'root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul' of Latin America.

A reclamation of indigenous culture plays a key role in Carrington's work in particular where beliefs in ecological entanglement and a reawakened interest in goddess figures are evoked in *El Mundo Magico de Los Mayas* as well as her political engagement in the country's feminist movement and its periodical culture. Her evolving feminism was galvanised by her involvement with the feminist group *Mujeres Conciencia* as well as her contributions to the Mexican periodical *S.NOB*. Carrington's work in Mexico does not mark a dismissal of European influence altogether but rather brings it into conversation with Latin American culture in a way that over-rides the Eurocentric essentialism underpinning Humanism.

Similarly, a temporal shift to ancestral culture and ecologies is evoked in Bishop's poetry written during her fifteen years in Brazil, where her focus upon the country's ancient botanies and geologies forges a gynocentric realm that circumnavigates the colonialist manoeuvres of imperial patriarchs. Bishop's other-worldly creatures in 'Rainy Season; Subtropics', who exist in an agentive, primordial sphere, slip between land and water in liminal spaces which cannot be androcentrically mapped. The powerful dynamism of their tropical locale is manifest in 'Brazil, January 1, 1502' where the rapacious intent of European would-be colonisers, who intend to appropriate Brazil's land and its indigenous women, are ultimately confounded by an ecology that is older and wiser than them. These themes of entanglement, so pertinent to indigenous philosophy and recurrent in

Carrington's Mexican mural, are equally redolent in Bishop's poems 'Songs for the Rainy Season' and 'The Shampoo'. These are poems that suggest Bishop's entwinement with Brazil's terrain and culture, forging a more intimate personal poetics that gives voice to a queer politics previously muted or coded in her writing. Her queer temporalities and queered landscapes, signposted in the liminal spaces she constructs and her own ontological and intimate kinship with its flora and fauna, reconfigure European mappings. Such a reconfiguration catalyses the feminist posthumanism that gives voice to non-Eurocentric difference in Bishop's challenge to heteronormativity, bringing her Latin American geographies into conversation with posthuman scale and perspective. As a result, we witness Friedman's so-called 'location feminism' of difference in action in this Chapter where Bishop's and Carrington's oeuvre in Brazil and Mexico begins to steer a pervasively Eurocentric Humanism towards a more posthuman vision of space and time. Such reconfigurations and revisions of Eurocentric Humanism are apt thematic cues for the topic of radical retellings that drives Chapter Four. In this next Chapter I consider how Leonora Carrington and Dorothea Tanning rewrite traditional fairy tales and Bible narratives underpinned by androcentric principles. I investigate, more specifically, how they employ dark humour and violence as subversive tools in a way that marks their course upon a posthuman, feminist trajectory.

## Chapter Four

### Radical Retellings: Rescripting the Anthropocene and Making it

#### Strange in *The Hearing Trumpet* (1976) and *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004)

Leonora Carrington and Dorothea Tanning were both artists who understood the tenet that ‘To write, of course, is to rewrite.’<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I investigate how their reconfigured and surreal narratives offer a posthuman, feminist alternative to androcentrically skewed tales of the Anthropos. I focus upon their radical revisions of Christian stories anchored in Western imagination, and most inclined towards a presumption of the human species’ exceptional status. Instrumental in disengaging such essentialist stories from Humanism’s orbit is the practice of defamiliarisation which Rosi Braidotti posits as a ‘key methodological tool to support the postanthropocentric turn.’<sup>2</sup> This chapter takes Braidotti’s postulation as a cue, showing the extent to which Carrington and Tanning foster an estrangement from patriarchal narratives in their surrealist retellings. My analysis focuses first upon Carrington’s *The Hearing Trumpet* (1976) and then upon Tanning’s *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004), arguing that the recourse to humour and violence in these novels signifies key modes by which the texts are estranged from the androcentric narratives of Christianity and fairy tales. Carrington’s black humour and Tanning’s visceral depiction of violence in these works share the capacity to destabilise patriarchal claims to mastery, disengaging the reader from the orbit of Humanism that pervades didactic, Christian storytelling.

Furthermore, this chapter examines Carrington’s and Tanning’s radical retellings, not just in terms of their subject matter, but also in the way they are told. I consider not only the

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p.141. Suleiman quotes Chantal Chawaf.

<sup>2</sup> Rosi Braidotti, ‘Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism’, in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. by Richard Grusin (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp.21-48 (p.30).

defamiliarised thinking that exhibits an anticipatory posthuman approach, but also how both writers play with the boundaries of form to unsettle the parameters of androcentric story telling. To this end, I suggest that the modes of estrangement, proposed by Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky, are an illuminating lens through which to read both Carrington's and Tanning's written oeuvre. Shklovsky's belief in making it strange or 'ostranenie' in order to see anew resonates with Braidotti's call for defamiliarisation.<sup>3</sup> As a result, I investigate how both *The Hearing Trumpet* and *Chasm* are suggestive of such posthuman estrangements of form in the way they rupture patristic narratives and appropriate an intertextual approach, invoking mythic and cinematic modes respectively.

If Surrealism was 'committed to nothing less than the complete transformation of human values' as Whitney Chadwick insists then such a transformation requires modes which problematise the existing politics that are enshrined in a human approach.<sup>4</sup> I suggest that Chadwick's assertion positions the women surrealists as early posthuman thinkers in so far as they wish to remould anthropocentric tales rather than eschew them altogether. This chapter proposes that they reconfigure patristic stories and fairy tale frameworks into posthuman versions which enact the transformational values that Chadwick highlights. Braidotti identifies metamorphic ontologies and approaches as key to posthuman thinking, explaining that making transformational modes explicit facilitates the move towards a more post-androcentric outcome. She suggests that such transformations be made visible

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<sup>3</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), pp.21-32. In this essay Shklovsky explains the impact of 'making it strange' in art in order to enable the audience to begin to see afresh, to prompt new perspectives so that we are estranged from the familiar. This is very much a praxis that anticipates Braidotti's own posthuman appropriation of defamiliarisation as a concept and speaks to the women's surrealist praxis that I highlight in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Thames & Hudson, 2021), p.19. This concept of transforming human values is one I drawn attention to in the thesis introduction. It is foundational to the thesis as a whole.

in order to understand the processes by which they are achieved, explaining that this entails a defamiliarisation from our humanist ways of seeing and thinking:

[Defamiliarisation involves] a process of peeling off, stratum after stratum, the layers of signification that have been tattooed in the surface of our body and – more importantly – in its psychic recesses and the internalized folds of one’s sacrosanct ‘experience’. Like a snake shedding an old skin, one must remember to forget it.<sup>5</sup>

A mode of ‘peeling off’ layers is a process that is manifest in the women surrealists’ work explored in this chapter, where female protagonists point to the tattoos of androcentric culture marked upon them but take their existing lines in surreal, and post-patriarchal new directions. This method both highlights the androcentric cultures that posthuman thinkers wish to change and at the same time has the capacity to catalyse a radical, feminist retelling. In other words, once the dominant model is acknowledged, it can be problematised and a process of dis-identification can begin, prompting a more balanced and ecological way of thinking as Braidotti further explains:

Dis-identifications from dominant models of subject formation is a way of decolonizing our imaginary through a radical disengagement from the axes and institutions of power in our society [...]

Dis-identification leads to post-identitarian politics of location.

Defamiliarization also entails active processes of becoming that enact in-depth breaks with established patterns of thought and identity formation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 170.

<sup>6</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), p.139-140.

I argue that Carrington's surreal revision of the Holy Grail quest in *The Hearing Trumpet* enacts precisely such 'breaks' with 'established patterns of thought' marked within the Arthurian version's adherence to Christian doctrine voiced by male masters. The themes of 'becoming' that recur in this thesis are further manifested when dominant male discourse is eschewed for a more mobile collective of women and non-human voices who trouble the humanist foundations that myopically define subjectivity. The heroic male figure triumphing in their mission is a theme similarly parodied in Tanning's *Chasm*, where her allusions to the Western film genre in the novel are rewritten to place women at the centre of the action. Both the Galahad figure, who is victorious in capturing the Grail and the Western film cowboy who similarly enacts the medieval fantasy of a knight on a quest, demonstrate Carrington's and Tanning's capacity to revise well-worn narratives in their novels, shifting these traditional patriarchal stories into feminised realms. As readers we witness destabilised visions of the subject where more entangled identities are prone to flux and change. Moving away from the mould of Enlightenment Humanism's Man of Reason, I argue that Carrington and Tanning both rewrite this androcentric ontology into a defamiliarised one that constantly metamorphoses via its encounters with human and non-human others – a mode that anticipates Braidotti's posthuman thinking:

The conceptual frame of reference I have adopted for the method of defamiliarization is monism. It implies the open-ended, inter-relational, multi-sexed and trans-species flows of becoming through interaction with multiple others. A posthuman subject thus constituted exceeds the boundaries of both anthropocentrism and of compensatory humanism, to acquire a planetary dimension.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p.89.

Exceeding the boundaries of a 'compensatory humanism' as Braidotti puts it here is a radical shift in human thinking and can demand transgressive behaviours. In the revised Christian tales and fairy stories discussed in this chapter we witness how such acts of defamiliarisation are not easy ones, but often require 'productive forms of conceptual disobedience' in order to overhaul an androcentric culture.<sup>8</sup> I argue that such rebellious modes are manifest in Tanning's dark fairy tale *Chasm* where a subversive female protagonist performs violent reconfigurations of Bible narratives, particularly in episodes which allude to Genesis and the Book of Exodus. To this end, I explore how Angela Carter's feminist reading of Sadeian thinking provides a deconstructive and defamiliarising lens through which to read Tanning's recourse to brutal spectacle. I investigate how Tanning's subversive female characters exhibit what Carter would term a Sadeian feminism in their passionate commitment to their desires which includes an impulse for violence. Carter suggests that a Sadeian approach unleashes a non-biologically skewed libidinal drive in women, allowing them to rewrite the male/female, active/passive binary that plagues humanist, and so Christian discourse. The transgressive violence of *Chasm* is a spectacle that resonates with Carter's Sadeian philosophy, thereby forging a feminist politics that disrupts and defamiliarises Christian tales of female passivity:

Sade's work concerns the nature of sexual freedom and is of particular significance to women because of his refusal to see female sexuality in relation to its reproductive function, a refusal as unusual in the late eighteenth century as it is now, even if today the function of women as primarily reproductive beings is under question.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p.140.

<sup>9</sup> Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago Press, 1979), p.1.

Whilst Carter acknowledges Sade as a ‘monstrous and daunting cultural edifice’, she harnesses his call to women to be active as an opportunity to rewrite their fate as passive mother figures chained to domesticity.<sup>10</sup> I argue that what she labels Sadeian feminism, enables women to ‘fuck their way into history and, in doing so, change it’ is emblematic of the cultural disobedience that characterises Tanning’s radical re-tellings.<sup>11</sup>

These themes of cultural and corporeal disaggregation share parallels with Carrington’s own approach where posthuman bodies are frequently reconfigured into hybrid surrealities. The rupturing of the corporeal is a motif I also examine in Carrington’s revision of *The Holy Grail* in the way that she explodes the boundaries of text and form in *The Hearing Trumpet*, where her intertextual praxis serves as a further defamiliarising method. Such an approach speaks to Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose* (1925) where he argues that literature forces the reader to see anew by presenting established ideas or everyday experiences in original and unusual ways. He implies that a form of inertia creeps when an object acquires the ‘status of “recognition”’ meaning that whilst we know it is there, ‘we can say nothing about it.’<sup>12</sup> He speaks of an ‘Automatization’ that occurs where ‘life fades into nothingness.’<sup>13</sup> Importantly, I argue here that Shklovsky highlights an over-familiarisation and complacency that characterises human experience, where Christian and thus humanist tales are so embedded in the reader’s unconscious that they cease to question them. Shklovsky’s proposal that art’s potential to help us see anew by

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<sup>10</sup> Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p.37.

<sup>11</sup> Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p.27. Sade is an important figure in Surrealism and Carter is not the only one to note this. Michael Richardson discusses how the ‘Marquis de Sade is an exemplary figure for the surrealists, exemplary to the point of myth,’ however, as he adds, ‘the myth was born from a will to demythologize: to divest his character of the demonic sheen that had accrued to it during the nineteenth century, but without rehabilitating him or making him acceptable. Sade’s value indeed lay precisely in the fact that he was unacceptable, that he both embodied and refuted the unacceptable nature of existence itself, as well as in his refusal to allow the world to dictate what he should be.’ Michael Richardson, ‘The Marquis de Sade and Revolutionary Violence’, *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, p.71.

<sup>12</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. by Benjamin Sher (Champaign and London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), p.6.

<sup>13</sup> Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, p.5.

“estranging” objects and complicating form’ is a blueprint which chimes with Braidotti’s philosophy of defamiliarisation in its capacity to rupture androcentric complacency.<sup>14</sup> I argue that the estranged overlapping and clashing of texts in *The Hearing Trumpet*, which converge in a surreal milieu, speaks to the process of complication that Shklovsky promotes in literature, thereby unravelling the androcentric didacticism subliminally peddled by Christian narratives.

Tanning’s estrangements, wrought through violent themes and subject matter, are similarly demonstrated in the deconstructive cut-and-paste approach that characterises Carrington’s inter-textual writing. Such defamiliarisations are manifest in the episodes of comedy and black humour that brim conspicuously in *The Hearing Trumpet*. I will explore in this chapter how Carrington employs humour and dark comedy as a force that destabilises androcentric power, thereby forging a more posthuman milieu. Indeed, in her deployment of black comedy, Carrington speaks to Surrealists’ brand of humour that was ‘always founded in a refusal of given conditions and as a revolt against whatever is imposed upon us.’<sup>15</sup> Carrington’s satirical voice, which takes aim at religious patriarchs, serves as both a ‘revolt against’ their totemic power and also comically underlines the arbitrary nature of their claims to mastery. Frequently reducing these figures to caricature and ridicule unleashes comedy as a mode of defamiliarisation that unravels their totalitarian reign over women and non-human others. As Yael Sherman, Cynthia Willett and Julia Willett explain, also citing Janet Halley, feminist humour aims to ‘shake up any stultifying “moral compass” with the kinds of laughs that do not just knock power off of its throne but that free[s] us from oppressive norms’.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, Carrington’s recourse to comedy as a

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<sup>14</sup> Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Richardson, ‘Black Humour’, *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, p.207.

<sup>16</sup> Yael D Sherman, Cynthia Willett, Julie Willett, ‘The Seriously Erotic Politics of Feminist Laughter’, *Social Research*, 79.1 (2012), 217-246 (p.219). These authors draw upon Janet Halley’s *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

defamiliarising tool also speaks to an experimental approach in her work that facilitates a playfulness in her novel. Such play upsets the strict boundaries of religious patriarchal rule that feature in *The Hearing Trumpet*, derailing the patristic trajectories of The Holy Grail tale in an often carnivalesque manner. I posit that such playfulness enables an open-ended and unbounded retelling where identities metamorphose and interconnect in the same way that the texts within texts become entangled and shape-shift. As Suleiman explains, 'it is in playing that the "I" can experience itself in its most fluid and boundaryless state', speaking to the metamorphosing posthuman ontologies that populate Carrington's radical retellings as well as the intertextual flux of her written form.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Disaggregated Tales and Stories in Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet*.**

*The Hearing Trumpet* was written in 1950 whilst Carrington was in Mexico and in her early thirties. Susan L. Aberth explains how Carrington told her that 'she wrote the entire book while seated in the Café Garibaldi in the Plaza de los Mariachis in the midst of cacophonous noise.'<sup>18</sup> It was subsequently lost and not published until 1974 in a French translation. The original English publication did not appear until 1976 demonstrating how the text itself has been subject to several revisions, conceived in a notebook in one language before being translated for a publication, then transferred back to English two years later. It is a novel that crosses between cultural and political time zones, immediately establishing *The Hearing Trumpet* as a work whose historical ambiguity and plurality provides an apt foregrounding to Carrington's own diverse and polyphonic approach. Anna Watz has discussed how Carrington's novel *The Stone Door*, published at the same time as *The Hearing Trumpet*, is a work that 'gestures towards feminist and avant-garde concerns of the 1970s' but explains that it is also embedded within the surrealist era in which it was

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<sup>17</sup> Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p.179.

<sup>18</sup> Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism Alchemy and Art* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2010), p.147. Aberth conducted this interview with Carrington in February 1999, in Mexico City.

conceived.<sup>19</sup> I suggest that this convergence of two moments together applies just as readily to the latter novel which I focus on in this chapter. To understand Carrington's impulse to radically retell Christian stories it is helpful to look to the thoughts she expresses about religion in her essay 'The Cabbage is a Rose' (1975). The essay serves as a manifesto for post-religious thinking, taking aim at the Bible as a catalyst for patriarchal Humanism that has continued to be the rationale justifying women's and non-human animals' subordination:

I do not know of any religion that does not declare women to be feeble-minded, unclean, generally inferior creatures to males, although most Humans assume that we are the cream of all species. [...]

The Bible, like any other history, is full of gaps and peculiarities that only begin to make sense if understood as a covering-up for a very different kind of civilization which had been eliminated. What kind of civilization?<sup>20</sup>

Carrington points to the provisional and unreliable status of history here, holding the Bible to account as the text that is positioned most emphatically as a totemic document for mankind. She underlines its 'gaps' and 'peculiarities' in a way that unravels the androcentric essentialism of Christian teachings, casting a sceptic's eye over its words in order to highlight its fatuous message about women in particular. Importantly, her

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<sup>19</sup> Anna Watz, "A language buried at the back of time": *The Stone Door* and Poststructuralist Feminism', in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde*, ed. by Jonathan P. Eburne and Catriona McAra (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp.90-104 (p.91). Watz's essay explores the possible intersections between post-structuralism and Surrealism. She suggests that the 'search for a new language that could upset the symbolic order [...] is at the heart of the continuity between surrealism and avant-garde feminism of the 1970s, and which is manifested in Carrington's writing', p.93.

<sup>20</sup> Leonora Carrington, 'The Cabbage is a Rose' (1975), in *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp.375-377 (p.376).

question about ‘What kind of civilization?’ exists beneath the rhetoric of the Bible’s teaching is an enquiry that I argue she explores fully in *The Hearing Trumpet* where she imagines instead, an alternative, posthuman populace that destabilises the patristic template of the Arthurian Holy Grail. In her novel I suggest that she begins to clear aside what she describes as ‘Dogmaturd’<sup>21</sup> in order to address the many gaps that the Bible does not address, including the question of ‘why was Eve blamed for everything?’<sup>22</sup> Carrington’s coinage of ‘Dogmaturd’ sets the comic tone for her novel revealing both her distrust of religious teachings and also her deployment of humour as a strategy for wrenching them from their moral high ground.

To plunge into the surrealist novel *The Hearing Trumpet* is to embark upon a comical and vertiginous journey to a gynocentric past in what I suggest is a posthuman and feminist revision of The Holy Grail and the grand narratives of Christianity. In the Arthurian legend it is Galahad who is destined to succeed in the epic quest, but in Carrington’s subversive, inter-textual tale, it is his 92-year-old mother Marian Leatherby who delivers the Grail to a menagerie of animals and women. Although a conspicuous assemblage of stories weave and coil themselves throughout the pages of Carrington’s surreal tale, it is Marian who maintains the story’s thread and with whom it begins and closes – albeit in Carrington’s typically open-ended manner. Marian’s age has made her position in her family’s home untenable, and she is banished to a religious institution with other elderly female outcasts.<sup>23</sup> In this unlikely space presided over by a religious zealot, she uncovers

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<sup>21</sup> Carrington, ‘The Cabbage is a Rose’, p.376.

<sup>22</sup> Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p.20. Carrington highlights the strangeness of the human species’ fixation with Bible rhetoric: ‘Humanity is very strange and I don’t pretend to know anything, however why worship something that only sends you plagues and massacres?’, p.20.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Evans discusses the topic of respectability and women as they age in *Making Respectable Women: Changing Moralities, Changing Times* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Pivot, 2020). Evans explains that ‘Women are still being judged, and judged in ways which are often both negative and punitive. The concept of the ‘respectable’ is central to those judgements’, p.xi. Evans adds that definitions of what is respectable relates to society’s presumptions about ‘what a woman should be’, p.xii. This is a definition that is ‘of crucial importance because it is related to legal, political and moral judgements about women and the various forms of social possibilities, definitions and expectations

the tale of a mysterious abbess who is the catalyst for an adventure that surreally reimagines The Holy Grail tale. Carrington's grail, embarked upon by Marian and her troop of female-human-animals from the institution, culminates in an apocalypse induced by patriarchal law. However, rather than signalling a descent into nihilism, Marian and her community of women and non-human animals become part of an affirmative posthuman landscape populated by goats, bees and hybrids; one that looks positively towards the future without an androcentric lens rather than looking back to the one of 'misery and cataclysm' that she equates with the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

The novel begins with Marian's abjection which is most palpable in her disconnect from humanity. Carrington makes it clear that Marian's own family views her as a monstrous female in her elderly state. Her grandson calls her 'the monster of Glamis' and a 'drooling sack of decomposing flesh' and to her son she is simply an 'inanimate creature'. The maid similarly locates Marian in a non-human category and her daughter-in-law Muriel argues that as an old person, she does not 'have feelings like you or I.'<sup>25</sup> But rather than be offended by these less than complimentary descriptions Marian embraces them, suggesting in often comic tones that her aged status has considerable advantages. Now toothless, she explains how she never eats meat as 'I think it is wrong to deprive animals of their life when they are so difficult to chew anyway.'<sup>26</sup> Adding that she doesn't 'have to bite anybody' and that 'there are all sorts of soft edible foods easy to procure and digestible to

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that have derived from them', p.xii. Carrington's novel, in many ways, foregrounds these discussions regarding women's respectability.

<sup>24</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.20.

<sup>25</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.10. This suggestion of Marian's lack of feelings goes against society's presumptions about women's respectability being bound up in their capacity to be tuned into the needs, and feelings, of others. As Mary Evans explains, the idea that there are 'feminine values of altruism and a greater capacity for emotional engagement with others is a longstanding tradition within western, and other, cultures,' *Making Respectable Women*, p.6. The fact that Marian allegedly has no feelings of her own precludes her from the idealised realm of the feminine where women supposedly brim with feelings, and channel them, first and foremost, towards the wellbeing of others.

<sup>26</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.1-2.

the stomach'<sup>27</sup> she presents a pragmatic, if comedic treatise of the life of an elderly woman that assuredly destabilises androcentricism's carnivorous habits.<sup>28</sup> Carrington suggests that rather than be inhibited by age, Marian can at times appear to be liberated by it as this comic example demonstrates:

With age one becomes rather less sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of others; for instance at the age of forty I would have hesitated to eat oranges in a crowded tram or bus, today I would not only eat oranges with impunity but I would take an entire meal unblushingly in any public vehicle and wash it down with a glass of port<sup>29</sup>

Here, Marian appears to relish a sort of emancipatory freedom that her age affords her in an amusing spectacle performed on public transport. Her penchant for a glass of port, and one washed down in a public setting, may well be an unashamed subversion of society's expectation that it is a drink consumed by gentlemen first and foremost. It also challenges the presumption that a woman should not be seen consuming alcohol in public and therefore losing control of herself. Marian sloshing it back in an unceremonious manner thus thwarts patriarchal conventions and even more so, does it with great relish in a very public arena that unravels class hierarchies. After all, public transport is not the obvious

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<sup>27</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.1.

<sup>28</sup> Carrington's writing here speaks to the themes of Carol Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, first published in 1990. She explains in the preface to the twentieth anniversary edition, that the sexual politics of meat is 'an attitude and action that animalizes women and sexualizes and feminizes animals', (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p.4. Derek Ryan summarises the significance of Adams' work, where patriarchy 'creates the expectation that power and virility should be expressed by men through misogynistic attitudes and behaviours towards women as well as through the eating of meat; as victims of this power dynamic women and animals share oppressed identities', *Animal Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.137. Such thinking is anticipated by Carrington decades before and is played out in the example of Marian, who in proclaiming not to need to 'bite anybody', may well be referring to any living flesh.

<sup>29</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.3.

space for an upper-class gentleman's tipple. Moreover, by entering a world where 'one can never trust people under seventy and over seven', Marian demonstrates how she is free to elude humanity's judgement of her and civilisation's codes of behaviour which are manifest in the Christian texts that Carrington parodies in the novel.<sup>30</sup> Rather than portray a nonagenarian protagonist as one who feels a sense of loss at being ejected from her familial community, Marian seems relieved by it, defamiliarising narratives which depict elderly women as lonely, helpless and needy. Marian is in fact a sharp and witty character who is immediately established as a figure identifying more readily with the non-human world than her human family, explaining that 'I could sit among the bees for hours on end and feel happy'.<sup>31</sup> She is more at home in the back yard that she shares with her two cats, a hen, some flies and a cactus plant called Maguey than she is with her son Galahad and his family who are clearly repulsed by her toothless, deaf and ageing body. Indeed, Marian's most cherished connections are non-familial ones where those from the non-human world present as more amiable companions. Recent scholarship has acknowledged the inter-species connections that Carrington forges in the novel. Kristoffer Noheden explains that in her 'surrealist pursuit of a radical transformation of the world, Carrington creates an ecological mythology in which a new ice age ushers in a utopia that crosses species barriers'.<sup>32</sup>

One amiable human friend in the novel is Marian's close friend Carmella, who resolves her deafness with the gift of a hearing trumpet. It is this rather strange, if practical

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<sup>30</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.7.

<sup>31</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.32.

<sup>32</sup> Kristoffer Noheden, 'The Grail and the Bees: Leonora Carrington's Quest for Human-Animal Coexistence', *Beyond Given Knowledge: Investigation, Quest and Exploration in Modernism and the Avant-Garde*, ed. by Harri Veivo, Jean-Pierre Montier, Francois Nicol, David Ayres, Benedikt Hjartarson and Sascha Bru (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), p.239. Noheden further adds that 'Environmental concerns, the human treatment of animals, and gender and age issues, the novel demonstrates, are inseparable. Its ecological agenda arguably timelier than ever, *The Hearing Trumpet* also points to the potential imaginary envisioning in the strivings towards a world rid of human exploitation', p.239.

present that enables Marian to discover that her family are depositing her at the Christian Well of Light Brotherhood old-age home, a joyless institution which is full of women who are similarly on the other side of Humanism's definitions of normality. The news of her transition to this home causes consternation, not because of her imminent separation from her family, but because of her estrangement from her cats and creaturely community. Her separation 'from these well-known and loved, yes loved, things were "Death and Death indeed"' to Marian illustrating her as a character who feels most kinship within a posthuman milieu.<sup>33</sup> Her move to an institution, characterised as a 'brotherhood', brings her closer to a humanity she feels no connection with. She is instinctively unnerved by a sense of distrust that the institution's name Well of Light Brotherhood home instils, admitting to Carmella that 'it frightens me.'<sup>34</sup> Presumed senile by her family, Marian and Carmella demonstrate instead an astute sense of judgement in their comic premonitions about the institution's true purpose:

'The Well of Light Brotherhood,' said Carmella, 'is obviously something extremely sinister. Not I suppose a company for grinding old ladies into breakfast cereal, but something morally sinister. It all sounds terrible. I must think of something to save you from the jaws of the Well of Light.' This seemed to amuse her [...] and she chuckled although I could she was quite upset.<sup>35</sup>

This conversation between Marian and Carmella foreshadows the parodic retelling to come where, whilst Carmella's chuckling hints at the 'dogmatism' of the institution's religious messaging, there is also an acknowledgement of the 'morally sinister' result that it renders.

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<sup>33</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.13.

<sup>34</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.12.

<sup>35</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.12.

In this way Carrington ridicules hegemonic religious culture contained within the home in a way that defamiliarises and thus holds to account its claims to a universal and doctrinal truth.

Marian and the female community at the Well of Light Brotherhood are figures who immediately see through the institution's false rhetoric, exposing the gaps in Christian teachings via comedic episodes. The women live in homes of fairy tale proportions including a Swiss chalet, a circus tent, a red toadstool and an Eskimo's igloo.<sup>36</sup> These fictive dwellings, which belong to a child's fantasy realm, introduce the fallacy of the institution's religious preachings, presided over by Dr Gambit who Carrington recurrently reduces to a figure of ridicule. Dr Gambit's project is one of conversion where he intends that all the residents will 'follow the Inner Meaning of Christianity and comprehend the Original Teaching of the Master'.<sup>37</sup> Carrington's capitals here highlight the satiric bite in her writing, sarcastically mocking the self-importance that accompanies patriarchs appointed to positions of religious authority. As Ali Smith explains in her introduction to the novel, his teachings are a 'mix of cod-therapy talk and religious salesmanship' underlining Carrington's belief that traditional religion 'never comes without money behind its power'.<sup>38</sup> The falsity of Gambit's sanctimonious position is comically exposed by the elderly female community who see him for what he is, despite society's presumptions about their senility. One of the residents, Georgina, explains that he is 'a kind of Sanctified Psychologist' where 'The result is Holy Reason like Freudian table turning. Quite frightful and as phoney as Hell.'<sup>39</sup> Georgina also subversively highlights Gambit's moral hypocrisy further describing him as a 'libidinous fellow' who makes excuses to get her 'into his boudoir for cosy talks.'<sup>40</sup> These comic interludes rewrite the weighty seriousness of

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<sup>36</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.31. These bizarre homes are introduced here.

<sup>37</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.28.

<sup>38</sup> Ali Smith, 'Introduction', in *The Hearing Trumpet*, pp.v-xv (p.xi).

<sup>39</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.33.

<sup>40</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.33.

Christian rhetoric espoused by the patriarchal masters that Carrington critiques in her essays, defamiliarising their sober messaging via her parodic revisions. There is also a discernible swipe at sexual deviancy in the priesthood. Mrs Gambit receives a similarly humorous overwrite in her role as Christian and spousal accomplice. An equally autocratic figure, her role is to engage the women in a practice entitled the Movements; an activity so steeped in the religious cod psychology that Ali Smith notes, that she can only vaguely gesture at its meaning when Marian asks what the process entails:

The Movements were given to us in the past by Somebody in the Tradition. They have many meanings. I am not at liberty to disclose to you yet as you have only just arrived, but I can say one of their outer meanings is the harmonious evolution of the Whole organism to different Special rhythms which I play to you on the harmonium.<sup>41</sup>

The absurdity of Mrs Gambit's response and the ensuing 'Movements' which require that the women stand on 'one leg like storks' and exercise a series of bodily jerks in a slapstick spectacle, results in Marian collapsing into hysterical laughter; something she herself labels as 'irreverent behaviour'.<sup>42</sup> In this episode Marian recalls how in her youth she had often been overtaken by 'uncontrollable laughter, always in public' that gripped her, demonstrating comedy as a tool of release which helps her to escape the religious codes of behaviour which entrap her and her peers.<sup>43</sup> Marian's 'maniac laughter' destabilises the hegemonic rule of Christian masters in the novel enabling her to embrace a feminist resistance to androcentric rule that attempts to curtail women and non-human others. As Yael D. Sherman et al emphasise, 'in the process of subversion, humor can transform a

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<sup>41</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.34.

<sup>42</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, pp.36-37.

<sup>43</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.37.

politics of resentment into a politics of joy.<sup>44</sup> I suggest that Carrington's movement from resentment to joy via comedy is a strategic manoeuvre in her radical retelling of Christian narratives in the novel. It is one which resonates with Sherman et al's intimation that feminist comedy has an important defamiliarising impact as they explain here, arguing that the negative, and indeed enraging aspects of patriarchal culture can be recalibrated. Here they explain the constructive powers of what comedian and writer Kate Clinton has coined as 'fumerist' comedy; a kind that I suggest is palpable in Carrington's novel:

fumerist comedy can make visible the history of identity and the struggles of recognition and identification, but as a moment of dislocation and transformation. In other words, the moment of laughter may jolt one out of habitual habits and cognition and open up fresh possibilities. Comedy can create a new kind of temporary community, not based on homogeneity or rigid identities, but rather on a shared dislocation out of the customary lines of identity.<sup>45</sup>

Such 'dislocations' speak to the post-anthropocentric defamiliarisations that Braidotti calls for. Significantly, the observation that comedy has the capacity to forge communities resonates with Carrington's tale where the women of the religious institution form a strong bond that ultimately releases them from Gambit's religious trap.

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<sup>44</sup> Sherman, Willett and Willett, 'The Seriously Erotic Politics of Feminist Laughter', p.228.

<sup>45</sup> Sherman, Willett and Willett, 'The Seriously Erotic Politics of Feminist Laughter', p.229. Sherman et al here draw upon Gina Barreca's perspectives on feminist comedy in their analysis of feminist humour, citing her 'Introduction' in *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988), p.15. Barreca further explains the impact of so-called fumerist comedy, arguing 'it captures the idea of being funny and wanting to burn the house down at all once', *They Used to Call Me Snow White...but I Drifted: Women's Strategic Use of Humour* (New York: Viking Press, 1991), p.178. This subversive feminist humour, that harnesses anger and transforms it into dark laughter, is one that I suggest functions as a defamiliarising tool in Carrington's novel.

Their community is in fact galvanised further by another subversive female, albeit one who appears to stare at them from a painting at the institution.<sup>46</sup> The portrait is in fact of a nun whom Marian depicts as a winking figure apparently mocking Dr Gambit from the wall behind him at mealtimes in a manner which further destabilises his authority. Marian becomes obsessed with the nun named Dona Rosalinda, who captures her imagination in a way that provides an escape from the drudgery of the institution's routines. Dona Rosalinda also transfixes the attentions of Marian's fellow residents, each of whom has an opinion about her true identity, giving voice to a multitude of possible narratives that resonate with posthuman thinking. Georgina's transgressive and subversive humour undoes religious rhetoric, imagining the nun in less than holy terms: "She is definitely winking; the bawdy old bag is probably peeking at the monastery through a hole in the wall, watching the monks prancing around in their knickers." Georgina had a one-track mind.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from the further comedic strand that the abbess brings to Carrington's tale, she is importantly a figure who moves the novel towards an intertextual territory, bringing the story into contact with the threads of *The Holy Grail*. This increasing interest in the winking nun, brings the women together in an excited community with one resident Maude describing a dream involving Dona Rosalinda that heavily alludes to the Grail. In her reverie, she is searching for a 'magic cup' on a fantastical quest, discovering a 'silver chalice brimming over with golden honey' which she returns to the Goddess in a distinctly non-patriarchal rewrite. Dona Rosalinda has an incidental role in the dream appearing in a 'four poster bed' in a 'frilly white nightcap', in a pantomimic episode that pokes fun at religious authority.<sup>48</sup> Aside from this further comic reinterpretation of religion, Maude's dream is a

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<sup>46</sup> There is the suggestion here that Carrington is employing a satirical female gaze, playfully subverting the male gaze so dominant in men's surrealist art.

<sup>47</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.41.

<sup>48</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.58.

catalyst that brings Carrington's secular retelling of *The Holy Grail* to the surface and extends her play with characters to a play with narrative form itself. It is a mode that I suggest is a further example of Carrington's defamiliarisations where the linearity of Christian narratives is exploded for multiple stories that slip across boundaries. As Anna Watz explains, such intertextual play and 'overlapping texts in *The Hearing Trumpet* overtly question the notion of origin' in a way that critiques 'the discursively structured phallogentric order';<sup>49</sup> an order that Carrington sees as anchored in Christian master narratives as she intimates in her 'The Cabbage is a Rose' essay. Such intertextual praxis also sign-posts Carrington's playful approach to writing, applying humour and play as critical tools that have the capacity to defamiliarise traditional patriarchal stories. Suleiman notes how Carrington's multiple and overlapping tales are indicative of a surrealist inheritance in a way that enables a play with boundaries:

It is as if Carrington has grafted the Surrealist preoccupation with doubling and boundaries between dream states and reality onto the postmodernist preoccupation with doubling and with boundaries between ontological levels, levels of narration and narrative representation, and levels of transmission or translation – all this is part of a generally dizzying collage of texts and mythologies [...] And all this underpinned, of course, by the primary structure of feminist revision.<sup>50</sup>

Suleiman's analysis here speaks to Barreca's postulation that humour and play have the potential to catalyse a feminist politics in the way the reader experiences in *The Hearing*

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<sup>49</sup> Anna Watz, 'A language buried at the back of time': *The Stone Door* and poststructuralist feminism', in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Jonathan P. Eburne and Catriona McAra (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp.90-104 (pp.95-96).

<sup>50</sup> Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p.174.

*Trumpet*. The 'dizzying collage of texts and mythologies' highlighted by Suleiman, which unleashes a project of feminist revision, is demonstrated most persuasively in the figure of Dona Rosalinda who may begin as a figure of fun, but ultimately has an important political function. Her story, discovered by resident Christabel Burns, is a tale that is both anti-patriarchal and anti-Christian, a story of an abbess devoted to the Goddess, and attempting to destroy Christianity's foundations. Such intertextual play in Carrington's writing is a manoeuvre that holds the androcentric trajectory of Christian versions of The Holy Grail to account.

The section about Dona Rosalinda occupies almost one fifth of the novel's pages, including other tales within it in a number of languages. Carrington explains that the nun's story was translated from the original Latin in a narrative that consists of letters as well as scrolls found by the author of her tale who we learn is a monk. Rosalinda's tale begins with an ointment which she claims can 'release secrets which would [...] discredit all the gospels'; a project which resonates with Carrington's own wish to dispel the myth of patristic, essentialist narratives.<sup>51</sup> In an intertextual, and playful manoeuvre which further threatens the integrity of Christian tales, Carrington fuses the nun's story with the Holy Grail tale when it is discovered that the origin of the magic ointment merges with the beginnings of the Grail. Instead of being a chalice that Jesus drank from, as detailed in the Arthurian legend, in *The Hearing Trumpet*, the cup 'held the elixir of life and belonged to the Goddess Venus', thus situating it within a revised, female realm.<sup>52</sup> In this example, Carrington conjures a rather different version of the Grail's genealogy, underlining instead Venus's connection with it:

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<sup>51</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.75.

<sup>52</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.91.

She is said to have quaffed the magic liquid when she was impregnated with Cupid [...] The story follows that Venus, in her birth pangs, dropped the cup and it came hurtling to earth, where it was buried in a deep cavern, abode of Epona the Horse Goddess.

For some thousands of years the cup was safely in the keeping of the subterranean Goddess, who was known to be bearded and a hermaphrodite. Her name was Barbarus.<sup>53</sup>

In this passage Carrington conjures a re-conceived realm of posthuman ontologies which over-write the hierarchical power dynamics that characterise the Grail's patriarchal version. In Carrington's vision, hybrid creatures and non-heteronormative characters meld with mythical beings to assert a disconnect from the Galahad version whose quest for the Grail is founded in the Christian master narrative. As Noheden notes, the 'quest for the Grail in *The Hearing Trumpet* is ultimately aimed at disrupting patriarchal, Christian domination over women and animals, and at restoring the Goddess to a position of myth strong enough to lend a new structure to the world.'<sup>54</sup> The 'subterranean Goddess' who nurtures the cup safely within a 'deep cavern' speaks to a gynocentric terrain, far removed from the heroics of Galahad's glorified quest. In this version, there is a more grounded appraisal of the cup's origins where its 'hurtling to earth' during Venus' birth pangs suggests a more grounded heritage. Carrington forges an unmistakable female sphere for the Grail, one which speaks to the earthly entanglements discussed in Chapter Two, rather than a deified,

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<sup>53</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.91. Horses recur across Carrington's written and visual oeuvre. I refer to their presence in her *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)* (1937-38) and 'The Oval Lady' (1937-38) in Chapter One. Susan L. Aberth explains more specifically that 'Epona, the Celtic goddess that appeared to her followers on a white horse, would be an important feminine archetype for Carrington in Mexico, particularly after reading Robert Graves's 1948 Celtic study *The White Goddess*. [...] Like the hyena, horses are another aspect of her animal self, representing her love of freedom and her desire to escape the stultifying class background', *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Farnham and Burlington: Lund Humphries, 2010), pp.32-33.

<sup>54</sup> Noheden, 'The Grail and the Bees', p.242.

Christian elevation. The fact that it is located in a 'deep cavern' is also suggestive of a geography that resonates with the female corporeal form; a subject I consider in detail in my analysis of Tanning's desertscapes in *Chasm* in this chapter.

Themes of interconnection, intimated through Carrington's intertextual praxis, are also suggested in the fact that the protector of the cup, Barbarus, is bearded; a feature she shares with Marian who proclaims to find her own 'short grey beard' to be 'rather gallant', whilst 'conventional people would find it repulsive.'<sup>55</sup> In this way, Carrington revises male definitions of femininity, broadening the scope to incorporate a posthuman milieu of ontologies which escape the objectifying stare of the patriarchal gaze. Suleiman argues that Carrington's female and feminist revision of the Grail tale in *The Hearing Trumpet* is, in fact, one that speaks more to a 'reappropriation' than a 'theft' in her blasphemous paganisation. She explains that scholars of Grail legend agree that it was most likely pre-Christian and most interestingly, of Celtic origin – perhaps explaining Carrington's particular interest due to her own maternal family's Celtic heritage which fascinated her.<sup>56</sup>

This slippage between Rosalinda's tale and the Grail's origin eventually merges with Marian's own story as the Grail sought by the nun is ultimately the one that is recovered by her, Galahad's mother, and a community of women and non-human others. A carnivalesque series of episodes and incidents lead us to this surreal denouement in a vertiginous journey befitting of a surrealist method: Dr Gambit is removed from his position of power and the women of the institution embark upon their own quest to recover the Grail following earthquakes that rupture and defamiliarise their world, eradicating much of the human species as a new age ensues. The tower in the institution's courtyard

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<sup>55</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.3.

<sup>56</sup> Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p.243. In her notes, Suleiman explains how 'scholars of the Grail legend seem to agree that the Grail tradition is pre-Christian, probably Celtic origin.' Roger Loomis suggest the Grail's Christianisation was the result of a misreading. Since the Grail was often associated with a similarly blessed drinking horn (*cors beneiz*), and since *cors* could mean body the Grail became associated with Christ's body and blood. Suleiman draws on Loomis' readings in his book *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

dramatically splits open and a glittering winged creature bursts forth as if to embrace this new, non-androcentric realm as the tale shifts further into a fairy-tale sphere. Marian descends under the tower to the 'Womb of the World' where in a spectacularly surreal and humorous episode, she encounters herself stirring a soup that she is also blended into.<sup>57</sup> An alchemical moment passes described as a 'mighty rumbling followed by crashes' and 'there I was [...] stirring the soup in which I could see my own meat, feet up, boiling away merrily as any joint of beef.'<sup>58</sup> A mirror reveals that Marian now straddles multiple identities in a comic overlap that parallels Carrington's melded narrative forms. Defamiliarising the humanist model of unified wholeness that defines the patriarchal figures in Christian master-narratives, Marian is instead a melded identity of the Abbess, the Queen Bee and 'myself'. Such a metamorphic process, indicative of a dissolution of humanist subjectivity, points to the process of becoming posthuman that Braidotti discusses here:

[The posthuman encompasses] multiple ecologies of belonging, while it enacts the transformation of one's sensorial and perceptual co-ordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we still call the self. This is in fact a moveable assemblage within a common life-space that the subject never masters nor possesses but merely inhabits, crosses, always in a community, a pack, a group or a cluster.<sup>59</sup>

Despite questing for a Grail, as in the more well-known example of Arthurian Galahad, Marian and the community of human and non-human animals are not in the business of mastering or possessing a chalice, each other or even their own identities. Indeed, we see

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<sup>57</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.137.

<sup>58</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.138.

<sup>59</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.193.

in the above example how, as Noheden observes, Carrington presents '[t]he surrealist vision of the world in *The Hearing Trumpet* [which] suggests that liberty is also contingent upon creating conditions for coexistence across species lines.'<sup>60</sup> Carrington constructs identity as an open-ended and malleable force, anticipating Braidotti's posthuman ecologies identified above. They operate as an assemblage of parts, a collective like the fused texts of the novel and are thus not predicated upon a culture of ego-bound individualism in the mould of the Christian Grail narrative.

This politics of collectivism that exhibits a comical disconnect from the patriarchal Arthurian legend, is exhibited most emphatically in the vision of an atom-powered ark and its inhabitants as the novel moves towards its surreal conclusion. Carrington's comic reconfiguration of Christian narratives continues into the final pages of *The Hearing Trumpet*, where, as Marian and her friends contemplate how to rescue the grail, her old friend Marlborough arrives in an Ark. Carrington may draw upon her own biography here in that Marlborough is described as a 'great poet' who has 'achieved fame in recent years', according to Marian.<sup>61</sup> Rather unexpectedly, it transpires that he has a wolf-headed sister, Anubeth, who arrives with him accompanied by a pack of wolves. Anubeth is also of course a reprisal of the 'becoming--animal' hybrids that I discussed in Chapter One. The ark itself is a surrealist amalgam, estranged from Noah's version in the Bible in its apparently random contents that defy epistemological mappings and eschew any hierarchical structures. Carrington defamiliarises the domesticity suggested by the term 'house-proud' when Marlborough insists Marian enter the ark, explaining that Anubeth has 'arranged everything with great taste':

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<sup>60</sup> Noheden, 'The Grail and the Bees', p.251.

<sup>61</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.21.

The interior of the Ark was like the opium dream of a gypsy. There were embroidered hangings of wonderful design, perfume sprays shaped like exotic feathered birds, lamps like praying mantis with moveable eyes, velvet cushions in the form of gigantic fruits, and sofas mounted on prostrate werewomen beautifully sculptured in rare woods and ivory.<sup>62</sup>

This is indeed a very defamiliarised abode to be 'house-proud' of, where a bizarre vision of human and non-human life coincides in Carrington's hallucinogenic vision.<sup>63</sup> This is not the ordered structure that characterises Noah's ark where the neat system of two by two asserts a binary system. Rather, Anubeth's ark is one of colourful disorder where the praying mantis – a creature whose female eats the male after copulation – has moveable eyes, suggesting it has the capacity to see beyond Humanism's myopic parameters. In amongst this surrealist paraphernalia however is the dissonant effect of the trio taking tea, speaking to Carrington's capacity to speak to convention in order to defamiliarise it. Whilst they drink 'jasmine tea and small glasses of a French liqueur' in a seemingly civilised scene, conversely, this custom all takes place at a 'small jade table which was balanced on top of a reared cobra in amethyst'.<sup>64</sup> It demonstrates how Carrington's defamiliarising praxis has the potential to jolt the reader out of routine via her modes of estrangement, enabling an audience to look through a lens of alterity; a mode which speaks to Shklovsky's discussion of *making it strange* as a powerful literary tool as well as Carrington's own eye as a visual artist. As well as scrambling the vision of the Christian ark into a surreal and secular

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<sup>62</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.152.

<sup>63</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.152.

<sup>64</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.152. The interior of the Ark engenders the Surrealists' penchant for the practice of Cadavre Exquis [Exquisite Corpse], where one artist drew a body part on paper, folded it over and then passed it on to the next person to do the same. The result, once unfolded, was a jarring collage of a defamiliarised body, designed to provoke new, irrational and disordered ways of seeing. The clashing components compiled in Carrington's Ark similarly invoke an anarchic scene, melding disaggregated bodies and materials in a surreal melee, and by implication, satirising the ordered, and humanist, taxonomies of Noah's Ark.

spectacle bringing it into the realms of an avant-garde ready-made, it is also defamiliarised in its guise as a collective ensemble. The hybrid and eclectic occupants of the ark join forces with Marian and her female and non-human community in a collective effort to rescue the Grail from the 'Revengeful Father God' and so 'restore it to the Goddess'.<sup>65</sup> In this way Carrington anticipates the 'multiple ecologies of belonging' that Braidotti discusses as key to adopting a more posthuman approach, defamiliarised from the ego-bounded model of the Vitruvian male which the Galahad hero embodies.<sup>66</sup>

The tale moves increasingly in the direction of a composite multiverse that evolves away from the confines of traditional Christian narratives predicated upon the hero status of a single narrator. Rather, thanks to the collective effort of this multi-species and post-Christian community, the Goddess appears, appropriately assembled as a swarm of bees and so mirroring the plural nature of her allies in their reclamation of the cup from the Archbishop. In Carrington's surrealist and feminist revision, the bees who comprise the Goddess become the protectors of the cup rather than its keeper and are supported in their efforts by a pack of wolves. In this way Carrington both anticipates the multiple becomings of posthuman thinking but also conveys her belief in a feminist politics that entails a collective movement and momentum, recapitulating her role in Mexico's feminist group *Mujeres Conciencia*, discussed in Chapter Three. The delivery of the Grail sees the wastelands of Man's civilisation eschewed for a return to nature whereby Marian envisages a world populated by hybrids and non-human animals as an 'improvement upon humanity'.<sup>67</sup> The Grail itself is within the safekeeping of the swarm of bees which they take off to a secret part of the community's cavern 'leaving a trail of honey in their wake which glittered like gold on the snow'.<sup>68</sup> There is no glorious and heroic recognition of Marian and

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<sup>65</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.146.

<sup>66</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.193.

<sup>67</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.158.

<sup>68</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.158.

her community; only a quiet and humble description of the new interconnected landscape she envisages for the world beyond herself and beyond a dominant human species. As if to continue the theme of melding texts together, Carrington asserts that the story will continue to be recorded in a daily record 'on three wax tablets.'<sup>69</sup> Once Marian dies, the tale will be documented by hybrid were-cubs, creatures which eschew any symbols of human power for visions of entangled, interspecies connection. Their vision suggests that Carrington imagines a more balanced and posthuman future for the world - one which makes space for multiple ecologies that commune together in the way that her comically defamiliarised, inter-textual modes propose. Most importantly, the posthuman landscape forged here underlines the seriousness of Carrington's feminist project; the novel's humorous revisions are estrangements that serve to address her concerns about allowing the damaging androcentrisms of Christian narratives to continue their domination.

In the surrealist assemblage that characterises Carrington's writing investigated in this chapter, she repeatedly exhibits humorous 'dis-identifications from dominant models', forging a defamiliarised, and thus posthuman approach. Her satirical reconfigurations of patriarchal religious figures destabilise their claims to mastery and thereby dethrones them from their hierarchical position holding the androcentrism to account that underpins Christian narratives. In portraying them in an estranged vision of caricature, Carrington rewrites patristic narratives in a way that forges space for posthuman ontologies which have been recurrently overlooked by history thereby uncovering the 'very different kind of civilisation' she wishes to reveal in 'The Cabbage is a Rose.' It is a civilisation that she argues has been 'eliminated' by religious leaders and the teachings disseminated via the Bible. Carrington explodes these texts and plays with them, enfolding them into new and defamiliarised shapes in a way that speaks to motifs of disaggregation. Building upon these themes of rupture and deconstruction, I now explore how Tanning's representations of

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<sup>69</sup> Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, p.158.

violence in *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004) function as 'productive forms of conceptual disobedience', operating as a powerful counter-story to androcentric hegemony. I show how Tanning alludes to Christian master-narratives in order to reconfigure them in brutal scenes, referring specifically to her surrealist revisions of Genesis and The Book of Exodus as well as considering the influence of the Western film genre upon the novel.

### **Erupting Feminisms in Tanning's Violent Story Revisions.**

In her 2013 essay, 'Sadeian Women: Erotic Violence in the Surrealist Spectacle', Catriona McAra observes that both Carrington and Tanning 'use recurrent themes of devouring, decapitation and defacement into their surrealist work that is often graphically violent.'<sup>70</sup> In Chapter One I explored Carrington's short story 'The Debutante' which involves the maid's face being torn off as part of a ruse to free the protagonist from the rituals of marriage. McAra observes that both artists 'demonstrate their awareness of the violent, sadistic tastes of the surrealist group' however she argues that 'they exhibit their ability to re-appropriate such tastes for their own purposes.'<sup>71</sup> She suggests that the themes of violence that surface in their work, particularly in Tanning's, speaks to a disenchantment with male Surrealism, particularly with the way women were adopted as object and muse. Motifs of facelessness, also present in a gory scene I examine in *Chasm*, defamiliarise the objectified *femme-enfant*, demonstrating one example of how violence has the capacity to act as a mechanism for estrangement from patriarchal culture, thereby asserting a feminist politics. As McAra adds 'In Tanning's and Carrington's examples the whole face is ripped off as a subversive metaphor for feminist rebellion that returns and disrupts the male gaze by depicting the obscene side of patriarchal discourse.'<sup>72</sup> Whilst Tanning was keen to

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<sup>70</sup> Catriona McAra, 'Sadeian Women: Erotic Violence in the Surrealist Spectacle', in *Violence and the Limits of Representation*, ed. by Graham Matthews and Sam Goodman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.69-89 (p.86).

<sup>71</sup> McAra, 'Sadeian Women: Erotic Violence in the Surrealist Spectacle', p.77-78.

<sup>72</sup> McAra, 'Sadeian Women: Erotic Violence in the Surrealist Spectacle', p.82.

disentangle herself from discourses that attempted to stamp her with a feminist label, many critics have pointed to the transgressive and violent behaviours of her female characters as fruitful in animating feminist debates. In turning my attention to her surrealist novel, I investigate how recurrent violent spectacle provocatively uproots traditional, androcentric story-telling from its foundations, arguing that its resonance with a Sadeian thinking forges a posthuman, feminist approach. In particular I suggest that Tanning's defamiliarised narrative, which plays with invocations of the fairy tale and Western film genres spliced with radical reinventions of Bible stories, is indicative of what surrealist scholar Alyce Mahon terms a 'Sadean imagination':

By Sadean imagination I mean a Sadean world, created in the imagination, in our understanding of humanity is expanded through an exploration of humankind's dark, sexually explicit, violent and cruel nature. Within this imaginary locus, power is played out by and on sexual bodies without any concession to law, religion, or public decency, in keeping with Sade's assertion that '[m]orals do not depend on us; they have to do with our construction, our organization.'<sup>73</sup>

In the same way as Carrington's recourse to black humour is a tool in destabilising traditional Christian narratives, Tanning's *Chasm* resonates with Mahon's description of a 'Sadean imagination' in its confrontation with humanity's 'violent and cruel nature.' I argue that such violence functions as a similarly defamiliarising tool to Carrington's black comedy; one which, in particular, exhibits motifs of corporeal violence as a feminist rebuttal and thus re-vision of religious story-telling, anchored in androcentrism.

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<sup>73</sup> Alyce Mahon, *The Marquis de Sade and the Avant-Garde* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), p.1. Mahon quotes Sade as he is cited in Maurice Lever, *Marquis de Sade: A Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p.318.

During an interview with Alain Jouffroy, Tanning explained that her use of violence was in rebellion against those civilising forces that obscure the unruly, carnal desires of the human-animal.<sup>74</sup> It is a statement which provides an apt introduction to *Chasm's* dark Sadeian themes and recalls the feminist politics of Carrington's human-animal hybrids. Raised in Galesburg, Illinois, where Tanning wrote that 'nothing happens but the wallpaper', she recalls Sunday sermons at the First Lutheran Church in a way which anticipates the transgressive praxis she repeatedly exhibits in her work:<sup>75</sup>

Dancing, miming, jazz music were godless, the arts of Satan to tempt you into certain hell. Dorothea considered them privately: hell, Satan, Sodom and Gomorrah, all flashing, all fiery – but wicked. Opulent Salome with her pretty red veils, and Venus always lying down, undraped, irresistible to weak but necessary humans. Angels, too, were naked, beautiful boys with wings and a flutter of veil across their groins, always that tiny veil, the caress. They hovered over their favorite mortals in the paintings in books; they told them to look behind the wallpaper.<sup>76</sup>

In Tanning's recollections of her childhood Sundays spent in church described above, she demonstrates the transformative powers of imagination, transporting herself from mundane scenes of a religious sermon towards a landscape of Satan's arts instead. In this

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<sup>74</sup> McAra, 'Sadeian Women: Erotic Violence in the Surrealist Spectacle', p.75. McAra summarises here an interview that Jouffroy conducted with Tanning in 1993. 'Interview with Tanning', in *Dorothea Tanning*, ex. cat., (Stockholm: Malmo Konsthall, 1993), p.57.

<sup>75</sup> Victoria Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations* (London: Lund Humphries, 2020), p.12. The tedium of Galesburg is a topic that Tanning underlines several times. She explains that it is a place 'where you sat on the davenport and waited to grow up', p.12. Her reference to wallpaper is a provocative theme that she returns to in her work – one which I explore more fully in Chapter Five. As Carruthers explains, a 'common source of amusement and distraction for the young Tanning was the game of studying patterns in the wallpaper and on furniture upholstery, allowing her imagination to form images that were not intentionally there', p.12. This practice recalls Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) and I discuss such parallels further in Chapter Five.

<sup>76</sup> Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations*, pp.12-13.

way she escapes the banality of her existence, awakening an imagination catalysed by melding stories of the Bible and Greek mythology together in transgressive revisions. She emancipates herself from the patristic church setting in the way she defamiliarises its sober space, invoking it instead as one of excess and desire with visions of 'Opulent Salome' and even the angels themselves featured as figures of sexual desire. She highlights the Christian church's subversive opposite in Satan and most importantly is excited by such a transgression. Her reflections upon Satan's arts and the 'certain hell' that follows, as discussed in the Lutheran sermon, do not instil fear in Tanning but rather, catalyse her imagination further where an 'undraped' Venus and the 'flashing' fieriness of hell offer a thrilling escape chute. The fact that she refers to herself in the third person in this account is suggestive of a radical retelling of her own life, where in estranging herself from reality by fictionalising a version of 'Dorothea', she forges a subversive and empowering mode of defamiliarisation, distanced from the Christian narrative that defined her childhood.

In *Surrealist Ghostliness* (2013) Katharine Conley argues that Tanning upends typical assumptions, made by the conservative and Christian American Midwest culture in which she grew up, that women belong in the home. Instead, Conley explains how 'Tanning shows domestic space to be full of threats and temptations only the most ingenious person can conquer.'<sup>77</sup> In this way Tanning forges a portal out of a patriarchal family life in Galesburg to embark upon the more non-conventional path she envisages for herself. As she explains, 'one of my reasons for painting was really to *escape* my biography.'<sup>78</sup> Such subversive thinking intimates a key mode in Tanning's work, where the violence and mystical forces that it involves ruptures androcentrically skewed tales which construct

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<sup>77</sup> Katharine Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), p.121.

<sup>78</sup> Quotation from Tanning interview with Alain Jouffroy. Dawn Ades, 'Orbits of the Savage Moon: Surrealism and the Representation of the Female Subject in Mexico and Postwar Paris', in *Mirror Images Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. by Whitney Chadwick (London: The MIT Press, 1998), pp.106-127 (p.116).

posthuman and feminist reconfigurations. In Jouffroy's words, Tanning's writing and art exhibit 'traces of an eruption' that unsettles the foundations of humanist, patriarchal culture, unleashing an inner wildness and suppressed desire that empowers her female characters.<sup>79</sup> As Conley astutely observes, 'These girls create their own fate, the way Tanning has done'.<sup>80</sup>

*Chasm: A Weekend* is itself a reworking of the novella *Abyss* that Tanning wrote while living in the Sedona desert with Max Ernst in the 1940s. This version was in fact Chapter Four as it appears in *Chasm*, first published in the periodical *Zero: A Quarterly Review of Literature and Art* in 1949. The full novel version, investigated here, was published in 2004 when she was ninety-four. It is a remarkable testament to the longevity of her creative powers and her imaginative prowess, given that it is a tale that orbits the world of a seven-year-old girl, Destina.

The novel could be construed at first glance as a traditional fairy tale in its nod to prescribed conventions, with a cast that includes a seemingly innocent young girl, an animal side kick, a mysterious old woman and a tyrannical patriarch. Its setting could also be categorised within the framework of fairy tale templates featuring the imposing mansion of Windcote, set within a desert landscape which embodies magic and mysticism. However, Catriona McAra situates the novel in its historical context in a way that I suggest triggers the revisionary praxis that estranges it from traditional story-telling: 'The spectre of twentieth-century wartime fascism looms large, endowing her novella with historical authenticity, and representing a real-life patriarchal force which her protagonist, Destina, must overcome.'<sup>81</sup> As we discover, Raoul Meridian symbolises precisely such fascistic and

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<sup>79</sup> Alain Jouffroy, 'Dorothea Tanning: Le chavirement dans la joie', *XXe Siecle* 43 (1974), pp.60-68 (p.68).

<sup>80</sup> Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, p.127.

<sup>81</sup> Catriona McAra, "'Open Sesame": Dorothea Tanning's Critical Writing', in *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration*, ed. by Anna Watz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.210-224 (p.210).

patriarchal forces in the way that he tyrannises all those who pass within his sphere. Orbiting around the world of seven-year-old Destina, the novel charts the events of a single weekend when her monstrous guardian, Meridian, invites a party of eccentrics to his fortress in the desert, which is also shared with governess Nelly and the aged and often dismissed 'baroness'. The invited party includes a faded film star, businessmen and most significantly, the intriguingly named Albert Exodus and his fiancée Nadine Coussay - a young woman whom Meridian plans to make his own *femme-enfant*. The bizarre comings and goings of this group, who plan to indulge their desires in games and sexual dalliances at Windcote, are however a narrative side-show that is ushered to the periphery of Destina's tale; one which becomes further estranged from fairy tale conventions as the increasingly surreal and violent threads of the story surge to the fore.

*Chasm* immediately establishes a narrative driven by a female genealogy in its prologue, detailing the 280 years of Destinias born from 1682 to 1965 where we join the current heroine Destina Meridian. This female lineage of Destinias shares a nomadic existence, beginning with a Destina Kirby who in 1662 married a seaman and voyaged between 'England and the New World.'<sup>82</sup> These women are characterised by their adventurous escapades and non-conventional lifestyles in a genealogy that points to the endurance of a female line, one that I argue intimates a radical re-vision of the Bible's opening tale of Genesis. In the Bible's opening book, we witness instead the begetting of sons, not daughters, where women are anonymous male child bearers, invisible as a result of their sex. In this Christian master narrative, it is the begetting of sons that sets the tone of Christian storytelling in a family tree that renders women invisible. In Tanning's story opening, the female line is not only named, it is a name that is repeated and so cemented through time where in the opening page the first parents agree that 'no female descendant

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<sup>82</sup> Dorothea Tanning, *Chasm: A Weekend* (London: Virago Press, 2004), p.1.

of theirs should ever be called otherwise.<sup>83</sup> Importantly, the long chronology of *Destinas* asserts the female line through history but also speaks to its future in the name's allusion to destiny. In this way there is a sense that the name Destina speaks to endurance and futurity, one that cannot be broken by patriarchal and Christian storytelling, thereby reckoning with the way in which the Bible recurrently silences the stories of women. It immediately establishes *Chasm* as a narrative that is concerned with defamiliarisations, wrenching traditional tales into new shapes that give voice to women historically muted by androcentric, Christian storytelling.

We join the Destina narrative of *Chasm* in 1965, when Destina Meridian is seven years old; a child born to a maternal line of the same name who exhibits the same wild spirit and sense of kinship with the desert that Tanning's protagonist later demonstrates. Destina's mother is in fact the daughter of Meridian's wife with whom he becomes estranged as a result of his secretive travels. He learns on his return from Europe, having completed one of his 'mysterious errands', that his wife has died and that her daughter, now aged seventeen, is pregnant with 'father unknown.' Controversially, he marries her and carries her off to Windcote where she commits suicide soon after giving birth. In these decidedly surreal and tragic circumstances, Destina Meridian's tale begins.

Destina is an isolated and eccentric figure who inhabits the so-called 'little girl's rooms' of Windcote with her combative governess Nelly; a female figure who has similarly been victimised by Meridian's rule.<sup>84</sup> Destina's world, I argue, is one which resonates with Carrington's human-animal ontologies, where her closest companion is, in fact, a lion whom she visits out in the desert canyon every night. Destina's pre-occupation with this wild space is a movement which increasingly radiates outwards to influence other characters, where the wildness of her own ontology begins to spill over in a post-

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<sup>83</sup> Dorothea Tanning, *Chasm*, p.1.

<sup>84</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.44.

anthropocentric and interconnective manoeuvre. The way others become drawn into this wild sphere away from Meridian's phallogocentric narrative is suggested most palpably in Chapter Four when the character Albert Exodus is inexplicably attracted upstairs towards Destina's quarters. Here, Tanning swiftly rewrites any fairy tale configurations of a coddled, young girl's nursery: even in the approaching corridor it is 'dark as a cave' with 'no lights', foreshadowing the mysteries to come and speaking to Gothic conventions.<sup>85</sup> In Destina's room, there are no toys or familiar comforts of childhood but rather an asymmetrical disorder in a large space, recalling Anubeth's ark in *The Hearing Trumpet*. There is an unmistakable surrealist aesthetic at work in the way Tanning charts the randomness of the room's contents, reconfiguring linear narratives for a more disorientating vision that unsettles any expectation of a traditional children's tale:

Upon all of these tables lay myriad smaller objects in wonderful disorder, and on the chairs as well, several of them lying on their backs, legs in the air serving as more racks for the apparently inexhaustible littler of rags, garments, shoes, boxes, jars, a birdcage, umbrellas, a Mexican saddle, several wigs [...] Albert didn't see anything but a blaze.<sup>86</sup>

Here, we are estranged from the domain of a child's fairy tale space instead occupying a world which explodes the epistemological categorisations that Humanism insists upon. Rather, as McAra has observed, the appearance of a bird cage and umbrellas in particular suggest 'hallmarks of the surrealist museum, as a readymade history.'<sup>87</sup> Such anachronistic objects, clustered together in this scene, derail linear narratives for melded temporalities

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<sup>85</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.43.

<sup>86</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.45.

<sup>87</sup> Catriona McAra, *A Surrealist Stratigraphy of Dorothea Tanning's Chasm* (London: Routledge, 2017), p.65.

and space. These fragmented pieces disrupt humanist philosophers' predilection for wholeness and unilateral storytelling to make space for other voices and tales that rupture boundaries. This mode of disaggregation, similarly exhibited in Carrington's inter-textual praxis, is further demonstrated in Chapter Four when Albert and Destina meet and she shows him her memory box. The contents of this box, as well as its further suggestion of bodily distortions, continue to unravel humanist discourse. It foreshadows the violent tropes which permeate the text and thereby speaks to an ontological wildness that divorces it further from Humanism's civilised codes of behaviour. Destina's memory box is in fact a grotesque revision of a children's toy chest, continuing the theme of the surrealist museum in its disparate and abject contents. However, it is conspicuous that Albert is not unsettled by the items inside, as this extract demonstrates:

That the objects were of a surpassing strangeness affected him not at all. While she reached into the box, pulling out bits of fur, the claws and tails of gila monsters, skins of reptiles, spotted eggs, even single eyes preserved in tiny jars, nothing reached him but the eerie silver web of her voice and the superb reality of her nearness.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the monstrous body parts that stare back at Albert, he is not affected by their strangeness. Rather, it is as if he is intoxicated by a new way of seeing – a new defamiliarised ontology that Destina etches before him. Her capacity to forge original, and I suggest, posthuman ways of seeing, is manifest in the recurrent reference to eyes in this section of the chapter, indicative of a shift towards a post-anthropocentric ontology. Rather than be disgusted by an eye floating in a 'creamy and gelatinous fluid' and another

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<sup>88</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.55. Gila monsters are venomous and carnivorous lizards who inhabit southwest United States and Mexico. They live much of their lives underground or in rocky caverns and can reach up to 30 years of age. They are an endangered species.

described as a 'blue-white globe, veined with red' – evidence of the desert lion's recent hunt - Albert appears to long to know more, bringing him into the proximity of this child's wild inside-out space.<sup>89</sup> It is a defamiliarised and disorientating slippage within a liminal sphere, countering the delineations and boundary lines which divide human and non-human geographies. Similarly, it speaks to a muddling of the categorical epistemologies that underpins Christian story telling. The episode marks the beginning of a non-androcentric trajectory that leads Albert and his fiancée Nadine out of Windcote and into the untamed space of the desert chasm, where Destina's lion counterpart resides. This vertiginous slippage, where corporeal fragments of the wild outside coincide with the domestic space of the child's nursery, disrupts configurations of it as a realm contained and controlled by its male choreographer, Raoul Meridian. More so, the cross-over between these domains speaks to an eruption of such boundaries and enables an anthropological exodus from Meridian's confines; an exodus highlighted in Albert's surname and one that alludes to the Book of Exodus in the Bible as I will show. The spilling over of the memory box's contents from what McAra terms a 'vagina-like threshold', speaks to the birth of an erupting violence in the novel; a violence that gives voice to Destina and her governess Nelly.<sup>90</sup>

Destina's open memory box mobilises Carter's concept of a Sadeian feminism, where the violence that the lion wreaks, seen in Destina's keepsake, resonates with Nelly's later homicidal actions as we move towards an increasingly savage denouement. The box is an important motif which speaks to the child's own, mystical and inner forces and second sight which threaten the structure and foundation of humanist reason. As Conley asserts, Tanning's 'female figures are alive with rushing inner forces',<sup>91</sup> adding that Destina's own 'inner knowledge [...] grants her access to mysterious forces that can arouse terror in

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<sup>89</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.56.

<sup>90</sup> McAra, *A Surrealist Stratigraphy*, p.70.

<sup>91</sup> Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, p.120.

adults.<sup>92</sup> Tanning's work recurrently exhibits the eruption of women's repressed power and knowledge as a counter to patriarchal containment, where their hitherto denied will and desire spill over in visually disturbing scenes. The body parts that stare back at Albert from the memory box foreshadow further transgressive eruptions in the novel and speak to violent disaggregations which take place in a way that disables Humanism's modes of reason and linear order. These inner forces that burst forth in her female characters are recurrent themes seen, not just in the vision of Destina's subversive actions, but also in Tanning's paintings of the 1940s which re-envisage women's roles. Her revised female characters resonate with Sade's unconventional reflections upon how women should be understood.<sup>93</sup> Mahon explains these Sadeian reconfigurations in a way that addresses Tanning's implicit feminism here:

Sade's female roles go beyond the traditional feminine body – of mother and whore, young virgin and old crone – and focus on the female as libertine philosopher. This new imago may be of any age and brings the body and mind seamlessly together in libertine acts and speech.<sup>94</sup>

Destina is a character who, despite her youth, explodes these concepts of a 'traditional feminine body' in the way she circumnavigates Raoul's rule and that she treasures her memory box's macabre contents. I suggest that both examples are 'libertine acts' which thwart her guardian's tyranny. However, it is in Chapter Nine that Tanning unleashes the

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<sup>92</sup> Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, p.122.

<sup>93</sup> Key paintings such as *Children's Games* (1942) and *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943) present young girls who share parallels with Destina. In *Children's Games* we see these subversive figures tearing at the wallpaper in a manner that threatens the integrity of the domestic space and so they assert their own violent and rebellious desires. Katharine Conley argues in *Surrealist Ghostliness* that they have 'energy to spare – energy that activates everything around them, from the hallway to the natural world outside', p.126.

<sup>94</sup> Mahon, *The Marquis de Sade and the Avant-Garde*, p.4.

most shockingly brutal episodes in the novel where the long-suffering Governess savagely stabs and murders Windcote's feared patriarch; an event that is most convincingly a Sadeian feminist and libertine act in the way that Mahon posits. Nelly's revenge upon Raoul is a visceral attack which resonates with Carter's conception of a Sadeian feminism, reversing phallogocentric Christian tales of active/passive and male/female binaries in an unapologetically ferocious spectacle. She traps Raoul in his bedroom, apparently duping him into believing that they are about to play one of his sado-masochistic sex games. Whilst he is vocal about his longing for Nadine, he complies with Nelly's proposed game as she promises to perform the role of his designated *femme-enfant*. Tanning proceeds to describe him in terms every bit as grotesque as the way that Destina's memory box contents are etched. It is a macabre scene that is a direct attack upon Meridian and his tyrannical rule of power. Here, Tanning sets the murder scene, with Nelly poised to attack:

She studied the mucid cavern of his mouth as it opened to swallow the world, this purple grotto emitting sound. And the hole in his belly - it was only a navel but it too was whispering [...] she drew out from her skirts the ice pick, and grasping it with both hands brought it down at the center of his big neck, and as soon pulled it out, releasing a tiny red jet like a toy fountain.<sup>95</sup>

Here Meridian is reduced to a passive role as Nelly turns his lust against him, emphasising his orifices of open mouth and navel as though to suggest his penetrable vulnerability. Tanning distances him from his androcentric position of power, speaking instead to his animal and corporeal frame, reducing him to components that mirror the contents of Destina's memory box. In this way her writing performs what Braidotti would describe as a

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<sup>95</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.107.

posthuman 'Dis-identification from dominant models', enacting a defamiliarised mode of story-telling that disrupts patriarchally led tales. No longer a subservient domestic servant in a nurturing role, Nelly is empowered in this moment of violence where in unleashing her murderous will, she rewrites the role of passive female determined by Christian narratives by repeatedly stabbing her employer and keeper. Meridian's patriarchal power is similarly subverted: he is characterised instead by a defamiliarised role reversal where it is he who is the victim of an unwanted penetration, symbolised by the stabbing. McAra explains that the scene enacts an empowering revision of gendered roles:

The scene verges on a renegotiation of the spectacle, not just for its multi-sensory textures but because it reverses the traditional phallic/uterine, active/passive roles usually ascribed to masculine and feminine. During the attack the abuser becomes the abused and is disembodied from life to corpse, from object to abject as we find a role reversal of the traditional rape scene. Raoul's abuse of Nelly is avenged as she 'penetrates' him in the only logical way possible.<sup>96</sup>

The fact that it is Nelly who performs this violent act is significant and speaks to an emphatic example of defamiliarising female violence. Raoul's body is brutalised by a person who is not only a woman but one who figures as a typically subordinated example, both in her position as a servant within the Windcote mansion as well as surrogate mother figure to Destina. The fact that it is this woman, a figure in the role of care giver as well as prostitute to Meridian's sexual needs makes her penetrative act of murder conspicuously defamiliar. The way her murderous act depicts the most extreme estrangement from her passive position forcefully highlights the abusive way women are treated in patriarchal

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<sup>96</sup> McAra, 'Sadeian Women: Erotic Violence in the Surrealist Spectacle', p.85.

tales, where Meridian's brutalised body shocks not because of the murder itself necessarily, but because it is a homicide enacted by a formerly passive woman upon her tyrannical master.<sup>97</sup> Tanning's writing here exhibits a 'Sadean Imagination' in that it 'opens up violence for the male *and* female artist' signifying a 'refusal to restrict sadism and masochism, violence and suffering to strict sexual and gender or libidinal and destructive divides.'<sup>98</sup>

Whilst Tanning describes Nelly as feeling disgusted after the murder, it is not so much a revulsion at her crime that she experiences, but more a sense of horror at the spectacle of Raoul's inside-out body. Rather than experiencing shame at her own savagery, Tanning suggests that she becomes a higher being following her transgression, where a 'ray of first sunlight touched the top of her head like a halo.'<sup>99</sup> In this way Tanning performs a textual rupture that exposes the wrongs of androcentric control by turning it upon itself. Discussing both Carrington and Tanning, McAra notes how this transgressive approach suggests the surrealist collage technique, but one with a subversive feminist edge:

Following the inherent violence of Max Ernst's cut-and-paste collages found in works such as *La Femme 100 Tetes* (*The Hundred Headless Woman*) (1929), Carrington and Tanning appear to go even further than

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<sup>97</sup> Barbara Creed's work on the 'monstrous feminine' is illuminating here. She discusses how the dominant interpretation of women in horror films is that of victims. However, Creed considers in her treatise how women are also constructed, and perceived, as monsters arguing that they primarily terrify, not because they represent castration but because of the threat of their becoming a castrating agent. More specifically, Creed looks to the example of the female monster as castrator inspired by surrealist art: 'As well as its expression in surrealist art [...], the myth of the *vagina dentata* is extremely prevalent.[...] the myth states that women are terrifying because they have teeth in their vaginas and that women must be tamed or the teeth somehow removed or softened – usually by a hero figure – before intercourse can safely take place', *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1993), p.2. The way in which Creed investigates a reversal of gender politics in examples from film, as well as her fruitful examination of monstrous women and the politics they engender, speak to a similar rewrite taking place in Tanning's novel.

<sup>98</sup> Mahon, *The Marquis de Sade and the Avant-Garde*, p.22, p.23.

<sup>99</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.108.

their male peers, violently slashing through prescribed fairy tale constructions of femininity by using magical, ravenous animals as their trusty familiars or daemons to bite into, or disenchant, reality.<sup>100</sup>

Whilst Nelly herself does not have a trusty animal familiar, the allusion to Destina's lion in her savage act of violence catalyses such a liberating mode of female empowerment more widely, where the symbol of Destina's memory box opens enabling portals for other characters in the novel. As McAra explains, such violence cuts up and thus reconfigures Christian fairy tales in a way which emancipates the female voice. I posit that this mode creates a defamiliarised landscape which disrupts the parameters of Humanism and its tidy, predictable narratives. Meridian's death marks the novel's final emancipatory shift towards the desert chasm to which the title refers, where the characters' escape from his fortress of power takes the key cast members deeper into a posthuman feminist territory. In this space, the wild and post-androcentric ontologies, modelled in Destina's memory box, thrive and conjure new posthuman trajectories, as the seven-year-old protagonist seizes the narrative's reins.

In the final episodes I examine in *Chasm*, I suggest that Tanning turns her attention towards a further radical revision of Bible narratives in her focus upon Albert Exodus and his pseudo-pilgrimage to witness Destina in the desert with her lion companion. Albert's surname Exodus suggests a provocative allusion to the Bible's Book of Exodus where the Israelites are released from slavery at the hands of the Egyptians, prompted by a series of plagues unleashed upon them by the angry Christian God. Whilst there are no plagues in *Chasm* and no discernible gods, Albert, and his ex-fiancée Nadine, do embark upon a quest to encounter Destina and the lion on a seemingly spiritual journey through the desert wilds; one that could be considered a defamiliarised and posthuman revision of the

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<sup>100</sup> McAra, 'Sadeian Women: Erotic Violence in the Surrealist Spectacle', p.81-82.

Israelites' own journey through the desert in order to seek a homeland and thus a connection with their own Christian God. As Tanning explains, in *Destina*, Albert 'believed he saw his salvation', indicative of Moses's and the Israelites' own encounters with their Christian God on Mount Sinai in the Bible during the Book of Exodus.<sup>101</sup>

Albert's and Nadine's is an adventure of spectacular and cinematic proportions; one that addresses the Biblical scale and magnitude of the Israelites' own Christian pilgrimage in its drama, but one that I suggest culminates in a feminist revision. Such feminist politics are rendered in Tanning's defamiliarised vision of the young female *Destina* as a spiritual force, reconfiguring the angry Christian god that Carrington critiques in *The Hearing Trumpet*. Moreover, Tanning conjures the desert itself as a feminised corporeal sphere similarly anticipating a posthuman feminism. The filmic mode she adopts to construct this scene is demonstrative of a further defamiliarisation from Christian dogmatic tales, seen in Exodus where the Bible text is repeatedly peddled to justify androcentrism. Tanning's cinematic revision speaks to the fictive spectacle of all stories – including Christian ones - drawing on film as a medium of excess in order to expose the malleability of stories as well as highlight them as fantastical scripts that are constructions rather than templates of truth. The sense that Tanning is behind a camera splashing her story across a vast cinematic screen also redirects the audience to view anew through a female gaze, one that over-rides the androcentric lens that typifies Christian story telling exemplified by the Book of Exodus.

It is Albert's 'absolute certainty of *Destina*'s rendez-vous with her "friend"' that tempts him out to see her with Nadine with whom he now has a strained relationship.<sup>102</sup> He feels increasingly estranged from her following his encounter with the mystical child, whilst Nadine's openly flirtatious relationship with Meridian has further exacerbated their

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<sup>101</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.112.

<sup>102</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.112.

distance from one another. In the early pages of the novel, Tanning depicts Nadine as a vain character who is held back and anchored by her beauty, marking her out as Marian's opposite number aesthetically. It is a beauty that limits her as it marks the reductive lens through which the world sees her, caught perpetually in the web of the male gaze. Tanning describes it as a feature that isolates her, functioning as a sort of physical handicap: 'Powerful, insidious beauty was her burden, as heavy as an infirmity.'<sup>103</sup> Her 'burden' contrasts with Marian Leatherby's sense of emancipation which is triggered by her nonagenarian status; one enabling her to eat on a tram with hedonistic abandon. Raoul's invitation to join him at Windcote is intoxicating to Nadine, a further endorsement of a beauty that has been taught to require constant reaffirmation. In her expedition through the desert, we witness how she experiences an awakening that neutralises such human vanity as well as one which results in the violent and grotesque deaths of the couple who meet their gruesome ends in the depths of a rocky chasm.

The estranged couple immerse themselves in the desertscape in their efforts to glimpse Destina and her lion, with Albert acknowledging cryptically that 'He had not come this far before.'<sup>104</sup> They climb jutting rocks and clamber across crags in his belief that their height will provide the best vantage point to witness Destina. Nadine becomes increasingly frustrated by Albert's quest, cynical about his dogmatic belief that Destina represents a spiritual awakening. But he is convinced of the young girl's powers and is enraptured when she finally appears upon a distant hill:

Crossing the sage-dotted hill walked the figure of a child. So small, white-clad, and clearly feminine, it gleamed like phosphorus in the cool light. [...]  
It was easy to make out the little figure, even without binoculars, and

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<sup>103</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.25.

<sup>104</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.118.

Nadine watched now without them. Albert stood beside her, yet apart, transfixed. Their stares followed the figure, [...] her white effulgence, her resolute crossing of sand and hillock, moving between rocks as on a cardboard stage.<sup>105</sup>

The reference to 'sage' dotting the hills is a significant one in that it belongs to the *genus salvia* meaning 'to save', emphasising how Albert deems the experience as one of spiritual connection and rescue. In this way Tanning further alludes to the Book of Exodus and exercises a radical revision and feminist re-appraisal. In the Bible version, Moses similarly experiences an encounter with God upon Mount Sinai where the Ten Commandments are pronounced. This pronouncement and visitation by God strengthen the Israelites' religious convictions and galvanises their quest as they continue on the path to a promised land. Tanning replaces the male Christian God with a seven-year-old girl who is entangled with the wilds of the desert-cape. It is indicative of a posthuman and feminist revision that destabilises and critiques the essentialisms of androcentric Christian storytelling. Tanning's poetic and seductive description of Destina's 'phosphorous' gleaming speaks to the lens through which Albert sees her, her white glow suggestive of his perception of her as a deity facilitating the 'salvation' he craves.

McAra notes how Tanning's appropriation of 'phosphorous' as a descriptor for Destina alludes to the Western film genre with which she was fascinated. She proposes that 'film is much more important to feminist readings of her practice than previously understood'<sup>106</sup> and that she performs an autotopographic<sup>107</sup> revision of the genre, bringing

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<sup>105</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.123.

<sup>106</sup> Catriona McAra, 'Glowing Like Phosphorous: Dorothea Tanning and the Sedona Western', *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, 10:1 (2019), 84-105 (p.85).

<sup>107</sup> McAra applies an autotopographical reading to *Chasm*, drawing upon Mieke Bal's essay 'Autotopography: Louise Bourgeois as Builder', *Biography*, 25:1 (Winter 2002), pp.180-202. McAra explains in 'Glowing Like Phosphorous', 'If Bal's autotopography is a "spatial, local, and situational

the geologies of the landscape to the fore. McAra further suggests that the white glow frequently employed as a filmic device in Westerns in order to convey the female character's innocent femininity, is re-employed by Tanning as a glow that empowers such figures in a more subversive manner:

[Tanning] conjure[s] the phosphoric spark and fizzle of the Hollywood siren, and Destina is endowed with an otherworldly power like the red rock landscape with which she is in cahoots. The chasm becomes a character as well as a scenic backdrop, a darker force of nature, ready to engulf the adult baddies.<sup>108</sup>

McAra's reference to Destina being 'in cahoots' with this landscape is a significant and posthuman one, speaking to nature as an agentive force that has the capacity to forge a feminist politics as discussed in Chapter Two. The allusion to Western film here also demonstrates Tanning's inter-textual method that has parallels with Carrington's approach, where a melding of texts and sources is instrumental in enabling her radical revision of patriarchal tales.

Tanning presents Albert's presumed spiritual awakening as a self-indulged fiction in the way she consciously constructs the scene as a film set here, describing how Destina moves between the rocks 'as on a cardboard stage'. Similarly, Albert's belief in his spiritual rescue is further undone by Nadine, who instead of being swept up in religious fervour like her former fiancé, views Destina as simply a child who should not be wandering around alone at night. Whilst Albert is caught in a spiritual torpor by 'the little form' who gave to

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'writing' of the self's life in visual art," then Tanning's *Chasm* can be read as a self-portrait, or, more precisely, a displaced autobiography', p.86.

<sup>108</sup> McAra, 'Glowing Like Phosphorous', p.102.

him ‘the only dream he would ever need’,<sup>109</sup> Nadine instead pragmatically insists that they need to ‘call to her, go help her?’<sup>110</sup> In this episode Nadine has an awakening of her own, perceiving Albert as a figure of ridicule in the same way that Carrington satirises the patristic Dr Gambit in *The Hearing Trumpet*. Dismissively, she screams at him in rage for wasting her time as she sees the spiritual quest for the illusory mirage that it really is:

There was no mystery, there was only a man’s caprice. There was no adventure, only a promise unkept, no lions or anything else to see, only a silly boast and a man ignominious awe of a little child, a man empty of all potential. She saw the figure on the opposite hill as no more than a further irritation, eccentric in its pursuit of nothing, an implement of confusion and dismay.<sup>111</sup>

Nadine’s attack upon Albert foreshadows the physical violence to come; in her rage she espouses a rhetoric that could extend to a critique of all dogmatic religious belief systems which places the human at the centre and all others blindly follow. She recognises the emptiness of their quest, bringing Albert’s spiritual elevation to ground, seeing only a ‘fake!’ and a ‘little child’. The lion, a creature recurrently functioning as God in Christian narratives, fails to appear with Destina and so brings Tanning’s tale firmly into a secular sphere in her grounded and defamiliarised fairy tale.<sup>112</sup> The disparity between Albert and Nadine becomes heightened, where their growing incandescence with each other

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<sup>109</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.125.

<sup>110</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.126.

<sup>111</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.126.

<sup>112</sup> C. S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) is perhaps the most famous example of a lion functioning as a Christian symbol in twentieth-century literature. Through the lion character, Aslan, Lewis creates a Christian allegory intimating that a world without Christianity would be one of sufferance. Aslan’s sacrificial death to save Edmund’s life and his resurrection are read as alluding to a role that mirrors that of Christ.

transmutes into a physical altercation. When Nadine springs at Albert in retaliation for his strike at her, he steps back and drops into the blackness below. The ‘two dull thuds’ confirming Albert’s fall brings Nadine into a posthuman sphere, where rather than experiencing a spiritual awakening, she finds herself in a defamiliarised and post-androcentric space. She becomes further estranged from the environs of a religious grand narrative instead realising that for ‘the first time in her life she was aware of nature’; one distanced from her former humanist perceptions of it as a passive and pretty thing that exists solely for her aesthetic pleasure:

It wasn’t at all the nature she had always coveted, it was something else: a cruel, laughing force extravagantly beyond her notions and, above all, indifferent to her existence. All around her in this stony vastness were energetic signs of shared life [...] She would not know that to get to the lion was a long journey leading from the louse on the leaf’s underside through all the creatures of the earth’s mastery;<sup>113</sup>

Nadine’s new perspective is indicative of an awakened, entangled approach to nature, recalling the materialist themes I discuss in Chapter Two, where she notes the ‘energetic signs of shared life.’ This epiphanic moment recognises the inter-connected dynamic that drives the natural world and invokes a posthuman understanding of life distanced from the individualism of Albert’s own spiritual quest that is driven by self and salvation. This androcentric individualist mode is one that Tanning implicitly critiques in her radical revision of the Book of Exodus populated by Christian believers who are looking to save themselves. Whilst Tanning does put Christianity’s reference to all creatures great and small on the map here in her recognition of the ‘louse’, it is not as components which

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<sup>113</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.129.

hierarchically situate Humanism's superior position, but as ontologies that interweave across a continuum of entanglements. In this way she eschews Christian narratives which assert the mastery of a male god overseeing a populace of fakes seeking their own salvation – like Albert – reconfiguring them for a posthuman realm where a host of creaturely ontologies co-mingle. Importantly, Tanning does not idealise this space, estranging it from the reverence with which Albert perceives his spiritual awakening with Destina in the desert. Rather, through Nadine, she dispenses with modes of glorification that characterise Christian story telling instead acknowledging the natural world as a 'cruel, laughing force'; a force where the instinct to survive demands a sometimes savage and violent approach. It is a theme demonstrated by the corporeal remnants of Destina's memory box and in Meridian's brutal murder and speaks to the motifs of rupture and disaggregation which mobilise Tanning's defamiliarised tale; a story whose dramatic finale in the deaths of Albert and Nadine charts its surreal course away from the androcentrisms of Bible stories.

The vision of grotesque entrails in the memory box and Raoul's stabbing returns in the spectacle of Albert's dying body, which like that of Windcote's patriarch, becomes penetrated in a gory, rather than glorious conclusion. The desert landscape, repeatedly conjured in terms which evoke female corporeality, has 'impaled him', further reversing the active/passive, male/female Cartesian dynamic that characterises Christian tales. Like Meridian, Albert is pierced by an agentive female, both in the way that it is Nadine's remonstrations which lead to his fall but also in the way that his body is impaled upon a female landscape. In the same way as Meridian's body is turned inside out by Nelly's stabbing, Tanning highlights Albert's mutilation in a bloody account, invoking Carter's Sadeian feminist politics once more:

He was aware of the mutilation of his body as one contemplates the pieces of porcelain that cannot be mended, wistfully and regretfully, yet with recognition of a completed catastrophe. He felt the stealthy slipping away of his entrails, the busy flowing of his blood as an event, momentous and authentic. His hands were already numb. They would not hold on for long.<sup>114</sup>

Albert's plunge into oblivion is not one where his spiritual quest is rewarded but one that confronts him with the raw animality of his mortal human body, where his 'entrails' are no different from the creaturely contents of Destina's memory box. Like Nadine's posthuman awakening to the entangled materiality of the earth, the ensuing spectacle of Albert's death is not one mired in religious glory and elevation but instead a vision that exposes the fictive nature of Christianity's tales of human exceptionalism. The feminist politics of his mortal culmination within a seemingly female landscape is suggestive of the Sadeian feminism that Carter speaks to.

The desertscape's repeated appearance as feminised landscape, characterised by crags and crevices as well as the chasm to which the novel's title refers, is one that points to the female body as a defamiliarised sphere; not one that speaks to the passivity of women as they appear in Christian narratives. Rather, these female landscapes are cruel and perilous as Nadine asserts in her posthuman re-appraisal of nature. The vagina-like form that McAra likens to the desert formation that ultimately kills Albert, is not a receptive, submissive female space to be dominated but instead a pointed threat that rewrites the male/female active/passive binary. This is an angular and dangerous femininity that subverts fairy tale visions into Sadeian figures, who are capable of inflicting the same pain back upon their victimisers. Carter's explanation of how a feminist appropriation of

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<sup>114</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.130-131.

such Sadeian politics can enable women to erupt from their prescribed roles in Christian narratives, is a thinking that resonates with Tanning's own subversive praxis. In this way, she defamiliarises violence in her tale by positioning women as its instigator:

[...] if he [Sade] invented women who suffered, he also invented women who caused suffering. The hole the pornographer Sade leaves in his text is just sufficient for flaying; for a castration. It is a hole large enough for women to see themselves as if the fringed hole of graffiti were a spy hole into a territory that had been forbidden to them.<sup>115</sup>

Tanning disempowers the male characters giving voice to a female sphere which is galvanised by its kinship with an inherent and brutal animality that harnesses their desires. The violence in the novel that causes considerable male suffering is a rupture that speaks to such animality and the cruel nature that Nadine identifies. Importantly, such violence also unleashes a feminist will that has been suppressed by the patriarchal trajectories of Christian storytelling, where women feature as passive, peripheral figures. Nelly's position is a typical example as I have discussed, where her designated role as educator and maternal surrogate initially suggests her as a fairy tale stereotype. Through violence however she shakes off the reductive and confining employs that cast her aside, destabilising Christian storytelling to assert a Sadeian figure who takes charge of her own destiny. In the novel's final violent act, Tanning also rewrites the male surrealists' subjugation of the *femme-enfant* who appears in the guise of Nadine; a character whose name's proximity to André Breton's own *femme-enfant* in the novel *Nadja* (1928) cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p.36.

<sup>116</sup> André Breton's *Nadja* (1928) documents a woman's descent into madness, attempting to invoke the male surrealists' fantasy of a kind of female mania. In the tale he imagines and plays out the

As I have alluded to, Nadine is a woman with whom Meridian is sexually obsessed. She is portrayed as a puppet, one who too easily submits to the will of the male gaze which is captivated by her sexuality and beauty. In the desert, Albert acknowledges her as 'Beautiful Nadine' even when his own attraction to her has dwindled as he anticipates his salvation via Destina and the lion. I suggest that Nadine's willingness to submit to Meridian's autocracy positions her as an accomplice in his patriarchal power play and as a result, leaves her vulnerable to Tanning's fierce rewrite. The religious symbolism of the lion, intimated by Albert's excited anticipation of an encounter with the creature, is abruptly rewritten in the moment of the animal's confrontation with Nadine. Not a deliverer of salvation or an initiate of human exceptionalism, the lion is instead an example of nature's violent savagery. After cornering Nadine upon a 'jagged point', he tears off her face in a macabre spectacle. Tanning's cool and restrained description of her death is a defamiliarised vision that betrays the Gothic horror of Nadine's end:

For a while he did not seem to be aware of the figure under him but looked steadily into the spaces of the dark. Then he bent down, raised his paw and began to tear at the face. Soon he finished, moved away, and disappeared behind the ledge. The body of Nadine lay as it had fallen [...] But there was no longer a face.<sup>117</sup>

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figure of femme-enfant Nadja as one who is supposedly emancipated from logic in order to embrace a poetic and spiritual terrain. Ultimately it is a novel that explores the male psyche rather than functioning as a genuine interrogation of female madness. For that, Carrington's *Down Below* (1944), explored in Chapter Five, functions as a more robust examination of the topic. Meridian's attempted seduction of Nadia in *Chasm* brings to mind the older man and vulnerable young female dynamic that Breton constructs in *Nadja*. But Nadine's superficial vanity and quest for sexual affirmation is brought to ground in Tanning's novel where she experiences an existential awakening in the desert, shortly before her savage death.

<sup>117</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.136.

This brutal episode both rewrites a phallogocentric culture that defines women via the scopophilic gaze, but also exhibits a posthuman politics that decentres the human and thus the Christian narrative that peddles human exceptionalism. The lion's incarnation as a wild beast of nature rather than a vehicle of Christian story telling is emphasised in the manner that his violence against Nadine is almost incidental, where at first 'he did not seem aware of the figure under him'. Even in death, she is not especially chosen or selected as Christian tales would tell us, but mere animal prey to another, so unworthy of his attention that he does not even bother to eat her. Tanning's deployment of violence here offers a radical rewriting of fairy tale and Christian thinking, de-masking it as a fiction in the same way that Nadine's own superficial beauty can be stripped away and laid bare. Her death, like Albert's, is not glorified in a deified moment of connection but instead mired in its own materiality that connects them both to the earth from which they came.

Nadine's awakening to the power of nature after Albert's death is galvanised further in the moments before her own as her imminent encounter with the lion confronts her with a truth unencumbered by the myth or fantasy of fairy tale. Noting how 'this beast, he knows it all', she is led towards a final awakening that the old woman of Windcote, a side-lined and forgotten crone until now, was in fact privy to the truth of the desert's power all along.<sup>118</sup> On the cusp of her own ending, Nadine recognises how the lion is, in fact, like the old woman of the tale, exclaiming, 'She knew, she knew!'<sup>119</sup> This woman, referred to as the baroness, has until this moment, figured as a voiceless crone who the party endures at best or at worst, chooses to ignore. She recalls Carrington's Marian Leatherby character in *The Hearing Trumpet*, whose frail, aged body prompts such disgust in her own family members that they forcibly remove her from their sight to an institution. However, as we move towards the final chapter of *Chasm*, the baroness proves to be as

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<sup>118</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.135-136.

<sup>119</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.136.

pivotal to this radical retelling as Marian is to Carrington's revised Holy Grail quest; a wise figure, who despite her frail appearance, wields extraordinary power and knowledge that connects her to Destina in a cyclical dynamic.

The baroness is the antithesis of Nadine, empowered by her temporal estrangement from Nadine's *femme-enfant* and thereby an agentive player in the plot rather than a peripheral or demonised old woman of traditional Christian fairy tales. Like Marian, the baroness catalyses a new post-anthropocentric tale that escapes the confines of Windcote. She and Destina discover their kinship as a great grandmother and grandchild who share a second sight, and they move from Meridian's fortress of patriarchal power to the baroness's home. Meridian is not only side-lined by his death but also eschewed in the way that he is swiftly forgotten by Destina as she embarks upon a new life with her grandmother who encourages her to continue to roam the desert as she once did. Their reunion mobilises a new temporality for them but also a new spatiality beyond the imprisoning borders of Windcote where the baroness's promise to tell Destina 'about the stars', brings the tale into a new, secular cosmos. It is a space that resonates with the posthuman landscape Carrington evokes on the final page of *The Hearing Trumpet*, thus acquiring a 'planetary dimension'.<sup>120</sup> Rather than be mired in an androcentric ending that instils Christian didacticism, Tanning, like Carrington, conjures a posthuman and connected milieu where the grandmother's home is characterised by birds in 'the trees and on the wind...', not in cages.<sup>121</sup> In this space, 'Most of their attention was for the outside' and Windcote's trapped aviary birds are returned to 'their Costa Rican forests' in a symbol of their ensuing freedom.<sup>122</sup> As I have argued, the emancipatory conclusion of the novel is achieved through a violence that speaks to Braidotti's calls for 'conceptual disobedience' in order to provoke a post-anthropocentric politics. The recurrent visions of disaggregated

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<sup>120</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.89.

<sup>121</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.151.

<sup>122</sup> Tanning, *Chasm*, p.152.

bodies and surrealist bricolage stitched together in new incarnations invokes a violence in Tanning's novel in order to perform a revolutionary and textual rupture, where Albert's 'Exodus' facilitates Destina's future within a secular, posthuman realm.

### Conclusion

The transgressive behaviour exhibited in both Tanning's and Carrington's work, empowers and mobilises a feminist politics in the way that they radically reimagine Christian themed stories which recurrently subjugate the female. Discussing *Chasm* and *The Debutante* in particular, McAra observes how the sadistic acts of defacement and devouring the *other* demonstrates how 'these tales can be read as feminist in terms of their Sadeian interrogation and re-visioning of the masculine narrative of the castration complex.'<sup>123</sup> In this chapter I have investigated the extent to which Braidotti's call for modes of defamiliarisation in order to combat humanist discourse are manifest in Carrington's and Tanning's work, suggesting that their prescient posthumanist approach to story-writing forges radical and feminist re-tellings. This chapter has focused upon defamiliarising modes of humour/play and violence to develop the argument that these surrealist writers enact posthuman revisions of Christian oriented tales, examining in particular how they disaggregate both corporeality and texts themselves. In this way both Carrington and Tanning creatively un-hinge their stories from fixed androcentric templates, violently and humorously carving them into feminist narratives which set a course upon posthuman trajectories. Such an approach resonates with Braidotti's call for a 'Dis-identification from dominant models' in order to achieve a more balanced milieu. Their recurrent visions of fragmented bodies, subjectivities and texts, achieved through violence and dark comedy, disrupt Humanism's predilection for wholeness and individualism exemplified in the Vitruvian male template. This vision dictates its recourse towards one master narrative that

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<sup>123</sup> McAra, 'Sadeian Women: Erotic Violence in the Surrealist Spectacle', p.82.

fails to give voice to those outside of its doctrines of androcentric perfection - where Christian narratives force feed a moral resolution that complies with a patriarchal rule underpinned by human exceptionalism. Rather, Carrington's and Tanning's surrealist stories exhibit the dissonant marriage of dismemberment and bodily distortions set within fairy tale and Christian legends in order to explode the parameters of this reductive discourse. As a result, their subversive, secular tales serve as unsettling defamiliarities that calibrate new, posthuman ways of seeing, enabling readers to step beyond a patriarchal-shaped Anthropos towards an open-ended, post-androcentric milieu.

Moving into a new realm and seeing beyond the parameters of Humanism is a key theme of this thesis. I have considered how posthumanism opens up new conceptual, as well as geographical parameters, with Chapter Three's focus upon Latin America as an example of the way in which locations can be re-viewed via this lens. Issues of spatiality are the focus of Chapter Five where I argue that recurrent motifs of liminality and in-betweenness in the work of Bishop, Carrington and Tanning invoke Michel Foucault's 'Heterotopias'. I suggest that these spaces, characterised by their transitional and liminal conventions, forge a terrain that peers beyond Humanism's strictures of Reason to instead fully explore a surreal feminist imaginarium.

## Chapter Five

### Crossing Over into a Heterotopic Posthuman Beyond

In her surrealist memoir *Down Below* (1944), documenting her descent into madness, Leonora Carrington describes how she enters ‘another place’, forging a portal out of a personal crisis and the fascist politics of the Nazi regime.<sup>1</sup> Taking ‘another place’ as a cue, this chapter investigates the way the recurrent motif of crossing beyond a threshold into unconscious and oneiric space in Carrington’s, Bishop’s and Tanning’s work communicates a posthuman politics in their exit from Humanism’s orbit of Cartesian rationality. I argue that these metamorphic spheres are characterised by their shared liminality where female protagonists recurrently occupy in-between realms that speak to the posthuman ‘becoming’ themes of this thesis. To this end, I explore how they over-ride the epistemic fixity of humanist thinking in a way that resonates with Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘Heterotopias’. I suggest that these embody posthuman ‘becoming’ spaces which are typically marginal, transitional or fantastical, and yet still traceable to a real, geographical place. Most significantly I demonstrate how the artists’ and authors’ odyssey beyond androcentricism is not a retreat, but rather an explorative and empowering feminist strategy that anticipates a posthuman approach in its quest to move outside Cartesian frameworks. In the women’s oeuvre identified here unconscious and irrational dreamscapes are not psychoanalytically inflected zones in the way male surrealists imagine them where hysterical, irrational impulses are equated with a passive femininity. Instead, I contend that Bishop’s, Carrington’s and Tanning’s examples eschew such presumptions of a passively experienced, irrational unconsciousness for one that is active and agentive. I maintain that these ‘becoming’ journeys towards such liminal and metamorphic terrains

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<sup>1</sup> Leonora Carrington, *Down Below* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2017), p.xx.

are not necessarily etched as utopic or transcendental manoeuvres but are more often portrayed as grounded and visceral experiences where an active female approach is manifest.

Beginning with an analysis of Carrington's *Down Below* I consider how what she labels as 'limited Reason' is confronted with the 'marvellous' in her journey towards a surreal chthonic terrain, where her traumatic episode of insanity forces open a posthuman portal.<sup>2</sup> It is an expansive space which, as Natalya Lusty explains, allows her to actively 'acquire a new kind of knowledge about the self and its non-rational modes of operation.'<sup>3</sup> The portals that Carrington forges via her liminal and 'marvellous' contact zones are similarly exhibited in Bishop's Paris poems where I show how the oneiric flux of her dream poetry exteriorises the interior in dynamic and affective poetics. Bishop's melding of unconscious and conscious states in poems which reside in a liminal, early morning milieu are further explored via speakers who are heterotopically positioned, looking down upon the city from an apartment window. In this way she enacts her belief that there is no split between conscious and unconscious space, eschewing about these modes of human experience. Tanning's seemingly dismissive comment that in Galesburg where she grew up 'nothing happens but the wallpaper' is a fruitful starting point for an analysis of how her female subjects repeatedly take issue with walls in order to seek what lies beyond them.<sup>4</sup> In the same way that Bishop's dreamscapes coincide with an agentive wallpaper in one of her Paris poems, revealing the fantastical realm that exists beyond it, so too do we witness sentient wallpaper at work in Tanning's early paintings and later soft sculptures as she explores an otherworldly locus. I demonstrate how her subjects' quest to attack the wallpaper's surface signals both rebellion, but also a fascination with what simmers beyond rational boundaries. Tanning's heterotopic domains give voice to a powerful feminist

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<sup>2</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.9.

<sup>3</sup> Natalya Lusty, 'Surrealism's Banging Door', *Textual Practice*, 17.2 (2003), 335-356 (p.344).

<sup>4</sup> Victoria Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations* (London: Lund Humphries, 2020), p.12.

politics that overrides the passivity that male surrealists equate with female hysteria and madness. Rather, Tanning's figures, who emerge from beyond the walls, are emancipated by their embrace with irrational experience in a surreal milieu that I define as a posthuman beyond.

Rosi Braidotti's critique of Humanism is, in part, driven by the way in which it prizes consciousness rooted in reason and rationality, thus failing to open up to a spectrum of posthuman beyond space. Cartesian thinking recurrently positions rationalism as a superior force with which to confirm human exceptionalism. For Braidotti it is an inhibiting presumption that fails to grasp the full continuum of human and non-human experience. In Chapter One I discussed how the human species' resistance to our own animal ontology, for example, leads to a constricted existence governed by a 'rapacious, predatory, unthankful' consciousness where we fail to acknowledge our interconnection with other species to our cost.<sup>5</sup> Braidotti explains how Humanism's prized claim upon consciousness as a superior force is, 'far from being an act of vertical transcendence', representative of 'an act of inner invasion' that 'constitutes literally the folding and holding within of forces originating from the outside.'<sup>6</sup> She describes how 'the image of the neural human container is inadequate and needs to be updated and replaced by flows and distributed processes instead.'<sup>7</sup> I take Humanism's image of the 'neural human container' – the receptacle of human consciousness - as a symbol that Carrington, Bishop and Tanning challenge and hold to account. I suggest that not only does their work peek inside this so-called 'container', but they also let its contents spill out, thwarting the presumed exceptionalism of humanist reason and consciousness, thus exploding the boundaries that Cartesian thinkers cling to. Whilst this exploration of what lies beyond human consciousness is a theme that we also

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<sup>5</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p.122.

<sup>6</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p.122.

<sup>7</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), pp.14-15.

witness in the work of male surrealists, their position is one that recurrently insists upon experiencing the unconscious sphere as a passive landscape. Anna Watz explains that ‘Many surrealist ideas about how to compel the conscious, rational ego to retract and thus allow irrational unconscious impulses and desires free reign involve simulating a state of passivity’, with Breton insisting that surrealist writing involved placing oneself ‘in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind’ as possible.<sup>8</sup> To be passive was to be receptive to a mode that he and the male surrealists persistently conflated with femininity. I show how Carrington’s, Bishop’s and Tannings’ construction of heterotopias overrides the binary essentialisms of humanist thinking. The rupturing of boundaries and consequent slippage between worlds that we witness in the work analysed in this chapter repeatedly models how active and agentive female figures counter the passive femininity that the male surrealists prized as an invocation of unconscious and dream realms. By equating femininity with a passive unconscious, the male surrealists inadvertently reinforce the androcentric dichotomising of Cartesian thinking that prizes rational consciousness, a position that Braidotti’s posthumanist frameworks hold to account:

Central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of ‘difference’ as pejoration. By organising differences on a hierarchical scale of decreasing worth, this humanist subject defined ‘himself’ as much by what ‘he’ excluded from as by what ‘he’ included in ‘his’ self-representation. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behavior, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. Insofar as difference

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<sup>8</sup> Anna Watz, ‘Identity convulsed: Leonora Carrington’s *The House of Fear* and *The Oval Lady*’ in *Surrealist Women’s Writing: A Critical Exploration*, ed. by Anna Watz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p.44. Watz quotes from Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p.26, p.29.

spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as Others.<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, the 'Otherness' Braidotti emphasises here surges to the fore most conspicuously in the women surrealists' creation of liminal spaces that resonate with Foucault's heterotopias. It is a manoeuvre that eschews Humanism's preoccupation with a 'universal rationality' as well as the male surrealists' invocation of a feminised unconscious space. It enables a breaching of thresholds to explore a broader multiverse of experience. Foucault first explores 'heterotopia' in the preface to *The Order of Things* (1966) where he positions it as a term specifically within the context of texts and writing. It is in 'Of Other Spaces' (1986) however that I suggest his vision of heterotopias has most resonance with the women's surrealist work examined in this chapter, where he identifies them as spheres which are both of 'crisis' and of 'deviation.' Positioning them against utopias, he notes how heterotopias are recurrently found within a so-called 'out-side', but one that is locatable within an actual place:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilisation, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites [...] that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely

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<sup>9</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 'Yes, There Is No Crisis. Working Towards the Posthumanities', *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 2.1-2, (2015), 9-20 (p.11).

different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.<sup>10</sup>

Foucault's identification of heterotopias as being 'outside of all places' is key to my posthuman examination of the women surrealists' work of this chapter where in each example their protagonists are enabled by their threshold positioning beyond a specific location. These female writers and artists can be found interrogating the boundary lines between a recognisable place and beyond it in surrealist realms. These spaces communicate the freedoms of a non-rational, unconscious approach whilst also acknowledging its co-existence with consciousness in an oscillatory dynamic. Explaining that heterotopias are most often conspicuous as spaces of crisis or deviation, Foucault cites in-between locations such as rest homes and psychiatric hospitals as examples – a reference especially pertinent to Carrington's *Down Below*. Heterotopias are also significant in illuminating how the surrealist work examined here anticipates a posthuman

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Places', *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p.24). Foucault goes on to compare heterotopia to a mirror explaining that 'it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there', p.24. Heterotopia is a concept explored by a number of cultural geographers including Kevin Hetherington who provides a spatial reading. He cites heterotopias as 'Places of Otherness, sites constituted in relation to other sites by their difference.' More specifically he defines heterotopia as 'places of alternate ordering' and adds that they provide of 'an example of an alternate way of doing things', *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.viii. To reach his findings about heterotopias Hetherington draws upon Louis Marin's analysis of the term utopia. Marin looks back to Thomas More's coinage of utopia where he collapsed two Greek words together: *eu-topia* meaning good place and *ou-topia* meaning no-place or no-where. Marin interrogated the potential of the space between *eu-topia* and *ou-topia* calling it neutral. It is this space that Hetherington identifies as an 'in-between' (p.viii); one he qualifies as an example that elucidates Foucault's heterotopia. He suggests that heterotopia exists in 'this relationship between spaces', p.ix. More recently, Alessia Zinnari has deployed a heterotopic reading of Carrington's *Down Below* in a way that has helped to inform my own posthuman analysis of the memoir. Zinnari similarly emphasises how the ambiguities in *Down Below* can be resolved in viewing this space as a heterotopia and liminal space. She suggests that reading the text through a heterotopic lens facilitates an affirmative reconstruction of the journey Carrington takes through a mental health crisis in order to find her own meaning. She conducts this reading in, "'I was in another place": The Liminal Journey in Leonora Carrington's *Down Below*', in *Leonora Carrington: Living Legacies*, ed. by Ailsa Cox, James Hewison, Michelle Man, Roger Shannon (Malaga: Vernon Press, 2020).

milieu as they are 'capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible.'<sup>11</sup> The plurality of spaces that the women surrealists conjure speaks to such juxtapositions: Carrington is incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital and yet enabled by the 'down below' and marvellous realm of a pavilion within its grounds; Bishop looks out from a Parisian apartment window but at the same time inhabits a transitional milieu caught between wakefulness and the dreams of her unconscious; Tanning's female protagonists are locatable within a mansion hallway or hotel but at the same time enter surreal portals that explode from the walls. I argue that the way their female protagonists occupy these marginal and liminal positions negotiates a slippery path between conscious and unconscious realms which is suggestive of a posthuman strategy. In forging and operating within these liminal realms I explore how Carrington, Bishop and Tanning perform a feminist renegotiation of their experience as silenced, hidden women, both within Cartesian, androcentric culture but also in the way that some male surrealists depicted women as a passive conduit of the unconscious.

**Going 'down below': Carrington's Posthuman 'voyage to the other side of reason.'**

André Breton encouraged Carrington to write her surrealist memoir *Down Below*. The male surrealists were entranced by the topic of female madness believing that young women who lost their grip upon sanity had the potential to serve as a fantastical conduit into the unconscious and irrational. Whitney Chadwick explains that it was the research of French psychiatrist Pierre Janet that fuelled the male surrealists' excitement about the concept of female madness:

In his study of Hysteria, Janet called the ecstatic states of his female patients *l'amour fou*, or mad love; his vision became the basis for Breton's

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<sup>11</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Places', p.25.

belief in the transformative power of the ecstatic state, at once erotic and irrational. Breton was content to maintain the identification of woman with this image of convulsive reality [...] she completes the male vision by absorbing into herself those qualities that man recognizes as important but does not wish to possess himself.<sup>12</sup>

Breton's surrealist novel *Nadja* (1928) is, as Natalya Lusty asserts, 'central to surrealism's ideological and aesthetic construction of madness',<sup>13</sup> whilst *Down Below's* critical reception has been less well documented. Breton's early career in neuro-psychiatric medicine prompted his experiments with automatic writing when shell-shocked soldiers were his subjects. However, it was female madness that fascinated him most. As Lusty explains, like Freud's own interpretation of hysteria, male surrealists regarded 'the hysteric's body as capable of producing a series of somatic signs that acted as a coded message for the subject's psychic disorder'.<sup>14</sup> The madness of a *femme-enfant* provoked both aesthetic and erotic pleasure among the group; a pleasure that Breton explores in his novel about a flâneur-like male protagonist wandering the Parisian streets as he reflects upon his affair with *femme-enfant* Nadja. He eventually abandons her when she attempts to express her own account of deteriorating mental health. He becomes increasingly frustrated with her as this example conveys: 'Sometimes I reacted with terrible violence against the *over-detailed* account she gave me of certain scenes of her past life, concerning which I have decided, probably quite superficially, that her dignity could not have survived entirely intact.'<sup>15</sup> Breton's intention to evoke a narrative study of female madness is suggestive of his attempts to emulate Freud and his early psychiatric training but his speaker's

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<sup>12</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Thames & Hudson, 2021), p.39.

<sup>13</sup> Lusty, 'Surrealism's Banging Door', p.336.

<sup>14</sup> Lusty, 'Surrealism's Banging Door', p.335.

<sup>15</sup> Extract cited in 'Surrealism's Banging Door', p.351.

abandonment of Nadja, conveyed above, ultimately reveals the novel as one that is best summarised as a male quest for control over his patient. Indeed, the novel's opening demonstrates the speaker's key preoccupation, asking 'Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I "haunt"'.<sup>16</sup> What emerges of most concern in the work here is the male protagonist's own subjectivity rather than the needs of Nadja who recedes from the narrative as her mental health declines. The tragic encounter with Nadja, who was inspired by Breton's relationship with Léona Delcourt, eventually leads to his declaration of love for someone else. She remains unnamed but is based upon Suzanne Muzard with whom Breton had an affair. As Krzysztof Fijalkowski explains, 'There presides over both of these relationships, and over the book itself, a feeling of loss and unease mirrored in a repeated concern for a dissolution of his own sense of selfhood'.<sup>17</sup> As Fijalkowski identifies, the book then is less a study concerned with women's mental health but rather what it potentially emblematises for the male speaker and his own identity. In contrast, Carrington's *Down Below* confronts Breton's mythical, and self-serving portrayal of female madness and offers a blunt and feminist alternative. In her account, published in the final edition of the surrealist magazine *VVV*, she reasserts the female voice that becomes lost in Breton's text;<sup>18</sup> a novel that had cemented a fantastical representation of female madness in Surrealism by the time

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<sup>16</sup> André Breton, *Nadja* [1928], translated by Richard Howard (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.11.

<sup>17</sup> Krzysztof Fijalkowski, 'Convulsive Beauty', *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, p.182.

<sup>18</sup> The surrealist periodical *VVV* provided a new outlet for women artists. It was first published in June 1942 and was edited by David Hare in collaboration with André Breton, Max Ernst and Marcel Duchamp. Producing only four issues it attempted to come to terms with the future of Surrealism in the context of global upheaval as well as its exile from Europe. It was an influential magazine despite its brief output. As Natalya Lusty explains, 'the journal's impact was key to consolidating the movement's presence in New York and its ensuing influence on the New York art scene [...] the journal endeavoured to open up the disciplinary parameters of the movement beyond a narrow focus on art and literature', 'Experience and Knowledge in *Down Below*', in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde* ed. by Catriona McAra and Jonathan P. Eburne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp.57-71 (p.58). There's a useful overview of *VVV* in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume II: North America 1894-1960* ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.737-739 and pp.749-754.

Carrington was articulating her own experience. Lusty explores how Carrington's work acts as a foil to Breton's novel:

As a narrative concerned with mimetically reproducing the paranoid and psychotic voice and experience, *Down Below* writes against Breton's clinical detachment. As such, Carrington's text uncannily restores the silenced and abjected figure of Nadja in Breton's text.<sup>19</sup>

As Lusty's analysis attests, Breton's novel fails to illuminate the subject of female madness fully. Whilst the protagonist ultimately stages a retreat from Nadja's disintegrating sanity, in Carrington's *Down Below*, we witness instead a speaker who is fully immersed in the experience, and importantly one that she is open to sharing. She forges a space that operates outside of the binary essentialisms that underpin androcentric and male surrealist frameworks, where women are the subordinated other of patriarchy. I now outline how Carrington constructs a heterotopic space that gives voice to a female account. It is an inclusive and collective enterprise rather than serving to cement the hierarchical positioning of Humanism's Man.

*Down Below's* pavilion of stairways and portals with the capacity for metamorphosis is a strategic space that over-rides the asylum's dogmatic and androcentric approach. We witness in one description how on the third floor of 'down below' Carrington 'came upon a small ogival door'. Explaining how she knew that if she opens it she 'would be at the centre of the world', she finds on doing so that 'a spiral staircase' appears. It leads to an illuminated and cosmological circular room which has an immediate, prismatic effect upon her.<sup>20</sup> This fusion of the public and the political in Carrington's memoir speaks to an

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<sup>19</sup> Lusty, 'Surrealism's Banging Door', p.337-338.

<sup>20</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.48.

affective mode in her work where she draws important lines of connection between her own struggle and the struggles of others. These themes of connection are emphasised by her construction of a liminal realm where a melting pot of ontologies, existing in both a grounded and yet cosmic realm, serves to neutralise the dictates of Humanism's 'neural container'. Carrington explodes the divisions between rational and irrational, conscious and unconscious, body and mind in her heterotopic space which functions as a counter-narrative to the dictates of the medical profession's supposedly reparatory programme. Importantly, as Lusty argues, the fact that the memoir was published in the final issue of *VVV* perhaps suggests that Carrington in many ways has the 'final word on "female madness"'.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, its positioning in an issue dedicated to collective myth, helps to refocus the lens through which a reader interprets the memoir, diverting an audience from the myopic way that the topic of madness was typecast by male surrealists and androcentric culture. In this way it repositions women, placing them at the helm of their own narrative rather than mere conduits of male desire.

*Down Below* documents Carrington's nervous breakdown at twenty-two years old, induced by the horrors of World War Two in 1940 and her lover Max Ernst's arrest by the Germans for his perceived status as an 'illegal alien' in France. Carrington, who had been living with Ernst in the Ardèche, found herself isolated in the cottage they had shared together, and her mental and physical health rapidly deteriorated as a result. Carrington's friend, Catherine Yarrow, discovered her in a distressed state during a visit, and persuaded Carrington to accompany her to Spain. In Madrid, they hoped to obtain a visa for Ernst thus releasing him from his detention, and Carrington from her own anguish. However, the journey from France to Spain became an increasingly troubled one for Carrington as her mental health further declined. As a result of this deterioration, Carrington was committed to a mental institution in Santander where Dr Luis Morales was at the helm. Portrayed as a

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<sup>21</sup> Natalya Lusty, 'Experience and Knowledge in *Down Below*', p.58.

tyrannical male figure in the memoir, Morales reprises the role of patriarchal dictators witnessed repeatedly in Carrington's surrealist writing, where his cruelty correlates with the fascist politics of World War Two. At the asylum, Carrington was diagnosed as marginally psychotic and so began her period of treatment alone in an institution that she repeatedly characterises as callous.

The narrative is unique in Carrington's writing in that it does not effuse any of the humour exhibited in her other written work and discussed in Chapter Four. Rather, it is a direct and harrowing evocation of her agony within an institution which shares the same essentialist belief system as we witness at the Well of Light Brotherhood home in *The Hearing Trumpet* (1976). In *Down Below*, Dr Morales and his colleagues have a programme of assimilation on the agenda for Carrington, planning to force her back into the world of reason by administering the drug 'Cardiazol', a powerful anti-psychotic which induced convulsive spasms, akin to the effects of electric shock treatment. This 'treatment' traumatised Carrington beyond the horrors of madness itself and she spoke of its lasting terrors long after the period narrativised in *Down Below*. However, the experience is one that ignites Carrington's creative fuse, where the so-called 'Down Below' of the title demonstrates how she harnesses an imaginary locus in order to circumnavigate the brutal assimilating routines of the asylum. Marina Warner explains this manoeuvre in the introduction to the most recently published edition of the memoir:

The title echoes mythological and literary descents into hell [...], but at the same time the depths – 'down below' – are represented as an actual safe place, a sanctuary within the grounds of the asylum, where the writer

dreams of going because there the horrific treatments (the agonizing injections with Cardiazol) will stop.<sup>22</sup>

Carrington begins recounting her traumatic memories of her experience in Santander with the symbol of an egg. It is a motif that both signposts a female perspective, whilst also intimating the themes of liminality that forge a space and politics outside of the divisive machinations of the asylum, where patients must endure agonising treatments to force them back to reason. Feeling challenged by the prospect of revisiting this episode three years later in Mexico, Carrington explains how she experiences an awakening about how to recount her tale with the vision of an egg:

This morning, the idea of the egg came again to my mind and I thought I could use it as a crystal to look at Madrid in those days of July and August 1940 – for why should it not enclose my own experiences as well as the past and future history of the Universe? The egg is the macrocosm and the microcosm, the dividing line between the Big and the Small which makes it impossible to see the whole [...] The task of the right eye is to peer into the telescope, while the left eye peers into the microscope.<sup>23</sup>

Carrington's decision to employ the egg as a 'crystal' or lens, foreshadows her intention to evoke her experience in Spain in the liminal manner that she perceived it during her incarceration, where she overcame the adversity of her suffering by crossing a threshold into a shapeshifting multiverse. It is one that takes account of both the macrocosm and the

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<sup>22</sup> Marina Warner 'Introduction', *Down Below*, pp.vii-xxxiv (p.xxiv). Warner's characterisation of 'Down Below' as both a real place and a virtual, imaginary locus resonates with Foucault's definition of what constitutes a heterotopia.

<sup>23</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.19.

microcosm in the way that the vision of an egg symbolises. The egg signposts a border crossing into a metamorphic, shifting space where experience is a melding of the macro and the micro, or political and the personal, as we see in Carrington's memoir. The egg's capacity to signal an inside/out mode that drives Carrington's narrative is further galvanised on the following page where her memoir explains that during this troubling episode, her intestines 'vibrated in accord with Madrid's painful digestion', introducing the boundary-less themes that recur throughout her account.<sup>24</sup> Carrington's awareness of how her experience is a component bound up within a wider sphere beyond herself, is indicative of an account that includes the 'past and future History of the Universe'. Carrington's *Down Below* is a more collective and inclusive enterprise, emphasised on the opening page where she asserts 'the necessity that others be with me that we may feed each other with our knowledge and thus constitute the Whole [...] What I am going to endeavor to express here with the utmost fidelity was but an embryo of knowledge.'<sup>25</sup> Whilst this statement primarily addresses fellow surrealist Pierre Mabilie, who persuaded her that sharing her experience would provide cathartic balm to her suffering, it also speaks to a wider community and Carrington's wish to share her experience and connect with others. As Lusty further explains, Carrington describes how the perceived 'you' in *Down Below* is 'both Mabilie and a wider community of readers for whom an "embryo of knowledge" transforms private, individual suffering into shared experience and knowledge'.<sup>26</sup> The embryo reorients the reader into a female sphere, distanced from the male surrealists' accounts of female madness. It also demonstrates how Carrington wishes to communicate her experience as an evolving and 'becoming' one rather than a narrative that dictates and pathologises in the essentialist manner of a humanist approach.

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<sup>24</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.20.

<sup>25</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.3, p.4.

<sup>26</sup> Lusty, 'Experience and Knowledge in *Down Below*', p.63.

The asylum's ambition to force Carrington back to a reasoned and rational demeanour begins before she has even arrived, when she is injected with the sedative Luminal on her journey there. Explaining how she was 'handed over like a cadaver to Dr. Morales' we witness how Carrington's experience at the hospital is one that recurrently involves her own will being suppressed in order to instil a reasoned conformity that she repeatedly reels from.<sup>27</sup> Once again conflating her own experience with the wider context of World War Two, she describes waking up, strapped down upon a bed in the asylum not knowing whether she was in a hospital or a concentration camp. Following the Luminal, she becomes 'sadly reasonable',<sup>28</sup> but is informed that unbeknown to her she had 'acted like various animals – jumping up on the wardrobe with the agility of a monkey'.<sup>29</sup> Dr Morales' project to bring her under control and adhere to rationality is further demonstrated with the administering of the drug Cardiazol. It is a treatment that entirely incapacitates her. Perhaps alluding to the convulsive beauty of Breton's *l'amour fou* if only to subvert it, Carrington describes how she is 'convulsed, pitiably hideous' during the treatment which leaves her 'obedient as an ox'.<sup>30</sup> Morales applauds her compliant demeanour afterwards as indicative of her transformation from a 'tigress' into a 'young lady'.<sup>31</sup> In this way we witness how becoming what she describes as 'the feeblest creature in the whole world' conflates with the institution's ideal of turning her back into a 'young lady'.<sup>32</sup> This male appropriated categorisation marks Carrington's return to Humanism's reasoned neural container where women know their passive and subordinated place. It also recalls the male surrealists' penchant for the figure of the *femme-enfant*, a puppet manipulated by and for the male

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<sup>27</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.18.

<sup>28</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.22.

<sup>29</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.23.

<sup>30</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.41.

<sup>31</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.41.

<sup>32</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.41. This supposed transformation from an animal into a young lady recalls the way that Carrington adopts hybrid forms in order to challenge the controlling machinations of patriarchal culture. It is a topic I discuss and explore in Chapter One.

gaze. I suggest here that Carrington forges a portal out of these trappings allowing her to embrace a new experience, taking her beyond the humanist frameworks that the medical institution represents.

Shortly after her horrific spell of Cardiazol treatment she slips away into the 'Down Below' realm to avoid the drug's onslaught. 'Down Below' is a space that she describes as a pavilion 'like a hotel, with telephones and unbarred windows' speaking to it as a conduit of communication.<sup>33</sup> It also marks it as a transitional space where one stays temporarily rather than resides permanently. Carrington experiences it as a 'paradise' that could only be reached by resorting to 'mysterious means'; a means that Carrington's surrealist and marvellous imagination is more than capable of.<sup>34</sup> This pavilion precisely embodies Foucault's concept of a heterotopia in its capacity to be both an outside and inside sphere, often attached to another building and yet exterior to it. Carrington's slippage towards this space is one that adheres to a definition of the heterotopic in that it functions and exists within a discernible location but at the same time exhibits a sense of a fantastical 'outside'. In other words, it is both locatable, anchored as the pavilion is within the grounds of the asylum, but at the same time it is embellished through the lens of Carrington's fantastical imaginary. Such ambiguity is emphasised in Carrington's recourse to liminal spaces within this realm where she repeatedly occupies further marginal and in-between spheres which are both locatable and yet peripheral. We enter stairways as doorways which often catalyse fantastical realms that elude humanist reason, as this example demonstrates:

There were three storeys: in each a door was open [...] I went up [a spiral staircase] and found myself in a tower, a circular room lighted by five bull's-eye windows: one red, one green (the Earth and its plants), one

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<sup>33</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.35.

<sup>34</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.35.

translucent (the Earth and its men), one yellow (the Sun), and one mauve (the Moon, night, the future).<sup>35</sup>

Carrington's 'down below' space resonates with Tanning's portals here where open doors prompt a spatial metamorphosis. There is a distinct circularity to this terrain where the spiral stairway and the room itself eschew the borderlines of humanist divisions. The tower represents a melding of the real and the marvellous in a way that emblematises the heterotopic where Carrington orientates the reader towards the 'Earth and its men' whilst at the same time noting a mauve window that beams in the moonlight. In this realm Carrington is in a perpetual state of becoming that resists the conformity required of her in the asylum, instead embracing other potential ontological positions that recurrently demonstrate modes of metamorphosis and affectivity. Rather than appearing as the weakened and 'enfeebled' figure that presents following her Cardiazol treatment, in 'Down Below' Carrington is empowered by the liminality that she experiences. She forges a magical and cosmic space where its characteristic in-between-ness counters the prescriptive boundaries of the institution and the androcentricism it represents. She explains how, unlike the restrictive imprisoning effects of the asylum, in 'Down Below' 'The pavilion with this name was for me the Earth, the Real World, Paradise, Eden, Jerusalem.'<sup>36</sup> This spiritual and yet earthly space recalls Foucault's heterotopia in the way it functions as a 'counter-site' to the hospital itself and as such, Carrington's 'crisis' catalyses a 'deviation' from conformity. The metamorphic nature of heterotopias enables Carrington to transform her 'pathologised' madness and breakdown as it is viewed by Dr Morales and his team, into a 'breakthrough' as Orenstein describes it where she embraces a mobile and becoming position.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.44.

<sup>36</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.44.

<sup>37</sup> Gloria Orenstein, 'Visionary Art for the New Age', *Chrysalis* 3 (1978), 65-77 (p.68).

I would go Down Below, as the third person of the Trinity. I felt that, through the agency of the Sun, I was an androgyne, the Moon, the Holy Ghost, a gypsy, an acrobat, Leonora Carrington, and a woman. I was also destined to be, later, Elizabeth of England. I was she who revealed religions and bore on her shoulders the freedom and sins of the earth changed into Knowledge, the union of Man and Woman with God and the Cosmos, all equal between them.<sup>38</sup>

The multifarious subject positions that Carrington adopts here speak to a posthuman politics that is enabled by this liminal and heterotopic space where she circumnavigates Humanism's template of Vitruvian male rationality and 'limited Reason'. Rather, she is a liminal character in her 'androgyne' positioning, capable of further metamorphosis as 'acrobat' and 'gypsy' attest to; figures who suggest both elasticity and nomadism. Carrington's reference to a 'union' is key here demonstrating how her heterotopic space of 'Down Below' explodes Humanism's hierarchical boundaries to achieve a balanced 'Cosmos.' The fantastically charged environment of 'Down Below' that resonates with Surrealism's preoccupation with the marvellous, catalyses Carrington further as the traumatic treatments of the asylum recede, leaving her to explore this chthonic world and cross over into a new frontier of knowledge. Here, she details her increasing sense of empowerment in this polyvalent and alchemically charged space that intimates the posthuman feminism which characterises her oeuvre:

The son was the Sun and I the Moon, an essential element of the Trinity, with a microscopic knowledge of the earth, its plants and creatures. I knew that Christ was dead and done for, and that I had to take His place because

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<sup>38</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.45.

the Trinity, minus a woman and microscopic knowledge, had become dry and incomplete [...] I was Christ on earth in the person of the Holy Ghost.<sup>39</sup>

Whilst this audacious proclamation is an overt example of Carrington's self-delusion that she acknowledges in retrospect, it nevertheless demonstrates how the narrative performs a feminist revision of Christianity that recalls the discussion of radical retellings in Chapter Four, bringing patristic accounts into a more posthuman and gynocentric realm. As Lusty argues 'the figure of the all-powerful father haunts the entire text' where the shadow of Carrington's textile tycoon father, his associate Van Ghent, and the male doctors of the asylum are portrayed as tyrannical figures in cahoots with the fascist politics of the day.<sup>40</sup> Lusty adds that Carrington expresses in the memoir her 'fear of conformity, institutionalization and a loss of individuality; within the stultified upper-class world of her family, within the psychiatric hospital, within the fascist state *and* within the incestuous and paternal world of the surrealist coterie.'<sup>41</sup> Carrington demonstrates how the brutality and subordination she experiences in the hospital mirrors the savagery of war bringing together her own personal experience with political, world events. Importantly, Carrington's narrative signposts how the liminal space of 'Down Below' contests a patriarchal Trinity representing a brutal and dehumanising culture. She labels it 'dry and incomplete' without 'a woman and microscopic knowledge'.<sup>42</sup> By underlining the value of the microcosmic Carrington returns to where the memoir began when she made clear she would take into account the microcosm as well as the macrocosm, drawing attention to an 'embryo of knowledge'. In this way Carrington's 'down below' space is a heterotopia: it functions as a counter-site that is 'simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' in

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<sup>39</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.45.

<sup>40</sup> Lusty, 'Surrealism's Banging Door', p.348.

<sup>41</sup> Lusty, 'Surrealism's Banging Door', p.349.

<sup>42</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.45.

her reconfiguration of the asylum, looking towards its 'outside' pavilion as a sphere of metamorphosis and connection.

Ultimately it is Carrington's imaginative capacity to convert this experience into her own rescue that releases her from the hospital's confines as this chapter argues when she manages to abscond and gain passage to Mexico with Renato Leduc, a friend of Pablo Picasso. She explains that the second time Cardiazol is administered she is better able to withstand it by closing her eyes and she returns to 'Down Below' again, seeking a 'door' to this 'Paradise'. In this final reference to 'down below' we witness her entrance through a portal that recalls Tanning's predilection for doorways, further suggestive of a fruitful and posthuman liminality. Carrington describes reaching the 'foot of the stairs in my Paradise' exclaiming that here she has 'the strength to struggle against the invisible powers that were striving to detain' her at the institution and beyond.<sup>43</sup> Importantly this final most detailed episode in 'down below' conjures it as a sphere that combines a plethora of places in a surreal and kaleidoscopic vision: 'There were three storeys: in each a door was open. I could see in the rooms, on the night tables, other solar systems as perfect and complete as my own [...] They had penetrated the mystery at the same time as I.'<sup>44</sup> Reaching a tower and 'spiral staircase' whilst articulating this space in the context of a wider cosmos demonstrates how Carrington's 'down below' realm forges a posthuman heterotopic space: it juxtaposes in a 'single real place several spaces' as Foucault describes it as well as 'several sites that are in themselves incompatible'.<sup>45</sup>

Foucault's reference to the theatre with its many stage sets and props often 'foreign to one another' is a fruitful example that resonates with Carrington's shifting 'down below' terrain which frequently exhibits the characteristics of a surreal *mis-en-scene* as her solar systems appearing in the context of the more domestic 'night tables' suggests.

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<sup>43</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.48.

<sup>44</sup> Carrington, *Down Below*, p.48.

<sup>45</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Places', p.25.

This contrasts the fixed boundaries of the hospital in Santander with its imposing borders both within the rooms themselves but also as a cultural institution that dictates a humanist framework of rationality as a cure for the insane. Exclaiming how she ‘triumphed’ we see how the heterotopic space that Carrington creates empowers and saves her and others as Dr Morales’ programme of assimilation fails. Alessia Zinnari further explains:

Writing about her displacement and demonstrating how she autonomously rescued herself, the author chooses to renegotiate her experience making it public and, therefore, political; she does so by reshaping her social position in a (his)story in which she was being silenced, hidden and erased for being a woman artist.<sup>46</sup>

The freedoms and alchemical potential of this ‘down below’ space is not only a refuge or sanctuary in the way that Marina Warner suggests but also speaks to Carrington’s creative and posthuman politics that allow her to triumph in the face of adversity. This triumph is enabled by her occupation of a liminal space that creatively overrides both the pathologising effects of the asylum that equates rationalism with recovery, but also the eroticised and deleterious effects of female madness as they are imagined by the male surrealists. Rather Carrington’s heterotopic ‘down below’ performs a female and feminist renegotiation of the experience of madness and the unconscious that thwarts the dictates of both the medical profession.

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<sup>46</sup> Alessia Zinnari, “‘I was in another place’: The Liminal Journey in Leonora Carrington’s *Down Below*”, in *Leonora Carrington Living Legacies*, ed. by Ailsa Cox, James Hewison, Michelle Man and Roger Shannon (Malaga: Vernon Press, 2020), pp.19-40 (p.28). In this essay Zinnari considers how Carrington’s *Down Below* could be read as heterotopic. She explains how heterotopias are suggestive of an escape route and thus a feminist manoeuvre. I agree with Zinnari but consider more specifically how such a mode in Carrington also signposts a posthuman space in the way that its necessary liminality also shakes off humanist codes of reason.

### **Elizabeth Bishop's Posthuman Dreamscapes.**

Carrington's *Down Below* sees her crossing over a threshold to enter a posthuman beyond that explodes the Cartesian boundaries which confine and dictate. This play with boundaries to forge heterotopic liminalities is a theme that similarly asserts itself in Bishop's Paris poems, published in *North & South* (1946). These works recurrently occupy an oneiric landscape in a colourful imaginary locus that spills beyond Humanism's 'neural container', introduced earlier. In the same way that we witness marginal and threshold positions in Carrington's memoir I explore how Bishop's speakers similarly perch upon a precipice that anticipates a posthuman beyond where the melding of seemingly opposite spaces – marked out as conscious and unconscious realms - merge in a fruitful, imaginary terrain that exhibits visible tendrils to the real. Carrington's symbol of the egg functions as a fitting motif for Bishop's poetry examined here which similarly intimates a preoccupation with the overlap between interior and exterior modes and spaces. Her speakers' recurrent position at a window looking down towards the cityscape is indicative of the empowering potential of a liminal perspective.

In her Parisian poems, Bishop's connection to Surrealism is at its most palpable. Her study of the movement during her time in Paris between July 1935 and February 1936 and June to December 1937 is a discernible influence. I discussed in Chapter Two how she acknowledged owning a copy of Max Ernst's work *Histoire Naturelle* (1928) and adopted his frottage technique into her own writing in such early poems as 'The Monument' and 'The Weed'. Susan Rosenbaum also cites Gertrude Stein as a particular influence during Bishop's spell in Paris where she attended her lecture 'entity versus identity' and found inspiration in her experimental aesthetics.<sup>47</sup> Bishop frequented André Breton's Art Gallery during this time as well as favourite avant-gardist haunts including Les Deux Magots and Café de Flore.

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<sup>47</sup> Susan Rosenbaum, [Mapping Mina Loy & Elizabeth Bishop in Paris – Mina Loy – Navigating the Avant-Garde \(reclaim.hosting\)](http://reclaim.hosting)

However, as Rosenbaum notes, Bishop was too shy to accept invitations from fellow modernists and expatriates in Paris, including one to take tea with Stein herself. She also said that she had never met any of the surrealist artists, despite her professed interest in their work and aesthetic praxis.

Bishop's fascination with dreams and her shared interest in unconscious and oneiric landscapes is a demonstrable parallel with the surrealist movement's practice in Paris. As Katharine Conley explains, Breton and Philippe Soupault launched the Surrealism movement with the publication of *Les Champs magnetiques* which communicated their 'desire to speak directly from their unconscious minds', an interest that resonated with Bishop during the 1930s.<sup>48</sup> Linda Anderson notes that the '1930s marked the period in Bishop's life when she was most directly interested in the unconscious; her notebooks from this time reveal her carefully attempting to record her own dreams'.<sup>49</sup>

Breton and Soupault were fascinated by the Freudian unconscious. The formative experience of writing *Les Champs* demonstrates how it was an aesthetic praxis that began with automatism. This idea was originally coined by Guillaume Apollinaire and defined more specifically as a 'pure psychic automatism by which one proposes to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other means, the true functioning of thought'.<sup>50</sup> It explains why the examination of dreams was such a fruitful pursuit for the surrealists who were anxious to fully interrogate the possibilities of the unconscious in potentially liberating the artist from consciousness and reason. However, like Carrington, Bishop deviates from the male surrealists regarding their psychoanalytically inflected accounts of the unconscious and its correlation with a passive femininity. In contrast, Bishop exhibits a belief that there

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<sup>48</sup> Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p.6.

<sup>49</sup> Linda Anderson, 'The Story of the Eye: Elizabeth Bishop and the Limits of the Visual', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Poet of the Periphery*, ed. by Linda Anderson and Jo Shapcott (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 2002), pp.159-174 (p.163).

<sup>50</sup> Conley, *Automatic Woman*, p.7.

is ‘no “split”’ between consciousness and the unconscious, a view that is manifest in poems of this period which recurrently occupy transitional realms that renegotiate a rational spatio-temporality. As Richard Mullen explains, Bishop ‘shares the surrealists’ interest in the unconscious’ but she ‘does not seek to subvert logical control’.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore Mullen asserts that Bishop ‘refuses to accept the “split” between the roles of conscious and unconscious forces in our perception of the world.’<sup>52</sup> Rather, she retains a grip upon the conscious world, and the irrational never threatens to fully overwhelm her writing. Bishop is fascinated by what she describes as the ‘surrealism of everyday life’ where, from the liminal position she recurrently occupies in her Paris poems, she unleashes visions that etch an alternative view, sliding between conscious and oneiric perspectives. By interrogating these hybrid spheres, Bishop invites her reader into a subterranean and imaginary locus, like Carrington, finding an agentive power in these unmappable spaces. The two poems I now discuss here all exhibit an amalgamation of sleeping, dreaming and conscious worlds where the speaker navigates a course between, inside and out of them in interwoven liminal contact zones. The distortions and juxtapositions between waking and sleeping worlds here, between conscious rational thought and an unconscious seepage alludes to Bishop’s connection to Surrealism. Her descriptive accretions, that construct a collage of images, forge an in-between space that unsettles the boundaries of dreaming and waking.

Like Carrington’s ‘Down Below’, Bishop’s ‘Sleeping on the Ceiling’ is a poem that is interested in crossing over thresholds and exploring unconscious realms, occupying the liminal space of a dream that illuminates her waking world in a kaleidoscopic manner. As Costello notes it is an example of how Bishop’s Parisian poetry speaks to a surrealist

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<sup>51</sup> Richard Mullen, ‘Elizabeth Bishop’s Surrealist Inheritance’, *American Literature*, 54.1 (1982), 63-80 (p.63, p.64).

<sup>52</sup> Mullen, ‘Elizabeth Bishop’s Surrealist Inheritance’, p.64).

influence in its recourse to the oneiric and 'distortion'.<sup>53</sup> The poem emulates Foucault's heterotopic space where the speaker's dreamscape is located within the tangible geography of Paris's landmarks but at the same time, occurs 'outside' of it, criss-crossing between the speaker's unconscious revelations and controlled accounts of a conscious and exterior world. The title suggests the role of the 'insect-gladiator' who appears in stanza three, a creature who recurrently navigates a path across ceilings and often seems to pause and sleep there in prolonged periods of stasis. In this poem Bishop forges a playful, imaginary sphere where her ceiling has become the Place de la Concorde in Paris and her wallpaper morphs into the Jardin des Plantes thereby constructing a mobile slippage between conscious and unconscious space. In the first stanza we are immediately situated in an in-between sphere, both contemplating the peacefulness of the ceiling as the speaker looks up from her bed whilst reflecting upon the darkness of the fountain in the park outside. In the second stanza Bishop introduces the reader into an enchanting, if troubling fairy tale space where the wallpaper begins to erupt:

Below, where the wallpaper is peeling,  
 the Jardin des Plantes has locked its gates.  
 Those photographs are animals.  
 The mighty flowers and foliage rustle;  
 under the leaves the insects tunnel.<sup>54</sup>

In the same way that we are greeted with a series of thresholds in *Down Below* where Carrington ventures through spiral stairways and an inside/outside pavilion, so too does

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<sup>53</sup> Bonnie Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993). Costello observes that 'Dream imagery and distortion are the most conspicuous features of this [surrealist] influence', p.27.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, 'Sleeping on the Ceiling', in *The Centenary Edition Poems Elizabeth Bishop* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011), p.30, ll.6-10

Bishop's speaker here experience multiple edges via the 'wallpaper' and locked 'gates' that anticipate an agentive, liminal space. The speaker is 'Below' where 'peeling' wallpaper is indicative of further happenings beneath its exterior. All is a confusion of the unseen and unknown where 'insects' are 'under' leaves but also 'tunnel' into a deeper subterranean space, evoking portals in hallucinatory imagery that befits Bishop's simulation of a dream experience. I suggest here that Bishop is interrogating Humanism's 'neural container', exploring its depths and layers and unpeeling them, thus disturbing the tidy categories of epistemological thinking. In stanza three Bishop implores her reader to further investigate and importantly, confront these oneiric spaces that we frequently overlook or dismiss:

We must go under the wallpaper  
to meet the insect-gadiator,  
to battle with a net and trident,  
and leave the fountain and the square.  
But oh, that we could sleep up there...<sup>55</sup>

The instruction that 'we must go' beneath the wallpaper is an invitation to eschew surface representations that preoccupy Humanism and go beyond the world we think we know. It urges us to see anew by penetrating other, unseen realms that an exploration of the dreamscape enables, recalling Costello's observation that Bishop's poems recurrently conjure the 'otherworldly.'<sup>56</sup> The way Bishop constructs these Parisian poems is also

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<sup>55</sup> Bishop, 'Sleeping on the Ceiling', p.30, ll.11-15.

<sup>56</sup> Bonnie Costello describes how Bishop's poetics are catalysed by creative explorations of the unseen as she explains here: 'Bishop, for all her "accuracy" and descriptive precision, is a poet interested in the way experience can trigger metaphysical ideas and desires, directing us from surfaces to the unknown, the otherworldly.' Costello's reference to Bishop's accuracy and description is important here demonstrating how there is always a visible anchor to the real in her poetry, as we witness in Carrington's pavilion, whilst also evoking a slippage towards an 'unknown' and 'otherworldly' sphere that cannot be rationally defined. Costello, 'Bishop and the Poetic

important to consider when reflecting upon her evocation of liminalities. In Bishop's poetry we often see her deploy space as an indicator of meaning as much as language itself and this is relevant to a discussion of the liminal realms she creates. In the first line of the final stanza cited above, we are implored to 'go under the wallpaper' in an open invitation, where the enjambment that follows provides an accompanying blank canvas alongside Bishop's provocative statement. Severing contact between going under the wallpaper in the first line and deferring the infinitive of purpose that follows in the second, suspends the reader in a playful and imaginary locus between them, poised in a liminal realm that catalyses the imagination. There is the sense that Bishop is encouraging a collaborative approach to her dreaming where her heterotopic experience is a more collective exercise in the manner of Carrington's *Down Below*. It is also demonstrative of the boundary crossings that a slippage into oneiric and heterotopic space allows. The speaker is not simply articulating her own experience but, in the blank spaces of her poetry, inviting the reader's own imaginative input. She is speaking to a posthuman politics of multiplicity that implicates writer and audience. This manoeuvre is recapitulated in the final line where Bishop muses dreamily 'But oh, that we could sleep up there...', where the choice of pronoun 'we' may speak to a companion in the poem, but also may signal Bishop's address to the reader. The ellipsis functions as a portal towards an agentic, oneiric sphere that encourages the reader to fully explore and exploit the unknown that a trip beyond the neural container allows. We are suspended in the heterotopic space of the poem and the dreamy realm that it renders: one that cannot be epistemologically mapped, inviting divagations beyond Humanism's fixed cartography and thereby eschewing the male surrealists' suppositions that to experience the unconscious one must adopt a passive position.

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Tradition', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. by Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.79-94 (p.90).

Bishop's recourse to the symbol of the insect recapitulates the poet's particular interest in Lepidoptera seen in 'The Man-Moth', discussed in Chapter One. The insect species' capacity for metamorphosis is an appropriate motif to communicate Bishop's liminal, oneiric realm where inner and outer worlds collide. The insect's exoskeletal physiology is a symbol that aptly intimates Bishop's fascination with the slippage between interior and exterior space, where her interrogation of dreams, concealed beneath our consciousness in the neural container, surges to the surface on vertiginous journeys. The insect's skeleton being located on the outside of its body symbolises how Bishop similarly brings the usually concealed and hidden dreamscape to the surface, thus speaking to an inversion that signals a posthuman shift of perspective. The poem creates a space that is a 'counter-site', both recognisable but different from its original in the way Bishop skews it through an oneiric lens. Bishop's melding of an apartment room and Paris landmarks with a dream about agentive wallpaper is a precise evocation of such juxtapositions and emphasises in this heterotopic manoeuvre her belief that there is no split between conscious and unconscious thought.

The title of the poem 'Sleeping Standing Up', like 'Sleeping on the Ceiling', immediately signposts Bishop's play with scale and rational perspective that was characteristic of the dreamscape poems she wrote in the late 1930s, seemingly inspired by her time in Paris.<sup>57</sup> It etches an oneiric vision where rather than coming to consciousness in the liminal space of early morning, the speaker conjures the experience of falling into sleep as she slips into a twilight reverie. The themes of distortion that Costello notes in Bishop's

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<sup>57</sup> Mark Ford discusses Bishop's interest in dreamscapes which intimate the fact she was reading surrealist literature during her time in Paris, as well as the fact that she was translating the work of Arthur Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire. Ford observes that there is something 'dreamily opaque' about her poems in *North & South* (1946) which he concludes 'most obviously signals their "Frenchness"', 'Mont d'Espoir or Mount Despair: Early Bishop, Early Ashbery, and the French', *PN Review*, 23.4 (1997), 22-28 (p.24). Reflecting back on this time herself in *One Art*, Bishop explains: 'I lived in Paris one whole winter long, and most of another one [that of 1937] – and that "endless wall of fog" [from Baudelaire's "Le Cygne"] haunts me still', Elizabeth Bishop, *One Art: Elizabeth Bishop*, Letters Selected and Edited by Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), p.396.

Parisian work, become an all-encompassing focus in 'Sleeping Standing Up' where the poet communicates an hallucinogenic description of a world shifting on its axis as she sinks into sleep:

As we lie down to sleep the world turns half away  
 through ninety dark degrees;  
 the bureau lies on the wall  
 and thoughts that were recumbent in the day  
 rise as the others fall,  
 stand up and make a forest of thick-set trees.<sup>58</sup>

Bishop simulates the sense of an other-worldly sphere via the shaping of her stanzas: the first three lines sliding inwards suggest a slippage towards this inner, unconscious realm of the dream that counters the presumed primacy of human consciousness. Rather, 'Sleeping Standing Up' is oneirically led where the way the lines oscillate across the page suggests the agentic pull of the unconscious, where those thoughts 'recumbent in the day/rise' as Bishop describes.

As I have discussed regarding Carrington's *Down Below* and Bishop's poetry thus far, there are further threshold crossings taking place in this poem; a manoeuvre that I will also investigate in my discussion of Tanning later. In this poem here we witness the bureau 'on the wall', an 'edge' in stanza two, and a 'door' in stanza three, all significant indicators of the liminal realm that the speaker is on the cusp of entering. As Bishop makes clear in stanza one, we have penetrated a distorted and disorienting sphere where rational perspectives are inverted to forge a space that uncannily examines a broader spectrum of human experience. Bishop retains a hold on the rational world locating recognisable

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<sup>58</sup> Bishop, 'Sleeping Standing Up', p.31, ll.1-6.

objects and boundaries in the room she sleeps in, where the bureau is repositioned in a dizzying fashion. Bishop's melding of the familiar here within an unfamiliar, oneiric terrain forges a space in-between as I have discussed, speaking to the liminal heterotopias that provide an exit out of Humanism's predilection for an exclusively rational approach. Maintaining her grip upon a real and tangible geography constructs an unsettling space where the reader in one moment recognises the terrain that Bishop describes, but then is wrenched into a surreal and dystopic dreamscape as the second stanza intimates:

The armored cars of dreams, contrived to let us do  
 so many a dangerous thing,  
 are chugging at its edge  
 all camouflaged, and ready to go through  
 the swiftest streams, or up a ledge  
 of crumbling shale, while plates and trappings ring.<sup>59</sup>

The spectre of global conflict that looms over Carrington's experience at the Santander asylum is a context hinted at in this second stanza where 'armored cars' and a reference to being 'camouflaged' allude to the terminologies of war. Written between 1937 and 1938, there is an affectivity in this poem that grounds Bishop's dreamscape within a recognisable milieu; the threat of another imminent world war is palpable in the semantics of risk and battle that she exhibits in this stanza. It demonstrates a further example of how she forges heterotopic space in the way she constructs multiple, if contradictory sites in a surreal amalgam. In this second stanza, we are party to a perilous space, one that is unstable as the reference to 'crumbling shale', 'swiftest streams' and 'trappings' suggest, thereby

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<sup>59</sup> Bishop, 'Sleeping Standing Up', p.31, ll.7-12.

unravelling the linear foundations that a humanist rational perceptive presupposes. Rather, this dreamscape intimates a potentially dangerous sphere, one where an unconscious dream filters and exhibits the terrors of a potential world war event that affectively bursts forth in this poem. Rather than suppress the dream experience, Bishop continues to let it spill over in the third stanza immersing herself in this oneiric space of 'turret slits' that interrogates experience beyond the lid of humanist consciousness. Whilst at times frightening it also demonstrates how the speaker is able to access a thrilling, multi-verse of possibility by adopting this liminal approach, thereby resonating with Carrington's own politics in her 'down below' sphere.<sup>60</sup>

Bishop's dreamscapes in her poetry of this period are imbued with movement, attesting to her own nomadic approach to subjectivity that slips and slides between conscious and unconscious loci. It speaks to a broader, posthuman sensibility where the human's immersion within their environment speaks to the porosity of boundaries: both of a physical kind but also suggesting the malleability of the psyche where dreams inevitably spill over in the same way as the exterior world merges with our oneiric imagination in a dynamic interplay. Therefore, the tightly contained neural container of Humanism that prizes consciousness and rational thought as markers of human exceptionalism is exposed as an illusion in Bishop's poetry that instead etches explorative posthuman terrains that enable her female speakers. These recurrent slippages between interior and exterior spaces where Bishop's nether-worldly-dream sequences tip into the conscious world are

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<sup>60</sup> Looking back at these poems from the late 1930s, which she wrote whilst in Paris, Bishop expresses nostalgia for the creative energy that they effuse. She explains in a letter to Anne Stevenson from 1964 'I was very politically ignorant and I sometimes wish I could recover the dreamy state of consciousness I lived in then – it was better for my work, and I do the world no more good now by knowing a great deal more.' Cited in Mark Ford's essay, 'Mont d'Espoir or Mount Despair: Early Bishop, Early Ashbery, and the French', p.24. Such a 'dreamy state of consciousness' is precisely what I suggest is communicative of a heterotopic mode in Bishop's Parisian poems. It communicates a posthuman politics in the poems' estrangement from Humanism's recourse to reasoned consciousness as the ruling principle.

indicative of the porosity of Humanism's boundaries, highlighted by her heterotopic geographies.

Such porosity, where Humanism's tightly drawn borders are threatened by visions of a leakier ontology, is similarly manifest in Tanning's paintings and later sculptures as the following analysis shows. Tanning's novel *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004,) explored in Chapter Four, introduces these themes in the vision of Destina's memory box where she exhibits disaggregated wild body parts, releasing them from containment and speaking to the wild inside/out themes that follow. In my examination of her paintings and corporeal sculptures I suggest that a similar eruption takes place where the controlled containment expected from women by Cartesian culture, as well as by male surrealists, is eschewed for a more otherworldly and oneiric experience; female figures' inner forces are unleashed in Tanning's empowering liminal doorways and portals. These are heterotopic symbols of transitional and in-between spaces that resonate with those explored by Carrington and Bishop.

### **Dorothea Tanning's 'unknown forces'**

In *Between Lives* (2001), Tanning's second memoir, she describes a belief she held that 'we are waging a desperate battle with unknown forces', providing an introduction to the way her exploration of unconscious realms is suggestive of a posthuman politics as well as her resonance with Bishop's poetic journeys beyond surface representations.<sup>61</sup> She asserts a wish to prompt new ways of seeing that recalls Bishop's experimentation with perspective, as well as Carrington's reference to looking upon the world through both a macroscopic and microscopic lens. Crucially, like Bishop and Carrington, Tanning encourages a shift away

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<sup>61</sup> Dorothea Tanning, *Between Lives: An Artist and Her World* (London: W.W.Norton & Company, 2001), p.336.

from steering the world exclusively through a conscious I/eye, also eschewing some male surrealists' belief in the unconscious as an exclusively feminised and passive experience:

I want people to look with three eyes, two outside and one inside. I want their minds to wander and explore just as much as my own; in our make up there are so many conflicting elements that people aren't consciously aware of...I want people to connect with their feelings, see through that unconscious, imaginative eye to a response that is less analytical, less controlled. I don't want to tell people what to think.<sup>62</sup>

Tanning's call to 'wander and explore' intimates a key mode exhibited in her work, one that demands that both she as an artist, as well as the audience, suspend an exclusive grip upon conscious over-analysis to embrace a free-wheeling, active unconscious that simmers beyond it. Her call to see through an 'unconscious imaginative eye' is a posthuman approach in its deprioritising of conscious thought. In the following examination of Tanning's *Children's Games* (1942) and *Hotel du Pavot, Chambre 202* (1970-73) I show how the female figures in these works exhibit what Katharine Conley describes as 'rushing inner forces'.<sup>63</sup> I consider how Tanning employs such forces as mechanisms which threaten Humanism's epistemological containment fields; spheres which dismiss the unseen as irrational and thereby meaningless. By doing so Tanning recasts unconscious experience beyond presumptions of it as necessarily feminine and passive. I demonstrate how these works portray a feminist politics in liminalities which threaten the integrity of the domestic space and rational thinking. Powerful and subversive female figures wrestle with interior

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<sup>62</sup> Victoria Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations* (London: Lund Humphries, 2020), p.8-9. This is from an unpublished interview with Tanning by Carruthers conducted in New York in 2000.

<sup>63</sup> Katharine Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), p.120.

walls and wallpaper that emblematised containment and control under patriarchal rule. I present how such transgressive female figures are emancipated by Tanning's malleable construction of space itself in both her early paintings of the 1940s and soft sculptures created over two decades afterwards. We witness how these female characters' unconscious desires are unleashed to reveal and interrogate 'unknown forces' that exist beyond the bounds of Humanism. As Conley observes in her monograph *Surrealist Ghostliness* (2013), Tanning's work of this period 'hums with an inner energy' where young girls struggle with 'ghostly forces.'<sup>64</sup>

The ghostliness that Conley identifies speaks to emerging interests in occultism and spiritualism during this period where the trauma of World War as well as the destruction wrought by the flu epidemic of 1918 continued to resonate. Whilst the Modernist period led to many experiencing a crisis of traditional religious faith, there was equally a turn towards other spiritual belief systems to find meaning, and to connect with lost loved ones – a theme exhibited similarly both in Carrington's *Down Below* and her oeuvre more widely. Marina Warner explains that 'Modernity did not by any means put an end to the quest for spirit' but explored new spiritual realms that had the capacity to enrich secular knowledge.<sup>65</sup> Kate Summerscale's recent book *The Haunting of Alma Fielding* (2020) attests to this coincidence of increased interest in psychical behaviour with the historical events of the 1930s and 1940s, where her case study intimates uncanny similarities with the liminal figures we witness in Tanning's visual oeuvre. Alma Fielding is described as a 34-year-old housewife who reported to her local newspaper in 1938 some very strange, supernatural events were taking place within her home. When reporters went round to her house in Croydon to see for themselves, it was as if the building was 'under siege from itself' as

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<sup>64</sup> Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, pp.119 and 123.

<sup>65</sup> Marina Warner, *Phantasmorgia: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.10.

Summerscale describes it, where ‘objects were propelled by an unseen force.’<sup>66</sup> Ghost hunter Nandor Fodor was called to investigate: a figure who found his services were in demand as the supernatural scene in the 1930s was a burgeoning one. As Summerscale explains the losses of World War I and the influenza pandemic meant that many spiritualist circles were established as a result of so much bereavement. But Fodor believed that supernormal phenomena – the kind witnessed in Fielding’s home, and as I suggest here, in Tanning’s painting *Children’s Games*’ - was not necessarily exclusively caused by ‘the shades of the dead but by the unconscious minds of the living.’<sup>67</sup> In a statement to the *Daily Mirror* in March 1938 for example, he communicates his belief in an unconscious sphere, resonating with Tanning’s own frequent recourse to portals: ‘There is a door which leads from the mind we know to the mind we do not know [...] Now and again that door is opened. Strange things happen. There are manifestations, queer phenomena, transfigurations.’<sup>68</sup> Fodor’s insight here could be a description of the often unsettling and irrational manifestations that brew within Tanning’s oeuvre, often signified or even galvanised by the open doorways that recurrently feature in her work. These ‘queer phenomena’ as Fodor describes them are unleashed by such open doors that speak further to the heterotopic themes of this chapter. Significantly, Summerscale identifies how poltergeists often emanated from the powerless in society such as women, adolescents and children. Fielding is a woman who is confined to the home; one who after the war found any newfound freedoms were curtailed, as Summerscale explains, ‘The ideal woman was contained, composed, restrained.’<sup>69</sup>

In Tanning’s paintings from this period, we witness women who are instead unleashed, and like Alma Fielding, find release and agency in an embrace with unknown

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<sup>66</sup> Kate Summerscale, *The Haunting of Alma Fielding* (extract), in *The Guardian* on 19/9/20.

<sup>67</sup> Summerscale, *The Haunting of Alma Fielding* extract.

<sup>68</sup> Summerscale, *The Haunting of Alma Fielding* extract.

<sup>69</sup> Summerscale, *The Haunting of Alma Fielding* extract.

and unseen forces. This contact enables them to function within liminal spaces, 'outside' of the patriarchy that imprisons them. In the same way as Alma's interactions with a ghostly presence, possibly manifesting itself as her unconscious, frees her from the parameters of a patriarchal culture, so too do the figures in *Children's Games* experience a similarly emancipatory process in their engagement with what lies beyond androcentric culture – a culture at its worst with the rise of Fascism as Carrington's memoir demonstrates.



**Figure 5.1** *Children's Games* (1942), Dorothea Tanning © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2023

*Children's Games* resonates both with Alma Fielding's supernatural experiences and with Bishop's poem 'Sleeping on the Ceiling' in its mobile iteration of walls and wallpaper that rupture the boundary lines of androcentric culture. In Bishop's surreal poem, her dream catalyses a metamorphic vision of a bedroom where we 'must go under the wallpaper/to meet the insect-gladiator'. A no less surreal, albeit more visceral vision confronts the viewer in Tanning's *Children's Games* where we similarly encounter unknown inner forces

bursting from beyond the wallpaper in a scene that defies Cartesian Humanism and chimes with the poltergeist themes of Alma Fielding's experience. It is one of several similarly themed paintings of the 1940s by Tanning completed during her transition between New York and Sedona, Arizona. Both she and Max Ernst had begun to feel disillusioned with the city's art scene and they sought new inspiration in the Arizonan desertscape. It is a painting often seen in tandem with *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943) in its depiction of adolescent female figures similarly wrestling with unknown forces, in visions which challenge the dictates of a patriarchal culture; a culture that demands women remain in situ as passive, home dwellers.

*Children's Games* is a painting that is dominated by Conley's description of 'strange forces' which emanate from beyond the wallpaper's threshold but also from within the young girls of the work themselves. It is a troubling vision that conjures both a Victorian ghostliness via the clothing that the girls are wearing, and via the long intimidating corridor reminiscent of a nineteenth century Gothic mansion. At the same time the painting also projects a modern rebelliousness in the girls' subversive act of tearing off the wallpaper, thereby invoking multiple temporalities. In the painting we witness these two figures on the brink of adolescence, determinedly ripping at the wallpaper to reveal the mysterious female bodies beneath. These bodies are not passively awaiting inscription like some male surrealists' ideation of a *femme-enfant* but are already alive and agentive. One of the figures has a rounded stomach and pubic hair, whilst the second emits a thrust of wild hair from the navel that umbilically connects to the other young female figure. It is unclear as to whether the women beneath the wallpaper are pulling in the young girls or if the girls are drawing them out into their sphere, but in mining beneath the paper I suggest that an emancipatory and reciprocal movement is represented, freeing the female figures on both sides from their confinement. In this way Tanning unleashes a mobile and liminal contact zone that resonates with the heterotopic spheres Bishop and Carrington construct.

The wildness of the girls' hair speaks to an ontology that spills beyond the bounds of a reductive 'neural container' which demands a controlled and rational appearance. It is emblematic of female characters enacting a posthuman politics which recognises what Braidotti describes as the 'embrainment' of the body rather than being depicted as mechanical vessels that operate according to rationalist dictates. The house is similarly forged as a container, or vessel, an instrument of phallogocentric culture that patrols female human behaviour and demands that it remain concealed and controlled. Tanning eschews these dictates in *Children's Games* rupturing the perceived containment of such phallogocentric confines by interrogating the dark forces beyond them in a way that recalls the Alma Fielding example. The themes and space are conspicuously heterotopic both in the female figures' attempts to explode the boundary walls of the mansion house but also in their location within a hallway that similarly speaks to an in-between milieu. Their age as adolescent girls is equally suggestive of an anticipatory and agentive ontology but also further speaks to a liminality in that they occupy a transitional temporality and space that negotiates the path from childhood to adulthood. The dark forces beyond the walls are intimated as so powerful that they pose a threat to such patriarchal rule and containment and also to the girls themselves. For example, a third figure lies prone as though overwhelmed by the extremity of her transgressions in her bid to go beyond the wallpaper and the phallogocentric culture of repression that it entails.

*Children's Games* further disrupts the tidy definitions of women's passivity misleadingly suggested by the innocence of its title, demonstrating how these women's journey to explore the inner forces that drive them illuminates a wildness denied by humanist parameters. Not only does Tanning forge a disjuncture in the patriarchal system, she also conjures a liminal and creative sphere that gives voice to a feminist politics in their heterotopic kinship. As Alyce Mahon explains, 'in Tanning's interiors the layers of decoration and decorum are literally peeled back, to show the flesh behind or beyond the

confines, perhaps pointing to the possibility of a space “outside”.<sup>70</sup> Tanning’s space ‘outside’ is a clear indicator of a heterotopic manoeuvre that resonates with Carrington’s and Bishop’s examples examined in this chapter. The creative, in-between sphere she constructs is both locatable – within a domestic space – and yet on the edge or outside of it in its uncanny strangeness. The collectiveness of this endeavour, where the females in her painting are apparently collaborating in their journey beyond repressive androcentric culture, is a theme I have already discussed in the work of Bishop and Carrington. Conley explores this theme in her discussions of the connections between the girls and figures behind the walls:

[they enact a game] about the mysteries of the lost imaginary world to which children retain access but adults tend to forget [...] The painting invites the adult viewer to remember what it was like to be a child and to believe in the material reality of the ghosts buried in the house, behind the walls, a burial these vigorous girls seek to escape.<sup>71</sup>

Conley here speaks to an ‘imaginary world’ as an empowering locus in the way that Bishop and Carrington access through ‘down below’ and dreamscapes. It suggests that a return to childhood perspectives forges a conduit back to these spheres that eschew rationality as the pervading principle. This is a further interrogation of a repressed and forgotten realm that, in turn, forges new posthuman approaches, where the imaginary splinters the rational mantel of humanist thinking. Conley’s reference to ghosts is to explore an encounter with the repressed and to allow it to brim at the surface in the way Tanning invokes in *Children Games*, where in pulling back the wallpaper these women imprisoned in their domestic

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<sup>70</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Dorothea Tanning: Tate* (London: Tate Publishing, 2018), p.74.

<sup>71</sup> Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, p.125.

confinement are finally released. Importantly, the ghost here, a symbol of what lies beneath, is one that allows ordinary women's 'pent-up energy' to find 'release' as Conley further explains: 'The ghostliness of Tanning's work stems from the reality she confers on the invisible energies she expresses on the visible and bubble forth from below the surface of ordinary settings such as hallways and broom closets.'<sup>72</sup> Here, Conley speaks to the cross-overs between conscious and unconscious spheres that are exhibited in Tanning's work where 'invisible energies', denied by Humanism, erupt in the everyday, forging agentive in-between portals.

By interrogating these nether-worldly and liminal heterotopias and exploring the ghostliness of our experiences, Tanning reconfigures and reimagines female ontology in a way that explodes the boundaries of space, defying the fixed spatial-temporal understanding of Humanism. These repressed ghosts lingering beneath and beyond show how the female figures in Tanning's work 'seek knowledge about *all* aspects of the human, including the increasingly embodied ghosts they discover haunting the old houses they inhabit and reflecting back to them hidden aspects of their own desires.'<sup>73</sup> Conley's reference to the way in which these figures uncover 'all' aspects of the human speaks to a broader, posthuman sensibility as well as the way in which the contact zones they forge intimate an empowering liminality for female figures who were otherwise trapped. The physicality of Tanning's painting, captured in the way she invokes a tactile quality in the swirls of paint that depict the girls' dresses and hair, anticipates her later soft sculptures created over two decades later. Whilst there is a considerable time span between these painted works and the era of her sculpted oeuvre, I turn to demonstrate how Tanning's inside out themes are sustained throughout this timeframe.

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<sup>72</sup> Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, p.120.

<sup>73</sup> Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, p.119.



**Figure 5.2** *Hotel du Pavot, Chambre 202* (1970-73), Dorothea Tanning © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2023

*Hotel du Pavot, Chambre 202* (1970-73) exhibits conspicuous parallels with its earlier cousin *Children's Games* where Tanning recapitulates the vision of figures erupting from the wallpaper, this time from a hotel room as the title intimates. The concept for the soft sculpture and installation derives from the lyrics of a song from Tanning's childhood about a 1920s Chicago gangster's wife, Kitty Kane. Kitty poisoned herself in room 202 of a local hotel. Tanning recalls one of the song verses here, providing a context for the work:

In room two hundred and two  
 The walls keep talkin' to you  
 I'll never tell you what they said  
 So turn out the light and come-to-bed.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations*, p.163.

The walls that 'keep talkin' return in this installation demonstrating how Dorothea's statement that in her childhood town Galesburg 'nothing happens but the wallpaper' reiterates the potential agentic force of the walls which are in fact a recurrent locus of activity in her work.<sup>75</sup> The talking walls of the sculpture articulate themselves through an agentic corporeality where female bodies protrude from them in a similar manner to those in *Children's Games*. However, in this three-dimensional incarnation, the bodies are constructed from soft, flesh-coloured fabric either emerging from the walls or retreating into them. The violent ripping exhibited in *Children's Games* is supposedly enacted by the figures behind the walls themselves where the aftermath of their emergence is manifest in the visceral tears of paper. As we have observed before, there is a disorienting slippage between the seemingly every day with the marvellous and other-worldly in the sculpture. There is an oppressive conservatism to some facets of the hotel room for example, where a rug lies in an orderly fashion across the panelled floor, mirroring the symmetry of the wooden walls beneath the lined wallpaper. I suggest that the seeming impenetrability of these vertical lines forges a claustrophobic ambiance in Tanning's vision emphasised by its absence of windows and dim lighting that is similarly apparent in *Children's Games*. But at the same time a dissonance is invoked in the way that furniture, such as table and chair, shapeshift into anthropomorphic visions. Their supposed solidity collides with the soft fabric from which they are constructed, melding the material and body together. Similarly, the open door to the left of the frame – a recurrent motif in Tanning's written and visual oeuvre as I have discussed – hints at other realms and a possible escape towards the unknown space behind it, recapitulating the fruitful potential of an otherworldly sphere below or beyond in the women surrealists' work. Importantly, such a play with boundaries

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<sup>75</sup> Dorothea Tanning, 'Dorothea Her Lights and Shadows (A Scenario)'. Translated from *XXe Siecle*, Paris, September 1976, reprinted in *Dorothea Tanning: 10 Recent Paintings and a Biography*, exh.cat., Gimpel-Weitzenhoffer Gallery, New York, 1979.

upsets Humanism's linear parameters and ushers this surreal spectacle into the domain of the marvellous, recalling Fodor's fruitful reference to portals. Victoria Carruthers also notes this metamorphic slippage:

In *Hotel du Pavot, Chambre 202*, the artist's preoccupation with the fantastic and other-worldly is evident, but also the way in which the boundary between physical 'place' and psychic space is collapsed, providing the perfect metaphor for the unconscious or the imagination.<sup>76</sup>

Tanning forces open another sphere as Carruthers observes, beyond the visual towards imaginary portals and psychic realms similar to the spaces that Carrington and Bishop investigate in their 'down below' and oneiric, heterotopic visions. The female figures of *Hotel du Pavot* are depicted in a state of urgency, empowered by liminal positions that neutralise the passive *femme-enfant* figure so idealised by some male surrealists. The work's title is also an implicit invitation to explore a broader psychic experience in the translation of *Pavot* meaning poppy. The opiate properties of the poppy plant and its capacity to induce an hallucinogenic experience, is an appropriate signifier of the vertiginous effect the figures emerging from the walls has upon the viewer. The poppy - a symbol of death and loss - is also significant in this context given that Tanning had Kitty Kane's death in mind when she composed the installation. Indeed, Tanning's *Hotel du Pavot* shares a resonance with Carrington's *Down Below* in their shared evocation of vertiginous psychic realms which tunnel beneath a broader, corporeal spectrum of human experience, thereby exploding Humanism's foundations anchored in reason. In these works, we discover that 'reason' is indeed 'limited' as Carrington posits before embarking upon a troubled, if enlightening journey into a 'down below' space that signals an

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<sup>76</sup> Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations*, p.158.

awakening to new realms of knowledge and understanding. It is an epiphany that resonates with the polyvalent nature of Tanning's visual art. I argue that this exploration of a psychic and imaginary geography simmering beneath and beyond human consciousness prompts a more kinaesthetic response that over-rides a myopic way of seeing, attributable to an androcentric lens. Here we 'look with three eyes, two outside and one inside' as Tanning directs. We travel into a heterotopic portal beyond human exterior perceptions to explore a more tactile multi-verse, speaking to a wider and affective experience that recognises our connection to both our unconscious and our environment.

Tanning's soft sculptures mark a move to see with three eyes in the way they are indicative of a shift of perspective. We witness how human experience is documented beyond one skewed through a rational human container. Carruthers explores the effects of this change from painting to sculpture in Tanning's work arguing that it prompts themes of metamorphosis that are further pertinent to the becoming themes of this chapter:

Like humans, Tanning imagined these creations to be transitory and fleeting. Indeed, soft sculpture defies the conventional longevity of traditional sculpture. The hard surfaces of marble, stone or concrete are replaced by the implication of yielding sensuality; of fluid organic shapes forming bulges and ripples. Soft sculpture can invert our expectations, or accentuate the effects of gravity in the collapsing, sagging and shifting associations with bodily metaphors.<sup>77</sup>

Carruthers here underlines the malleability of these works, both in the material sense but also in the way that they can similarly prompt a transformation of our perceptions, noting how they 'invert our expectations.' Her reference to a 'yielding sensuality' speaks to an

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<sup>77</sup> Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations*, p.148.

apparent eroticism in Tanning's oeuvre but also to the more compromising sensibility and aesthetics that it exhibits which challenges humanist essentialism. *Hotel du Pavot* is in fact comprised of a range of materials including fabric, wool, and synthetic fur, cardboard and even ping pong balls. The human body's malleability, emphasised in Tanning's use of soft fabric, speaks similarly to the metamorphic potential of the mind where 'walls keep talkin' to you', shifting her art out of the limitations of humanist reason to become immersed in wider and unseen psychic realms. The fleshly, female bodies that burst forth from the walls in *Hotel du Pavot* speak to posthuman agentive bodies that Braidotti urges us to take account of, forging figures that are not mechanical automatons of the Cartesian kind but thinking and agentive flesh and blood that lie beneath. They invoke ontologies that are dynamic beyond the bounds of the neural container's dictates and are catalysed by their liminal geography. The earthly and organic quality of this medium is a detail that Tanning had in the forefront of her mind when she envisaged her move towards a more three-dimensional terrain in her art. She explains this here in her memoir, *Between Lives* (2001), describing an awakening to this new artistic mode which she experienced whilst listening to Karlheinz Stockhausen conduct his piece 'Hymnen' at a concert:<sup>78</sup>

Spinning among the unearthly sounds of 'Hymnen' were the earthly, even organic shapes that I would make, had to make, out of cloth and wool; I saw them so clearly, living materials becoming living sculptures, their life span something like ours. Fugacious they would be, and fragile,<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> 'Hymnen', by German composer Stockhausen, comprised of electronic music and so-called concrete music; a mode constructed by mixing recorded sounds. Composed in 1966-67, although further elaborated upon in 1969, it was made up of four parts and was based upon a collection of national anthems from across the world.

<sup>79</sup> Tanning, *Between Lives*, p.281.

These 'living materials becoming living sculptures' intimate a rewriting of the passive *femme-enfant* figures that obsessed the male surrealists and speak to a palpable feminist uprising in Tanning's three-dimensional modes. These figures are not passive conduits of the unconscious but empowering and agentic manifestations of irrational, and unknown forces forcing open a posthuman portal that takes the viewer on a journey beyond the reasoned boundaries of Cartesian thinking. The mobile threshold crossings and the liminal, heterotopic space they enable speaks to a mode of seepage as a potentially empowering one in the context of Tanning's work where her female characters' capacity to slip between multiple spaces is a constructive manoeuvre. As I have argued regarding Carrington's *Down Below* realm, it is not the marker of escape but rather indicative of how Tanning's female figures also forge a space of their own that circumnavigates the boundary walls of Humanism. Margrit Shildrick explains the potential of this mode here: 'What a feminist project might aim to do is to uncover the mechanisms of construction, flaunt the contradictions and transgressions which destabilise the binaries, and insist on a diversity of provisional bodily identifications.'<sup>80</sup> Tanning's *Hotel du Pavot* is a work that 'destabilises' the binaries Shildrick discusses in the way that she ruptures the rational and irrational, body and mind, conscious and unconscious in her soft sculptures that explode boundaries. The hotel room in itself is a space that is immediately suggestive of liminality and transition; a realm that speaks to a temporariness that complements the urgent nomadism of the soft figures that meld with the walls and furniture, forging a heterotopic sphere. In this way these corporeal, liminal visions both transgress and contradict in the way that Grosz proposes in her corporeal feminist project where 'bodily identification' can only ever be 'provisional' when we peek beyond the lid of consciousness and fully explore it.

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<sup>80</sup> Margrit Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), p.60-61.

Such an emphasis upon the corporeal, which overrides the primacy of an androcentric consciousness, is further emphasised in the way *Hotel du Pavot's* figures are exhibited with their heads or faces concealed as we also witness in the women behind the wallpaper in *Children's Games*. Mahon argues that these figures 'resist the traditional speaking gesture of hands and fingers in favour of an erotic gesture of navels and orifices'.<sup>81</sup> It is also significant that the young girls who tear at the wallpaper in the earlier painting are turned away from the viewer leaving them to focus upon their agentic bodily actions rather than the aesthetics of their face. This could also be interpreted as a turn against the male surrealists' instinct to subsume women into their misogynistic category of passive *femme-enfant* or examples of *l'amour-fou*, therefore enacting a corporeal refusal that invokes feminist and posthuman resistance. Whilst in Humanism, as Braidotti discusses, the mind and consciousness are sites that mark human exceptionalism, in Tanning's, the head or face is often curiously absent forcing the audience to focus instead upon bodies. In this way she invokes an imaginary and bodily landscape that defies Humanism's rational epistemologies, encouraging the audience to contemplate and explore unknown, in-between spaces driven by the corporeal and the psyche. As a result, Tanning's work examined here, like Bishop's and Carrington's, conjures a mobile and liminal landscape beyond Humanism's epistemic boundaries, exploding binary identifications in a manoeuvre that thwarts the reductive mechanisms of androcentric thinking. Their recurrent heterotopic manoeuvring forges empowering and emancipating feminist, posthuman spaces that give voice to a broader spectrum of human ontologies, thereby embracing conscious and unconscious experience as a continuum rather than a binary dynamic.

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<sup>81</sup> Mahon, *Dorothea Tanning Tate*, p.57.

## Conclusion

In the surrealist work investigated here all three artists are contending with the 'unknown forces' that Tanning identifies, venturing to the precipice of Humanism's boundary of consciousness before breaching it to forge posthuman geographies in heterotopic realms. Bishop, Carrington and Tanning expose 'the neural human container' that symbolises Cartesian Humanism as 'inadequate' in the way Braidotti posits, conjuring instead transitional realms characterised by 'flows and distributed processes.' The surrealist work exhibited here resonates with Michel Foucault's heterotopic spaces via liminalities which are geographically locatable, yet conspicuously within a terrain that could be categorised as an 'outside.' In this way they conform to Foucault's idea of a threshold, an in-between space or spaces characterised by a plurality that eludes the reductive borders of humanist culture. I have explored how the surrealist work here manifests 'counters-sites' in Foucault's words, where the female characters exhibit nomadic and malleable identities who find agency in their slippage into unquantifiable unknown, in-between landscapes, myopically overlooked by a humanist lens.

Bishop's fascination with dreamscapes as fruitful portals into the unconscious typically thwart humanist, rational perspectives to inhabit an often-playful imaginary locus as well as tiptoeing across a threshold to glimpse into nightmares and fears. Her fascination with Surrealism in Paris in the 1930s inspired her to delve further into the unseen, invoking dreamscapes which broaden our understanding of the human psyche and experience beyond its rational container. At the same time, Bishop's Parisian poems negotiate the dynamic between conscious and unconscious experience melding them in her heterotopic, oneiric geographies. Similarly, Carrington's invocation of the marvellous in a 'down below' space during her time in an asylum in Santander exposes the cruelty of the medical profession's machinations but also her capacity to find a creative catalyst in her journey beyond its androcentric walls. Whilst Dr Morales' remit was to return Carrington to a

surface of humanist reason, she repeatedly demonstrates how conforming to a fascist Humanism that was manifest during World War Two was to be part of a species from which she felt disconnected. Instead, her psychic and surreal journey to explore the mythic and metamorphic realms of down below speaks to a wider understanding of humanist epistemologies but also human ontology where her breakdown in many ways is better understood as a breakthrough towards new experience and knowledge. Such an awakening, which involves a broader understanding of the human psyche and experience by mining what lies beyond it, is similarly manifest in Tanning's visual oeuvre where she unleashes strange forces in adolescent figures who are catalysed by their liminal and heterotopic positioning. In the same way as Bishop's speakers and Carrington are enabled by their melding of conscious and unconscious experience in liminal spheres so too do Tanning's female protagonists enact agentive, unconscious, and irrational experiences by occupying an in-between and transitional geography that forges portals towards a posthuman beyond. As Carruthers argues we witness in the works I have explored here how Tanning employs 'the body as a formal device for exploring movement, sensation and emotions' allowing them to emerge from spaces where they were formerly concealed or repressed.<sup>82</sup> Most significantly I have considered how Tanning invokes a feminist politics most resonantly in her visions of what lies beyond the thresholds of androcentric culture, where the bodies that thrust out of walls and wallpaper speak to an anticipatory posthuman politics that neutralises the male surrealists' construction of so-called '*l'amour fou*'. As a result, the female figures explored in this chapter demonstrate how a trip to the other side of reason, is not to be subsumed into passive stasis as some male surrealists would suggest but to forge a heterotopic space that constructs an active feminist politics. Most importantly, the artists' odyssey into these transitional spaces that explode humanist frontiers is not symptomatic of a retreat or quest for sanctuary but more a creative and

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<sup>82</sup> Carruthers, *Dorothea Tanning: Transformations*, p.164.

interrogative enterprise that unearths posthuman, feminist and liminal spheres;  
kaleidoscopic and equivocal realms that oscillate between conscious and unconscious  
experience in a becoming praxis that underpins the themes of this thesis.

**Conclusion: Exiting the Anthropos**



**Figure C.1** *Birthday* (1942) Dorothea Tanning © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2023

In her self-portrait *Birthday* (1942), Dorothea Tanning stares back at the audience in a confrontational manner, her gaze unwavering and determined in a way that unsettles the viewer. Her appearance is anachronistic, dressed in a quasi-pre-Raphaelite costume that speaks to a traditional aesthetic and yet her exigent gaze and semi-dressed appearance is at once modern and subversive. At her feet sits an unknown hybrid creature who mirrors her rebellious stare and shares the parallels I note in Chapter One between Leonora Carrington and the lactating cheetah in her *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)* (1937-39). Tanning's chimerical creature is bat-like but with hawk wings and a bedraggled tail. Its claws grip firmly to the stripped floorboards, but its black-tipped wings are aloft as if poised for take-off. Indeed, both characters are apparently mobilised, as if in an anticipatory mood, thereby challenging the typically fixed stance we may associate with the still of a human self-portrait. Such an interconnection between human and animal is a clear posthuman theme and one that I have shown is manifest in the work of the women surrealists examined throughout this thesis. Indeed, *Birthday* both signposts and consolidates posthuman themes of metamorphoses, becoming and entanglement that Tanning, Elizabeth Bishop and Carrington repeatedly exhibit in their surrealist work. It is a painting that demonstrates how the aims of this thesis have been two-fold: (1) to contribute to scholarship that situates women surrealists beyond the male canon via an ecological, feminist lens and (2) to show how their oeuvre has the capacity to act as a navigational tool as we confront a sixth mass extinction event. Crucially, my findings have highlighted how the women surrealists' motifs of entanglement, becoming and metamorphosis speak to our inherent ecological interconnections with the non-human world in a way that explodes humanist and speciesist principles - values that have imperiled all life on earth.

Whitney Chadwick's argument that Surrealism was propelled by an ambition to completely transform human values has been the cue to examine how the surrealists present a challenge to such values. Given the environmental crisis that pervades our times, caused by the misplaced values of our species, I have argued that it is therefore timely to consider ways in which the surrealist movement questions our principles. Indeed, the ecological interests of Surrealism, more broadly, have been noted by a growing field of scholars as I have discussed. This thesis demonstrates how Surrealism's female practitioners were, in fact, best placed to hold such values to account. Humanism, as feminists Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway argue, is a pervasive framework that has privileged white, male, Eurocentric figures. The male proponents of Surrealism's predilection for the passive *femme-enfant* figure has the potential to perpetuate this patriarchal myth system, further galvanising my argument that they are not in a position to convincingly challenge these human and humanist values. Posthumanism is thus a lens and strategy in this thesis, given its capacity to help the human species recognise its own role in the world in a more balanced manner. Derek Ryan's summary of posthumanism explains how the purpose of this framework and philosophy is not one of nihilism about our future but rather one that looks to revise and reimagine our actions towards, and relationships with, non-humans and non-human space.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Cary Wolfe stresses that posthumanism upsets the hierarchical and divisive habits of Humanism enabling a new ontology for the human species. He explains that it allows us 'to describe the human and its characteristic modes of communication, interaction, meaning, social significations and investments with greater specificity once we have removed meaning from the ontologically closed domain of consciousness, reason, reflection'.<sup>2</sup> Key to the revision Wolfe proposes is

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Ryan reimagines a more balanced dynamic between human and non-human animals in his discussion of the aims of posthumanism and animal theory in *Animal Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.69.

<sup>2</sup> Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p.xxv.

to recognise our own relationship with the non-human world to see how we are part of its intricate web rather than exterior to it. Such posthuman principles of entanglement are precisely the ones that this thesis highlights in the work of Tanning, Bishop and Carrington.

The resonance between Tanning and the hybrid in *Birthday* speaks to a non-hierarchical approach to non-human animals and the more balanced ecological dynamic exhibited by the women surrealists examined here. Such an interrelationship, which I have identified more specifically in Chapter One via the similarly hybrid visions seen in Carrington's and Bishop's work, is evidence of their prescient non-speciesist stance as well as their belief in the inherent animality of the human. Carrington in particular was a believer in human-animality explaining that, 'There are some faculties that we haven't admitted or recognized because we're frightened that somebody might think we are also animals, which we are'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, not only does Carrington argue that we should confront our own animality rather than be afraid of it, she also echoes Friedrich Nietzsche who posited that the animal represents the best of humanity.<sup>4</sup> We witness this repeatedly in her written oeuvre where human-animal assemblages and creaturely communities speak back and challenge androcentrism as the ruling principle.

Likewise, Bishop's early poetry shows an understanding of human-animal interconnections in her surrealist vision of the hybrid. The poems 'The Man-Moth' and 'The Riverman' signpost human-animal interconnections in cross-species alliances which explode the bodily boundaries so prized by humanist thinkers. Moreover, Bishop's human-animal hybrids are characterised as outsider figures who communicate her own queer identity. They present a further challenge to Humanism's heteronormative parameters and

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<sup>3</sup> Hans-Ulrich Obrist, 'Interview with Leonora Carrington: An Approach to a Reality That We Do Not Yet Understand', *Leonora Carrington*, ed. Sean Kissane (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2013), p.160.

<sup>4</sup> In Chapter One of this thesis, I discuss how Nietzsche argues that to be part of humanity is to be inherently prejudiced, positing further that the animal within us should emerge again in order for us to be free. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.26.

thus its typically boundary-making praxis. Indeed, this thesis has noted how boundary transgressions are a repeated motif in the work of the women surrealists, crossings which denote not just simply rebellion but also indicate a potential to construct a new cartography of multiple human-animal ontologies. These examples demonstrate how both Bishop and Carrington body forth Gilles Deleuze's figure of the 'becoming-animal' which Rosi Braidotti adopts as a potential feminist strategy.<sup>5</sup> This thesis repeatedly observes the 'becoming animal' at work in the women surrealists' oeuvre, seen in hybrids but also in examples where women and creaturely communities operate as an ensemble across species lines. While my discussion in Chapter One focused on human-animal hybrids in the work of Carrington and Bishop, Tanning's deployment of her childhood pet Tibetan terrier, who often appears in anthropomorphised form, is a topic that requires investigation beyond this thesis. Like Carrington's cheetah or equine figures, Tanning's so-called Katchina is a canine who exhibits the characteristics of what Donna Haraway would term as a 'companion species'. I posit that Tanning's animals merit an exclusive study of their own.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, themes of human-animality as well as human and animal interconnections abound across the women's surrealist oeuvre demonstrating how a posthuman lens could also illuminate the work of other female practitioners with surrealist associations.

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<sup>5</sup> Braidotti's insistence that the 'becoming animal' mode has the potential to 'scramble the master-code of phallogentrism' thereby 'loosening its power over the body' furthers their thinking in a way that provides original feminist readings of the human-animal hybrid in the women surrealists' work. Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p.124.

<sup>6</sup> Donna Haraway's concept of *companion species* develops the becoming animal motif to consider more specifically the idea of *becoming with* other species. The singularity of each animal and our interrelationship with them is of most importance to her where she charts a reciprocal and affective dynamic between human and non-human species, thus unravelling humanist binaries. Haraway's 'Becoming with' enacts what she describes as a 'multidirectional gene flow' of 'multidirectional flows of bodies and values', p.9. Focusing in particular on her own relationship with Australian Shepherd Cayenne she explains, 'We are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand. We are, constitutively, companion species. We make each other up, in the flesh,' p.2-3. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003). This 'becoming with' lens could be fruitful in examining Tanning's portrayal of her dog Katchina in her paintings and may also be illuminating when more closely examining Carrington's equine visions in both her written and visual art.

Whilst *Birthday* does not directly pertain to human-animal hybridity, it signposts the motifs of entanglement that I conclude are key to demonstrating how the women surrealists were percipient advocates of posthuman thinking. In this thesis I have repeatedly highlighted the becoming modes that characterise the work of all three figures showing how they represent a praxis that speaks to an anticipatory posthuman and feminist politics. Chapter Two illuminates what I describe as becoming matter visions in their oeuvre and brings it into conversation with the becoming momentum identified in the previous chapter. With this focus I show how both organic and non-organic subjects in their work indicate our connections to botanic life as well as supposedly inert matter. I conclude that Tanning and Bishop perform a so-called horizontalizing of relations between human and non-human space in visions that show how we are implicated within a world of matter, because we are composite matter ourselves. *Birthday* is an emblematic example of the becoming-matter momentum I demonstrate in Chapter Two, where we see how the Tanning figure herself is dressed in an apparently mobile and organic costume which on close inspection, is a living entity. From her dress Tanning exhibits visible green tendrils trailing to the floor. At first glance they are comprised of twisting and thorny plant life but when we look closer, we witness how the botanic limbs are in fact also in the guise of the female body. Not only does this pose a threat to Humanism's investment in the integrity of bodily boundaries, it also speaks to the human's own ontology that is dependent upon, and entwined with non-human space. Thus, we observe in the women's surrealist work how the environment and ecologies that we presume to be exterior to us both materially, as well as philosophically are in fact an inherent and integral component of our own metamorphic make-up, consequently rupturing the nature-culture binary that Humanism is predicated upon.

Such themes of metamorphosis recur throughout the work of the women surrealists examined and thus assert the posthuman position that it presciently exhibits. To

be on the move and nomadic is a key characteristic of the women's surrealist oeuvre and exploring alternative destinations is a key praxis that further demonstrates a turn away from androcentric fixity. As Braidotti underlines, 'the morphological frame of the nomadic body is open-ended, interrelational and trans-species. It explodes the boundaries of humanism at skin level'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, 'nomadic' bodies and ruptured 'boundaries' are posthuman markers in both Bishop's and Carrington's work inspired by their move to Latin America. It is a relocation that is suggestive of a further estrangement from a Humanism that is repeatedly derived from and located within an essentialist, Eurocentric locale. I show how Bishop's and Carrington's work from this period evades the epistemological mappings of European culture and geography to instead explore a Latin American milieu that recurrently turns toward indigenous philosophy; one which eschews a European-bound Humanism. To this end, Chapter Three highlights the striking parallels between indigenous philosophy and posthumanism. Latin American indigenous culture's foundational principles are found in a belief in caring for the Earth in a reciprocal dynamic. Its deeply felt conviction that everything on the planet is connected and implicated together are key posthuman values thus distancing them from a Humanism that seeks to draw a clear line between human and non-human worlds. I show how these values radiate from the work of Carrington and Bishop set in Latin America, work which repeatedly turns to pre-patriarchal culture that intimates a gynocentric domain. Chapters Two and Three in particular speak to the way in which the women surrealists work demonstrates an ecofeminist legacy whilst moving beyond its more essentialising praxis. Throughout this thesis I have prefaced how the figures examined here exhibit a kinship with the agentive power of the non-human world in a way that intimates an early ecofeminist inheritance. However, their politics is repeatedly channelled via an anticipatory, posthuman trajectory

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<sup>7</sup> Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p.124.

that eschews any suggestion of positioning women and nature together as passive partners.

This thesis has thus shown how the women's surrealist venture was very much one underpinned by revisionary principles which rewrite women's place within the surrealist canon as well as the very values that we claim as humanist. Thus, a specific focus upon 'Radical Retellings', seen in Chapter Four, speaks to an overarching theme that further brings all chapters into conversation. As I have argued, the subjects of this project repeatedly hold humanist values to account before reconstructing them in new kaleidoscopic and shifting visions. I show in Chapter Four a conspicuous revisionary process at work in Carrington's novel *The Hearing Trumpet* (1976) and Tanning's *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004). In selecting these novels, I also address what Anna Watz describes as the double-marginalisation of women surrealists given that the attention their work has received has been predominantly skewed towards their visual oeuvre. Watz has made a vital contribution to scholarship with her recently published *Women's Surrealist Writing: A Critical Exploration* (2020) which I view as the beginning of a wider and more investigative exploration of the genre that has been woefully overlooked. In this way Chapter Four speaks to a further radical retelling in the way that it seeks to likewise bring women's surrealist writing to the fore and out of the shadows of its more well-known visual art. More specifically, I show how both writers perform radical retellings of narratives entrenched in Western tradition, and in particular those that impart Christian didacticism. Carrington's and Tanning's recourse to dark humour and violence respectively performs a feminist and posthuman reconfiguration of stories that make patriarchal Humanism the ruling principle. Key to arguing that both Carrington's and Tanning's retellings are indicative of posthuman trajectories I demonstrate how they are examples of what Braidotti would label as defamiliarisations. Such an estrangement from the more well-known and indeed humanist tales embedded within western and religious storytelling exhibit the strategy of

defamiliarisation that Braidotti argues is vital in performing an ‘anthropological exodus’. Indeed, I show how the surrealists’ practice of defamiliarisation has the capacity to recalibrate the pervasive perspectives of Western Cartesian thinkers. As Braidotti succinctly puts it in a way that could sum up the surrealist modes examined throughout this thesis, ‘Defamiliarization with anthropocentrism shifts the relationship to the non-human others and requires dis-identification from century-old habits of anthropocentric thought and humanist arrogance.’<sup>8</sup>

Such ‘dis-identification’ underpins the becoming trajectory that we witness across the work of the subjects examined throughout this thesis. Defamiliarising the world we think we know speaks to a posthumanist strategy that has the capacity to redirect our ‘humanist arrogance’ towards a more balanced and ecological perspective. This mode is similarly redolent in the shifting and heterotopic spheres we encounter in the work of all three subjects which I make the focus of Chapter Five. I show how space is reimagined in constantly shifting and metamorphic spheres that are typically characterised as an in-between in their surrealist oeuvre. In this way they conform to Michel Foucault’s coinage of ‘heterotopias’ which are necessarily liminal, empowering and enabling loci. This thesis’s recurring themes of metamorphosis surge to the fore in this context, where speakers are catalysed by the way in which they occupy these shifting geographies, thus defying and over-writing the logocentrism that anchors Humanism. Bishop, Carrington and Tanning all choose to pursue and occupy these in-between and often irrational modes and milieux which embrace unconscious and oneiric zones, giving voice to female speakers typically muted by the reasoned dictates of Humanism. In this way I show how their oeuvre has the potential to forge a more open-ended posthumanist ontology in the way that it eschews what Wolfe describes as the ‘closed domain of consciousness, reason, reflection.’<sup>9</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>8</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), p.140.

<sup>9</sup> Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, p.xxv.

throughout this thesis I have demonstrated how the artists' and authors' open-ness to becoming and metamorphic modes forges space for fantastical and oneiric experience that explodes the boundaries of the Cartesian reason.

Whilst this thesis has examined surrealist work that, in some examples, is over one hundred years old, it is a study that is primarily driven by contemporary feminist theory and contributes to current environmental debate. The ecological crisis pervades our times: scientists, scholars and politicians grapple with this existential threat in a world that stands upon the brink of an emergency of the human species' own making. This thesis has argued that posthuman principles, which have the capacity to aid us in navigating an environmental disaster, are presciently signposted in the surrealist visions of Elizabeth Bishop, Leonora Carrington and Dorothea Tanning. I have posited that their twentieth-century work traces the demise of the natural world back to the actions of what Haraway identifies as 'Species Man'<sup>10</sup>, where we witness the speciesist decision making of a Humanism that is rooted in patriarchal thinking. However, this thesis demonstrates the way that all three subjects evoke a cartography that seeks to overcome and reimagine the ruins of androcentric activity. Their surrealist oeuvre conjures a more balanced milieu of human and non-human connections that maps a possible path forward. In this way it is a study that resides at an intersection between feminism and posthumanism, arguing that the way in which Bishop's, Carrington's and Tanning's surrealist oeuvre recurrently speaks to women's alliance with the non-human, underlines the imperative that we exit androcentricism in order to divert from our current apocalyptic trajectory. More specifically the five chapters here chart the topics of entanglement, becoming and metamorphosis as recurrent strategic motifs in all three of the subjects' work that most redolently signal how

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<sup>10</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), p.47-49. Haraway discusses the problem with 'Species Man' explaining that his pervasive story-telling needs to give way to other voices that take account of non-human others and those of the human species who have been marginalised by his tyrannical reign over earth.

it is enmeshed within a posthuman mode. As we approach the centenary of Surrealism in 2024, marking one hundred years since Breton's first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, it is therefore a timely moment to reevaluate the movement, and consider how its capacity to defamiliarise the world we think we master, could reconfigure human values. Thus, this thesis is in many ways the beginning of a broader conversation about the more balanced environmental perspectives exhibited by the women surrealists' catalogue and how they in turn have the capacity to catalyse current feminist, ecological thinking. Indeed, Surrealism's centenary is the cue to question a pervasive androcentric perspective as the imperative that we rewrite our species' values becomes more vital than ever before.

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