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Sticky Stories: Affect and Biblical Myth in Women’s Speculative Fiction, 1970-2020

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Abstract

A regular feature of feminist speculative fiction, a world threatened by disease, climate change, war or political regime, often provokes its characters to feel nostalgic about a romanticised past or hopeful about an idealised future. Donna Haraway notes that these feelings are often based in “a comic faith in technofixes [... or that] God will come to the rescue of his disobedient but ever hopeful children” – or worse, that we might take “a position that the game is over” (3). This thesis asks how biblical myths of creation and apocalypse provide unconscious cultural blueprints for these feelings, which can intensify emotions or distract us from, as Haraway calls it, “staying with the trouble.” I use this concept in conjunction with the work of biblical scholar and queer theorist Stephen D. Moore, who approaches affect theory and the Bible through Sara Ahmed’s apt metaphor of “stickiness” to describe the way certain emotions attach themselves to certain people, stories or ideas. The thesis also uses Karen Bray and Stephen D. Moore’s formulae for viewing negative affect as a tool for wider “social diagnosis.”

This research focuses on precisely these issues in the following novels: Call Me Ishtar (1973) by Rhoda Lerman; The Passion of New Eve (1977) by Angela Carter; Dawn (1987), Adulthood Rites (1988) and Imago (1989) (known as Xenogenesis/Lilith’s Brood trilogy) by Octavia Butler; Oryx and Crake (2003), The Year of the Flood (2009) and MaddAddam (2013) (known as the MaddAddam trilogy) by Margaret Atwood; and (in a shorter case study) The Power (2016) by Naomi Alderman. These works of speculative fiction play with the connected myths of beginning and end to reveal their emotional pull for characters as well as readers. Reading these novels in chronological order, this research finds that they tend to respond to debates within varying strands of feminism or womanism; trends that are reflected in feminist/womanist/queer biblical studies or theologies of the time. Lerman and Carter use creation/apocalypse and their associated emotions to satirise movements within “second wave” feminisms that focused on uncovering the “lost” goddess of the Hebrew Bible, while still diagnosing the patriarchal structures that created the goddess movement. Butler’s Lilith’s Brood novels investigate another figure submerged in the Hebrew Bible’s creation myths, Lilith, and her association with monstrousness and the “other.” Lastly, Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy reveals multiple Eves and Adams who are each in some way complicit in a seemingly inevitable second fall caused by our mistreatment of the environment.

Throughout these novels, negative affects such as rage, loneliness, depression and disgust operate on and through characters, who in many cases cannot escape the nostalgic pull of Eden or the purgative push of apocalypse. Awakened to this, the reader may identify moments in which characters may (or may not) as Haraway puts it, “stay with the trouble” rather than giving in to the intoxicating dream of beginning afresh.
Lay Summary

Donna Haraway writes, “it matters what stories tell stories,” and it is often through fiction that we can more clearly see the reality of our own time. Speculative fiction can be used as an umbrella term for various genres that involve unreality: these can include science fiction, fantasy and magic realism. This research looks at several works of speculative fiction by women between 1970 and 2020: *Call Me Ishtar* (1973) by Rhoda Lerman; *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) by Angela Carter; *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989) (known as *Xenogenesis/Lilith’s Brood* trilogy) by Octavia Butler; *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013) (known as the *MaddAddam* trilogy) by Margaret Atwood; and (in a shorter case study) *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman.

Each of these novels in some way involves a world threatened by unrest, disease, climate change, war or political regime, provoking its characters to feel nostalgic about a romanticised past or hopeful about an idealised future. They are also all brought together by common themes, which are the biblical myths of creation and apocalypse: some include characters called Eve, Adam or Lilith; others contemplate what Paradise might mean; others are fixated on returning to “the garden” via a deadly apocalyptic event. This thesis asks how these biblical ideas of beginning and ending can intensify characters’ emotions and distract them from, as Donna Haraway calls it, “staying with the trouble” of their present reality. In many cases within these novels, the characters’ obsession with beginning afresh can lead to far greater trouble.

In particular, the research looks at how contemporary affect theory – the study of emotion – can be applied to these novels, both in the context of feminist theory and biblical scholarship. As well as Donna Haraway, the main theorists whose work the research interacts with are Stephen D. Moore and Sara Ahmed, who argue that certain objects (in this case myths) can become “sticky,” attaching themselves (and their associated emotions) to certain people, stories or ideas. Looking at how these stories “stick” – and what that stickiness can do to individuals caught in their trap – can help us make wider judgements about the kinds of societies under scrutiny in the selected novels, which usually reflect back on our own society.

Reading them in chronological order, this research finds that these novels tend to respond to debates within varying strands of feminism of their time; trends that are also reflected in biblical studies and theology too. Throughout, negative emotions such as rage, loneliness, depression and disgust operate on and through characters, who in many cases cannot escape the nostalgic pull of Eden or the purgative push of apocalypse. Awakened to this, the reader is able to identify moments in which characters may (or may not) “stay with the trouble” rather than giving in to the intoxicating dream of beginning afresh.
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Abbreviations

(A)KJV (Authorised) King James Version
ANE Ancient Near East(ern)
LXX Septuagint
NRSV New Revised Standard Version
SF Science fiction
SpF Speculative fiction
Introduction

The end of the Bible returns to the beginning. There is an echo or trace of the nothingness, the formless void, from the beginning. There is the possibility of a new and different creation, another text. Leaving the void intact creates the possibility of change. Maybe this time the story will be different.

_Tina Pippin, Apocalyptic Bodies, 77_


_Donna Haraway echoing Marilyn Strathearn, Staying with the Trouble, 35_

It is in the intensity of bodily responses to worlds that we make judgements about worlds.

_Sara Ahmed, The Cultural Politics of Emotion, 209_

When Donna Haraway writes, “It matters what stories tell stories,” her readers are reminded of the importance of intertextuality for conveying particular meaning and feeling in contemporary fiction (Trouble 35). For this project, I investigate ancient stories of beginnings and endings at work in several contemporary novels: the biblical myths of creation and apocalypse, which form blueprints for thinking and feeling through the novels’ uncomfortable (usually dystopian) circumstances. The two creation narratives in Genesis 1-3 provide the reader with a complex and often problematic sense of where they came from or what could have been; and apocalyptic writing, in particular the New Testament’s Apocalypse of John or Revelation, provides its readers with equally troubling feelings about where they are going, or rather what’s coming to them. This thesis aims to demonstrate how and why these narratives overlap and inscribe meaning
on our own stories in ways that can intensify or distract our emotions and, importantly, prevent fictional characters from staying in the moment. The novels selected for this study, spanning fifty years, make use of these narratives in different ways, responding to important currents and anxieties within their time of publication. In Sara Ahmed’s terms, this thesis will examine why these stories (both biblical and literary) “stick” to each other, stick us to each other, or stick characters to certain powerful emotions that may cloud their judgement. Seeing the narratives for what they are, or what they can do, in turn, allows the reader to understand these myths at work in their own tumultuous times.

**Myth, Re-vision and Speculative Fiction by Women**

Before introducing the selected novels, I should address the way in which this thesis approaches the idea of myth, particularly to describe certain passages of the biblical canon. Margaret Atwood recalls some of her fellow students’ scandalisation at hearing Northrop Frye use the word “myth” in his lectures on the Bible in the late 1950s, and goes on to clarify that “myth” need not delineate whether something is truth or fiction but instead refers to stories that generate cultural meaning. She writes, “myths are stories that are central to their cultures and that are taken seriously enough that people organize their ritual and emotional lives around them” (*Other Worlds* 55). Similarly, Holly Morse explains in Barthesian terms, “any text that naturalizes historically contingent social constructions, such as gender, into normative, and even seemingly ‘objective’, truths constitutes a myth” (*Eve’s Afterlives* 110). More playfully, Joanna Russ
writes, “[myths] are dramatic embodiments of what a culture believes to be true—or what it would like to be true—or what it is mortally afraid may be true” (Write 81). In this way, Western culture is largely shaped by biblical myths and their reception histories, which continue to influence politics, art, literature, law, gender norms and, of course, religion. Insistence on literal interpretation of the Bible by some has made its stories less malleable over time, yet flexibility of interpretation has always been a natural part of cultural meaning-making (Armstrong 131; Greenblatt 97). Certainly fiction, especially genres such as science fiction, fantasy and speculative fiction are held to be very close relatives of myth, owing to their reliance on allegory and use of the fantastic to ask similar questions of the reader (Atwood, Other Worlds 51-56). In this thesis I use “speculative fiction” (SpF) as an umbrella term for these related novels that use cognitive estrangement to ask certain questions about our place in the universe. While this thesis does not attempt to define the genre, it groups the selected novels together under the label since they share many of the elements outlined in R. B. Gill’s 2013 article entitled “The Uses of Genre and the Classification of Speculative Fiction.”

In her introduction to Myth and Fairy Tale in Women’s Fiction Susan Sellers provides a far-reaching overview of differing definitions of myth, from Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung to Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, and on to more contemporary writers of fiction (1-8). Among these is Angela Carter’s famous declaration that myth is “consolatory nonsense” (The Sadeian Woman) as well as Marina Warner’s assertion that myth works “as a lens onto human culture in its historical and social context, binding the reader in stock reactions or else providing the starting point for new tellings” (paraphrased in Sellers 7). The phrase “binding the reader in stock reactions” is
particularly pertinent here as I go on to assess the affective hold certain myths have on
their audiences. While Sellers and many others consider the “new tellings” to be the
important factor in what is an expanding body of work on women’s re-vision of myth,¹
this research focuses more on readers’ or characters’ emotional relationships to old
tellings, and how different strategies of mythic re-vision can intensify or distract us from
the issues at hand. Sellers writes,

    stories play a formative part in creating who we are since they present a medium
    through which we can organise, communicate and remember our experiences,
    proffering ready-made schemata that equip us to understand and evaluate our lives by
    connecting what happens to us to a wider community and other points of view. (vii)

I contend that myths also contain “ready-made schemata” for feeling as well as
understanding and evaluating our lives, and that the latter cannot function without the
former.

The works of speculative fiction I have selected for this thesis each engage in re-
vision of the two creation myths found in Genesis 1-3, reimagining their details or
characters and readdressing the meaning of gender, nature, knowledge, and a loss of
innocence. Speculative works of fiction by women focus a surprising amount on the
garden narrative,² despite thinkers such as Haraway and others advising against a return
to the scene of innocence:

    Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time
    wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the

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¹ I draw the term “re-vision” from Adrienne Rich: “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of
entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it
is an act of survival” (35). Why an act of survival? Alison Jack explains, “to expose the patriarchal ideology
of some texts: some then to reject them completely, others to recover what they can from the wreckage,
still others to re-write or recreate the voices that have been silenced” (108).
² Jonathan Magonet reminds readers that it is Christian tradition that labels the Garden narrative “the
Fall” – and indeed the Christian tradition that breaks up the text into chapters puts emphasis on the
entrance of the snake in a way that the Masoretic text does not (39). Thus I have chosen generally to refer
to Genesis 2-3 as the “garden story/narrative/myth” in order to focus on what is shared between these
traditions.
power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. (“Cyborg” 55, my emphasis)

This thesis aims to prove that these works return to Genesis (and Revelation) to uncover something about our concept of before and after that disrupts or informs our ability to function in the now. The fictional texts I have chosen to focus on are: Call Me Ishtar (1973) by Rhoda Lerman; The Passion of New Eve (1977) by Angela Carter; Dawn (1987), Adulthood Rites (1988) and Imago (1989), known as The Lilith’s Brood or Xenogenesis trilogy by Octavia E. Butler; Oryx and Crake (2003), The Year of the Flood (2009) and MaddAddam (2013), known as the MaddAddam trilogy by Margaret Atwood; and to a lesser extent The Power (2016) by Naomi Alderman. These works of speculative fiction experiment with the biblical myths of creation and, by extension, the destruction of the world as we know it, since that is usually the only way to begin again. They do this not to trouble themselves over retrieving an “original innocence” but to reach into the Bible’s mythic landscape and “seize the tools” used to draw out particular affective responses in characters – and readers. In Keith Oatley’s work on emotion in fiction, he identifies backward-chaining and forward-chaining as responses to differing negative emotions: backward-chaining looks for explanations as to why something has come about and forward-chaining looks to solutions or retributions. Oatley notes that anger is usually associated with forward-chaining and sadness with backward-chaining (95-96).³ This research aims to link these processes to the tendencies for characters under stress to sweep backwards to creation or forwards to apocalypse, depending on the emotions being evoked, and why such habits might be problematic. The texts in this thesis

³ My use of Oatley’s work only extends to this particular claim, as I find his exploration of emotion in literature inadequate in its discussions on gender, class and race.
similarly do not simply warn against nostalgic longing for an imagined prelapsarian perfection; they also identify how closely creation and apocalypse are linked in the Western psyche, and how the ambivalent emotions evoked by this connection can cause people to be complacent or overreactive in the face of catastrophe. Though these works of fiction span decades, they all share a satirical or cynical tone with regards to myth. The emotions or affects at work in these texts are, as a result, more complex, perhaps more “ugly” (Ngai 10) and therefore more nuanced than they might be in utopian literature, or literature written from a particular confessional or theological standpoint.

**Affect Theory, Literature and the Bible**

Though the master’s thesis I submitted in 2018 pursued other lines of enquiry, one of the novels examined, Alderman’s *The Power* (2016), provides several jumping-off questions for this body of doctoral research. For example, I might ask why, in times of crisis, we find so many Eve (or Lilith) figures present in women’s speculative fiction? Why does Western civilisation still abound with images of the couple in the garden, lolling in their easy nakedness or shamefacedly covering themselves as the consequences of their actions dawn on them? Why are these images so often juxtaposed or intertwined with images of apocalypse? And why does the garden myth still “haunt” us, as Paul Morris describes in 1992, in debates ranging from women clergy to animal rights (“A Walk” 21). Thirty years later, you still need not look far for references to Genesis 2-3, whether in sexually suggestive advertising (Edwards 4), the

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4 More specifically, the two creation narratives consist of Genesis 1.1-2.4a and 2.4b-3.24, but for brevity I will refer to them throughout this thesis as Genesis 1 and 2-3.
bitten apple on your iPhone or Virago novel, or the opening remarks in internationally reported trials. But for all its ubiquity in cultural contexts, the story is rarely scrutinised in its written form outside of academic contexts (Bal, qtd. in Morse, Eve’s Afterlives 2). Even within academia, there is a palpable hesitancy in recent feminist theological and biblical scholarship to approach the subject. Like these scholars, I am cautious about reproducing clichés, which is why I have selected novels that appear to disrupt the apparent naïveté with which Genesis 1 and 2-3 have sometimes been treated. This research is not concerned with the calibre of feminist exegesis or literary re-vision of the Genesis creation accounts per se; instead it focuses on how we can trace important feminist, womanist, gender-critical, queer, ecological and cultural trends and debates over time by investigating the way that certain authors approach biblical themes, using affect (or emotion) as a driving force.

As I explore the above questions, I find emotion to be key to the “stickiness” of stories of creation and apocalypse in contemporary media. The theoretical framework

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5 The week I wrote this paragraph, Ghislaine Maxwell’s attorney was reported to have opened her case with the words, “Ever since Eve was accused of tempting Adam for the apple, women have been blamed for the bad behavior of men and women are often villainized and punished more than the men ever are” (Bekiemips).

6 Scholars tend to hint that this area can be seen as a) old ground, b) potentially supersessionist territory, or c) goddess-theology territory (all three are associated with a certain kind of first- or second-wave white, middle-class feminism). Take the titles of two articles from the last two decades: Deborah Rooke’s “Feminist Criticism of the Old Testament: Why Bother?” (2007); Judith McKinlay’s “Bothering to Enter the Garden of Eden Once Again” (2011). Some mainstream writers have also expressed exasperation with endless revisiting of Eden, as Julie Burchill does in her 1999 article “All About Eve All Over Again” – though from the perspective of her own nostalgia for her “sticks-and-stones” school of feminism. Perhaps both sides of the argument feel dread about this territory because it has seen battles fought not only between genders but also between differing feminisms and differing religious attitudes.

7 A term coined by Alice Walker to indicate a feminist of colour pursuing values such as “Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered ‘good’ for one” and “Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” and “Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless” (Walker, qtd. in Williams 243).

8 As it “offer[s] a more expansive theoretical ‘tool kit,’” gender criticism helps to supplement and reveal areas in feminist criticism that may be lacking in inclusivity of all genders and sexual identities (Koosed, Reading 45).
for this research is therefore based in affect theory where it meets both literature and religion. I argue that these novels show that the human tendency to long for former paradise essentially stems from the same nadir as a longing for apocalyptic destruction. The principal scholars to whom I turn for this framework include Sara Ahmed, Stephen D. Moore, Karen Bray and Donna Haraway, and to a lesser extent Catherine Keller, Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai, and can be linked together in a central thesis statement below:

The “sticky” push-pull of negative affect (Ahmed) can be intensified by the biblical myths that provide blueprints for how to feel (Keller/Moore/Bray). These myths may soothe or invigorate the thinker, but can make them feel worse in the long run (Berlant). It is easier to indulge/purge these ugly feelings (Ngai) than to stay with the trouble (Haraway).

Each chapter will investigate these claims in much more detail as the novels are grouped by the themes and concerns of their time. I will however first go over the ways in which I have connected them in this body of research.

One of many “turns” of the past few decades, the turn to affect or emotion has influenced critical theory within multiple fields. Ngai argues that this is in part a response to the popularity of cultural-historical and semiotic analysis in the 1970s and 80s, which did not see emotion as “concrete” enough, and the poststructural analysis popular in the 1980s and 90s, which questioned subjective experience altogether (24-25). Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg describe as many as eight overlapping “orientations” to affect theory within their Reader (6-8), however it has typically been possible to divide these into two main camps. First the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari among others holds affect to be essentially physiological and pre-cognitive, “logically prior to structured sensory perception, conscious cognition, and linguistic
representation [...] even prior to feelings” (Bray and Moore 2); meanwhile the camp associated with Silvan Tomkins, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Sara Ahmed includes thinking and feeling within its scope to describe something more like emotion (Kooosed and Moore 384). To argue for the connectedness of physiological affect and cognitive emotion, Ahmed uses a metaphor I find convincing: the yolk and the white of an egg may be separated and used for different purposes, but they are never found as naturally separate entities, nor is separating them a simple task (Emotion 210).

While Ahmed is therefore typically associated with the affect-emotion camp, Karen Bray and Stephen D. Moore place her (along with Lauren Berlant, Sianne Ngai and Ann Cvetkovich) in a third branch of affect theory that concerns itself with the wider cultural/political milieu. For Bray and Moore, then, there are three main camps consisting of: the psychobiological (Tomkins-Sedgwick), the prepersonal (Deleuze-Guattari-Massumi), and the cultural (Ahmed-Berlant-Ngai) (5). This third “cultural lens,” useful for feminist, queer and critical race theorists, focuses on how affects “are produced through cultural and historical structures of power” (5). Bray and Moore differentiate between the psychobiological and the cultural in an interesting way here: “Instead of viewing such feelings as signs of sickness in the individual, they invite us, whether explicitly or implicitly, to examine the potential of such moods for social diagnosis” (5-6). Thus the scope is turned away from the subject and out towards the structures of history, environment and culture to diagnose the problem (if, of course, a particular affect is seen as a problem). Bray and Moore’s discussion raises intriguing questions that will prove useful templates for my own questions as I examine the characters and worlds constructed within the selected novels. They ask:
How might envy, for instance, diagnose a society whose mainspring mentality is a compulsion always to strive—and forever to fail—to “keep up with the Joneses”? How might depression diagnose a society that demands we be ever more efficient and productive but systematically denies us the feelings necessary to perform optimally or even adequately? How might rage diagnose what it feels like to have your life under threat or your intelligence under suspicion because of your race, gender, or sexual orientation? How might anxiety diagnose a society taught to be afraid of anyone who does not worship your God? (6)

Using this template and often forming my own diagnoses, I ask how these negative emotions can lead the thinker to fall into nostalgic longing for Eden or a hopeless draw towards apocalypse.

Returning briefly to the divide between affect-physiology and affect-emotion, it is also important to note some squeamishness surrounding emotion in academia. Ahmed argues, and Moore reiterates, that the risk of privileging the physiological over the emotional in the academe is that these can fall into old grooves of gendered hierarchy in which the former is seen as masculine and the latter is therefore feminine (Ahmed, Emotion 3; Moore, “Rage/Joy” 197-98). Ngai reminds readers that the distinction between the two was originally described in psychoanalysis to differentiate between the way the analysand describes their own feelings (emotion) and how they appear to the observer (affect) (25). Like Ngai, I am not concerned with categorising the difference between affect and emotion, but in understanding them as a spectrum of feelings varying in intensity (27). I do realise however that by refusing to separate the two, I place myself by default into the Ahmed-Ngai-Berlant camp. As the word most

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9 Having said this, I wonder why there are assumptions that physiology might be seen as “masculine” when in other contexts the body – particularly a body that is sensitive, porous, instinctive – is so often associated with femininity when compared to a rational, public mind (Ahmed, Emotion 170, 207; Koosed, Reading 33). Is it that the Sedgwick-Ahmed camp(s) feature prominent women scholars, queer theorists and people of colour that they are quickly relegated to the feminine? I am grateful to Carole Jones for our illuminating discussion about how the body is gendered differently depending on the comparison being made.
often used by these thinkers (and biblical scholars introduced below working in the same field) is “emotion,” I will often use this interchangeably with “affect” even as I consider this project to be situated within “affect theory” as a critical area.

A biblical scholar writing in recent years about emotion, gender and queer theory, Moore provides this research with a useful bridge between Ahmed and the fiction this thesis examines. His chapter in Fiona C. Black and Jennifer L. Koosed’s *Reading with Feeling* summarises some of the branches of affect within biblical studies: reader-response criticism concerns itself with the feelings of the contemporary reader or exegete (“Rage/Joy” 194-95), and historical scholars are concerned with the ancient emotions *contained within* the texts, grappling with languages and cultures that once conceptualised emotion differently to us (200). My research is closer to reader-response criticism in that it analyses how biblical myth provides unconscious cultural blueprints for certain ways of feeling, and how contemporary works of speculative fiction enhance or disrupt those emotions through use of tone (the effect on the reader), characterisation (representations of emotion) or formal structure (narrative perspective, plot, etc.). Yet having asserted this, I may at times delve into the ways in which emotions may have been understood differently within Genesis 1-3 and Revelation in order to illuminate opportunities for diverse interpretations over time. Many of the biblical scholars working in emotion in the past decade are quick to remind the reader that the area itself has “[n]othing like a consensus strategy […] which is appropriate for a developing subfield in conversation with such rich cross-disciplinary resources” (Spencer 3). As a Bible-in-Literature scholar with a literature background (i.e. my non-dominant foot in biblical studies), I appreciate the “joy” of anachronism described by Moore when
leaning into a contemporary theoretical field that has nothing and yet everything to do with Genesis or Revelation, and the contemporary literature that re-visions it. Moore uses the term “interaffectivity” to describe this unlikely interaction between biblical text, affect theory text, and scholar, to which I of course add one last layer: the literary text (“Rage/Joy” 206-07).

Returning to the central thesis statement for this doctoral research, I wish now to outline how negative affect and biblical myth are connected. Ahmed makes frequent reference to Berlant’s work, both preceding and following Berlant’s 2011 monograph Cruel Optimism, which argues that “[a] relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (Berlant 1). In the body of fiction selected, this project sees Eden as one such obstacle in that it promises an original innocence and emotional bliss that is in no way retrievable without causing further damage. A regular feature of feminist SpF, a world threatened by disease, climate change, war or political regime, provokes its characters to feel nostalgic about such an idealised past. This is a nostalgia that is incurable at best and only achievable at worst by a vast annihilating event that would return the planet to a pre-anthropocentric balance.

In her 2016 monograph Staying with the Trouble, Haraway notes this exact kind of longing for the problem to be solved for us, causing us to fixate on a comic faith in technofixes, whether secular or religious: technology will somehow come to the rescue of its naughty but very clever children, or what amounts to the same thing, God will come to the rescue of his disobedient but ever hopeful children. (3)

Or worse,

a position that the game is over, it’s too late, there’s no sense trying to make anything any better, or at least no sense having any active trust in each other in working and playing for a resurgent world. (3)
In the context of this thesis I take this to mean that, to minds influenced by biblical myth, one may struggle to act when faced with what looks like an insurmountable challenge, preferring instead to fantasise about how good it might feel to return to Paradise – something that necessarily entails an apocalyptic reboot. I argue that this is driven primarily by the feelings and emotions evoked by and rooted in the biblical myths of beginning and end, and a very human tendency to wallow in them rather than face the messy ordinariness of “staying with the trouble.”

I aim also to draw out frequent parallels between these claims in feminist and queer philosophy or biblical scholarship and the novels selected for this research, asking such questions as Haraway poses again:

> How can we think in times of urgencies without the self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse, when every fiber of our being is interlaced, even complicit, in the webs of processes that must somehow be engaged and repatterned? Recursively, whether we asked for it or not, the pattern is in our hands. (Trouble 35)

In this instance Haraway appears to echo the work of several feminist biblical scholars: Tina Pippin asks, “How does one gain a balance between finding and facing the apocalyptic horror without giving in to it?” (xi). Whether the process of giving in is by remaining stuck in prelapsarian nostalgic longing, or giving up in favour of a post-apocalyptic “New Jerusalem,” the fiction asks precisely this question by repeatedly evoking and manipulating the emotions at work within these myths. Pippin asks if such frequent returning to apocalyptic thinking might “clear the space for hope” (5), but my research is more concerned with delving deeply into emotions that are stickier (à la Ahmed) or uglier (à la Ngai) than hope.
One emotion of particular interest for this project is Ahmed’s assessment of
disgust and other related negative affects, as interpreted and used by Moore in his
biblical scholarship. Reading Revelation alongside Ahmed, Moore asks,

How do revulsion, indignation, and other associated emotions, but above all disgust,
combine in Revelation to move its audience toward ethically significant – or ethically
problematic – behavior? How does Revelation’s mobilization of emotions create an
economy of displeasure, the circulation of negative feelings toward constructive – or
destructive – ends? (“Retching” 504)

In this thesis I ask similar questions, mainly focusing on Genesis 1-3 and drawing
parallels with Revelation where appropriate, about how negative emotions from these
narratives work within the selected speculative fiction for this project, and how
characters respond to these “sticky” objects. Where Moore sees “Revelation’s
apocalyptic disgust [as] a hyperbolic expression and reciprocal effect of its immense
obsession with purity,” I also see the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2-3 as
representing the same (“Retching” 512). A feeling that both responds to and generates
borders between subject and object, disgust is a primal emotion that functions at a deep
level in the myths in question. Though it may feel like a “gut feeling,” Ahmed argues that
disgust is heavily mediated (Emotion 83); it relies on the history of the things associated
with the object that are contained within the subject’s mind. Disgust is sense-heavy: the
texture and qualities of the disgusting object threaten (or seem to threaten) the
subject’s surface. But for the subject it is the proximity to the object that is offensive,
not the object itself; the boundaries of subject/object are formed and undone at the
same time, and it is the very idea of penetrating one’s supposed purity that creates the
boundary in the first place (Emotion 83-85). Ahmed uses the metaphor of a border that
need only be maintained if there is a threat to it, e.g. the border of a country in danger
of a perceived invasion. During this process, the border itself becomes the object of disgust – the horrifying idea that the edge of “us” may become “the not us” (*Emotion* 86-87). Julia Kristeva’s infamous skin-on-milk analogy is invoked in Ahmed’s work to cement the idea that the border itself is disgusting: “Kristeva shows us that what threatens from the outside only threatens insofar as it is already within” (*Emotion* 86). Thus the abject, according to Ahmed, does not really get inside us, but “turns us inside out, as well as outside in” (*Emotion* 86). There is therefore a circularity to abjection that can be pictured as follows:

![Diagram of circularity of disgust](image)

Fig. 1: Based on Ahmed’s concept of the circularity of disgust: “Border objects are hence disgusting, while disgust engenders border objects. [...] So the subject feels an object to be disgusting (a perception that relies on a history that comes before the encounter) and then expels the object and, through expelling the object, finds it to be disgusting.” (*Emotion* 87)

In other words, disgust is deeply ambivalent: the subject pulls towards the object of their own making at the same time as they push it away, thereby continuing to ensure disgust is felt. This is essentially the same feeling of “intensity” happening, but in two directions, however the subject tends to perceive their own pull towards the object as
the object having moved too close to them, a threat from which they must recoil 

*Emotion* 85).

Ahmed argues that disgusting objects become “sticky” in many different ways. Objects are not inherently sticky, but it is the history of contact that makes them so 

*Emotion* 90). As they accumulate more of this stickiness, more things stick to them, which in turn calls into question the haecceity of the object itself. This stickiness “involves a transference of affect,” an effect of their coming into contact with each other (91). To illustrate this, Ahmed uses the example of a racist slur becoming a “sticky sign” over time, gathering other meanings and evoking other words. Calling something disgusting therefore both describes and generates meaning through iteration, so there is a performativity to disgust where naming something as such is akin to ejecting (as abject is literally “cast-out”) the thing that has already been ingested. This speech act both spreads the stickiness to others and also generates a community of the disgusted “us” who together pull away from the offensive closeness of the disgusting object (*Emotion* 94-95). This process doesn’t always draw communities of disgusted together: sometimes the violence of their disgust in turn disgusts others, who in turn can disgust the disgusted by their lack of participation in the violent loop (*Emotion* 99). Each chapter in this thesis addresses to a greater or lesser extent the effect of this cycle of disgust, for example in the violence between genders in Lerman’s *Ishtar* and Carter’s *New Eve*; in Crake’s willingness to commit genocide in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy; and Lilith’s revulsion towards her alien captors in Butler’s10 *Lilith’s Brood*.

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10 As this thesis refers far more to Octavia Butler than Judith Butler, I use “Butler” to refer to the fiction writer and will specify whenever referring to Judith Butler.
Longing for Eden and Fixating on Apocalypse

While these heavily layered emotions can inspire various actions or inactions in the characters in these novels, they also reveal a submerged desire for an affectless existence. Nostalgia for a prelapsarian past can represent, in a way, looking back to a time that is pre-affect. Similarly, apocalyptic longing looks forward to the total annihilation of the senses – a world that is post-affect. These emotional states are attached to time: nostalgia dwells in the past and dread (or fantasy) projects into the future; both distract us from the immediate present. The myths that push and pull along this spectrum of desire-disgust therefore function as anaesthetising drugs, which promise to smooth out the sticky emotions of the now, but do not follow through on that promise. I find in these novels that those experiencing negative emotions (mainly disgust) look immediately to myths in which a purging of unwanted emotion can take place, to keep alive the dream that an affectless existence is possible (and preferable). By highlighting this again and again, the works of fiction in this study aim to get readers used to what I call the “sticky present,” blending Ahmed’s sticky metaphor and Haraway’s concept of the “thick present” (Trouble 1). As a strategy for staying in the thick present, Haraway outlines a series of alternative terms for perceiving our current era in a non-human-centric way:

[Chthulucene] is a compound of two Greek roots (khthôn\textsuperscript{11} and kainos) that together name a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth. […]

\textsuperscript{11} Haraway is eager to point out that she gets the root for Chthulucene from a spider, “\textit{Pimoa cthulhu}” rather than from the monster dreamt up by the notorious H. P. Lovecraft (Trouble 31n; see also Balkan 845).
Chthonic ones are beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the-minute. I imagine chthonic ones as replete with tentacles, feelers, digits, cords, whiptails, spider legs, and very unruly hair. Chthonic ones romp in multicritter humus but have no truck with sky-gazing Homo. *(Trouble 2)*

Here Haraway summons images of the kinds of slimy, sticky, creepy critters that arouse feelings of disgust in the human imagination, spotlighting them in her discussion as a way of acclimatising her reader to their vital but overlooked centrality to our environment. The Chthulucene is in direct opposition to the clean anthropocentric lines apparently inscribed by both Genesis 1-3 and the Apocalypse of John, which have been taken to separate “sky-gazing Homo” and the “chthonic ones” as far as possible from one another, protecting their borders. I argue that the selected authors in this thesis engage in similar exercises of keeping the reader in disgust, activating their empathy with certain characters or creatures in order to situate them in the present and blur the potentially disgust-enducing borders of human-animal-machine. This may serve to equip readers with the ability to resist numbing themselves with the myths of tabula rasa. “I want to stay with the trouble,” writes Haraway, “and the only way I know to do that is in generative joy, terror, and collective thinking” (31). For the two texts from the 1970s as well as Alderman’s *The Power*, this is done by repeatedly flouting various conceptions of masculinity and femininity, particularly concerning the idea of a mother-goddess figure; for Butler’s trilogy it is in the taboo relationships between the betentacled alien species and humans; and for Atwood’s trilogy it is in the blurring of boundaries between animal and human. Each of these, in their own way, works to interrogate the “perfection” of the garden narrative and the longing to re-establish it.

For many, what remains in question is whether this blissful affectless existence we apparently crave is or has ever really been implied by these myths of creation and
destruction. Andrew Crislip writes, “After tasting the fruit, emotion is born” (101), but this body of research argues otherwise. As is represented in the selected novels, many feminist and queer biblical scholars have identified both negative affect in the pre-lapsarian Eden in the form of loneliness, confusion and inequality, and a chilling remoteness in the architecture and organisation of the postapocalyptic New Jerusalem. Is our nostalgia for a pre-affect existence then a kind of compulsive return to the real knowledge of good and evil: that there has never been, nor can be, a pure affectless existence? I lastly ask whether these novels show that, when there is not a convincing aetiology for suffering to be found or future relief to be hoped for, we recreate apocalypse/paradise again and again with a guaranteed fatal flaw so that we may grieve the present trouble, acknowledging our culpability in the various inequalities and ongoing ecocide caused by humanity. Throughout my analysis, I will draw frequent parallels between the novelists’ strategies and those of feminist and queer theologians or biblical scholars who have also explored these questions. I think no theologians are more used to staying with the trouble than those who are marginalised by the very texts they study.

**Creation and Apocalypse in More Detail**

The two creation accounts under scrutiny in this thesis are Genesis 1.1-2.4a, in which God (“Elohim”) creates humanity “in his image” after creating the world and all its creatures in six days; and Genesis 2.4b-3.24, where God (“Yahweh-Elohim”) forms a creature called “Adam” from the earth, followed by plants and animals, and finally a
woman, fashioned from Adam’s rib/side (Kvam et al. 29). In this “garden narrative” of Genesis 2-3, the pair of humans goes on to eat from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” which Adam has been warned against eating by God. Persuaded by a serpent, the woman takes the fruit and eats it, sharing it with the man, who is also present (Gen. 3.6). Eve finally earns her name, given by Adam in a highly significant act as naming in the Bible “constitutes possession and authority over what is named” (King 15; see also Kvam et al. 30; Yee 76). The couple are ousted from the garden of Eden and given punishments (though not curses)\(^\text{12}\) that are often read as an aetiology of suffering.

About Genesis 2-3 Stephen Greenblatt observes:

> For reasons that are at once tantalizing and elusive, these few verses in an ancient book have served as a mirror in which we seem to glimpse the whole, long history of our fears and desires. It has been both liberating and destructive, a hymn to human responsibility and a dark fable about human wretchedness, a celebration of daring and an incitement to violent misogyny. (6)

In this body of research I therefore explore why and how these two narratives provide fertile ground for some major strands of feminist and queer thought from the last fifty years. These tend to converge around gender/sexuality, and environment/ecology, both of which can be subsumed under the wider theme of hierarchy/power. While this thesis will look at these few verses in depth, it is less often the myths themselves and more often interpretations within biblical and extrabiblical texts, theological or historical writings such as the letters attributed to Paul,\(^\text{13}\) the Book of Sirach, the Alphabet of Ben

\(^{12}\) Morse writes, “readers who assume that the woman is ‘cursed’ in the Hebrew text clearly misread the text, which records only the cursing of the snake and the earth” (Eve’s Afterlives 61).

\(^{13}\) See 1 Timothy 2.8-15 in particular.
Sira, or the writings of Philo, Josephus, Tertullian, Origen, Augustine and Aquinas, or indeed works of literature, which shape our cultural understanding of them (Morse, *Eve’s Afterlives* 27; Kvam et al. 4; Yee 59). Of the countless literary and artistic representations of the biblical creation myths, *Paradise Lost* shapes much of our assumptions about the emotions felt by Adam and Eve both in and out of the garden. Of Eve in particular, Doretta Cornell notes, “Milton, of course, has fostered the wildest array of these interpretations of Eve’s weakness, inferiority, and origin of later human evil” (94). Christians in particular read Genesis 2-3 from a Christological viewpoint: in other words, that “the Fall” will eventually be restored through the sacrifice of Christ, which inevitably leads to a symmetry that makes Jesus a “New Adam” and Mary a “New Eve” (King 22; Kvam et al. 4). In Judaism, Eve “is remarkably free from the doctrinal baggage that accompanies the Christian Eve” thanks to the tradition of midrash and aggadic playfulness that characterises Jewish engagement with the myth (Kvam et al. 3; see also Sands 45). In her 2017 monograph *Jewish Feeling*, Richa Dwor argues that midrash is a useful mode for dealing with affect, as the process “enacts hypothetical conversations” that naturally evince emotions between the “affecting body” (the biblical text) and the individual (24-25). Citing Erich Auerbach, Dwor claims this is thanks in part

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14 Morse poses various problems with assuming The Alphabet of Ben Sira to be among the texts specifically dealing with Genesis 2-3 (*Eve’s Afterlives* 27-28). As this thesis addresses in further detail in Chapter 3, Alphabet is widely recognised as a contentious source, because the work is believed by some to be a satirical critique of Jewish culture rather than representative of Rabbinical tradition (Kosior 114; Wood 98).

15 Philo even writes in terms of infection that come close to Ahmed’s notion of sticky objects, since the fruit itself becomes an object of negative affect (thanks to its association with the serpent) that passes its stickiness from hand to hand: “sense-perception [Eve] being already infected by its object, passes on the infection to the sovereign and ruling element” (Philo, qtd. in Morse, *Eve’s Afterlives* 34). Morse argues that Augustine continues this line of thinking with his concept of original sin (38-40).

16 I am mindful of the various ways the term “midrash” has been used outwith its original meaning (Stahlberg 320). Within this project, I consider works such as Lerman’s *Ishtar* to be an example of both creative and literary midrash (Stahlberg 321).
to the sparseness of biblical description of its characters’ inner lives, which creates space for investigation and imagination within the emotional landscapes of those characters (25-26).

Another factor that creates space for imaginative engagement with themes of biblical creation is the issue that the two accounts “contradict one another in both general scenery and sequence” (Gertz et al. 248-49). Doublets such as these in Genesis imply that different sources have been used in the composition of Genesis 1-3 as we know it. Multiple hypotheses have been presented from the eighteenth century to the present, of which the Foundational Document/Supplementary Hypothesis, the (New) Documentary Hypothesis and the Fragmentary Hypothesis have held the most sway to date (Gertz et al. 251-52). The most successful of these at least in the twentieth century, the New Documentary Hypothesis, identifies the differing narratives in Genesis 1 and 2-3 as being from Priestly or “P” (6th-5th century BCE) and the earlier-dated Yahwist or “J” (10th century BCE) traditions respectively, though the hypothesis itself has been challenged more recently (Gertz et al. 253-55). This project does not attempt to contribute to biblical source criticism but still finds it useful to recognise that more than one tradition is at work in these passages, and texts may draw more strongly from one than the other to argue a particular point. Genesis 1 is noted for its poetic\textsuperscript{17} and symmetrical patterns, forming “a repetitive, rhythmic style suggestive of a liturgical text” culminating in God’s judgement that his work as a master builder is “very good” (M. Harris 35-36). The earlier source, Genesis 2-3 is described as a more typical narrative arc,

\textsuperscript{17} Mark Harris does however warn against “pigeon-holing” Genesis 1 as poetry alone and ignoring the deeper complexities and potential uses of the text. “A more careful consideration of Genesis 1 should acknowledge its status as a richly fertile exploration of the idea of beginnings, and of the complex network of relationships between God, creation and humankind” (49).
forming a “palistrophic structure” where the end mirrors the beginning, and in which God is portrayed anthropomorphically, walking in and tending to the garden (51).

Reflections of gender also vary between the two sources as much as their reflections of the nature of God: yet both can be interpreted as either hierarchical or egalitarian, depending on the style of exegesis (Kvam et al. 17-18). Gale Yee stresses that Gen. 2-3 was recorded during a time in which gender roles were under particular scrutiny, and thus the ideologies and anxieties of the time are “encoded” into the text (60). This thesis will delve into some of these arguments as they pertain to the novels in discussion, which make great use of the differences in detail that leave ample room for interpretation. Both narratives offer insights on ancient Hebrew ideas about God and creation, but while Genesis 1’s scope is cosmological, Genesis 2-3 is anthropological, providing, for many, “an aetiology of sin, death and hardship” (M. Harris 56). I will return to these differences throughout this thesis because “they provide cosmological grounding for the larger social order—or for doubts about it” (Kvam et al. 9). In particular, this thesis will track how these doubts and questions about the larger social order change over time for feminist, womanist and queer scholarship from the 1970s onwards.

Of equal importance to many of these debates is the influence on the Genesis creation myths from related myths of Mesopotamian origin, such as the Baal Cycle and the Babylonian Enuma Elish. While it is hard to substantiate evidence of direct borrowings, many of the myths that survive from the ancient Near East (ANE) share symbolic traces of a pantheon of gods and goddesses, floods, living clay, snakes and magic trees (Greenblatt 56-57; Bledstein 191-94; M. Harris 36). Many have compared
differing aspects of both Genesis 1 and 2-3 to the *Enuma Elish* and the epic of *Gilgamesh* (Greenblatt 29; M. Harris 53, 64). Similarly, Morse sees the epic’s “culture-bearer” Shamhat as a potential equivalent to Eve (*Eve’s Afterlives* 77-78). Adrien Bledstein contends that the word Eden may even be taken from *edinu*, the steppe on which Enkidu is left after he has been created from clay (191), and that the serpent may have had associations with both fertility and as a totem of power within the house of David (194). The myths are believed to predate both the Eden and Pandora myths, so Hebrews in exile in Babylon may have heard these stories recounted and used, disposed of or refashioned elements for their own creation stories (M. Harris 36; Morse, *Eve’s Afterlives* 78). Crucially for Bledstein and for many feminist thinkers, what has been left out of Genesis is the involvement of one or more goddesses:

The Hebrew narrator drew upon associations from the Sumerian paradise myth and the creation of Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic but without sexually identifying the creative YHVH. As [goddess] Nintu plants the semen of Enki, YHVH alone plants a garden. (189)

Bledstein argues that 2-3 is therefore slightly less androcentric than 1 in its few instances of portraying female generative power and equality between the sexes. For example, by referring to “thy seed and her seed” (Gen. 3.15, *KJV*), argues Bledstein, God implies that both parents are responsible for their progeny (198). Another crucial element to Genesis 2-3 is the emphasis on the distance not between the sexes, but between divinity and humanity (Bledstein 196). While in Sumerian myth the goddesses

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18 Citing Averbeck, M. Harris writes, “A careful reader, immersed in the mythological culture of the ANE, would presumably have identified this serpent with the ancient cosmic enemy of Yahweh” (64).
19 “Usually the Yahwist narrator is dated during either David or Solomon’s reign, and it is possible that the Yahwist criticized idolatrous practices among the Israelites by creating a role for the serpent in Eden in order to disassociate the serpent and the goddess from power over agriculture” (Bledstein 194).
give birth painlessly, Eve’s punishment of pain in childbirth\(^{20}\) reminds her that she is human, despite her generative power; equally, while Enkidu achieves wisdom “like the Gods” in *Gilgamesh*, Adam’s punishment reminds him that though he has knowledge of good and evil, he does not have the divine wisdom to use it properly (Bledstein 198, 195). Interestingly, it is only after the eating of the fruit and the punishments that Eve is given her name and title, “the mother of all living” (Gen. 3.20) – a title that in Hebrew shares a resemblance with multiple references to God as “living-one” (Stiebert 177). Many have therefore argued that an essence of the divine resides in the biblical Eve that has since been cast aside. For this reason, as we shall see in the first two chapters, the idea of reclaiming the lost goddesses is a common motif in some feminist circles in the 1960s-80s.

Of course, feminist and proto-feminist thinkers have used these myths to argue various (often opposing) views far earlier than the twentieth century, focusing on differing aspects of the story to influence debates of their times. Contemporary feminist biblical scholars are quick to communicate the fact that even very early writers such as Hildegard von Bingen, Christine de Pizan and Isotta Nogorola used Genesis 1 or 2-3 to challenge sexist attitudes towards women (Koosed, *Reading* 12; Lanser 68; Scholz 13-14; Morse, *Eve’s Afterlives* 182-86). In the late sixteenth century, there began a series of pamphlet debates known as the *Querelle des Femmes*, in which writers such as Aemilia Lanyer, Rachel Speght, Joan Sharpe and Esther Sowernam (some using playful pseudonyms) used the creation myths to appeal for better social and domestic rights for

\(^{20}\) Morse differs in her analysis from Bledstein here, and notes that the word used to describe suffering in childbirth is not usually associated with physical labour pains, but is still primarily understood as such. This is why the KJV and other translations use more emotionally charged words such as “grief” and “sorrow” (*Eve’s Afterlives* 23).
women among the literate middle and upper classes (Morse, *Eve’s Afterlives* 185-96). These writers again made particular use of Eve to argue that her latter creation ought to place her higher than Adam in majesty, as “every succeeding worke was ever more excellent then [sic] what was formerly created” (Sowernam, qtd. in L. Wilson, “Not Equal” 15). Mary Nyquist asserts that “Milton could not but have known that questions of priority figure prominently in the Renaissance debate over ‘woman’” (107), and I have previously argued that by choosing to narrate Eve’s creation prior to Adam’s in *Paradise Lost*, Milton avoids pandering to these “best-till-last” pamphleteers (L. Wilson, “Not Equal” 15).

These writers, aided by the increasingly available biblical texts in the vernacular such as the Geneva and King James translations, somewhat democratised access to interpretation (at least for the literate classes) (Morse, “First Woman” 66). While late medieval and early modern writers were quick to adhere to theological tenets and acknowledge Eve’s sin, later feminist thinkers, famously Mary Wollstonecraft among them, questioned the usefulness of Genesis as any kind of yardstick for the woman question. Indeed Wollstonecraft was particularly dismissive of any literal interpretation of the Bible, adopting instead a “radically sceptical” interpretation that has later been defined as a “hermeneutic of suspicion” (L. Wilson, “Suspicion” 98-99). Where some (Christological) arguments championed Eve’s actions for bringing about Christ’s vicarious atonement, others like Harriet Law urged readers to value Eve for her quest for knowledge (Morse, “First Woman” 71). Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *The Woman’s Bible* was produced in the late nineteenth century to forward these arguments, though it found little support in either religious or feminist circles and has since been upbraided for its
participation in anti-Jewish feminist Christian writings (Koosed, *Reading* 15-16; Morse, “First Woman” 74; Plaskow, “Anti-Judaism” 83-84; Scholz 14-19). Whatever the strand of feminist thought propelling these investigations, so many of which delve deeply into Genesis 1-3, most aim in some way to dispel the idea of the first woman “as a figure of carnal foolishness and a mother of death” (Morse, *Eve’s Afterlives* 10).

In the mid to late twentieth century, the figure of Eve arises again in more secular arenas. Both Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millet follow Wollstonecraft “to reject outright the story of Eve as a man-made mechanism for oppressing women” (Morse, “First Woman” 75). De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* in turn received a response from feminist theologians, most notably Mary Daly’s *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), a searing critique of the Catholic church that preceded Daly’s increasingly radical later works such as *Beyond God the Father* (1974) and *Gyn/ecology* (1978), which propose that biblical myths can be replaced by gynocentric ones, gods with goddesses (Rigney 8). Rather than rejecting the Bible as a purely patriarchal artefact, Phyllis Trible argues instead for a more nuanced reanalysis of the Hebrew texts in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978). Authors of all genres of fiction join these debates, and though not all run parallel, a palpable trend of feminist writing builds in this century to explore the links between gender, myth and patriarchal religion. As Eve becomes a less contentious figure in the increasingly secular society of the later twentieth century, her presence becomes more playful, for example in the tongue-in-cheek title of Rowe and Boycott’s 1972-launched magazine *Spare Rib*. The 1970s and 80s saw in feminist attitudes to scripture “a subversive and irreverent sense of fun, which marks the introduction of a feminist strategy of interpretation that really came to the fore with the
second-wave movement: satire” (Morse, “First Woman” 75-76). In secular circles at least, Eve becomes a bold and irreverent figure for re-vision: as some of the pin badges from the era proclaim, “Eve was framed!”. These slogans were employed not to redeem Eve theologically, but to expose the systems and traditions themselves that had portrayed her as a villain in the first place.

In the same decade, the figure of Lilith becomes a similarly powerful figure for re-vision and identification, particularly for Jewish feminist thinkers such as Judith Plaskow, who in her 1972 work “The Coming of Lilith” celebrated the infamous figure, reimagining her in feminist solidarity with Eve (Plaskow, “Lilith” 30; Koosed, Reading 65; Kvam et al. 379-80). Also in 1972, Lilly Rivlin published an influential article in Ms Magazine that sought the origins of this mythical demon-goddess and hinted at “an earlier supremacy of woman” (96), and the Jewish feminist magazine Lilith, still running today, was founded in 1976 (Koosed, Reading 64). The editors of the anthology published in 1998 entitled Which Lilith? describe the mythical woman as follows:

Lilith is mentioned in the Talmud, elaborated on in Midrash and in Kabbalah, whispered about in stories, passed down orally, often from mother to daughter. It is Lilith, we are told, who visits men at night, and inhabits their sexual dreams. It is Lilith who is responsible for the unexplained deaths of children. It is Lilith who defies God and the angels he sends, who chooses life alone by the Red Sea over life in Eden with Adam. It is Lilith who sleeps with a variety of human and mythological creatures. It is Lilith, according to Jewish mystical tradition, who marries Samael, the Jewish counterpart of the devil, and who even comforts God in the exilic absence of his feminine counterpart, the Shekhinah. (Dame et al. xv)

In her introduction to the same text Naomi Wolf credits the sudden popularisation of Lilith in the 1970s to the fact that she becomes, for certain movements, “a rowdy anti-Eve” (xii). The name Lilith (possibly from Akkadian lil meaning “wind/breath”) is believed to signify a demon or demigod, and is mentioned only once in the Hebrew Bible (Isa.
34.14) and once in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Song of Sage), though her name abounds in Jewish writings (Dame et al. xvi; Koosed Reading 64; Kosior 113\textsuperscript{21}). Genesis Rabbah features two references to Adam’s “first wife” but does not name her explicitly; instead it is the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*\textsuperscript{22} (C8-10 ce) that occupies the most authoritative place in the Western imagination in terms of dictating how the character Lilith is seen today (similar to *Paradise Lost*’s depiction of Eve, in this respect) (Kvam et al. 204). In short, the legend describes how Lilith and Adam argued about her refusal to lie below him during sex (she cites their simultaneous creation in Gen. 1). Irreconcilable, Lilith utters the Ineffable Name and flies away, whence she is pursued over the Egyptian sea by three of God’s angels, who threaten to drown her if she will not return. Instead they reach an agreement that she may have dominion over infants (eight days for males; twenty for females), but will leave them alone if she encounters the angels’ names nearby. In return, Lilith is cursed to have a hundred of her demon offspring killed every day.\textsuperscript{23} About this legend Rivlin remarks that, “By taking fragments of earlier myths and placing them within a Judeo-Christian framework, the author of the *Alphabet* has transformed a creation myth of male-female equality into a morality play, and the independent woman into a jealous avenger” (96). According to Wojciech Kosior, Eve and

\textsuperscript{21} See Wojcieck Kosior’s article for an exhaustive list of occurrences, forming three categories: those representing her as a night demon, those describing her appearance, and those that are hard to classify.  
\textsuperscript{22} *Alphabet* is not the only Jewish text that informs the image of Lilith in the contemporary imagination. Reading Lilly Rivlin’s article in Ms, I was confused as to why she had quoted a version of the myth in which Lilith is made from “filth and sediment instead of pure dust” (93), which she attributes to “*Alphabet*, as quoted in The Book of Genesis, by Robert Graves and Raphael Patai.” This seemed to differ from the *Alphabet* I had read, but I discovered that Graves and Patai are not quoting directly from *Alphabet* but are writing their own narrative based on readings from multiple sources. The “filth and sediment” sentence is actually taken from a collection of midrashim, *Yalqut Reubeni*, by Rabbi Reuben Hoschke Kohen, printed in 1660.  
\textsuperscript{23} See Kosior’s article for a discussion of where elements of the legend have coalesced around certain details.
Lilith mirror each other: both are in some sense mothers of monsters, and “both women remain in close relationships with the divinity and know the Ineffable Name, yet only Lilith makes explicit use of this knowledge” (121). Kosior posits that the mythology surrounding Lilith is created partly “to ‘distract’ hermeneutical attention from the actual linguistic problems evoked by Genesis 3” and the many questions they raise (123). Not only this, but Lilith functions as a counterpart to shoulder the more negative aspects of biblical and rabbinic depictions of Eve – in other words, “Without Eve, there would be no Lilith, since Eve is textually older than Lilith, and it is to Eve that Lilith owes her symbolic career” (Kosior 123). It is worth noting that no such counterpart is necessary for Adam, perhaps because he already has Eve to carry the blame.

For feminist biblical scholars and theologians, the matter often moves in parallel with these popular cultural debates.24 One of the more prominent thinkers in the 1970s to engage with the biblical creation myths is Trible, whose *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* attempts to debunk simplistic readings that make assumptions about gender roles and humanity’s relationship to a creator and creation. Trible analyses the Hebrew and subsequent translations to excavate further whether the language constitutes a more egalitarian understanding of the author or authors’ intentions than has been traditionally understood. She argues that the grammatically masculine word ‘*adam*’ in Genesis 2 is not yet a sexually differentiated being (80), and that the Hebrew word ‘*ezer*, which has been traditionally translated as “helper,” carries no inference of subordination in Hebrew where it does in English – in fact, it is often used to describe God (Trible 90; see also Koosed, *Reading* 53; Kvam et al. 28, 378; Morse, *Eve’s Afterlives*).

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24 Koosed’s *Reading the Bible as a Feminist* explores how various theoretical movements (particularly feminist and womanist theories) have influenced feminist biblical studies.
When the 'adam is put to sleep and something taken from its side, this changes the condition of both new beings: the newly extracted woman “does not fit the pattern of dominion that the preceding episodes have established,” and the newly gendered man is not given power over her (Trible 97). It is only at this point that, divided into new terms 'ish and 'ishah, the man (as newly sexed as his female counterpart) speaks for the first time. While these are new words to describe new beings, in Trible’s mind the fact that the word ha’adam (originally used to specify an unsexed creature) goes on to be used only to describe the masculine 'ish, but then later returns to describe them both, complicates future translation in a way that has historically been ignored (Kvam et al. 442). Carol Meyers adds that throughout its use in Genesis, the term “is not socially masculine; in none of those instances does it refer to a specific (male) individual but rather has an indefinite, generic sense, denoting a human being” (72). But this does not answer the problem of why the man is referred to as 'adam in the middle part of the story and the woman is not, “erasing woman and designating her as Other” (Lanser 72). Nevertheless, Trible’s reading challenges the assumption that Genesis 1 portrays the only “egalitarian” creation narrative: her interpretation of Genesis 2-3 has “No opposite sex, no second sex, no derived sex” (102). But while Trible and others such as Mieke Bal have continued to argue (though in different ways) that the sexism drawn from the myth stems from interpretative tradition rather than the text itself, much feminist biblical scholarship sees it as a product of its patriarchal time (see Koosed Reading 52-25

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25 Susan Lanser adds a caution to her analysis of Trible’s work in that “One of the characteristics of Trible’s discourse [...] is the rendering of the text into an English that is most favorable to [her] interpretation” (81n). Is this not the prerogative of any translator, however?
60; Lanser 68; Sawyer, “Resurrecting” 286-87; Stiebert 185; Yee 68

For Ilona Rashkow, Eve’s theft of the fruit (or the serpent’s encouragement to do so) is a ritualistic reclamation of the power of the fertility goddess that Yahweh has stolen, but this too only results in a reinstating of the dominance of patriarchal order over women (59, 69). For Yee (and others), then, the ‘adam Trible sees as genderless is an analogue of “the Israeliite [male] peasant who works the ground [and] is reliant on the king as his provider” – a hierarchical relationship that is then mirrored in the relationship of woman to man when Eve is formed (69). Similarly for Morse, contemporary understandings of the myth “have more in common with general misogynistic traditions concerning the workings of the devil, the female responsibility for sin, and the insatiable, even demonic, sexuality of women, than they do with the text of Genesis 3” (Eve’s Afterlives 57). While feminist interpretations are divided, then, it is clearly a myth that permits as much genderqueer interpretation as it does heteronormative interpretation, whether the androcentrism is encoded in the original text or added later in the myths’ reception.

Thus like many of the fiction writers this thesis deals with, Trible is keen to imagine Genesis 2-3 “afresh as a work of art” (74). When approaching the text from a literary rather than theological perspective, we find cyclical scenes containing cyclical episodes: beginning with the formation of eros in the garden, turning to a critical decision, and resulting in the “disintegration of Eros” and expulsion from the garden: “By repetition of key words and phrases, the end (3:22-24) returns to the beginning (2:4b-9, 15)” (Trible 74). Though the structure is ordered in such repeating rhythms of formation

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26 Rather than repeating the work here, I direct the reader to Yee’s footnote 49 on pages 186-87 for an extensive list of feminist criticism in which readings differ from Trible’s in accepting the androcentric bias of the biblical creation myths.
and division, it reflects a dissolution of order overall, rather than what its order might suggest. Importantly for this project, Trible also finds paradise not without loneliness (the created earth-creature wants a mate), not without hierarchy (mankind over animals), not without the potential for environmental and spiritual death, division and danger in the forms of trees and talking serpents. Without somebody to love and something to do in the gated garden, ‘adam is nothing: hence “[p]layful creation is a precarious existence” (81). Morse argues along the same lines that the ‘adam (and the part of it that will become Eve) “is defined by a state of lack and desire—it has no food and no knowledge, and it desires both” – otherwise the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would not need to exist (Eve’s Afterlives 66-67). It is this precarious element to Eden, with its potential for loneliness, its dangerous boredom, its toxic fruit and deadly serpent, that I wish to highlight throughout this thesis in order to interrogate the recurring fantasy in Western literature that we might want to return to it.

This thesis also explores the emotional connections to nature implicit within Genesis 2-3, whether pre- or postlapsarian, and how the selected fiction expands upon those ideas in relation to climate change. About the prelapsarian garden Trible writes:

> The Hebrew verb ‘bd, conventionally translated ‘to till,’ means to serve. It connotes respect, indeed, reverence and worship. To till the garden is to serve the garden; to exercise power over it is to reverence it. Similarly, to keep (šmr) the garden is an act of protection (cf. 3:24), not of possession. The two infinitives, to till and to keep, connote not plunder and rape but care and attention. They enhance the delight of the garden. […] Distinction without opposition, dominion without domination, hierarchy without oppression: to serve and to keep the garden is to live life in harmony and pleasure. (85)

Much recent speculative fiction asks these same questions: how and why have interpretations of mankind’s relationship with nature tended towards that of fear and

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27 See the above note about Lanser’s assessment of Trible’s word choice.
therefore control? And how is this drive towards domination related to gender inequality, racism and other forms of oppression? Trible points out the oft-overlooked fact that the tree itself possesses the greatest power over the earth-creature as the source of forbidden knowledge of good and evil, and therefore death: “Nature itself also has God-given independence” (87). But importantly for this thesis, “Power over creation has not alleviated human loneliness” – the prevalence of negatives and the sudden absence of Yahweh-as-subject in the narration of this episode hints at the ‘adam’s disappointment, and according to Trible, functions as a foreshadowing of the disobedience to come (94).

Another important feminist intervention into the text aims to highlight the man’s equal culpability where the story usually pictures the woman being deceived alone by the serpent, despite the note in Gen. 3.6 that the man is with her when she eats it. Many have observed that the word “you” used by the serpent appears in the plural form not just in the Hebrew, but also in the Greek and Latin (apart from Jerome’s Vulgate), whereas it is lost in grammatical English (Kvam et al. 33; Morse, Eve’s Afterlives 19). There is also the sticky issue of whether or not God has lied in this scenario, since they do not die and God acknowledges that they have become “like G/god/s” as the snake promised (Morse, Eve’s Afterlives 20). 28 In all these instances we see that the garden of Eden is planted with difficult emotions and potential misunderstandings for both its human inhabitants, even before the transgression. The reader concerned with affect

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28 See articles by Barr, Moberly and Rooke for more on this fascinating debate. God tells Adam “in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen. 2.17), and the serpent tells the woman “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3.4-5). Sure enough, on eating the fruit, “the eyes of both were opened” and their most immediate concern is their nakedness. The couple does not literally know death until their son Abel is killed.
theory may wonder what exactly the knowledge of good and evil entails, if the first humans have already felt certain complex emotions in the garden prior to their disobedience. Morse suggests that it is not the knowledge of moral and immoral things, but the knowledge of how things feel (Eve’s Afterlives 68). For this project, I would take this to signify the gap closing between affect as a purely physiological sensation, and emotion as the thinking-through of that feeling. The couple are not so much expelled from Eden as awakened from the dream that all is perfect. Citing Claus Westermann, Morse adds that rather than knowing, as in intellectually knowing, the word could more closely be translated as discerning (Eve’s Afterlives 69). As such, “the knowledge of good and evil” becomes more like “being able to discern between pleasant and unpleasant.” Morse’s purpose in teasing out these differences is to show how Eve has been boxed in to certain assumptions about “carnal knowledge” (67), but I will use this point about discernment to further my argument that the garden narrative is one that is loaded with affective meaning and consequence.

But there is still much to say about how these complex emotions also fall forwards into apocalypse as well as backwards to Eden. What links these two narratives together, despite the stark contrast between the natural paradise in which the first couple live and the sterile metropolis of the New Jerusalem? Moore writes of Revelation’s surprising pull:

Revelation is more even than an immeasurably influential religious text, it is also a cultural icon – or, better, a transcultural icon – of the first order. It powerfully shapes the collective hopes and fears, not just of eschatologically oriented Christians, but of Christians in general. (Torment/Bliss 4)

And later,
Revelation furnishes not just self-identified Christians, but people in every culture formed by Christianity – even cultures now effectively post-Christian – with a repertoire of terms and images for representing the end of the world as we know it. (Torment/Bliss 5)

Like the image of Adam and Eve in the garden, then, Revelation’s contents stick even to secularly minded individuals who have been influenced not directly by the book, but indirectly through its permeation throughout popular culture. In its popular/secular usage, apocalypse typically refers to a particular idea of the end of the world, ergo humankind, whether by war, human error, natural disaster or disease. But the term draws its meaning from its most famous biblical referent, the Apocalypse of John (also known as the Book of Revelation), where apocalypse does not signify a world-ending disaster but simply a “revelation.” The word is derived from the Greek apokalypsis/apokalyptein, meaning “to uncover, take the lid/veil off […] a revealing of and a revelling in” (Pippin 78). Just as ghost (goste in Middle English) “meant ‘frightening’ before it came to mean the thing that frightens,” apocalypse began as “unveiling” and then came to mean the terrifying thing that is unveiled (Barzun, qtd. in Pippin 103). It is worth noting that we usually associate fear with the unknown (Ahmed, Emotion 69), but in this case the terror is in the unveiling, the getting-to-know of the unknown, just as the Fall is in gaining knowledge of good and evil. It is this terror that I will be returning to frequently, along with its neighbours disgust, fear and hatred in this thesis.29 It is a fear that finds itself easily amidst the novels discussed here because each of them addresses, to a greater or lesser extent, the devastating effects of climate

29 Ahmed writes, “Disgust binds objects together in the very moment that objects become attributed with bad feeling, as ‘being’ sickening. The slide between disgust and other emotions is crucial to this binding: the subject may experience hate towards the object, as well as fear of the object, precisely as an affect of how the bad feeling ‘has got in’” (Emotion 88).
change, social inequality, war or disease, and the way we respond to those horrors. Not for nothing does Lawrence Buell note that apocalypse “is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” (Buell, qtd. in Canavan, “Hope” 155).

By no means the only book of its kind, Revelation participates in a wider biblical and extra-biblical tradition that took place between the second century BCE and the second century CE, which also produced the books of Enoch and Daniel as well as multiple extracanonical works in both Jewish and Christian tradition (Moore, *Torment/Bliss* 32-34). This apocalyptic genre is usually narrated by a particular witness (in the case of the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, an author who identifies himself as John of Patmos) who describes the events taking place and advises readers on how these should be interpreted (Pippin 78). The influence of Revelation across Western culture has been all-encompassing because, at least in Christian terms, it provides the necessary end to Genesis’ beginning. It is an unveiling and a resolution, but one which continues in a circular motion back to another new creation (Keller 69). This new creation-via-destruction also bears subtle marks of the creations described in Genesis, sharing details such as the tree of life in the middle of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22.2), (submerged) goddess imagery in both the woman clothed with the sun and the Whore of Babylon (12.1-2, 17.1-6), a threatening dragon-serpent (12.3-4) and a cosmic struggle between chaos and divine order. Morse also highlights the pain in childbirth of the woman clothed with the sun (with the serpent-dragon threatening her) as representing the punishment delivered to Eve in Gen. 3.16 (*Eve’s Afterlives* 144-45). The Whore of Babylon, “imperial patriarchy in drag,” is often taken to represent Rome, and her death
“surely counts as a cryptic case of cosmogonic goddess-murder” (Keller 77). In other words, just as in Genesis 2-3, submerged and defeated goddess figures continue to abound, ripe for feminist re-vision.

Moore’s recent monograph, *Revelation: Book of Torment, Book of Bliss*, provides an overview of changing approaches to the text over time, from eschatological interpretations in the Middle Ages by those such as Joachim of Fiore, to premillennialist “Rapture” doctrine, to contemporary examples of book, film, and video game franchises as well as music genres that explore these same images. For non-eschatologically minded scholarship on the text, Moore divides research into two streams: the mainstream tradition, which has looked largely into the sociohistorical context in which it was written, and more recent liberationist, postcolonial, queer and feminist scholarship, which reads the text in terms of what it means for readership in the present (*Torment/Bliss* 6-7). As well as identifying empire, sex and gender as some major channels of this second stream of scholarship on Revelation, Moore notes that ecology is of equal import, since: “Intrinsic to Revelation’s plot is a relentless, divinely ordained destruction of the natural world” (*Torment/Bliss* 8). All these issues of power, sexuality and our relationship to nature are intricately intertwined in Revelation, just as they are in the creation narratives. On top of this, affect plays an essential role in the text, evoking extreme responses in its images of brutality and ecstasy at various turns. Keller thus locates apocalyptic literature within the realm of “fascination and repulsion” defined by Kristeva “abject” (8). This can become a “civilizational habit” in which onlookers observing, for example, the destruction of the environment, are unsurprised
by its occurrence – a reaction that can lead to a “numbed complicity” in contributing to that destruction (Keller 8).

For Lois Parkinson Zamora, the book’s endurance “suggests the deep psychological needs to which it responds, as well as the flexibility of interpretation allowed by the form” (11, emphasis mine). Importantly for the genre, the cosmic battle described between forces of good and of evil provide the reader with an outcome in which the oppressed minority (the intended audience) become victorious over the oppressor, in which case, “the plagues and torments which the apocalyptist describes are a source of consolation rather than dismay” (Zamora 2). This text has been a source of great encouragement for oppressed communities, for example those who endured slavery in the USA, for whom the “hope for a better world” inspired acts of resistance and powerful songs (Moore, Torment/Bliss 6-7; see also Keller 10). Similarly the work of Allan Boesak has famously read Revelation alongside South African apartheid, hearing the call, “How long, Lord?” as the call of the unjustly detained and systematically abused (Moore, Torment/Bliss 75). So too has Pablo Richard read the text in a liberationist context for Latin America (Keller 38-39). In her feminist scholarship Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has also found Revelation useful because it represents the rebellion of a minority against the oppressor, and the city as simply a city rather than a gendered body (Pippin 8; Moore, Torment/Bliss 83).

On the other hand, Pippin (among many other feminist scholars) resists such a reading, pointing out that in it “hope comes through a rape, through massive violence and the total destruction of the earth” (8). There is, therefore, tension between differing strands of feminist thought, one of which relies upon the text as a means of resistance
and the other that cannot ignore its “toxic misogyny” (Keller 29). Moore sums up precisely the ways in which two female characters, Jezebel and the Whore of Babylon, epitomise the problematic violence involved in bringing about this “hopeful” new beginning:

In John’s mind, Babylon, as imperial Rome, represents the threat from outside to the Christian assemblies to whom he is writing, notably the threat of persecution (“And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus” – 17:6), whereas Jezebel represents the threat from within, the threat of Christian assimilation to Roman culture. That double threat is symbolized, for John, by two sexualized women. And the overcoming of the threat is symbolized by two startling instances of sexual violence, Jezebel raped on a bed by none other than the risen Jesus himself (2.22), and Babylon stripped, devoured and burned by the beast and its minions while God looks on approvingly (17.16-17). (Torment/Bliss 67)

In Moore’s assessment, part of the problem has been in translators’ unwillingness to interpret the sexual violence committed against these women-figures as sexual violence. Another problem for feminist and womanist readers who are divided on interpretations of the book is whether or not a study of Revelation allows for an implicit acceptance of such violence against women in reality. On this issue Moore pronounces, “John expects that Rome […] will arouse in his audience the same loathing and disgust that he feels for her and it” (Torment/Bliss 82). It is this disgust and the stickiness of the Great Whore’s association with the city that Moore explores at length in his article “Retching on Rome” – which I apply to the novels in this thesis.

For some, the Great Whore that is Babylon/Roma is an oppressed figure as well as an oppressor: womanist NT scholar Shanelle T. Smith identifies her as an ambivalent figure that is both slave as well as great colonising city, because of the mark on her forehead that identifies her as a brothel slave (127). Importantly for Smith, as an African American woman reading this narrative, she experiences, “[a]n unexpected rise of
emotions—a whole range of them—well[ing] up within me” (129). The effect of her own personal experience with the text allows her to see that the character can be “held in tension; she is a brothel slavewoman and an empress/imperial city [...] she is necessarily both/and, instead of either/or” (Smith 130). An ability to stay with these opposing images represents an ability not to be swept away by the emotional weight of Apocalypse; it represents looking closely at the headache-inducing, blurring and intersecting lines of oppression and domination that invite no easy solutions. Smith’s womanist liberationist approach (which she terms “ambiveillance”) therefore finds itself at odds with more mainstream African American liberationist biblical interpretations of Revelation, since “John does not, he simply cannot, write in full solidarity with the oppressed” (132).

Fascinatingly, Moore notes that, in terms of women of note in the New Testament, the Whore of Babylon is second only to the mother of Jesus (Torment/Bliss 7). This fact alone should alert readers to the problem of her representation as the archetypal fallen woman, and a clear picture of the dichotomous relationship between virgin and whore so often drawn in the Bible. Interestingly, Revelation’s second most prominent female character is another extreme representation of womanhood, but one that is slightly more ambivalent: the “woman clothed with the sun” is a counterpart to the Great Whore, but one that is “no less stereotypical” in the fact that she is silent and defined only by her labour with her son (Torment/Bliss 79). This observation of Moore’s mirrors exactly what Keller states about the gendering of good and evil in Revelation, where, “the extremes of innocence and vice are coded as impersonally feminine, while the active agencies of good and of evil are figured as masculine heroes and their
enemies” (Keller 11). As in the creation narratives, then, some have identified in the sun-woman another overlooked goddess figure, welcome or unwelcome, and the cosmic threat to her safety posed by the dragon/serpent implicitly linking her to Eve (Keller 64-65, 68-69).

In terms of its import for recent ecological criticism, several seemingly minor details of Revelation ask greater questions and create similar disagreements among scholars. By portraying Christ as an unethically slaughtered lamb, for example, “Revelation blurs the sharp, clearly defined conceptual line that separated human from nonhuman animals in the ancient world” (Moore, Torment/Bliss 69). While this appears at first to offer a critique of animal sacrifice, however, Moore argues that it still relies upon the logic of violence for “a God whose favour depends on the spilling of blood” (Torment/Bliss 71). Nevertheless, Moore concludes that the only ecological symbol left standing at the end of the text is one of this lamb ruling over human subjects – an inversion often witnessed in the recent “animal turn” of SpF. Moore argues, “[…] just as humans have from ancient times branded domestic animals with marks of ownership, so will humans now bear a visible sign that they are the property, not only of God, but of a sheep: ‘And his name will be on their foreheads’” (Torment/Bliss 97; Rev. 22.4, 14.1).

Similarly, the destruction of the natural environment that occurs as the bowls of God’s wrath are poured out upon the earth provide readers with differing interpretative results. One such interpretation by Barbara R. Rossing views the destruction of the natural environment as done in order to destroy Rome, the real destroyer. To this Moore responds:

[…] in destroying the destroyers of the earth, God’s angelic agents systematically make the earth uninhabitable even for the victims of those destroyers, both human and
nonhuman victims alike, and eventually themselves destroy the earth outright with a terrifying thoroughness of which the human destroyers would not have been capable. (*Torment/Bliss* 93)

This problem of collateral damage is a pattern that can be seen repeatedly in the fiction under scrutiny in this thesis, from the “Cataclysm” Mother Eve brings about in Alderman’s *The Power* to the “rescue” of Earth by the Oankali of Butler’s trilogy. Continually, readers encounter the message that our desperation for a new beginning can create only more destruction. Often what is left resembles less a garden and more the “science fiction cube” of the New Jerusalem described in Revelation (Moore, *Torment/Bliss* 96). My aim in this project is to identify precisely how and why these myths manipulate characters into making these mistakes.

As with the sections on Genesis 1-3 above, this thesis does not offer theological contributions to these arguments but instead asks how and why the emotions that stick to such foundational myths can manipulate the feelings of characters (and readers) faced with apocalyptic scenarios in their own lives. It investigates why a myth so grounded in its genre and political milieu can be so easily applied to different times and agendas, for example in Keller’s observation that the American political right “redirects the force of the text away from the liberation encoded into the text [...] into backlash against those very movements” (56). By focusing on Revelation alone among its other apocalyptic peers, my analysis admittedly leaves out multiple other texts: I have done this not to favour a Christological view of the selected novels in this study but because of Revelation’s ubiquity in the Western imagination. I am mindful also that Revelation “contains more allusions to Jewish Scripture (both the Hebrew Bible and its ancient Greek translations) than any other New Testament text” (Moore, “Torment/Bliss” 35),
and though it is a Christian canonical text, it still therefore participates in a genre saturated with Jewish tradition. As I identify the “sticky stories” of creation and apocalypse at work in the speculative fiction chosen for this project, I wish to highlight how the emotions operating within them (disgust, nostalgia, fear, etc.) are used to awaken the reader to the power of these myths, and our ability to resist (or not) their druglike effect. “Is creation really new if chaos still abides outside the garden gates?” asks Pippin, “Does the text throw the world back into an endless cycle of eternal return— out of chaos to creation and back again and again and again, neverending?” (64). It is precisely this circularity of creation and apocalypse that I address in these novels, since they work to highlight how easily the human mind can repeat destructive cycles in times of crisis, and how easy it is to resist staying with the trouble.
A Brief Case Study: The Power (2016) by Naomi Alderman

Fear, the Fear, is responsible for both the creation and destruction of the world.

_Tina Pippin, Apocalyptic Bodies, 115_

We have all been colonized by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfilment in apocalypse.

_Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” 55_

As mentioned in the introduction above, Naomi Alderman’s _The Power_ (2016) forms an important starting point for the questions asked within this doctoral research. Though the master’s thesis for which I studied _The Power_ pursued other enquiries within another critical framework, the novel’s use of creation and apocalypse provided the original inspiration to pursue affect in relation to these recurring themes in women’s speculative fiction. As I do not wish to go over parts of the novel already covered in the MScR thesis in too much detail, I use it here as a jumping-off point for demonstrating how this thesis will analyse the other novels.

In brief, _The Power_ reveals a world in which women and girls suddenly become able to wield electrical powers from a mutated organ (a “skein”) near their collarbone. Their rising power leads to some communities and leaders bringing about violence and inequality in ways that reflect an inverted version of the history of patriarchy. This draws upon the feature of SF (or SpF) known as the novum, which Sarah Dillon (after Darko Suvin) describes as “the dominant innovation or novelty [that] produces an estrangement from reality which causes the reader to reflect critically back upon it, and be prompted as a result to act for change” (175). Dillon stresses the point here, however, that owing to differing lived experiences of readers, a dystopia may not be “universally estranging” to all its readers (174). In the case of _The Power_, for example,
the novel is far more cognitively estranging for male readers (Dillon 178-79). For Michael Schaub, this is the novel’s whole purpose: “what a man reads as a horrifying dystopia, a woman reads as a fairly accurate state of the world as it is today.” While this is a valid point, I would argue that it is only one of many more issues under scrutiny in the novels. This case study will first identify recurring imagery from Genesis 2-3 in its various manifestations in the novel; it will ascertain how these are linked to apocalypse; and will draw these together under the scope of the affective or emotional impact they have on various characters. One character is of particular interest: a young mixed-race American girl called Allie, who is raised in abusive foster homes. Allie is one among many central female characters who find power in this society, but she uniquely uses religion as a tool for furthering her power’s reach, styling herself as “Mother Eve.” Her ministry appears at first to be one of redemptive sisterhood, but later becomes hugely problematic as readers discover that Alderman’s novel provides no feminist utopian model. Instead, it reveals the many ways in which power corrupts those with access to it, and the efficacy of religious mythmaking in aiding this process.

In one of the first instances of this new electrical power available to women, caught on a smartphone camera in Nigeria, a girl injures a man at a fruit stall. Nobody can tell how it has happened, though there are rumours of a snake amongst the fruit, or that the girl is a witch (Power 17). Throughout the novel, images of fruit, serpents and trees appear frequently in relation to these women discovering, using and often abusing their powers. As the novel progresses, however, Allie-Eve in particular is keen to offer

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As I refer to another scholar by the same surname later in this thesis, I should clarify here that any reference to “Alderman” is to Naomi Alderman, and other references to Isaac Alderman will be given as “I. Alderman.”
re-visions of these symbols for her own purposes. For example: the spark is initially described early on as “quick as a snake’s bite” (Power 24); Allie-Eve holds court at the convent “under a tree in the garden” (Power 81); the nuns speak of the passing on of powers as the work of the devil in the garden of Eden, “passing from hand to hand as Eve passed the apple to Adam” (Power 46); the Apple logo on ancient mobile/tablet technology becomes known as the “Bitten Fruit motif” by future historians31 (Power 213); and Allie-Eve is pictured as Mother Eve in religious artwork, “the symbolic tree behind her” (Power 225). We find that this “symbolic tree” becomes less of an image of something forbidden (linking women to transgression and gullibility) and instead becomes a metaphor for the forking of lightning (power itself) as it spreads. But while this power is still new, and appearing in younger rather than older women, onlookers of all genders are initially driven by fear and disgust at the flouting of a particular role expected of women. As seen above, the American nuns specifically liken the girls’ power to the serpent, who in their postbiblical understanding of the myth represents the devil in ways that are not applicable to the school that produced Genesis 2-3, which would have associated snakes with “life, death, wisdom, nature, chaos, and fertility” (Kvam et al. 32-33). The frightened customers at the market stall in Nigeria suspect that, if a woman has caused a man harm, she must either be a witch32 or be in league – of course – with a serpent. It is interesting to observe that Alderman’s focus in these scenes is often less on the interior emotions of the women who possess these powers, and more

31 This is a device that is also used in Robert Harris’ The Second Sleep (2019). When character Fairfax discovers a preserved piece of this “ancient” technology, he notes, “On the back was the ultimate symbol of the ancients’ hubris and blasphemy – an apple with a bite taken out of it” (23).

32 Paredes notes that, an ambiguous figure post-1970s feminism, “the witch best represents the initial, conscious use of the lethal power, though it plays into essentialist and biologically reductionist conceptions of women and the female body” (83).
on the reactions of onlookers and their own feelings about evil and femininity. In Bray and Moore’s terms, I might ask, “How might fear and disgust at powerful girls diagnose a society based in rigid gender stereotypes, which themselves find their blueprint in the Genesis creation myths?”

Both Alyson Miller and Verónica Mondragón Paredes identify the disgust felt by some of the convent nuns as a function of the Kristevo abject or monstrous feminine (A. Miller 409; Paredes 86). Reading this alongside Ahmed’s work, I would also add that their disgust is fed further because, “what threatens from the outside only threatens insofar as it is already within” (Emotion 86). Indeed, some of these nuns must have already begun to realise their own electric potential, since younger women tend to “awaken” powers in their elders. Still, the distaste expressed by some of the nuns in the convent is quite different from the violent terror experienced by some of the men who witness this change in power – what could be called a horror of the monstrous-feminine or the Kristevo “archaic mother”33 (Kristeva 205; A. Miller 418). The men’s terror in this novel – sympathetically recorded and eventually experienced first-hand by Tunde34 – is reminiscent of the ambivalent teetering described by de Beauvoir, where, “[woman] is man’s prey, his downfall, she is everything that he is not and that he longs for, his negation and his raison d’être” (175). Tunde’s first experience with this phenomenon is in a quasi-sexual encounter with his crush, Enuma,35 whose power leaves him feeling a peculiar mixture of ashamed and aroused. There are groups of now-powerless men who

33 Kristeva warns of “the belief in the omnipotence of an archaic, full, total englobing mother with no frustration, no separation, with no break-producing symbolism” (205).
34 In an interview, Alderman identifies most with her character Tunde (La Ferla).
35 Enuma’s first name could be an allusion by Alderman to the Enuma Elish, which shares many details with the biblical creation myths.
begin to think in these oppositional terms; an ambivalence so intense that for many it leads to violence: “And they’re angry, and they’re afraid, and then things happen” (Power 115). Using a twisted logic based on slavery, which does not go down well with Tunde, men’s rights activist “UrbanDox” uses a combination of biblical allusion and genetic essentialism to encourage journalist Tunde to see that, “This is why God meant men to be the ones with the power” — since men must keep their women in good enough health to rear children (Power 180). “They’re going to kill us all,” he tells Tunde, explaining that men are not as essential for reproduction, “Not one in a hundred will live. Perhaps not one in a thousand” (Power 180). While Tunde is initially sceptical of UrbanDox and his fellow online trolls, even he later feels the pull of apocalypse when he, fittingly hiding in a tree, watching a male sacrifice, thinks: “He wanted the fight over, he wanted to know who won even at his own cost, he wanted the final scene” (Power 270).

But it is not only the characters associated with victimhood that are wracked with apocalyptic thinking. Once the worship of a female God is established and she herself placed as the religion’s messiah, Allie-Eve manipulates her followers’ feelings about the sea change in gender politics, describing it in decidedly apocalyptic terms, and using it to bring about her own new beginning. One could argue that her position as a Christlike figure in the text, as a black woman, makes reference to the descriptions of the resurrected Christ in Revelation with woolly hair, bronze skin and mastoi (female breasts) (Moore, Torment/Bliss 61-63). In this way, Alderman’s female Christ figure seems on the surface like a radical re-vision of Revelation, but actually recalls genuine liberationist and queer scholarship on the text, which is then problematised by the violence Mother Eve seems willing to commit. Speaking in starkly oppositional language
as in Revelation, she says to gang leader Roxy, “I think there’s going to be a great battle between light and darkness. And your destiny is to fight on our side” (Power 103). As she does with all her followers, Allie-Eve uses this knowledge of Roxy’s prior hurt at the hands of men to manipulate her into apocalyptic thinking. An abused runaway herself, Allie-Eve knows well how trauma can feed violent rage. Reading from the point of view of affect, it is of note that Eve’s posse consists of “the girls who had suffered the most, their stories being particularly terrible, their knowledge of what one might fear from others and oneself particularly acute” (Power 79). While José Yebra views this in terms of justice, drawing out the inference that these girls would therefore “have the right to compensation” (77), I instead focus on negative affect and the importance of the “knowledge of what one might fear from others and oneself” (Power 79). It is this knowledge of what is to be feared that makes the girls more sensible of the kinds of revenge they might take. To frame the rage Allie-Eve feels and encourages so easily in others in the diagnostic style of Bray and Moore, I would write: “How might an abuse-survivor’s rage diagnose a society in which one half of humankind uses their physical strength to gain and maintain power and dominance, often to the point of violence?”

Returning to Koosed and Moore’s 2014 journal issue that situated affect theory within biblical studies, I find an interesting parallel to Mother Eve in Koosed’s study of Moses’ changed appearance after his encounter with God. Koosed remarks, “[...] the Law is not just accepted rationally because of its content. [...] The law is accepted because of the emotion that penetrates the people. Fear is the affect that produces, connects, and yokes God, Moses, and the Israelites all together” (“Moses” 422). While, unlike Moses, Allie remains visually unchanged by her encounter with “the Voice,” her
heightened electrical powers and use of religious register leave quite an impression on her followers, binding them together in their new belief system. Koosed also makes use of Ahmed’s affect theory in noting what affect can do to communities when she notes that Moses’ second descent “opens up past histories of trauma” for them, drawing them together in their collective fear (“Moses” 422-23). Similarly, by demonstrating her capacity to cause pain, Allie reminds her followers of their own trauma (which she shares); this fear of falling back into such suffering sticks them together and impels them to get their revenge, protect their borders.

So, for the girls who have been hurt and oppressed and wish to seek revenge, the end is surely coming; and for the men who have recently lost their grip on power, the end is surely coming. This is redolent again of Ahmed’s discussion on fear as it acts within the mind of a racist, where violence is created in the perceived need to protect oneself: “Such fantasies of the other hence work to justify violence against others” (Emotion 64). Yet, as we have seen, both of these apocalyptic points of view are also necessarily (like John’s Apocalypse) fraught with images from the garden narrative. For example, Allie-Eve is eager for a battle that will lead to a new beginning with a championed Eve and powerful tree, UrbanDox and his followers are eager to get back to a biblical Eden where men sit at the top of the hierarchy of creation. The scene in which Roxy’s skein – the “phallic” organ that provides the electrical power (Paredes 89) – is forcibly removed and inserted into her brother forms a gory inversion of the creation of woman from the ‘adam’s side. As readers learn, many of the leaders, both male and female, appear to be willing to encourage this kind of violence on a global scale to make their plans possible, a violence that escalates to nuclear war. The Voice, ever an
ambivalent tool in Alderman’s portrayal of Allie-Eve’s state of mind and relationship to God, begins by telling her, “You can’t get there from here. You’ll have to start again. We’ll have to begin again with this whole thing” (Power 294), but it later playfully warns her, “Step away from the tree, Eve, with your hands up” (Power 315). She does not step away from this figurative tree however, as the narrative frame reveals from the novel’s start.

In fact, Alderman is careful to construct the novel in such a way that the terrible inevitability of what is called the “Cataclysm” is felt by readers as well as characters. For example, section titles such as “Can’t be more than seven months left” and “Here it comes,” give an impending sense of the pull of apocalypse, the draw to the inevitable zero point (Power 249, 291). Equally, the “inverted realism of the frame narrative” in the form of the novel’s “editorial letters” serves to undermine any hint of hopefulness that the central characters have in a new beginning that might be better than the one represented at the start of the novel (Dillon 178). Lastly, the omniscient narrative voice, which also doubles as the slightly sardonic “Voice” Allie-Eve can hear, provides a perspective that knows the connectedness of beginnings and endings. “These things are happening all at once,” it reads, “These things are one thing. They are the inevitable result of all that went before. The power seeks its outlet. These things have happened before; they will happen again. These things are always happening” (Power 293). Upon learning that her adoptive mother (also called Eve) has continued her abusive work in the name of Allie-Eve’s new church, Allie-Eve has a moment of revelation – another conversation with this authorial Voice – where she realises that she cannot rid the world of evil purely by inverting the power dynamic between women and men (Power 316).
Seeming to echo Haraway’s “It matters what stories tell stories” (Trouble 34-35), she realises, “Beneath every story, there is another story” (317). Thus we see that, at the heart of Allie-Eve’s violence is the violence that has happened to her, which she is attempting to destroy along with everything else. It is this inescapable pain that renders her (and others like her) incapable of staying with the trouble.

This ambivalent Voice so closely associated with the narrative voice of the novel appears to sum up how easily trouble can lead individuals to think in terms of creation and apocalypse. The Voice tells Allie-Eve:

> Your whole question is the mistake. Who’s the serpent and who’s the Holy Mother? Who’s bad and who’s good? Who persuaded the other one to eat the apple? [...] All of these questions are the wrong question. It’s more complicated than that, sugar. [...] The whole idea that there are two things and you have to choose is the problem. (Power 319-20)

The next four chapters consider questions such as these and expand upon them, using the central thesis outlined in the introduction. As Alyson Miller argues, “The Power [...] does not emerge in a vacuum but continues to play upon and subvert the speculative fictions of other feminist writers attempting to conceive of societies that critique, or seek to operate beyond, patriarchal ideology” (404). The following chapters in this thesis bring the reader through this trend that precedes The Power and informs its central premise(s). The work attempts to locate, within this niche, how the key themes of creation and apocalypse act as devices and motifs that act upon characters’ (and readers’) emotions within both fiction and criticism over the last fifty years.
Chapter 1: Call Me Ishtar (1973) by Rhoda Lerman

Perhaps apocalypse began at creation, out of the violence of creative chaos, and every retelling is a sequel, a trace of a trace of the journey toward the end of time.

Tina Pippin, Apocalyptic Bodies, 1

I have learned with bad recipes to throw the whole thing out and start over again.

Rhoda Lerman, Call Me Ishtar, 78

This and the following chapter focus on two novels of the 1970s that share much common ground: Call Me Ishtar by Rhoda Lerman (1973) and The Passion of New Eve by Angela Carter (1977). By holding these two novels, one American and one British (though both set in the USA), against the backdrop of feminist debates of the time, I aim to show how the novels satirise movements that focused on finding the “submerged” goddess of the Hebrew Bible. Negative emotions such as rage, frustration, despair and disgust operate on and through the characters of these novels, sticking to readers and invoking adverse reactions in order to lampoon the idea of goddess culture as a helpful tool for the women’s movement. And of course, aspects of creation and apocalypse work throughout these texts to amplify those negative emotions.

Though it is not possible to pinpoint the origin of the creative, social, political and academic moments referred to as the women’s movement or “second-wave” feminism, many credit de Beauvoir’s 1949 work with inspiring many of its thinkers:

[The Second Sex] had a profound influence on the development of twentieth-century feminism, providing a key theoretical tool in the elaboration of the concept of the social construction of gender and offering a model of feminist enquiry for the theorists, literary critics, historians, philosophers, theologians and critics of scientific discourse who
developed the new fields of study which her multidisciplinary essay opened up. (Fallaize 85)

In liberal feminist discourse, the concepts of the “Female Mystery” and the “creature, intermediate between male and eunuch” (de Beauvoir 288, 296), respectively inform the concepts behind Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*36 (1964) and Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970). De Beauvoir’s stance on childbirth and childhood similarly inspired more radical feminist writers and activists such as Shulamith Firestone, who dedicated *The Dialectic of Sex* to de Beauvoir in 1970. Writers and artists of the era frequently turned to the Western world’s creation myths to investigate and critique assumptions about gender, just as the banners leading into Judy Chicago’s 1979 installation “The Dinner Party” feature a creation narrative using female pronouns and ending “And then Everywhere was Eden Once again.” Speculative fiction of the time also enters the debate in the rise of feminist utopian and critical dystopian writing, often bringing to life feminist models of society, or experimenting with the ingredients of the “Facts and Myths” outlined in de Beauvoir’s work. *Call Me Ishtar* and *The Passion of New Eve* are examples of this playful experimentation with the debates and trends of the time.

One such trend particularly parodied in these novels is the “Goddess movement,” a neopagan tradition that grew in popularity in the Western world in the 1970s. This movement operated under the assumption that former goddess-worshipping cultures had been suppressed by monotheistic patriarchy. It is well documented that many ancient Mediterranean cultures worshipped goddesses – in fact

36 Though later criticised for its shallow treatment of people of colour, LGBT people and class difference, *The Feminine Mystique* aptly addresses the rise in depression in American middle-class married women caused by their “schizophrenic” confinement to the domestic sphere after college.
the Hebrews were unusual for their monotheism amidst so many pantheistic neighbours (Stiebert 182). However, Rashkow provides evidence that the early Hebrews were also known to worship maternal female deities such as Asherah, who may have preceded what later became Yahweh (51). Asherah’s relatives feature in other cultures in the form of Tiamat or Ishtar, and many argue that she remains veiled in images within the Bible such as the tree of knowledge (in a reference to her role as “nourishing deity”) and the serpent (Rashkow 52-54). But Cynthia Ozick argues that the feminine aspect of God has been contained within monotheism, disappearing from view thanks to “the limitations of the human mind and the poverty of our human language” (122). Ozick outlines the various anxieties associated with addressing this problem in contemporary Jewish liturgy, which “can take us only to quibbles about the incompetence of pronouns. It remains the wrong question. It leads nowhere. It has no fruit. It is dust” (122).

Still, many writers are eager to identify the feminine aspects of God grammatically encoded within the Hebrew Bible, such as the Wisdom present in Proverbs 1.20-33 and 8.22-36. About such references, there is speculation over whether we may find references to ancient goddesses hiding in plain sight in the Bible either as God’s divine consort, a usurped predecessor, a re-vision of Eve or Lilith, or even as the primordial chaos that must be subdued (Keller 71-72; Pippin 68). Whichever strand of argument is favoured, the texts themselves form a crucial arena for feminist thought, thanks to this “first woman” functioning as a representative both of creative power and of monstrous evil. Both Lerman and Carter’s novels explore precisely this idea in the transformation of their goddess-turned-monster. They show how much further falls the goddess who transgresses, becoming nothing more than a “nursery bogey” when she
once (may have) represented the creator (Graves, qtd. by Daly, *Gyn/ecology* 86). In these two novels, the neglected goddesses (unlike their masculine counterparts) become only petty constructions of negative emotion associated with the fears, anxieties and complaints expressed by and about women of the time.

Many writers of the 1970s, including Carol Christ and Starhawk, 37 were seriously committed to redeeming such goddess figures. While most letters of correspondence between contributors and editors of the journal *Quest*, which ran from 1974-1982, sometimes ended with feminist sign-offs such as “In struggle,” or “In sisterhood,” a few (particularly pertaining to the “Women and Spirituality” issue) closed their letters as follows:

Fig. 2 and Fig. 3: Anonymised extracts from the *Quest* magazine archives, correspondence in 1974-5. Correspondence 1 reads: “May She continue to smile on you --” and 2: “The goddess in me embraces the goddess in you.” (MC753 16.16)

Others were cautious about imagining a pre-biblical, utopian, matriarchal deity, following de Beauvoir’s example:

[...] in truth that Golden Age of Woman is only a myth. [...] Earth, Mother, Goddess – she was no fellow creature in man’s eyes; it was *beyond* the human realm that her power was affirmed, and she was therefore *outside* of that realm. (102)

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37 See Christ “Goddess;” see also Rigney 65-66 for an overview of a few others writing in the late 1970s.
Similarly, Karen Armstrong agrees that goddesses may only have been created in hunter-gatherer societies “through an unconscious resentment of the female” always evident beneath its veneration of her (39). This tension reveals itself in the impossible duality of these myths:

[The mythical woman becomes] an idol, a servant, the source of life, a power of darkness; she is the elemental silence of truth, she is artifice, gossip, and falsehood; she is healing presence and sorceress; she is man’s prey, his downfall, she is everything that he is not and that he longs for, his negation and his raison d’être. (de Beauvoir 175)

For these reasons de Beauvoir does not consider the idea of “returning to” goddess culture a helpfully feminist approach because the symbols are too ambivalent, too loaded with desire and fear. These first two chapters argue that Carter and Lerman warn the same, but through a satirical stance that lampoons elements of Goddess culture while still condemning the misogyny and patriarchal structures that created it.

In Lerman’s Call Me Ishtar (henceforth Ishtar), the eponymous ancient Mesopotamian goddess occupies the body of a suburban Jewish housewife in upstate New York. A postmodern magic-realist novel in the tradition of the “Jewish absurd,” Ishtar consists of first-person narratives told by the goddess herself, which vary in style and typeface to convey tangential rewrites of biblical stories, fairy tales, and “comic mini-lectures on matriarchal lore” (Rosenstein). On entering this woman’s life in a supermarket car park, Ishtar continues running her household and helps her husband manage a seven-man rock-and-roll band appropriately called “Demons.” She also starts a business making cupcakes and Twinkies infused with “divine” breastmilk, mandrake and afterbirth, as well as looking after her tween-age son and flea-infested cats. Irritated by the mundanity of modern American life, Ishtar stages increasingly flamboyant and dangerous performances for the band with the aim of revealing her divinity to the
masses. These events, which increase the band’s infamy but fail to bring Ishtar anything other than a reputation as a witchy-mom type, lead to a botched marriage-counselling session followed by Ishtar faking her own death to escape being sectioned. After her funeral, during which she kidnaps her son, the novel closes with an ambiguous new adventure with another man.

The text has semiautobiographical elements, as Lerman herself was married to a Robert and also briefly managed a rock band in New York (Vosburgh). Interviewer Suzanne Mantell notes that Lerman was inspired “by the tension she observed between the world of sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll and her life as a suburban wife” (61). To this I would add that her midrashic engagement with biblical myth enables her to address tensions she observed in Jewish culture too: “For women in particular,” writes Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, “[creative midrash] can offer an entry—and even a means of confronting—a Judaism that has traditionally excluded them” (326). But Lerman was also keen to incorporate her academic study of myth and literature into her work – Lois Vosburgh notes that Lerman taught a course entitled “Myth into Science” at University College, as well as another course on parapsychology. A product of these influences, the novel blurs narrative, factual and mythical boundaries, shifting from Ishtar the housewife to Ishtar the Goddess to Lerman herself, all of which is reflected in its frequent changes in typeface, perspective and register. “The result,” writes Harriet Rosenstein, “is an imaginative embarras de richesses, an unresolved esthetic rivalry between narratives and narrators.” The novel received acclaim from the New York Times Book Review and Ms Magazine, as well as from some of Lerman’s peers including Marge Piercy. However after the 1970s very little has been written about Ishtar, which went
out of print until it was revived by Phyllis Rose’s *The Shelf* and republished by Overlook Press in 2017. There is evidence that it may not have been received well in some feminist circles, for example Russ is rather dismissive of her in her original interview copy for *Quest* in 1975: “now that Marge Piercy is doing it, and somebody else wrote a novel about Ishtar returning as a Bronx housewife, [the genre] does seem to be thriving” (MC753 17.7, 7). This was rephrased by the editors from the above to, “There is the novel about […]” for the magazine (Russ, “Reflections” 44). The editorial comment reads:

![Handwritten note](image)

Fig. 4: “(The woman who wrote the Ishtar novel may find it less insulting this way.” (*Quest*, MC753 17.7, 7)

The fact that the editors did not try to find out Lerman’s name or even print the name of the novel suggests they did not think it worth following up.

To mark the first of many unusual shifts in style and tone, *Ishtar* begins with a job application for the position of “Mother Goddess,” with a CV featuring past roles as “Angel of Death,” “Queen of Heaven” and “Whore of Babylon” (xi-xiii), initially centering herself in the midst of narratives of creation and apocalypse. Ishtar cites her reason for termination of her most recent position as Queen of Heaven, where she created alphabets between 4501 and 1350 BCE, as “Personality differences (Moses & Monotheism)” (xiii). This is a subtle challenge to the Western idea of *logos* as a masculine concept, where in fact many cultures credit various goddesses including Vac,
Devaki, Kali, Medusa, Carmenta and Isis for delivering written and spoken languages around the Fertile Crescent (King 23, citing Rosalind Miles). From this point Ishtar begins to exact revenge for having been reduced to the margins of the “man-made Bible” by monotheism (Ishtar 26). During these rewrites, Lerman draws deeply from de Beauvoir’s history of the goddess in agricultural and hunter-gatherer societies – and the extent to which women consequently “still dream through the dreams of men” (de Beauvoir 174).

De Beauvoir’s history reads, in part:

At Susa was found the oldest figure of the Great Goddess, the Great Mother with long robe and high coiffure whom in other statues we see crowned with towers. [...] She is at times steatopygous and crouching, at times slender and standing erect, sometimes dressed and often naked, her arms pressed beneath her swelling breasts. She is the queen of heaven, a dove her symbol; she is also the empress of hell, whence she crawls forth, symbolized in a serpent. [...] Capricious, luxurious, cruel as Nature, at once propitious and fearsome, she reigns over all the Aegean Archipelago, over Phrygia, Syra, Anatolia, over all western Asia. She is called Ishtar in Babylonia, Astarte among Semitic peoples, and Gaea, Rhea, or Cybele by the Greeks. In Egypt we come upon her under the form of Isis. [...] Sometimes she becomes invoked in prayers, sometimes she becomes a priestess as with the Druids amongst the ancient Celts. (101, emphasis mine)

Lerman appears to make extensive use of these examples, particularly those moments emphasised above in which the Goddess is “capricious, luxurious, cruel.” One particular extract from Ishtar seems to match de Beauvoir’s history, but voiced in the first person as if from the Goddess herself:

For I have been the Chaos, Tiamat, who preceded and fashioned all. I know the patterns. I have been the skin Marduk sat in after he slew me. I have been the skin of the Tabernacle and the loins of the Torah and I have been the jungle hut where the boys became men, and I have been the sukka hung with the gourds of my breasts and the grapes of my nipples and the figs of my vulva and the Tree of Life. I have been and I will be and Here I am Again in the emphalos of Eleusis, in the underground of the Pythian, in the penetralia of the living Leviathans who would seek me for their circumcision, who would seek me to be men. My Star fell and left only the Evening Star and the Morning Star to which I sing a song and no one can put Humpty Dumpty back together again. (83-84)
Like de Beauvoir, Lerman clearly draws from a deep mythological well, but she also incorporates into her declarations many humorous juxtapositions with fairy tale and contemporary culture. Most notably for this thesis, while Ishtar frequently takes pains to “correct” the written biblical myths, she is eager to take responsibility for the slaughter and disaster rather than portraying herself as the peaceful goddess that some spiritual feminists sought to revive during this time. In many more examples below, Ishtar is happy to lean into the terror, the disgust and the abject.

As well as engaging with this forbidding mother goddess trope, Ishtar takes great pains to satirise the myth of the feminine mystique, its terrestrial counterpart, famously defined by Friedan as the concept that women’s destiny is in “the fulfilment of their own femininity,” and that rather than competing with men, they should value submission and nurturing children (29). The goddess meets the mystique in Lerman’s metaphor below, in which Ishtar describes the dilemma to character Claire:

>The Angel of Death, the Whore of Babylon, the Mother of the World, we must be all of these things, Claire, all at once. That woman you have on your coins with the balanced scales? She is not Justice. She is woman balancing her roles. Standing on one foot, blindfolded. Half queen, half whore, half goddess, half kitchen help. (110)

Where the blindfold is meant to represent objectivity, Ishtar instead makes it one of the many aspects of the mystique’s blinkering of women’s lives described by Friedan. Instead of the scales weighing evidence, they now represent the attempt of the mystique to balance women’s impossibly disparate roles. I doubt it is an error in punctuation or mathematics that leaves Ishtar’s examples in four halves. By placing the

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38 Proponent of the Goddess movement, Zsuzsannah Budapest, writes in 1975: “We believe that Goddess-consciousness gave humanity a workable, long-lasting, peaceful period during which the Earth was treated as Mother and wimmin [sic] were treated as Her priestesses. This was the mythical Golden Age of Matriarchy.” (50)
goddess Ishtar in the life of a suburban middle-class housewife, Lerman collides the two extremes of the “woman myth” and questions their compatibility, or at least their potential to bring fulfilment. “I know I must,” utters Ishtar, “get it together, so I can be a goddess in my kitchen and a cook in the universe. Only then will I be happy” (73). This mention of happiness here emphasises its absence in Ishtar’s life both as goddess and as housewife. If we recall Bray and Moore’s description of Ahmed’s third branch of affect theory, which is embedded in the wider cultural-political milieu, they ask: “How might depression diagnose a society that demands we be ever more efficient and productive but systematically denies us the feelings necessary to perform optimally or even adequately?” (6). Ishtar seems here to fail to see (or at least pretend to fail to see) the feminine mystique in these terms: rather than women’s unhappiness diagnosing a sexist society, the feminine mystique blames the woman herself for not fully embracing her femininity. Why a creator-goddess should be troubled by such things is the central conceit of the novel.

Like others in this thesis, Lerman makes extensive use of the biblical creation myths (in which Ishtar is both creator and destroyer) to probe Ishtar’s emotional state. Early on, the character authors an open letter explaining that the stories of Job and Noah should be placed before the creation narratives of Genesis 1-3. The creations of her own, which she recounts throughout the novel, reveal themselves to be re-creations from the chaos of her destroyed earlier attempts (and these are the horrors witnessed by Job and by Noah etc.). The tone of her narrative is light, flippant and completely unlike the poetry of Genesis 1 or the elevated rhetoric of the apocalyptic genre; even the fearful events it describes are never allowed to be serious for long. For example,
Ishtar swerves from, “The waters were murky with the churning and burning and shit,” straight to, “Soon I would have a good mulch for the new plantings” (9-10). These words seem to anticipate the language Haraway uses to describe the Chthulucene in Trouble: “We are humus, not Homo, not anthropos; we are compost, not posthuman” (55). And of course, Lerman draws from biblical precedence for this way of thinking. Meyers highlights “a striking and significant wordplay” between the word for the first human and the word for arable land (‘adamah) in the original Hebrew in Genesis 2-3:

Using earth/earthling or human/humus would better capture the Hebrew wordplay. (English “human” is not the combination of hu with man; derived from Latin humanus, it is probably related to both homo, “man,” and humus, “earth”). [...] The use of ‘adam indicates that the essence of human life is not its eventual classification into gendered categories but rather its organic connection to the arable earth, the ‘adamah, that reddish-brown substance that can be cultivated to support life. (71-72)

Anne Primavesi adds that the word for human is “derived from a theoretical Indo-European root (ghum) meaning ‘earth’ or ‘ground’ from which comes Latin humus (earth) and Old English guma (man)” (205). So, in her glibness, Ishtar both references the Hebrew wordplay lost in English translation while also conveying a sense that this creator goddess, like Haraway, does not care much for human-centred narratives. But unlike Haraway, rather than getting readers comfortable with this idea, Lerman’s aim is to maximise the disgust reaction in the reader, and to awaken them to the idea that the hopeful “new plantings” come only after the “churning and burning and shit” of her prior, heedless destruction.

One of Ishtar’s early creation narratives, a version of which appears in feminist humour and satire publication Pulling Our Own Strings in 1980, features the idea of an original women-only world – a common premise in feminist speculative fiction. In this version, Lerman blends modern genetics, fairy tales, and biblical and pagan myths (e.g.
Moses in the reed basket, Romulus and Remus, and the wild man Enkidu in *Gilgamesh*)
to portray an origin story in which a “chromosomal deficiency” accidentally produces
the first “mutant” male, who is sent off down the river in a basket and raised by (and
mates with) a wolf, returning years later to blow the city walls down (*Ishtar 7*). The wild
man appeals to a poetess writing under a fig tree, who rebuffs him because he has eaten
flesh, and accordingly “belong[s] with the beasts” (8). The all-female society within the
city walls, proud of their poetry, their vegetarianism, their libraries and their quiet
peace, only agree to let him in on the grounds that he will do favours, tricks and menial
work for them. Unlike the woman of *Gilgamesh*, who sleeps with the wild man and
“civilises” him, Lerman’s women are disgusted by the “large, bestial and clumsy” mutant
and can never make him understand their culture (8). This retelling upends the Genesis
2-3 narrative by placing women as the original human and portraying men as “‘simply a
mutated extended clitoris fashioned for our amusement’” (159). In doing so, Ishtar
describes his body in pejorative terms to recentre the received interpretation of man as
norm and woman as Other, making man the alteration. In Ahmed’s terms, Ishtar (by
inverting this norm) uses disgust to illustrate how it is not the inherent qualities of the
disgusting object that make it disgusting, but the sense of threatened selfhood in the
person feeling disgusted. The city walls become a metaphor for the threatened borders
of the “civilised” human (in this case, women) that themselves risk becoming infected by
that too-close otherness. Importantly, there is also the potential for desire incorporated
into that disgust, which we see again and again in Ishtar’s insatiable sexual craving for
the human men whom she finds so pathetic (Ahmed, *Emotion* 88). Those reading *Ishtar*
already live in a world where contact between all genders generates complicated
histories of power relations, thus Lerman plays with the concept that what the women in the city fear is the knowledge that they too are animal: “to get stuck to something sticky is also to become sticky” (Ahmed, *Emotion* 91). By simply reversing the tradition of misogynist thought that places woman closer to beast, Lerman highlights the absurdity of dividing humans along such essentialist lines from each other – and from animals. But she also reminds readers of the impossibility of returning to an original scenario in which those lines are clearly demarcated in such binary terms and devoid of affective associations.

Another short passage that references Genesis 2-3 features Ishtar persuading Snow White to eat the “apple of wisdom.” She eats it incorrectly (“Ritual must precede wisdom”) and is poisoned to sleep, only to be awakened by her prince and later usurp Ishtar’s place as Queen, remarking, “‘Keep your Wisdom, Old Mother’” (15). This story involves a sudden change in typeface, which usually indicates the re-vision of a particular biblical or pagan myth or fairy tale in which Ishtar participates as a meddler or central character. Apart from these passages usually being tangential or supplementary to the main narrative, there is little cohesion to them such as differences in first- or third-person perspective, or intended audience (e.g. some passages resemble epistles that address the reader as “you”). The frequent changes in formal qualities seem to reflect the character Ishtar’s own capricious nature, leaving little room for the reader to adjust to their own feelings. Ngai notes that, on screen as well as in literature, such shifts in perspective are intended to be unnerving for the watcher, or in this case reader (28). Natalie Rosinsky argues the same when she notes that readers of *Ishtar* must contend not only with their own interpretation but also with the volatility of Ishtar’s
feelings and an author who seems determined to “cede authority” (10). Readers can never feel confident that they are going to keep their self-assured goddess Ishtar for long when she can move so quickly from, for example, pontificating about the symbolism of Delphi to jealously obsessing over mortals Claire and Mack. Drawing attention to her own postmodern narrative style, Lerman writes interjections such as, “Let us then go above and witness this scene,” switching from sans serif to serif and third- to first-person perspective as the narrator perches (bird-like, Lilith-like) on a shower curtain rod in the bathroom (155). Dwor notes this kind of perspective-shifting as a frequent feature of Jewish women’s midrash, in which we find “a multiplicity of voices arranged without evident hierarchy” (24). The tradition of midrash similarly relies “on atomization of words and phrases and a free hand in juxtaposing excerpts from across a wide body of text, with apparent disregard for continuity or the literary coherence of earlier meanings” (Dwor 23). Here we see Lerman engaging in a long hermeneutic tradition in which interpreters, artists and storytellers are able to draw multiple meanings from small details of a primary text (or several) and retain the authority of that text while also allowing for polyvalency.

Like the two narratives in Genesis, some of Ishtar’s creation stories contradict each other in basic detail, but do not necessarily detract from each other in the overall affective sense of the story (repeatedly) being told. Ishtar later takes pains to explain the “true” significance of her role in Eden, but her audience (waiting for the “Devils” to play) only laugh and clap at the spectacle:

The original sin was my murder, That is when sin began, when the first wife, the first mother was banished. But I am back. [...] I am the apple and it is I that must be eaten for knowledge and joy. [...] Jesus is bad hash. Partake of me. (61)
Initially Ishtar alludes to a connection between the myth of Lilith and the mother Goddess figure. In doing so however she highlights an interesting difference between Christian and Jewish (and Islamic) interpretations of Genesis 2-3, since “original sin” only developed in Christian doctrine towards the fourth century CE (Koosed, Reading 48).

Ishtar, then, is free to adapt what she sees as a true original sin – the murder of the goddess-as-Lilith, which I will return to further on. What is more immediately striking in Ishtar’s continued narrative however is her explanation to the crowd, whom she calls children, that Adam engaged in bestiality before Eve was created:

> The children roar as Adam mounts the sow and dives away from the bite of her tusks as she fights him from her back. “Don’t jest,” I tell them. “How do you think we domesticated animals for you. Adam, after I subdued him with my love, it was given to him to love the animals.” (Ishtar 61)

While Ishtar makes it clear that Adam did this with all the domesticated animals (apart from cats), Lerman’s decision to focus on the sow is certainly a loaded one for a Jewish writer re-visioning Genesis, and a sure way to maximise the disgust reaction in the reader. But some inspiration may have been drawn from the Talmud nonetheless, as Greenblatt notes that Rabbi Eleazar implies that Adam does this before Eve’s creation (215; see also Graves and Patai 50). But in a further twist, it is not the bestiality nor the added complication of the pig that Ishtar condemns, as she herself engages in her own (somehow implicitly cleaner) “divine copulation” with animals; instead it is the quality of Adam’s lust that makes him “flea-ridden, spent and odiferous,” a “Narrow-minded hot-buttocked tree dweller” (62, 63). Readers of Gilgamesh will recognise parallels between this Adam and the wild man Enkidu discussed above, who consorts with beasts before encountering Shamhat. Once again Lerman seems to anticipate the work of the post-humanists by blurring the lines between human and beast, describing Adam in
increasingly animalistic language as if he is infected by their proximity. The difference is, again, that she clearly does so to amplify disgust rather than diminish it, as she uses language particularly chosen to affront the reader’s sense of touch, heat and smell. And again, she is careful to do so in a way that still ensures the Ishtar of the reader’s imagination is not portrayed in a virtuous light next to Adam; she enjoys many of the same activities, but somehow does so in a way that separates her as divine in her own mind.

For example, Ishtar’s own relationship to animals is complicated and conditional. She calls eating meat the “original taboo,” dislikes hunters, cringes with disgust at Adam’s bestial desires and won’t eat eggs (56, 61, 72). But she herself requires the sacrifice of a piglet for a Cupcake ritual, slaughters a dog, tortures a cat, and allows a kitten to be poisoned by Pine Sol (96, 60, 101, 158). The fact that Ishtar requires a porcine dedication (“sacred to the Goddess, eaten only on Her days” (97)) makes the juxtaposition particularly taboo, again. Lerman’s further use of a terrified piglet in this ritual (and its unsentimental end over a cliff) is clearly intended to inspire feelings of discomfort and pity, if not disgust, portraying the goddess in an increasingly negative light.39 But as well as dealing harshly with animals in a way that negatively reflects the “dominion” described in Genesis, Ishtar also becomes part animal herself. Her pubic hair is replaced with feathers, which fascinates her and her husband but causes her gynaecologist to pray aloud in dread (133). These feathers connect her once more to the Lilith myth, owing to the association between the first woman and a screech owl (Isa. 34.14; see also Koosed, Reading 64; Wolf xiii). The reaction of the men who witness this

39 As well as being suggestive of Jesus casting demons out of the body of “Legion” into swine, and their similar end in the water (Mark 5.1-20; Luke 8.26-39).
also implies that on seeing the animality of a woman, the stereotypical heterosexual response is either lust or terror.

But far be it from Lerman to provide a clear-cut parody of Goddess culture without also adding in moments of genuine feminist inquiry. When Ishtar adds her own breastmilk, powdered afterbirth and mandrakes into the “Cupcakes of the Hostess,” she highlights how feminine fluids (though ironically in the case of breastmilk, actually intended for human consumption) typically evoke more of a disgust reaction than the flesh-and-blood implications of, for example, the eucharist or of the Ashkenazi tradition of eating of hamantaschen at Purim (115-16, 128). The slippage between Ishtar being read as anti-feminist or feminist, and joyous or disgusting, shows how subjective a concept tone can be. Ngai writes of tone, “the concept’s power resides precisely in its amorphousness” (30). That amorphousness in itself is, of course, another way of inciting a feeling of unsteadiness in the reader. For Moore, bodily fluids and their proximity (real or theoretical) act as important drivers in the disgust-generating language of Revelation (“Retching” 515). Ishtar’s lack of squeamishness in the face of such juices, indeed her willingness to make them into tasty treats, aligns her with the Whore of Babylon, who drinks the golden cup full of sticky abominations in Revelation 17.4 (Moore, “Retching” 515-16). But as with Adam’s bestiality, what is impure in Ishtar’s mind is not the thing being eaten, but in the intention behind the eating: “their reasons for eating it are impure” (Ishtar 128). This passage contains an allusion to Jesus telling the Pharisees, 

40 Unusually, Lerman does not delve explicitly into the lore behind the eating of hamantaschen. Citing a 1946 article by A.S. Yahuda, journalist Arielle Kaplan argues that these triangular-shaped pastries came from ancient mahn (poppy) taschen (pockets) intended not to represent Haman’s ears but Ishtar’s vagina, to be eaten as part of an ancient fertility ritual that recognised Esther and Mordecai as Ishtar and Marduk respectively. Here we see the submerged goddess perhaps having escaped even Lerman – or maybe this is why Ishtar accuses the “little God-eaters” of having impure reasons for eating it.
“there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile” (Mark 7.15). The idea that “impurity” comes from within the body rather than whatever appears to threaten the body reads remarkably similarly to Ahmed’s descriptions of disgust.

Ishtar’s son also exhibits animal-like qualities that, again hypocritically, disgust even her. Believing too ardently that Ishtar is the Tooth Fairy, he pulls out his permanent teeth: “Rodent teeth, thumbnail long, which initiate a deep and grinding horror within me” (47). While Ishtar takes this behaviour as a symbol of initiation and dedication, as it is in some indigenous tribes, she also sees it as a method of (his) control over her feelings, since he can evince a “deep and grinding horror” in her that no other character can. Recalling Freudian ideas about the mother-son relationship, she calls his ability to do this, “[a] divine demonstration of his power over both his body and my emotions” (79, 24). Teeth recur as a powerful motif at moments of pain or dread throughout the novel, with the ever-present threat of a dentist appointment looming both for Ishtar and her son. Ishtar also alludes to the myth of the vagina dentata of the castrating woman (Yee 3), reversing this masculine anxiety and instead making it an anxiety in which women must defend themselves against HPV: “We get uterine cancer because we have lost the teeth from our vaginas and can’t defend ourselves. Do you happen to know a good dentist?” (90). Using humour at bizarre moments as always in this novel, Lerman’s work is again suggestive of the cycle of violence that fear begets in the presence of the abject. Ishtar later has flirtatious conversations (real and imagined) with band members and her dentist about teeth, sex and “oral fixation” (111, 120). Thus teeth seem to be linked with pain, fear, power for Ishtar: as the novocaine hits and the dentist drills into
her jaw, Ishtar’s narrative stream of consciousness reaches new heights of kaleidoscopic divinity, treading the borderline between euphoria and death. She speaks of lost Paradise and of being “Lilith the Witch, who roams in desolate letos fields attacking children and golfers [...]” and concludes, “To be mortal and have bad teeth and unhappy loves is enough” (122). Here Ishtar fully (but briefly) becomes the Lilith figure she has been flirting with – the “mother-creator-destroyer” of Western lore during the Middle Ages (Rivlin 96) – but treated with Lerman’s characteristic lightness.

But back to teeth: despite their association with the perfect American smile, Lerman seems to touch upon a certain primordial fascination that recurs throughout the Bible frequently to indicate strong negative affect. Teeth are used in physiological descriptions to express feelings of hatred (Job 16.9; Psalms 35.16, 37.12, 112.10; Joel 1.6; Acts 7.54), terror (Deut. 32.24; Job 41.4; Psalms 57.4, 58.6; Dan. 7.5-19; Rev. 9.8), disgust (Prov. 10.26; 30.14), shame and bitterness (Job 19.20; Jer. 31.29-30); despair or regret (Lam. 3.16; Matt. 8.12, 13.42, 22.13, 24.51; Luke 13.28); demon possession (Mark 9.18), brutal justice (Ex. 21.24; Lev. 24.20) and suspicion (Prov. 25.19). By provoking in the reader’s imagination even the suggestion of toothache, tooth surgery or a child pulling out their own healthy teeth, Lerman manages both to reference a common biblical physiological indication of negative affect (and indeed source of countless idioms41) and presumably to provoke all kinds of personal negative associations that might exist in the reader’s memory. But it is not just teeth that Lerman uses to express strong emotions, but other physical manifestations of feeling often associated with biblical idiom: for example, when Ishtar narrates, “I swell with pride. I pour Joy over my

41 From the references above, the English language gains the expressions: “by the skin of my teeth,” “sets my teeth on edge,” “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” and “gnashing of teeth.”
hands. [...] My face grows radiant with shame” (132-33). Cleland Boyd McAfee notes that in the Hebrew Bible, “most of the emotions are connected either in the word used or in the words accompanying it with the physical condition that expresses it. [...] Anger is expressed in words which tell of hard breathing, of heat, of boiling tumult, of trembling” (III). In these moments, Lerman seems deliberately to echo biblical ways of conveying affect through physiological rather than emotional descriptions. Her contrastingly introspective and psychoanalytical discourse helps to reveal the chasm between the ways in which emotion is portrayed in biblical rhetoric and in twentieth-century American culture; she is more goddess when the former and more mystique when the latter.

We encounter more physicality in the form of drunken jollity at another retelling of creation, where Ishtar describes a postdiluvian creation story in which she and Noah drink strawberry wine and fashion life out of clay, before returning him to his wife (whom they have turned into a kangaroo for the duration of this affair). Here Lerman revisions and riffs off details shared not only with different chapters of Genesis but also with other Sumerian myths, for example where Nintu and Enki drink wine and create suffering together (Bledstein 190). The tone is flirtatious, playful, even self-conscious as they laugh at the animals they fashion:

I teased him into shaping something foolish and ridiculous and, if it made me laugh, I would breathe life into it. [...] I am really ashamed that I, Progenitress of Heroes and Mother of the Gods, etc., etc., could have done what we did. [...] We were screwing around and we were soused. Totally soused. [...] It was one Creation I relish whenever I remember it. (Ishtar 12-13)

Upon sobering up, Noah is so disgusted at their behaviour that he castrates himself. The association of Noah, laughter, shame and drunkenness indirectly recalls Genesis 9.20-23,
in which a drunken Noah is found sleeping naked by his son Ham. This is a narrative in which shame, vulnerability and taboo are central in determining long-term negative outcomes in the Hebrew Bible, not to mention its use over the centuries as a justification for slavery (K. Stone, “Queer Animalities” 279). Clearly the subtle suggestion of it in this particular scene in Ishtar is intended to draw associations of Noah’s shame with the shame surrounding nakedness that arises in Eden. Though a happy memory for Ishtar, it is one of many bacchanalian flirtations with humankind that results in the breakdown of a relationship as well as a loss of power for her. “Can I this time love a man without ruining him?” she asks herself as she later admires Nino, the lead singer of her band, before worrying that he in turn will destroy her in fear (34-35). Armstrong notes that this habit is particular to the goddess-Ishtar, who “has ruined each one of her lovers” (74), and yet for novel-Ishtar, her lovers seem just as capable of ruining her. In this short scene, Lerman could be drawing from the subtle indications that the God who saw that all his creation was “good” and “very good” is able to lose control of it so quickly as his protoplasts disobey his direct orders. Apparently, even the God of yet unblemished Eden can regret decisions, be indecisive, be anxious or disappointed. When Ishtar does the same, Lerman asks the reader, is it really because she is a woman?

Eve, who has been surprisingly absent in many of these re-visions of creation, soon comes to represent the yielding, gentle “ideal” woman so despised by Ishtar. She recounts that it is Adam rather than herself who creates Eve in his image:

Adam produced an image of woman he could deal with and subdue. I am first. Not that maidenly simpleton, see her? Adam created her from the lower parts of his hairy beastie body. He had little knowledge left and could not create beauty. See that nunsuch face. Mincemeat. Botcher. See how she hides her parts in false humility. Miserable wretched usurper. That sweet cowering dumdum, children, is the major source of your problems today. She is sin. Eat all the apples you want, Eve. They won’t work on you. (62-63)
Clearly, instead of identifying with Eve, as my introduction notes that many feminists have done in the past, Ishtar sees Eve as the embodiment of the feminine mystique: a manmade rather than a divine creation. In doing so she ironically delivers the kind of misogynistic criticisms, judgements and biases against women that she purports to challenge.\(^{42}\) On the other hand, this lighter treatment of Eve should not be so surprising in a novel so steeped in Jewish tradition, where the garden myth is not given as much doctrinal weight, though it is explored at length in differing modes of exegesis (Morris, “Exiled” 119-20; Sawyer, “Resurrecting” 273). Morse notes that many scholars of the rabbinic tradition are free to portray Eve as a trivial and foolish character, rather than the mother of all woe upon which Christian doctrine rests (Eve’s Afterlives 44-45). This is because Eve’s *felix culpa* is utterly necessary to the Christian theology of Fall and Salvation, whereas her existence “is irrelevant to the survival and continuation of Judaism” (Ozick 123). Lerman knowingly hints at the typological link between Eve and Mary in Christian tradition when she contrasts an image of Mary “looking very much like Eve, holding her bloody son in her lap” with an image of Ishtar as “whore, mother,\(^{43}\) and hag of death” (64). By this point in the show, she has sacrificed a dog, anointed the crowd with general-purpose oil, and portrayed the First Temple in Jerusalem and the ark with copulating cherubim. The reactions of the audience to the unfolding revelation,

\(^{42}\) See Morse’s summary of Eve as “Anti-Intellect” in Eve’s Afterlives 32-47.

\(^{43}\) After the event, rumour spreads around the town that people are saying they saw the Mother of God. Ishtar responds, “Aren’t they stupid? After all that. God is a mother” (70). This casual aside echoes exactly the point that so many feminist theologians have stated, which is that the feminine aspect of God has been erased by the patriarchy even to the point that a mother goddess must (“absurdly”) be the mother of god (Ishtar 121; see also King 20). The Christian portrayal of Mary, mother of Jesus, contrasted as it is before Ishtar shows her own image, perhaps primes her audience to see her in this dynamic.
along with the appearance of blood on the walls, slowly turns from gleeful laughter to
disgust, awe, fear, hysteria and shame.

But Eve, as we have seen, is still fair game for Ishtar. In competition with Claire
for the affections of the bandmates, Ishtar begins to associate Claire with Eve. She
criticises her and the band’s other groupies for her belief that “they know only the
worship of the phallus” (67). And yet Ishtar spends much of the novel appearing to do
the same, focusing only on Nino and Mack’s thrusting hips on stage. She knows she is a
“jealous goddess” and with characteristic pettiness, Ishtar literally wavers between
sisterhood and rivalry: “I do not like her. I do like her. She has strength. Her nose is
strong. Aah, but I am so much prettier than she is” (69). In another example Ishtar (as
omniscient narrator) “overhears” Claire’s private conversation about her, and then,
seemingly oblivious to her hypocrisy, remarks “It is one of the least attractive aspects of
modern woman – to sacrifice one’s sisterhood in order to snare a man” (97). When
Mack cannot maintain an erection with Claire, Ishtar continues in her ambivalent
attitude towards feminism as she overtly refers to contemporary authors who have
published on the deleterious effect of the “liberation movement” on men’s egos (105).
But still, Ishtar finds in Claire an acceptable Eve (perhaps because her standards are so
low with regards the first woman). She describes Mack and Claire in typically binary
terms as:

[...] less than an Arthur and a Guinevere and something more, I hope, than an Adam and
an Eve. [...] Mack has properties of beauty and sensitivity and knows his origin from
woman. Claire has strength and can laugh at large things. They will be put into balance.
[...] All I had was that steel spigot stuck into the concrete and the mushrooms and the
polluted ravine into which Allied Chemical pours its process. It’s no Paradise, but I’m
trying. (106)
This is one of several moments in which Lerman brings environmental issues alongside gender issues in her novel, as Ishtar bemoans the difficulty of creating “Paradise” in the polluted environment of the mid-late twentieth century. It is key to bear in mind that of the many movements gaining traction in the 1970s, the wave of ecological concern following Rachael Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) was a powerful one. Ishtar’s allusions such as this seem to hint that the dysfunction between these heterosexual lovers is linked to the poisoned atmosphere, as she goes on to suggest with Nino, below. Both the polluted environment and imbalance between the sexes, of course, find much common ground in the garden narrative of Genesis 2-3.

Ishtar again turns to the garden myth when she encounters a deviation from the image of the first man in the form of Nino. Ishtar discovers that Nino is in fact a trans man, whose priapic penis is made from one of his ribs: a fitting play on Genesis 2-3. “It is nothing to be ashamed of,” Ishtar soothes him, “It is very fine. From the rib of the Goddess was made man. It is that way. You are significant of a new beginning” (87). Ishtar is initially moved by the beauty and divinity of this discovery, and it is perhaps no coincidence that Nino’s name is close to Ninti, the goddess in the Sumerian creation story whose name is a pun that can mean “life” or “rib” (Lerner 185; Bledstein 192; see also Cornell 102). There is evidence to suggest that the title Adam gives the woman, “Havah” meaning “mother of all living” – and the rib from which she is sculpted – both reference this Sumerian goddess (Kosior 120). Lerman’s wording also appears to reference some feminist readings of Genesis 2-3, such as Bal’s interpretation that pictures the “side” from which the woman is formed as a womb rather than a rib (Kvam 102).}

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44 A play, but not a reversal, since (as Yee notes) in Eden the “birth” of the woman is already “a reversal of the real state of affairs” (70).
et al. 29). Yet bizarrely, immediately after this scene, Ishtar plunges her sewing pins into her apple pin-cushion, apparently now disheartened with Nino, hinting that she has heard about a relationship between him and Mack. While her description of Nino’s “poisoned half-ness” could be taken to mean the poisonous effect of twentieth-century society’s treatment of trans people, the comment differs enough from her kind earlier words that they perhaps reflect one of her capricious turns to jealousy – a jealousy obscured by this apparent sudden trans- and homophobia (Ishtar 88). For Ishtar, Nino seems to have taken on this same environmental “poison” and even threatens to “infect” Ishtar herself in the manner that, as Ahmed writes, “what is sticky threatens to stick to us” (Emotion 90). Ishtar is disgusted, perceiving her own heterosexual identity to be made vulnerable by her proximity and attraction to this Nino, hence her insistence that Mack and Claire might form a new Adam and Eve.

Thus as Nino and Claire come to represent different versions of Ishtar’s complicated relationship with Eve, Ishtar continues to identify herself with almost every other character and object in Genesis 2-3. Not simply the creator and Lilith, she also claims to be the serpent, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the fruit itself – the demonisation of which she declares to be the true original sin. At a later mention of snakes Ishtar clarifies the meaning of the serpent in the Eden story, whose ancient power “was not evil, but wisdom” (93). Of this symbolism in ANE cultures Jeanette King notes:

The serpent, which sheds its skin and is ‘reborn’, was a symbol of the Goddess’s powers of prophecy and regeneration. It finds its way into the Old Testament as the embodiment of all that is to be rejected, set against woman, divorcing her from the Goddess and her instinct. In ancient myth, moreover, it guards the tree of life which is another incarnation of the Great Goddess, but which ultimately gives way to the Cross, the Christian tree of life. (19)
At this point Lerman clearly engages with, and demonstrates knowledge of, feminist scholarship that claims submerged symbols of goddess worship are present but obscured within these ancient myths. But as we see in Ishtar’s increasingly destructive behaviour, she does not do so to redeem Eve or to offer a consoling image of the lost Goddess, as some Jewish and Christian feminist theologians and/or proponents of the Goddess movement have done. Lerman does the same thing with another extra-biblical aetiology of evil: the myth of Pandora, who in Ishtar’s re-vision is angry at the opening of her “cooky jar” by Epimetheus (94). Where contemporary feminist engagements with this myth would usually focus on the blame it places on women for human suffering and its observable links to Genesis 2-3, Ishtar is only concerned with the fact that Pandora is demoted from goddess to human. As a result Ishtar is far more concerned with Pandora’s death-bringing associations than with the life-bringing ones, as long as she is seen as divine rather than human. In other words, she can bring all the negative feeling into the world that she likes, as long as she is recognised properly for it.

Ishtar also makes use of serpent imagery along with an egg in a very domestic analogy for creation and destruction. As Ahmed has also used the concept of an egg as an important metaphor in her work, I find this extract an apt one for dealing with disgust:

The world is a large sick body of which you are the cells. And I was sick at the horror in my Universal appliance center and I, like Tiamat, the Great Mother, pulled the plug and tossed the whole mess into the snow below my kitchen windows and raced to my bathtub, where I am able to renew a limb or a psyche. I have learned with bad recipes to

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45 The reader learns from other references that this particular spelling of “cooky” was a childhood euphemism for Ishtar’s vagina.

46 Hesiod’s Pandora shows her as an erring woman, whereas the “original” mythical Pandora translated as “All-giving” or “All-gifted” is a goddess figure (Phipps 37-38; Morse, Eve’s Afterlives 28-31; see also O’Brien).
throw the whole thing out and start over again. Adding an arm, or kindness, or technical abilities or even oregano, doesn’t help when the original eggs are rotten. Some things are not worth saving. It is all the same, you know. Eggs, cauldrons, craniums, universes, chalices, pools, grails, bathtubs. All attached. (Ishtar 78)

If the feminine mystique belongs in the kitchen, and the feminine mystique is also a goddess, then the mother goddess who is a “cook in the universe,” overwhelmed by negative emotions, would have to eject, to abject, the “sick body” of her befouled creation out of her kitchen window. Here the egg, so often a symbol of feminine renewal, becomes rotten, ruining the entire dish. Lerman uses apocalyptic language here to convey how myths that involve destruction (such as the Apocalypse of John) require a violent casting out rather than a steady repairing of the trouble. In another example, Ishtar’s husband Robert smashes an egg against the ceiling during an argument, prompting Ishtar to exclaim that the eggs in her hatchery are all snakes’ eggs. The sticky mess on the ceiling is compounded from ugly to horrifying, and the feminine aspect that has been destroyed becomes suddenly masculine as she shouts, “Thousands of snakes died in your hatchery like sperm, dying, squirming, under the globe. Snakes!” (Ishtar 82-83). Here Lerman appears to weave subtle connections in this scene between Ishtar, laughing “venomously […] as only a Medusa laughs” (82), the submerged goddess in Eden who is tempted by the serpent, and an obvious association between the formerly feminine serpent symbol and sperm.

It is in moments of discomfort and ambivalence that many readers find Lerman hard to parse. In her interview with Mantell, Lerman acknowledges the importance and the difficulty of incorporating mythology into her work: “Often the mythology is daunting. But it is hard to leave out” (61). What is implicit in her somewhat defensive interviews is that her satire can be easily misunderstood. For example, Rosinsky regards
the attempts of fictional Ishtar to reincorporate matriarchal myth back into society as positive and consolatory:

Lerman validates, in her text, the personal and cultural efficacy of such consolatory, consolidating knowledge. And, by stripping patriarchal myth and history of their “sensible” facticity, Lerman makes “nonsense” a laudatory rather than a pejorative term. (10)

But despite the intended humour and empowerment in Ishtar’s stories and actions, I disagree with Rosinsky. There are several examples already outlined above that counter the idea of Ishtar as an admirable matriarch by encouraging disgust and other negative emotions in the reader. But the bar mitzvah scene towards the end of the novel perhaps offers the most grotesque example, where Ishtar moves rapidly from the lost, positive feminine “presence” of divinity, the Shekhinah, to Lilith-as-succubus (Keller 71; Schüssler Fiorenza 34, 195; Armstrong 110-11). “‘Wow,’” she states, “‘I’m wisdom. I’m the bride in his song. I am the Shekina [sic], the succubus. You name it. I’m it’” (165). But it is as this succubus figure that Ishtar rapes a teenage boy at his bar mitzvah, in what is one of the harder scenes to read in a novel full of uncomfortable scenes. I struggle to see how Rosinsky can have interpreted the novel in any way as consolatory, as even the “nonsense” is juxtaposed with moments of powerfully significant distaste.

In another, lighter, scene, there is again a dissonance between the way Ishtar sees herself and the way others (including the reader) see her. Perhaps living a fantasy shared by many parents, Ishtar unnecessarily disrupts a parent-teacher meeting:

Ordinarily, in order to create, I destroy. Of course, in order to destroy, I create. Cyclical. This night I destroyed not only to create but to satisfy a certain vindictiveness. My first act was minor and resulted directly from boredom, sexual frustration and feminine caprice. (173)
Moments such as these in Lerman’s work continue to forbid what Carter calls “consolatory” elements of Goddess culture, even as they do so in lighter ways than the example above. Lerman’s goddess is self-confessedly predatory, petty, and driven by a rageful insecurity that feeds all her violent actions. But she is open and unashamed about these emotional qualities, self-diagnosing the origin of her behaviours. This boredom and frustration could be classified under what Ngai would call “ugly feelings” (though I would question the existence of such a feeling as “feminine caprice”), but which many would find too irritating to bear for long. As Ngai notes, there is a doubling that occurs in these ugly feelings, for example “I feel ashamed about feeling envious” – and this is a doubling that lends itself well to irony because of the “relationship between the said and the unsaid” (10). I argue that part of the shame of such ugly emotions feeds into the push-pull of stronger, more cathartic narratives (in this case, the disgust of the present, and resultant longing for the affectless oblivion of paradise and apocalypse) which draw them up the scale, heightening the negative emotions, so that they may be exorcised. Thus Ishtar’s impatience with a tedious parent-teacher meeting escalates into a grand narrative in which she is the all-powerful creator-destroyer. In Ishtar’s own mind, absorbed by the sticky narratives of creation and apocalypse, she is an enraged, jealous and potent goddess; to her husband and the other parents she is a woman with a “split personality” having a very public nervous breakdown (180). While this is clearly all under the protective guise of satire, it still represents the emotional turbulence caused by the conflicting expectations placed upon women and the ease with which one can fall into grander narratives. Russ argues that in her feminist fiction, for example,
“the real target is the taboo against rage, specifically rage against men” (“Reflections” 42). There is clearly a similar unveiling of this taboo in *Ishtar*.

While its surface reading is apparently critical of certain feminist strategies, on a deeper level the novel still challenges the patriarchal systems (especially the creation of the “feminine mystique”) that made those movement(s) necessary. Rosenstein aptly calls *Ishtar* “an antiMosaic mosaic, a patchwork satire of patriarchy, sublimation and suburbia.” Strangely, for these reasons, Rosenstein declares in 1973 that it cannot count as a feminist text:

[...] it cannot be called feminist fiction. First and least importantly because Earth Mothers, however powerful, are hardly what the age demands. And because dominance, however humorously, is still the issue: putting Mama on top merely reverses the missionary position.

I believe Rosenstein also misunderstands *Ishtar* on this matter. In this chapter I have shown how the novel fully engages with feminist debates of the time, responding directly to de Beauvoir, Friedan and others’ warnings about the danger of mythologising of women, and as a result absolutely defines itself within the scope of feminist literature. As Rosinsky notes of both Lerman and Carter, “These authors are not merely writing light, diversionary, or ‘escapist’ fiction but are analyzing and responding to vital and contemporary issues” (3). As we saw in the case study of Alderman’s *The Power*, the effect of Lerman’s placement of a goddess-like “Mama on top” works to *subvert* patriarchy, not thoughtlessly invert it, and directs attention towards a deeper question of the emotions that drive human nature and how we gender those feelings. In her mischievous way, Lerman may caricature the “easy stereotypes” seen within the media portrayal of radical feminists at the time as power-grabbers and attention-seekers, but does not flinch from the bigger issues (Bradley 4). For that reason I believe her work
should stand alongside its more famously critical contemporaries. Upon rediscovering Lerman’s work, Rose remarks, “[Lerman] infused suburban American life with mythic depth as Joyce had intertwined Dublin life with the wanderings of Odysseus. She was a female Joyce, a female Roth, exactly what the seventies wanted” (vii).
Chapter 2: *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) by Angela Carter

Here we were at the beginning or end of the world and I, in my sumptuous flesh, was in myself the fruit of the tree of knowledge; knowledge had made me, I was a man-made masterpiece of skin and bone, the technological Eve in person.

*Angela Carter, The Passion of New Eve, 146*

All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway.

*Angela Carter, The Sadeian Woman*

While the previous chapter establishes the fact that, despite its apposite critique of its time, Lerman’s work has largely been overlooked for the last few decades, the work of Angela Carter has consistently been celebrated both in popular and academic circles. Carter has spoken explicitly about the function of her 1977 novel *The Passion of New Eve* (henceforth *New Eve*) as “an anti-mythic novel [...] a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity” (“Front Line” 71). For Carter, myths are “extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree,” many of which shape our understanding of gender roles (“Front Line” 71). Narrating from a future position as a now self-identified woman called Eve, the protagonist begins as a man called Evelyn, who finds himself in an apocalyptic New York in both senses of the word. The city itself is on the verge of two revolutions: one political (an extreme form of the Civil Rights and feminist movements of the era) (Filimon 91), and another psychic (a process of unveiling and renewal). He is later taken to a goddess-worshipping place called Beulah, surgically altered by a self-made goddess who calls herself “Mother,” and socially conditioned to become a woman named Eve. Yet Eve does not feel like a “real woman” until taken against her will as the
eighth wife of the patriarchal “poet” Zero.\textsuperscript{47} After finding and losing the movie star of his childhood fantasy, Tristessa de St Ange, Eve briefly reencounters the girlfriend Evelyn left in New York City, Leilah, now Lilith:\textsuperscript{48} commander of the Women’s army and daughter of Mother. This chapter focuses on the inner workings of each of these characters, examining their emotional responses to the biblical symbolism that surrounds them, and how Carter uses these to maximise these emotions in the reader too.

Before exploring individual characters in this novel, I first want to study the affective body of the city of New York. In Nicoletta Vallorani’s work, the fictional city has “the literary purpose of articulating the psychological and physical bodies of the people living within its boundaries” (365, 377) – and each city or town reflected in \textit{New Eve} is therefore gendered in some implicit way (Welby 83). A sort of urban pathetic fallacy, the chaotic (and therefore, according to Vallorani, feminine) city is described by Evelyn in lurid colours associated with decay, and is riddled with giant rats (Vallorani 370; see also Welby 79). Its feelings are literally written on its graffiti-filled walls, which function as both voice and skin proclaiming, “in a hundred languages expressing a thousand griefs and lusts and furies” (12). Just as much as any human character, Carter’s New York reflects my thesis that in troubled times people interpret their feelings through myths of biblical creation and apocalypse, either to exorcise their emotions or to numb

\textsuperscript{47} Because Eve’s gender reassignment is forced and not elected, I refer to Evelyn with he/him pronouns before Beulah, then Eve/lyn (as he or they) immediately post-operatively, and finally as Eve with she/her pronouns after she self-identifies as a woman under Zero’s treatment. The politics of this forced-and-then-accepted transition are reflected in the huge variation of ways in which Eve/lyn is written about in the criticism, not to mention Tristessa.

\textsuperscript{48} Rivlin notes that the association between the mythical Lilith and the name Leilah is due to the Talmudic tradition, which “confused this spirit’s name with the Hebrew word for night (laylah) and turned Lilith into a night demon, a succubus who attacked men sleeping alone” (114).
themselves. A man on the dirty beach on Coney Island tells Evelyn, “God had arrived on a celestial bicycle to proclaim the last Judgement was at hand” (New Eve 12) and his neighbour calls their time “Chaos, the earliest state of disorganised creation [...] the state before the beginning of the beginning” (14). And yet, Evelyn notes that the New Yorkers’ overstimulation in this environment makes them seem “estranged from their own fear” (11). The result seems to be that their myopic attention to these sticky myths and their associated “transference of affect” keeps them from fully engaging in the real revolution stirring in corners of the city (Ahmed, Emotion 91). In other words, unable to deal with their own discomfort at the uprising of minoritised citizens within the city, many of the inhabitants find it easier to channel their negative feeling into more familiar, more easily digestible biblical narratives about chaos, good and evil. Lizzy Welby describes this meeting of the great rational city and biblical end-times rhetoric as “Gothic/biblical past rush[ing] up to meet a technological present“ (79), but I would argue instead that it is the characters rushing back to biblical past, which foretells the (still-pending) future annihilation.

Berthold Schoene-Harwood also sees Evelyn’s New York as an expressive body, but one that is necessarily masculine (119-20). Its state of decay is “a direct result of patriarchal masculinity’s cultivation of a pose of impossible purity” – a purity that defines itself through its hardened resistance to all things chaotic and therefore must crumble (Schoene-Harwood 120). Purity is of course the “obsession” in Moore’s analysis of Revelation – an obsession that is the basis and engine of its endless spawning of disgust, and which leads to the rational and uniform New Jerusalem (“Retching” 512-13). Moore notes of Revelation that its “mobilization of emotions create an economy of
displeasure, the circulation of negative feelings toward constructive – or destructive – ends” (“Retching” 504). In Carter’s descriptions of New York lie easy comparisons to the city of Babylon so disdained in Revelation, and New York certainly suffers its own economy of displeasure in these opening chapters. As in the chapter on Lerman’s *Ishtar*, my analysis (like Moore’s) focuses on the push-pull of disgust-desire that moves Eve/lyn and other characters towards their own destructive ends. Moore writes, “what Revelation aims to effect, through affect, is to infect its audience with [...] infinite abhorrence” (“Retching” 512). Similarly Evelyn leaves the city infected – “a carrier of the germ of a universal pandemic of despair” – which also threatens to affect the reader (*New Eve* 37).

But initially, Evelyn finds his new sense of dread “queasily delicious” (15). We see in the push-pull of the city for Evelyn a reflection of Zamora’s description of “[t]he apocalyptist [as] both appalled and enthralled by God’s wrath” (11-12). The city poses a morbid attraction to his “gentle” English soul, as he asks his reader, “how could I resist the promise of violence, fear, madness?” (*New Eve* 15). Now an out-of-work academic, he spends his time estranged from reality, cocooned in fantasy in the form of nostalgic daydreaming about his past or pursuing sexual encounters with Leilah. One passage in this early section of the novel seems to sum up several elements of my thesis, as Evelyn reflects on an old essay of his on the French Enlightenment and its effect on the American constitution, before the narrator’s mind drifts to memories of her captivity by “the black goddess”:

That we should all be happy posits, initially, a consensus on the notion of happiness. We can all be happy only in a happy world. But *Old Adam’s happiness is necessarily dysfunctional*. All Old Adam wants to do is, to kill his father and sleep with his mother. “The reintegration with the primal form,” said the black goddess, opening her thighs,
closing her thighs, the ramparts of darkness, upon me. Ah! But no: we must not breathe a word of these desires in the pure, evangelical fusion of form and function, even if the black rats of these desires gnaw away at us constantly, all the time eroding. (16, my emphasis)

This proleptic daydream (since the reader has not yet met “the black goddess”) begins with a question raised in my introduction: whether the home of this “Old Adam” represents a true (if figurative) “happy world” or whether it is somehow seeded with an already present unhappiness that leads to what Morse calls “a myth of maturation, rather than an account of ‘the Fall’” (Eve’s Afterlives 127). Of course, just as in Ishtar, we also find a goddess lurking behind such glimpses of an imperfect Eden. Carter combines this suggestion with the Freudian terror Evelyn feels in the presence of Mother: neither he nor the implied reader can control how the claustrophobic ramparts of his “origin,” narrative or otherwise, will close and open. Carter also ensures that the rats eating away at New York eat away at his nostalgic daydream, too, leaving the final metaphor with an objectless transitive verb (“eroding” what?). As Evelyn is somehow both closed in (by the ramparts that are the goddess’ thighs) and unclose-off-able (the rats have gnawed their way in), we see a perfect demonstration of the circularity of disgust portrayed in Figure 1 in the introduction to this thesis.

The Hollywood-goddess in Evelyn’s daydreams, Tristessa de St Ange, is also juxtaposed abruptly with an archetypal opposite, the seventeen-year-old Harlem dancer, Leilah, a “born victim” whom Evelyn treats with violent obsession, then leaves after she experiences a traumatic abortion (New Eve 28). The way in which these two archetypes are held together in this novel is telling: it reveals not only the virgin/whore dichotomy so often associated with patriarchal (and biblical) portrayals of women, but
also how closely disgust accompanies the lust that these descriptions imply.\textsuperscript{49} Evelyn is both attracted to and repulsed by elements of Leilah’s sexuality that become the personification of Evelyn’s personal Babylon, as he finds himself, like the nations John of Patmos condemns, “eager to wallow in” what he sees as “her filth” (Moore, “Retching” 512). Moore recalls Ahmed’s observation that some things are stickier than others, and Carter clearly makes use of this by writing Leilah as both a sex worker and a black woman (“Retching” 515; see also Ahmed, \textit{Emotion} 92). “For what is a prostitute, a sex worker, but a circulating object [...]”, writes Moore, “And that circulation is productive of affect” (“Retching” 519). Carter thus presents Leilah through the racially and sexually coded language of Evelyn’s white, male, public-school educated mind: he compares her to a racehorse, a fox, a bird, a snake, a fish, later calling her his “prey,” “a siren,” “ghetto nymph,” “mermaid,” “rotten fruit,” and “succubus” (18-27). By doing so, he allows this hyperbolic exoticisation of her to excuse his appalling behaviour and to obscure the feelings she can also elicit in him. Kari Jegerstedt points out that this language recalls Freud’s “infamous ‘orientalist’ claim that female sexuality constitutes a ‘dark continent,’” and I would add that the references to animals, rotten fruit and succubus are enormously suggestive of Genesis 2-3. Evelyn’s allusion to “the exquisite negative of her sex” increases the feeling Carter wishes to convey that in Evelyn’s mind, woman is “Other” – and as a black sex worker “othered” further still (27). In other words, Leilah is defined here by the not-Evelyn, the \textit{impression} left behind in his absence – a word that Ahmed finds particularly useful for discussing affect-emotion without having to

\textsuperscript{49} For example, Evelyn experiences revulsion on seeing a photograph of his beloved film star simply relaxing in golf gear: “To have encountered her on a suburban golf-course? Or Dido in the laundromat. Or Desdemona at the ante-natal clinic. Never! [...] I therefore abandoned her” (\textit{New Eve} 7).
distinguish between the two.\textsuperscript{50} Evelyn’s ability to impress upon her at first attracts and then later disgusts him, “as she comes to embody maternity, blackness and the feminine” by the all-too-material reality of her pregnancy (Johnson, “Unexpected” 171).

We can see from the descriptions above that, as well as lurching forwards in eschatological time to apocalypse, descriptions of Leilah also stagger backwards into creation. Carter echoes the language of Genesis 1 as she writes that Leilah is “not a flying thing, nor a running thing, nor a creeping thing, not flesh nor fowl, some in-between thing, hovering high above the ground” (20-21). And Carter echoes God’s punishment of Eve when Evelyn notes, “she submitted herself, not to me, but to a craving she despised, or else to a loathed but imperiously demanding ritual, as if this, this \textit{exorcism by sensuality}, was what her sensuality needed to make it real” (18, emphasis my own). While the first part of the sentence appears to refer to the woman whose “desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3.16), the reference to “exorcism by sensuality” hints at the succubus myth, as well as other biblical women whose need for exorcism become implicitly connected to sexual sin (e.g. Mary Magdalene of Luke 8, “from whom seven demons had gone out”). To Evelyn, then, Leilah represents the inverse of the biblical myth of pure virgin so easily recognisable in Revelation as the Whore of Babylon. Delving further into the psychoanalytic parody offered by Carter in this novel, Jegerstedt comments on the Latin inscription that appears above Leilah’s building, \textit{“introite et hic dii sunt”} (“Enter, for here too are gods”) which Freud famously used in his letters on hysteria (and which reappears in Beulah). On

\textsuperscript{50} Ahmed writes, “I will use the idea of ‘impression’ as it allows me to avoid making analytical distinctions between bodily sensation, emotion and thought as if they could be ‘experienced’ as distinct realms of human ‘experience’” (\textit{Emotion} 6).
seeing this and commencing an abusive relationship with Leilah, Evelyn admits “I felt all the ghastly attraction of the fall” (25). Something about the affective draw of Leilah, then, makes an Adam of Evelyn, eager to fall alongside his implicitly already fallen lover. Interestingly, in this situation it is the idea of the Fall itself and not the love for the woman, nor the fruit or the knowledge of good and evil that specifically attracts Evelyn. Here we see a pull to the apocalyptic within the creation narrative itself – indeed, Morris notes that the garden story has its own mini apocalypse in exactly this way (“A Walk” 21).

Watching Leilah put on make-up in the mirror each night, Evelyn notices the artificiality of her femininity as it is constructed under his own gaze – and hers. As she “puts on” the performative persona she uses for work in the mirror, she becomes separate from her own self, frightening Evelyn and reminding him of a darker magic: “Leilah invoked this formal other with a gravity and ritual that recalled witchcraft” (28). Also detecting elements of biblical creation in this scene, King argues:

By this reading it is culture, represented by the mirror, that creates shame and a sense of lack, not the fruit of the tree of knowledge, as the biblical myth of the Fall proposes. That myth simply provides ideological justification, or mystification, for the social construct. (138)

By invoking the creation narrative of Genesis 2-3 here, King points out that for Carter it is not an innate source of womanhood that emanates from Leilah, but the culture imposed upon her, represented by the mirror. Instead of an Eden in which woman is made by an implicitly masculine God, from an implicitly masculine original body, the mirror in the scene expresses the idea that culture creates the woman – or at least she creates herself according to the expectations of that culture, as represented by the evaluative gaze of the man (Evelyn) also watching. Here Carter seems to give literal
expression to de Beauvoir’s claim that “One is not born, but becomes, a woman” (295), a well-known concept among her contemporaries in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{51} What is initially attractive to Evelyn soon becomes threatening, as her constructed femininity is literally sticky to the touch: the “scarlet grease,” “powders and unguents,” the glue of her false eyelashes, as well as hairsprays, perfumes and rouges that she applies not just to her face but to her nipples and labia (\textit{New Eve} 29). As Ahmed notes, “Perhaps stickiness becomes disgusting \textit{only when the skin surface is at stake such that what is sticky threatens to stick to us}” (\textit{Emotion} 90). Perhaps Evelyn’s aversion to these feminine devices is a foreshadowing of the femininity later forced upon him under Mother’s surgical scalpel.

But what threatens to stick to Evelyn more permanently than these products is Leilah’s pregnancy: her allure is suddenly proven to be as “contagious” to Evelyn as the Jezebel of Revelation is to John of Patmos (Moore, “Retching” 516). Leaving Leilah and the city after the abortion, Evelyn first feels exhilaration followed by despair. But he cannot tell whether it is she or the city that has infected him, or in fact he who has infected them, bringing the “pandemic of despair” with him “from the Old World to the New World” (\textit{New Eve} 37). This metaphor inevitably conjures images of colonisers (Evelyn’s ancestors) in search of the lost paradise, bringing devastation to indigenous populations, but the description of the disease as an affective one also hints at the garden story’s (supposed) introduction of emotional as well as physical suffering into human experience. In this example, rather than the couple leaving a perfect world and

\textsuperscript{51} In \textit{The Good Robot} podcast Rosi Braidotti claims that this sentence marked the start of social constructivism in modern feminism, which made the very idea of nature “a very suspicious term” (“Rosi Braidotti” 25:00-25:30).
entering into one with suffering, they bring their innate suffering out of Eden and into the world, which was yet unaffected by it.

In an effort to anaesthetise himself from the pain of this realisation, Evelyn escapes to the desert so often used as a space for exile and healing. Critics are quick to point out that the desert landscape of “negation and lack” reflects “the self-annihilative ideals of patriarchal man” (Schoene-Harwood 121). Evelyn’s draw to it, fleeing the “sticky present” of New York (or Babylon), is driven by his apocalyptic craving for a post-affect existence after the intolerable feeling of his first of many Falls in this novel. But Evelyn is soon captured and taken to an underground complex called Beulah (after John Bunyan and William Blake), which forms a “double satire” of an essentialist, separatist feminist city whose emblem is, ironically, a giant severed stone phallus (Vallorani 371-72; see also King 195). Welby calls the place “a terrifyingly despoiled Eden” in which the limits and borders set down in the biblical Eden are inverted (77); appropriately, it is in this environment that Evelyn learns what it is to be placed on the opposite side of its semiotic landscape. The mythical significance of his meeting with Mother is clear from the start (as has been alluded to from the beginning of the novel):

Holy Mother whose fingers are scalpels excavated the concentric descending spheres of Beulah, unless, that is, she herself has always been there – a chthonic deity, a presence always present in the shaping structure of dream. She is a holy woman, it is a profane place. / It will become the place where I was born. (New Eve 47)

Readers are given time to encounter Mother’s symbolism and theology first through Evelyn’s perspective and later through Mother’s own autolatrous litany. Like Lerman’s Ishtar, she is a “sacred monster” – but we see her through Evelyn’s eyes, rather than through the goddess’ eyes – and as such, this time the satire is aimed not only at the particular strand of feminism that champions goddess culture but also at Freudian
masculine terror of the feminine “Other.” As in Ishtar and Power, we are reminded that the goddess figure is also a human being, in Mother’s case having enlarged herself and adorned her chest with extra breasts through plastic surgery. She therefore exists “in a complicated mix of mythology and technology” (New Eve 48) that seems to anticipate the “spiral dance” that binds the goddess and cyborg in Haraway’s formulation (“Cyborg” 68). Mother is the picture of what Heather Johnson, also drawing on Kristevan ideas of the abject, calls “Rabelaisian grotesque – the bodily form exaggerated to excess, the symbol of fertility, and the focus on the lower stratum” (“Textualizing” 44). Sarah Gamble (124), Jeanette King (140), and Şułe Akdoğan (432), among others, also repeatedly use the term “grotesque” (particularly in reference to Bakhtin) to describe Mother at such moments, clearly understanding Carter’s aim to hyperbolise rather than romanticise the gynocentric essentialism of goddess culture. As with Ishtar, this grotesquity evokes in the reader ambivalent feelings of disgust and amusement, while Evelyn is not afforded such critical distance. Much like Ishtar again, Mother’s own litany invokes the names of multiple mythical goddesses, some vengeful, some fruitful, some sexual, some terrible, hinting at the warnings about goddess culture given by de Beauvoir, and later Kristeva and Judith Butler. Sellers remarks that Mother’s speech, “with its knowing wink to the reader as it highlights the ‘rolling iambic pentameters’ in

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52 In her notes at this point Gamble provides an example of a scholar who has read Mother credulously and found her, understandably, wanting (124, 139).
53 See Akdoğan’s article for insight into how Carter’s work interacts in criticism with the ideas of both Kristeva and Judith Butler. Akdoğan writes, “This radical stance of Mother is what Kristeva warns women to be careful about because any dependence on binaries always leads to sexism, either male or female” (431).
54 Judith Butler describes goddess reverence as “a nostalgic and parochial ideal that refuses the contemporary demand to formulate an account of gender as a complex cultural construction” (Gender Trouble 49).
which Mother holds forth on such grandiose topics as mortality and eternity [...] completes this process of deflation,” thoroughly demystifying the goddess (112).

Contemplating Mother’s “grotesque” shape once Eve/lyn also has a female body, Eve/lyn imagines “What rage, what desperation” could have been behind Mother’s transformation (77). In terms of emotion, this can be taken one of two ways: perhaps Eve/lyn has a moment of post-operative empathy; or perhaps he is projecting his own rage and desperation onto Mother. In the former case, we could return to Bray and Moore’s cultural lens, which asks: “How might rage diagnose what it feels like to have your life under threat or your intelligence under suspicion because of your race, gender, or sexual orientation?” (6). As a black woman working as a surgeon in 1970s USA, Mother is indeed likely to have had her intelligence under suspicion at times by colleagues and patients. Or, in the latter case, in which Eve/lyn is projecting his own rage and desperation, we could situate Eve/lyn’s feelings in terms of the abject:

The abject maternal body enrages the (male) subject as it is a constant reminder of his origins. How can he form a subjectivity if he was once expelled (like a jettisoned abject object) from his mother’s body? To imagine it induces horror and psychosis. Better to abject the mother—turn the maternal container into a terrifying devouring body to safeguard his “clean and proper” self. (Welby 74)

It is easy to apply this reading to the creation myth of Genesis 2-3, where the first human being is formed from the earth by implicitly masculine hands and the female version of its shape is literally abjected from the implicitly male original. Rather than being born, they are then cast out from the garden-womb in which they were so clinically created. In her satirical reversal of biblical creation, where “The garden in which Adam was born lies between my thighs” (63), Carter inverts this process and inspires rage and desperation in her protagonist as a result. However, by leaving the
feelings ambiguous, Carter allows the reader to wonder whether his rage and desperation is not an innate Freudian terror but instead, a rational reaction to Eve/lyn’s kidnapping, imprisonment, surgical intervention and rape. Thus Mother’s rage/frustration and Evelyn’s rage/frustration are revealed to be not biologically determined characteristics, but very human reactions to cultural injustices.

As part of the regeneration ritual that makes Evelyn into a “New Eve,” he is imprisoned in the womblike insides of a “seamless egg” (51), and it is telling that his terror is only fully vented in such a Brontean red room. Eliza Claudia Filimon highlights the significance of the shape of this highly feminised, claustrophobic place, describing it in terms of Kristevan abjection, “the horrors of not knowing the borders of the self, [fusing] time and space, just like the pre-natal period” (67). What is interesting is that this “natural” space, like Mother’s body, is highly manufactured: “In Beulah,” remarks Eve/lyn, “myth is a made thing, not a found thing” (56). In what King calls a “neat reversal,” Eve/lyn is all too aware that this (literally) dreadful place has been entirely enhanced by technology, “created with unscrupulous cunning by ingenious stage-management” (King 141; New Eve 52). Carter uses this opportunity to further interrogate the mythologisation around motherhood, as she does more explicitly in her nonfiction work The Sadeian Woman.55 It is noteworthy that in this place, which forces Eve/lyn into an infantile position compared to Mother, he notices “how degrading it is to be the object of pity” (New Eve 65). As he cries for his own mother he hears laughter from his captors and feels more shame than he can bear; there is, for him, “No humiliation like a child’s humiliation” (51). For Eve/lyn, this is the first of many

55 For a more expansive discussion on the links between abjection, motherhood, New Eve and The Sadeian Woman in this scene and the final cave scene, see Filimon 67-71.
realisations of what a loss of power and status can feel like. It is followed again by the shame of understanding how he has made Leilah feel, which makes him unable to speak (66).

Noting further elements of Freud in the ways in which Eve/lyn and Mother relate to each other, King remarks that the self-made goddess is “a grotesque embodiment of the castrating mother of male fantasy” (140). This is particularly clear when Mother tells Eve/lyn:

Oedipus wanted to live backwards. He had a sensible desire to murder his father, who dragged him from the womb in complicity with historicity. His father wanted to send little Oedipus forward on a phallic projectory (onwards and upwards!); his father taught him to live in the future, which isn’t living at all, and to turn his back on the timeless eternity of interiority. / But Oedipus botched the job […] / Mother won’t botch the job. (New Eve 53)

But Mother does botch the job in just the same way, only with biblical myth. She repeatedly uses Genesis 2-3 to keep her followers and herself in anteriority, which also “isn’t living at all,” and thereby prevents the unusual cult from staying with the trouble above ground. Here, Mother identifies apocalyptic longing as a masculine habit and, by implication, prelapsarian nostalgia as a feminine habit, thereby gendering both ways of thinking while proving that neither is helpful for “living at all.” As a result, there are several affective elements for the reader to unpack and feel through Eve/lyn in these key scenes, not all of which appear to be particularly supportive of certain strands of feminism. Readers may share the terror, shame and disgust evoked by the incestuous and violent rape scenes; dismay that the women of Beulah think imprisonment, rape, enforced genital surgery and brainwashing to be acceptable feminist actions; and disappointment that Beulah’s ideology perpetuates the damaging dichotomy of whore/virgin. Merja Makinen notes that Carter’s tendency to use violence in her novels,
particularly problematic violence done by women, troubled some of her peers “for going against the grain of the widespread contemporary feminist belief that violence emanated from an exclusively male source” (150). Indeed, Carter is well known for causing controversies among her contemporaries (Morse, Eve’s Afterlives 113). Violence, particularly sexual violence, not to mention sexual violence by women, are of course highly affecting subjects, and Carter aims to maximise the reader’s emotional response in scenes such as these.

Similarly, Carter does not shy away from heated debates surrounding trans rights of the time, provocatively probing (as Lerman does) multiple aspects of the debate and not necessarily offering a clear moral line. Johnson describes the period as one in which many autobiographies of trans people’s experiences were published and publicised; there was also rising academic and medical interest in gender dysphoria syndrome and the founding of new gender identity clinics at that time (“Unexpected” 167, 172). The addition of technological advances in the twentieth century (and the control of such technology by the medical establishment) informed much of the debate, and Carter interrogates the difference between biological sex and gendered psychology by reducing them to their logical extremes in Eve/lyn’s case: enforced surgical alteration and brainwashing with clichéd examples of femininity.56 “The novel therefore gives material form to the concept of gender as a construction,” writes King, “and uses technology to emphasize that ‘myth is a made thing, not a found thing’” (141, quoting New Eve 56). By repeatedly emphasising the taboos and fears lurking at the boundaries of these

56 Though Maria Aline Seabra Ferreira is quick to point out that, as the reader later learns, Mother must have known Tristessa was assigned male at birth. Thus there is an extra layer of complexity to what Eve/lyn is subjected to in Beulah (294).
constructions, and placing these within the framework of Genesis 2-3, Carter encourages readers to treat the “original” blueprint for men and women in the Western world with the utmost suspicion. For example, when Eve/lyn sees his new female shape for the first time, what results is a narcissistic attraction to (as well as dissociation from\textsuperscript{57}) the stranger in his reflection: “I had become my own masturbatory fantasy” (New Eve 75).

The sections on Tristessa below take this debate further, but for now Eve/lyn’s initial reaction points once again to the biblical Eve of Genesis 2, whom Daly (citing Peggy Holland) has called “the first male-to-constructed-female transsexual” (Gyn/ecology 86). New Eve reflects the same masculine origin, the same secondariness, the same phallic symbolism lurking behind his inverted human shape. Furthering the narcissistic taboo with a hint of incest, Eve/lyn remarks at the “strong family resemblance” in the mirror, and how “the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself” (New Eve 74-75).

Jegerstedt argues that the effect of this is to satirize Freud’s castration complex in young girls discovering, with supposed dismay, that they “lack” a penis. While it certainly does this, I argue that it also highlights an uncomfortable element of Genesis 2-3 often overlooked, for readers are reminded that Adam’s perfect `ezer (whether helper or partner) is made directly from his own flesh; she is his self, his “twin” and his mate (Morse, Eve’s Afterlives 118).\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{57} We also return to the divide between the two main branches of affect theory as Eve/lyn encounters himself shortly after the operation. He notes that there are “two channels of sensation, her own fleshly ones and his mental ones” (77-78). Though the mental Evelyn fades and these two channels soon integrate as Eve, the initial divide felt by Eve/lyn forms a telling example of the fallacy that flesh is female and mind is male; though as I have noted in this thesis’ introduction, these traditions are reversed in critical discussion surrounding affect theory.

\textsuperscript{58} This is a taboo Morse notes at work in Carter’s other fiction that re-visions the garden narrative (Eve’s Afterlives 116-121).
Attempting escape in the desert once more, Eve/lyn encounters another cult at the masculine end of the essentialist spectrum. “Zero the Poet” treats his dogs and pigs with more respect than he treats his seven child/teenage brides, who represent mindless caricatures of the feminine mystique. He rapes Eve and makes her his eighth wife, upsetting the already competitive atmosphere between his other wives. Described in much the same miasmatical sensory terms as Lerman’s mythic first men,59 with his “broad band of Classical, Christian and macho symbolism,” Zero is as much a bilious caricature of patriarchy as Mother is of matriarchy (Sellers 113). Vallorani also sees Zero’s home as deliberately Sadeian and grotesque, intended to undermine the very stereotype it appears to sustain (375). Zero’s apocalyptic masterplan is to wait out the self-destruction of American culture, kill Tristessa (whose supposed lesbianism he blames for making him infertile), and begin the repopulation of Earth. For now, his home is “the New Jerusalem; the helicopter his chariot of fire, his prick his bow of burning gold, etc etc etc” (New Eve 100). The vulgarity of Zero’s lifestyle alongside this reference to Blake creates a parodic image of a particularly American apocalypse, thus readers are once again brought sharply from creation to apocalypse and back again. Even Zero’s name, “The lowest point; vanishing point; nullity” (New Eve 102) reflects his nihilistic urge to wipe clean the slate of humanity and start anew: he is the Adam both of before-time and after-time. The sense of before-time allows him to feel that his squalid living and distaste for language is closer to the animals and therefore somehow Edenic; the sense of after-time allows him to feel the fullness of his disdain for the world without participating in or taking responsibility for it. Participating in society would mean having

59 Even to the point that he, like Lerman’s Adam, “allowed his pigs a liberty he denied his wives” (New Eve 94-95).
to check his out-of-control feelings – lust, disgust, rage and fear – which he so loves to indulge. Living among his own filth and that of his animals and child brides, Zero demands that the captive women raise piglets as their own children. This is not a posthuman vision of species equality as we see in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy but a dissemination of his own fury at his impotence (in both senses of the word), which he uses to further wound his wives.

Brutalised as he is in Zero’s community, Eve/lyn goes from man-identified outsider in Beulah to woman-identified outsider in the Church of Zero, and, poignantly, it is this maltreatment that finally makes her feel like a woman. When she admits, “The mediation of Zero turned me into a woman” (107-08), Carter unmistakeably echoes de Beauvoir’s claim again that “One is not born, but becomes, a woman” (295). But this time it is not self-construction in the mirror (like Leilah), nor surgical intervention to change her anatomy (like Mother), nor the actual abusive acts perpetrated by Zero that make her a woman, but the feelings induced by the acts. Or in Ahmed’s terms, the contact between those two power relations shapes who Eve becomes: since “women’s bodies and lives may be shaped by histories of violence that bring them to a feminist consciousness” (*Emotion* 174). Vallorani similarly states, “Awareness will spring out of sorrow and humiliation when Eve/lyn experiences sexual violation and sexual abuse on his/her own body’ (367). Eve has been raped before, by Mother; she has also felt sorrow and humiliation in Beulah. But it is the particular flavour of sorrow and humiliation brought about by the power imbalance between her and Zero that makes her feel like a woman. This is New Eve’s fall from innocence into knowledge, understanding how power is informed by gender; and that this in turn is heavily informed by the biblical
blueprints of Genesis 2-3. For the writer(s) of Genesis 2-3, sex is an emotionally neutral aspect of creation; gender, however, is the emotionally fraught consequence of gaining knowledge of good and evil. But, as Maria Aline Seabra Ferreira notes, it is not the character’s first Fall, despite New Eve’s prior insistence that she “remains wilfully in the state of innocence that precedes the fall” (New Eve 83). Ferreira highlights that in this novel “we are always already unavoidably grounded in the rhetoric of the Fall” (292).

How else would Eve reflect upon her supposedly prelapsarian condition, and how would she have been imbued with so much biblical symbolism by Mother, without having already been knowingly in a postlapsarian state?

Since “it is Eve/lyn’s reiteration of the gestures of femininity that achieves her change of gender,” this moment of realisation for Eve is often seen as a prelude to J. Butler’s theory of gender performativity (Sellers 111). As Gamble and others observe, the popularity of queer theory in the 1990s led to a resurgence of interest in this novel as a useful case study (119-20). There are important differences, however, between Carter’s gender performance and J. Butler’s gender performativity, and Joanne Trevenna argues that, bridging the years between de Beauvoir and Butler as she does, Carter’s portrayal of gender is closer to de Beauvoir (268). We can see this more clearly when we compare the treatment of Tristessa to the treatment of Eve, both by the novel’s characters and in the scholarship surrounding the novel since its publication.60 Eve and Tristessa reflect the two maxims delivered to New Eve at separate points in the novel:

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60 Carroll criticises other scholars’ use of the word “transvestite” to describe Tristessa in their analysis, and in particular, Johnson’s implicit ranking of Tristessa as less “successfully” trans than Eve (248). Similarly, Carroll upbraids the implicit sexism and homophobia in Makinen’s descriptions of Tristessa, who apparently “has no experience whatsoever of being a real woman” – whatever a real woman is (Carroll 248; Makinen 157). Like me, Carroll opts to refer to Tristessa as “she” throughout, explaining in a footnote as I do that this is the character’s “elective gendered identification” (243).
first Sophia’s “A change in the appearance will restructure the essence” (68); then Tristessa’s “‘Once the essence was achieved, the appearance could take care of itself’” (141). King notes:

The novel therefore offers two models of constructed femininity – the one biological and the other cultural, the one imposed by force and the other chosen – through which to explore the nature of gender and the essentialist debate. (144)

Discussions of these two women who were assigned male at birth also reveal gaps in the language available to articulate trans women in the mid-to-late twentieth century: “transvestite” is typically used to describe those who are non-operative, usually with masculine pronouns; “transexual” is used for those who are post-operative, along with feminine pronouns (though not always).

As such, Carter has Eve use masculine pronouns for Tristessa almost exclusively from the moment her penis is uncovered until her death (Akdoğan 437). This is despite Eve finding out that she once begged Mother for a sex-change operation and was refused because she was “too much of a woman already […and yet possessed an] awfully ineradicable quality of his maleness” (New Eve 173). Rachel Carroll points out that this contradictory impediment to Tristessa’s surgery reflects Sandy Stone’s description of the difficulties sex-change candidates of the time had in qualifying for an operation, as they were “evaluated on the basis of their performance in the gender of choice” – a rule which only reinforced binary characteristics and behaviours (S. Stone 228; see also Carroll 245). Clearly in this novel, “tensions between certain iterations of second-wave feminism and what might now be termed ‘transgender politics’ are dramatized in provocative fashion” (Carroll 254). She and others therefore find it more useful to historicise Carter’s work in its depiction of the sometimes troubled relationship
between second-wave feminist and transgender movements, rather than to imagine it anticipating Butlerian gender performativity (Carroll 243; Trevenna 275). My position in the remainder of this chapter, however, is to highlight how Carter uses biblical myth to trouble those waters further, and to draw out how some of the fraught emotions felt in those debates were (and still are) firmly rooted in both Genesis and Revelation.

Eve feels “an extraordinary fugue of feeling” culminating in “an ecstasy of regret” upon finally seeing Tristessa, “the essence of nostalgia,” lying supposedly dead in her home (New Eve 118-19). This scene, in which the young adorer gazes upon the face of a goddess figure as she feigns her own lying-in-state, recalls Ishtar’s fake funeral scene. This time it is a New Eve looking on, rather than a New Adam, and the perspective remains with the onlooker rather than the goddess feigning death, but similar themes are all present: hidden transgenderism, homoromantic love, intergenerational attraction, the suggestion of necrophilia and the queasy relief brought about by the realisation that the death is fabricated. Both also refer to the sleeping beauty fairy tale, which of course has its own symbolic connection to Eden through the poisoned apple (New Eve 119-21; Ishtar 191-92). Tristessa (suggestive of Tiresias, therefore semi-divine) even speaks like Ishtar in ambiguous biblical-sounding asyndetic declarations: “[...] I can read tears. They map our destiny when they flow down the face. I perform divinations by means of tears. I let my glass flow the same way, at random, in sorrow” (New Eve 143). At this point and many others that I have highlighted, Carter and Lerman are either both satirising the same trends within goddess culture, or Carter is echoing (knowingly or unknowingly) Lerman’s earlier novel. The only difference is the perspectives involved: where Lerman’s Ishtar feels only her divine explosive feelings and others think her
insane, Carter’s Eve is the outsider thinking the same of Tristessa, as she does earlier in the novel of Mother (143). Where Ishtar thinks this of a human lover: “one of those who would love me, then fear me and then, in fear, annihilate me” (Ishtar 34-35), Eve/lyn thinks this of Mother: “the eternally elusive quietus who will free me from being, transform my I into the other and, in doing so, annihilate it” (New Eve 59).

On discovering Tristessa’s male genitalia, Eve (along with many critics) begins to read all of Tristessa’s behaviours as inherently false, though (bizarrely) she never imagines that her dramatics might be a result of her training as an actor. Among those who see Tristessa only as a man masquerading as a woman, Gamble reads Tristessa as “irredeemably camp,” her performance lacking irony and self-awareness (127). But such comparisons are perhaps too quick to overlook a more nuanced reading of trans experience provided by Carter, even if it pre-dates contemporary language. For example, many trans autobiographies of the time explored identification with the “queens of camp” in Hollywood, often associated more with transvestite culture, but which was actually an important facet of transfeminine culture in the 1970s (Johnson, “Unexpected” 172). Tristessa, “tragedy queen,” whose name literally means sadness, not only perfectly acts out the various sorrows of her dramatic roles, but also acts as an emotional conduit for her audience, who “wept for themselves” rather than for her (New Eve 122). Despite her own new experiences as a woman, Eve’s descriptions of Tristessa continue to congest with an almost sadistic adoration of her pain, sadness, suffering: “I choked with love and pity for her” (126). Yet, paradoxically, seeing her suffer in real life, Eve struggles to read her emotions as genuine (123). As I mentioned above, Carter uses violence and taboo to make her readers feel, but in this particular
moment Eve’s lack of feeling is important: it shows her journey from heterosexual desire (in which an imbalance of power and feminine suffering was sexually exciting for Evelyn), through her own experiences of the same thing in reverse, which leads to an emptiness where violence-arousal once lived. The feeling is so alien to Eve that she imagines it as a failure in Tristessa, whereas instead it may be a failure of feminist solidarity and empathy in Eve.

Falling for Tristessa in person nonetheless, Eve continues along the narcissistic vein that began in Beulah, as she notes “we are mysteriously twinned by our synthetic life” (125). At the sight of Tristessa’s penis, she judges:

[…] he had made himself the shrine of his own desires, had made of himself the only woman he could have loved! If a woman is indeed beautiful only in so far as she incarnates most completely the secret aspirations of man, no wonder Tristessa had been able to become the most beautiful woman in the world, an unbegotten woman who made no concessions to humanity. (New Eve 128-29)

Here Eve perpetuates problematic ideas not only of presumed heterosexuality, but also of the notion that transgender people are driven by a sense of narcissistic projection of their own desires – a reading that many critics have drawn from these passages (Johnson, “Unexpected” 177). Appearing to cleave to the essentialist curve despite everything she has experienced, Eve compares Tristessa to “real women” in this passage, perhaps forgetting that Tristessa has clearly lived convincingly as a woman for most of her life. But at this moment Eve not only misgenders but dehumanises her completely: “Tristessa had no function in this world except as an idea of himself; no ontological status, only an iconographic one” (129). Returning to Bray and Moore’s descriptions of the cultural function of affect theory, I must point out how not only the characters around her judge her gender contrary to her wishes, but also the extent to
which critics (even contemporary critics) do the same. Many go as far as to diagnose what they see as this character’s deeper personality failings, for example Filimon writes, “deep in Tristessa’s psyche lies a masculine desire that on the surface assumes the feminine spectacle” and becomes “sadly just a filmic image” (197-98). For this particular debate, Tristessa becomes a “circulating object” that is “sticky, or saturated with affect, as [a] site[...] of personal and social tension” with the projected emotions of others (Ahmed, Emotion 11). What Bray and Moore might ask is not that we read this passage in order to diagnose what is “wrong” with Tristessa, but instead to diagnose what is happening in the culture around her to make her act in such a way (or be perceived to act in such a way). Echoing but altering Bray and Moore’s diagnostic questions once more, I could ask: “How might Tristessa’s melodramatic suffering diagnose a society that demands we occupy gendered roles that reward such suffering, but deny that behaviour to half the population on the basis of the shape of their genitalia?” Or, “How might Tristessa’s apparent insincerity or falseness diagnose a society that upholds womanhood as a complex masquerade based in masculine fantasy and myth?” After all, Tristessa’s suffering only seems fake to Eve when Eve knows Tristessa has a penis; before then, she was performing what J. Butler famously calls the “stylized repetition of acts” just as persuasively as any cis woman (Gender Trouble 191).

The experiment reaches its visual and emotional climax with Eve and Tristessa’s “double drag” marriage and forced consummation scene, which resounds with Shakespearean doubled and tripled identities, as “both were the bride, both the groom in this ceremony” (New Eve 132, 135). In what could have been a reference to this very scene, J. Butler argues:
The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy. The parodic repetition of ‘the original’ [...] reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original. (Gender Trouble 43, J. Butler’s emphasis)

Given how many theorists are eager to point out the queer complexities at play in New Eve, few if any see their brief affair as a lesbian encounter, therefore few see both characters as women. For example, King takes this to be a representation of the mythic hermaphrodite, or a narcissistic moment between two former men drawn by their admiration of each other’s feminine mimicry (144-45). Nevertheless, enacting this ritual, the couple both embodies and disrupts the heterosexual pairing that finds its schema in Genesis 2-3 — a text often used for religious arguments against homosexuality but which Ken Stone, reading Monique Wittig and Judith Butler, identifies as fraught with problems and ambiguities such as Eve’s desire for Adam being a punishment, the ‘adam’s’ initial gender being uncertain, and Eve’s former existence as part of this same nongendered person, who never asked for a mate (“Garden,” 55, 62-64). “Does it not begin,” asks K. Stone, “to look like a complicated tale of the human creatures’ gradual but forced submission to the constraints of the heterosexual contract?” (“Garden” 65). Such is the forced marriage and consummation of New Eve and Tristessa pictured as an equally uncomfortable arrangement. Significantly, the scene ends with Carter’s Eve feeling the shame felt by the biblical Eve after she eats the fruit: “[I] looked for some rag to cover my nakedness because I had grown suddenly ashamed of it” (138). New Eve is of course likely to have felt shame for many other reasons than her nakedness alone, for example in her complicity in the rape of Tristessa (Carroll 251). But she explains the feeling away with a reference to Genesis 2-3 and her nakedness, an easy conduit for exorcising her
larger emotions. She is Eve, she is naked, and therefore she must be ashamed of her nakedness rather than anything else.

When they have escaped and are stranded in the desert yet again, with the US in the midst of civil war, they encounter another extremist group consisting of boys whose allegiance is only to God and the USA. Like Zero, these boys consider themselves agents of the apocalypse: the difference being that Zero becomes atavistic in his desire to reboot civilisation, whereas the Children’s Crusade seems only to operate on a closed New Testament loop, which they appropriately listen to on repeat on the radio. Their theogony thus offers a parody of macho American Evangelicalism that cannot see or understand its full history, but only looks forward to annihilation. The Children’s Crusade provides a different yet still apt demonstration of Ahmed’s and Moore’s work on disgust when the leader vomits in response to Tristessa’s kiss. “He could vomit at a kiss and [his fellow child soldiers] did not think he was a coward; they thought it was further proof of purity,” narrates Eve (New Eve 159). To this young militant, a kiss from another (perceived) man is an intolerable contact that threatens the very skin of his selfhood, which stands for the body of Christ. I am reminded in this scene of the connection between disgust and rage about which Ahmed writes, “[...] bodies that are disgusted are also bodies that feel a certain rage, a rage that the object has got close enough to sicken, and to be taken over or taken in. To be disgusted is after all to be affected by what one has rejected” (Emotion 86). As a result, the young soldier’s response to the kiss is disproportionately aggressive – he murders Tristessa in a fit of gay panic. Looking at this scene in terms of the emotions felt by the soldier, I might then recast it in the model of Bray and Moore’s diagnoses: “How might disgust at a same-sex kiss diagnose a society
that polices and punishes expressions of love and affection between certain categories
of human based in origin stories that convey a heterosexual ideal of purity?” These boys
know nothing but the impending violence of apocalyptic renewal that promises a return
to such purity, hence their overriding fear, which in turn keeps them out of the present,
since “Fear projects us from the present into a future” (Ahmed, *Emotion* 65). If that
future is one that is already sticky with terrible meaning, filled with details that are
further fear- and disgust-inducing such as those in Revelation, then the individual
experiencing such stickiness cannot help but be drawn into it, if only to get to the other,
less sticky side. It is no wonder their young Colonel quietly sobs in Eve’s embrace when
he has the chance.

In her wanderings in the desert once more, both with and without Tristessa,
Eve’s thoughts again lead backwards and forwards through biblical myths of origin and
end:

Here we were at the beginning or end of the world and I, in my sumptuous flesh, was in
myself the fruit of the tree of knowledge; knowledge had made me, I was a man-made
masterpiece of skin and bone, the technological Eve in person. (146)

At the discovery of a family’s suicide, she thinks “Welcome to anteriority, Eve; now I
know we are at the beginning of the beginning” (166). Another moment of loneliness
after Tristessa’s murder brings Eve to think, “I might have been the only human left alive
in all the world, Eve and Adam both, on a mission to repopulate this entire, devastated
continent” (165). Clearly, even in this apocalyptic scenario, Eve still hankers after her
namesake’s role, invoking her name (and Adam’s) frequently in order to distract herself
from her grief and shock, keeping her from staying with the trouble. However the
apocalyptic pull that must precede the next creation draws her on as she remarks, “But I
continued on for I was filled with a raging curiosity to see the end of the world” (167). In these examples, Eve only seems able to think through her traumatic situation using the lenses of these biblical bookends – never able to stay present, since her draw towards the fray is not to participate in the revolution but simply to observe.

Now let us reencounter Leilah, or Lilith, as Eve does late in the novel, as a counterpart to Eve’s ambivalent stance. Eve struggles to pair the confident warrior Lilith with the Leilah she abandoned in New York City, though Carter hints at her transformation through proleptic foreshadowing from Evelyn’s florid earlier descriptions of Leilah “tearing” his orgasm from him, presenting her as a succubus: “the devils in female form who come by night to seduce the saints [...] Leilah, Lilith, mud Lily” (27, 29). In the revelation of Leilah as the woman named after the mythical Lilith, we see Carter participating in the same tradition that, since the sixteenth century, has evoked images of “monstrous, unruly, but also specifically Black female sexuality” (Wood 89). As the sex worker known as Leilah, Carter’s character pandered to this stereotype, but as Lilith-the-soldier now confronting Eve, she flouts it in various ways. Lilith explains her transformation:

I called myself Leilah in the city in order to conceal the nature of my symbolism. [...] Lilith, if you remember, was Adam’s first wife, on whom be begot the entire race of the djini. All my wounds will magically heal. Rape only refreshes my virginity. I am ageless, I will outlive the rocks. (New Eve 174)

This Lilith, like Lerman’s Lilith-identified Ishtar, makes declarations about herself with biblical-sounding rhetoric intended to shock her audience. Eve wonders if she had always been an illusion, seeming to forget how Evelyn watched her construct her femininity in the mirror each night. Twice Lilith explains that Beulah has adapted to the urgency in the real world: “‘History overtook myth [...] and rendered it obsolete’” (172-
73); “‘Historicity rendered myth unnecessary […] The Priestesses of Cybele have left off
simulating miraculous births for a while and have turned into storm-troopers’” (173).
The realisation of Lilith’s newfound self-sufficiency wounds Eve’s pride as she
understands that she herself will not find purpose in this revolution (175, 188). Though
the reader has access to Eve’s emotions and interior world, it is again Lilith whom the
author champions over Eve. There is “curative Medusan laughter” behind Leilah’s
seeming suffering when readers discover it was really Lilith in control (Schoene-Harwood
120). Where the Leilah of New York City was the Jezebel-whore, she is now an inverted
Jezebel-prophet speaking with clarity and import. Importantly, she has lost her
stickiness: if anything, her aloofness offends Eve. Lilith goes back to dance her End-of-
the-World dance while Eve regresses into the cervical cave where Mother has gone.
Lilith can stay with the trouble; Eve cannot.

Evidently, “Carter is not interested in constructing alternative, feminist myths as
a source of positive imagery and symbolism for contemporary women” (King 135). Hope
Jennings concurs that rather than offering an inspiring feminist model, revisiting
matriarchal myth “often end[s] up reiterating phallocentric representations of women’s
bodies” (“Dystopian” 64). Citing Irigaray, Jennings links this fallacy directly to a
dangerous tendency towards “feminist nostalgia” that “evades a confrontation with
women’s present day” (“Dystopian” 67). In other words, this nostalgia, which can be
found while digging in the clay from which ’adam was formed, keeps the one digging
from staying with the trouble. Carter provides an example of this nostalgic longing not
only in Mother at her most powerful, but also – especially – in what many read as
another manifestation of Mother when she is powerless. Lilith and Eve find a “mad old
lady” on the beach, drinking, belching, shitting and singing 1930s songs to herself – here the great mother goddess is reduced to a pitiable failure of the feminine mystique, since “the dove-tailing of Lilith’s account with the description of the old woman strongly implies that this is Mother” (Sellers 114; see also Gamble 128; Jegerstedt). While many do not associate this old woman with Mother and instead imagine Mother has become the rocks themselves, I am satisfied with a reading in which she is both. Here Eve is sent into another symbolic journey into the ground, a second womblike space with “Walls of meat and slimy velvet” in which Eve again feels “Familiar panic” like that which she felt in Beulah (New Eve 184, 180). King remarks, “in psychoanalytic terms the mother has been repressed into the unconscious and is manifest only in symbolic substitutions” (146). Filimon rather sees the cave scene as a demonstration of Mother’s association with Mother Nature in myth, and an attempt by Carter to show both as the very opposite of the romanticised, nurturing cliché (72). Importantly, this journey backwards in time fails to take Eve to a matriarchal prehistory far prior to Eden, prior to humanity, thus Carter is “rejecting the dream of return to a prelapsarian paradise, as if this might provide us with an original model or blueprint upon which to build new human identities” (Jennings, “Dystopian” 80). It appears that Mother has failed to rewrite history and provide a new myth in which this pregnant New Eve will bear a child of any world-altering significance. Instead it is Lilith and her fellow “storm-troopers” that do so, joining a revolution of women and people of colour that many in the mid-to-late twentieth century felt was already underway.

In the introduction to this thesis, I noted the differing attitudes of some feminist critics and authors in whether myths are useful tools to re-vision in order to produce
more redemptive and productive views on women in the future. Julie Burchill’s article against the prevalence of Eve in contemporary media in 1999 begins, “I blame Angela Carter” for popularising feminist engagement with myth, largely misunderstanding Carter’s intentions for criticising it (9). While most see this ambiguous ending as a failure to escape myth completely (see Gamble 129), Sellers makes note of a few who interpret the ambivalent ending of New Eve, with its final word “birth,” as a gesture of hopefulness that the pregnant androgyne may carry forth a new myth (115). The ending of Ishtar provides a similarly ambiguous (and watery) scene, as Ishtar and her son row into the distance with a flirtatious and naïve man who asks, “Do you bake?” (202). Their ambiguity creates its own affective response in the reader who may be “baffled” by their seeming apoliticism, as both could be described as “situated in an ambiguous or a non-feminist terrain in terms of lacking a strict political agenda” (Akdoğan 432). My aim in these first two chapters is to emphasise that both Carter and Lerman use this uncertainty to highlight what biblical myths are responsible for, and capable of, in the twentieth century. A vague and moist space may have been left for hope in both novels, but their often scandalous and emotionally fraught narratives seem overwhelmingly to suggest that the present day is no time for myth when revolution is afoot.

Carter has been explicit about this in much of her work, particularly in her introduction to The Sadeian Woman, where she writes:

All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway. Mother goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods. If a revival of the myths of these cults gives women emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life. This is why they were invented in the first place. (my emphasis)
I have italicised part of the penultimate sentence to draw out the affective aspects of these myths: they may be emotionally fulfilling to the characters within these novels, but they are so sticky that they hinder the objectivity of those characters. Looking at two other texts by Carter that also address the garden story, Morse notes, “Angela Carter interpreted the boundaries of Eden to be a limitation rather than a paradise, and saw the character of God as authoritarian and untrustworthy” (Eve’s Afterlives 207). While Carter does so in a less direct way with New Eve, using goddess figures rather than Yahweh Elohim, I argue that Carter’s 1977 novel still highlights these same problems by escalating the emotions at work in the biblical text and its afterlives. Morse again notes that this kind of reading, which “refuses to overlay the deity in Genesis 2-3 with the omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God of Jewish and Christian religion and culture,” is a strategy employed by increasing numbers of contemporary biblical scholars, but is also evident in a rich corpus of early Jewish and Christian Gnostic texts (Eve’s Afterlives 207).

As is demonstrated in these first two chapters, both Lerman and Carter make great use of negative emotion, specifically disgust, in order to turn the reader away from the kind of spiritual self-soothing that Edenic longing promises – not to mention the hope of finding a lost goddess amidst the foliage. In a rare comparison of Lerman and Carter together, Rosinsky concludes that “The Passion of New Eve savagely satirises the gynocentric vision that Call Me Ishtar merely parodies” (11) – but Ishtar is only less directly savage than New Eve because it operates from the perspective of the goddess herself, fighting futilely for relevance in a continent gripped by revolution. Like Ishtar, New Eve delivers a satirical model of the archetypal mother goddess in order to explore
and deconstruct both its legacy and its obfuscation in Western culture, but Carter’s novel does so from the perspective of an outsider. As Ozick has argued, to ask where the goddess has gone is to ask the wrong question: whether she is obscured by masculine grammar, or hiding behind the biblical Eve and Lilith, is neither here nor there. A study in the affective (and affecting) lives of these demoted goddesses in both novels shows that she is not worth trying to find.
Chapter 3: The *Lilith’s Brood* Trilogy (1987-1989) by Octavia E. Butler

We must watch out for the women, but, from the story of Eve onwards, the enigma lies in not knowing whose side she is on.

*Deborah Sawyer*, God, Gender and the Bible, 26

Let them learn that it isn’t shameful to be together with one another and with us.

*Octavia E. Butler*, Dawn, 200

Fig. 5: “Make People FEEL! FEEL! FeeL!” Octavia Butler’s notes and affirmations at the Wellcome Collection’s Joy and Tranquility exhibition. Photo with permission from Rachel Stoplar.
Octavia E. Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy (also known as *Xenogenesis*) consists of *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989). The first novel is written from the third-person limited perspective of Lilith Iyapo, a human woman who has been “rescued” from an Earth that has been almost destroyed by nuclear war. She soon learns that her rescuers/captors are an intelligent alien species who call themselves Oankali, and whose objective is to “gene-trade” with the surviving humans. The Oankali offer them no choice but to mate with them and produce offspring that will be free from the human “contradiction” of intelligence-plus-hierarchy, and provide the Oankali with the human “talent” for cancer, which they can use for regenerative processes. The second and third novels follow two of Lilith’s human-Oankali hybrid children as they resettle Earth: the first, Akin, is a male character who goes on to agitate for a human separatist colony; the second, Jodahs, is an “ooloi” (third gender) character whose experience yet again differs from its61 brother as it finds hybrid life more tolerable. Unlike the first two, the final novel is told in the first person, which provides the reader with a more subjective reading experience. For Gerry Canavan, this last novel changes everything: “*Imago* is perhaps most interesting for its quiet deconstruction of the earlier books in the series, especially with regard to the trustworthiness of the Oankali” (*Butler* 93).62

Fittingly, the trilogy begins in the wake of a profoundly violent secular apocalypse, and

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61 Butler uses the pronoun “it” for this third gender, which is neither male nor female, nor a blend of the two. Critics such as Smaran Dayal have speculated as to whether Butler would have used the current preferred nonbinary pronoun “they” if the books had been written more recently, but since there are moments in which Butler’s characters seem to enjoy using “it” to further distance themselves from these alien characters, I continue to use “it” in this thesis. In this mode, Butler appears to carry the mantle of Ursula K. Le Guin, whose 1969 SpF novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* famously illustrates a more genderfluid civilisation. Le Guin later expressed regret that her genderfluid characters were still referred to with masculine pronouns, therefore many subsequent feminist novelists such as Marge Piercy, who uses “person/per,” have chosen to invent new neutral pronouns.

62 Butler uses a similar strategy in her Parables novels, in which the perspective shift to the protagonist’s daughter in the sequel undermines her mother’s account in the first novel (L. Wilson, “Suspicion” 97, 105).
ends with a moment of creation as Jodahs “felt [the seed] begin the tiny positioning movements of independent life” (*Imago* 746).

Of the seemingly exponential amount of scholarship on Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy over the last thirty years, the lines of debate that apply to this chapter tend to focus on its contemporaneity with Haraway’s cyborg feminism, on biblical and extrabiblical themes, and on affect, but never all three together. Both Naomi Jacobs and Patricia Melzer read in Butler’s work multiple ideas of border meeting/dwelling/crossing in feminisms as expressed not only in Haraway’s cyborg, but also Gloria Anzaldúa’s “*mestiza* consciousness” and Rosi Braidotti’s “nomadic subject” (N. Jacobs 94-95; Melzer 89-94). Claire P. Curtis also perceives disgust and the act of acclimatising to such feelings as an important facet of these novels, as do I: “As a critical utopia, the novel is asking readers to work through their disgust over Oankali alien-ness (as Lilith does) and to embrace the possibilities of these next, unknown generations” (26-27). But while Curtis’ argument seems to anticipate Haraway’s *Trouble*, published just a year later, it misses what I find crucial in these novels, which is that the root of the disgust being explored emerges from – and is magnified by – the biblical and extra-biblical myths embedded in the text.

Just as pertinent to this chapter is the rich well of scholarship on Butler’s importance as a black writer in the SpF genre. Melzer links Butler’s oeuvre with “Audre Lorde’s call for ‘new patterns of relating across difference’” (68). Where I have used

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63 No less because Haraway mentions Butler as one of the key “theorists for cyborgs” in her manifesto (“Cyborg” 52). Nancy Jesser adds that, specifically, “Haraway sees Butler largely as the creator of cyborg heroines, heroines who are neither wholly innocent nor innocently whole” (51). See also Bonner; Green; Peppers; Boulter; J. Miller; Attebery; N. Jacobs; Melzer; Ackerman; Curtis; Sendur.

64 Peppers; Osherow; Grover.

65 Walker; Schwab; Ackerman.
Adrienne Rich’s phrase “re-vision” often to describe authors’ strategic retellings of myths, I now turn to a related concept in post-colonial criticism: the task of “writing back.” This involves multiple strategies for rewriting the canon, including, “the assumption of authority, ‘voice’, and control of the ‘word’, that is, seizure and control of the means of interpretation and communication” (Ashcroft et al. 96). Alternatively, Justin Louis Mann defines Butler’s work as “pessimistic futurism,” combining the seemingly oppositional postures of Afro-pessimism and Afro-futurism. “Pessimistic futurism,” argues Mann, “[...] does not abandon the historical terms of black existence, especially slavery, but also does not give in to that history as a fatalistic limit on what comes next” (66). Interestingly, Butler herself describes her work as “HistoFuturism,” a posture (similar to the one described above) that takes into account both historical and Futurist strategies (Streeby 721). In these ways, for Hoda Zaki and many other scholars, [Butler’s] works chiefly differ from those of her Anglo sisters in that they embody an indirect critique of the liberal feminist imagination and politics expressed in contemporary feminist SF—a difference which, insofar as it is attributable to racial considerations, points to certain tensions existing between Afro-American women and the feminist movement. (239)

Preferring dialogue to long, descriptive passages, Butler frequently turns to the Socratic method to interrogate these intersecting issues. As will be evident, many quotations from the primary texts in this chapter read more like a script than a novel, as Butler uses her characters as representatives of certain differing points of view.

As for her own point of view, Butler is very clear in rejecting utopian thinking, particularly with the strand of feminist SF associated with it. In an interview she states, [... ] personally, I find utopias ridiculous. We’re not going to have a perfect human society until we get a few perfect humans, and that seems unlikely. Besides, any true utopia would almost certainly be incredibly boring, and it would be so overspecialized that any change we might introduce would probably destroy the whole system. As bad as we
humans are sometimes, I have a feeling that we’ll never have that problem with the current system. (Butler, qtd. in McCaffery 69)

But while she is explicit about her own views in interview, her novels paint much more conflicting pictures that reflect not specific feminist utopian theories or postcolonial critiques, but tangles of complex feeling. Butler allows us to empathise with individuals on both sides of the aliens’ “acquisition” of Earth and its self-destructive humans without particularly presenting solutions or even judgements; only opportunities for empathy and learning how to stay with the trouble. Thus while Butler admits that she set out to write a trilogy in which the Oankali provide something if not utopian, then at least better than humanity and its Contradiction, according to one interview, she fails to do so: “I’m not sure I really managed what I set out to do” (Butler, qtd. in Canavan, Butler 96). As we shall see, this summation of Butler’s differs from the interpretations of many who admire aspects of the Oankali culture, yet it supports my thesis that these novels argue against the concept that one can or should abandon the present in favour of creating a new paradise. Sweeping backwards to Eden or forwards to apocalypse is itself an intoxicating act that grips multiple characters in the trilogy, but always proves to be fruitless. This chapter therefore argues that Butler’s trilogy shows how the affect-heavy dreams of creation and apocalypse cloud the judgement of individuals faced with a broken (doubly fallen) world, and only those who can resist such affective traps are capable of staying with the trouble.

As is habitual in Butler’s writing, the significance of the protagonist’s name gives the reader clues for how to interpret the uncertain early chapters of this novel, in which the reader knows as little as Lilith. In Jewish legend and the wider cultural milieu, Michele Osherow argues that the name Lilith “is enough to connote fear and evil [as] the
original femme fatale, the insatiable seductress” (70). Osherow also remarks that another link between Butler’s Lilith and the extrabiblical Lilith is that both experience a catastrophic exile from their home (75). In fact, each of Butler’s protagonists within the trilogy follow this motif of exile: in *Dawn* Lilith is a human suspected of betraying her kind; *Adulthood* sees her “construct” son Akin first as human-looking in an Oankali environment, then Oankali-looking in a human environment; then in *Imago* another child, Jodahs, becomes the first of its kind (construct ooloi), feeling neither human nor Oankali. All are outsiders in their communities; all are in some way or another a continuation of the mythical Lilith.

Butler’s Lilith finds herself “still a ‘slave’ to the negative connotations of her name” even as she gains power in the novels (Peppers 50). Her initial captivity in an Oankali cell, combined with her surname Iyapo, bring immediate suggestions of slavery to the reader – a frequent theme or motif detected in Butler’s work. Among many others, Haraway notes that the alien ship containing countless captured human beings “inescapably evokes the reader’s memories of the terrible middle passage of the Atlantic slave trade that brought Lilith’s ancestors to a ‘New World,’ where a ‘gene trade’ was also enforced” (*Visions* 379). Reading these early chapters and their criticism together, we find frequent reference to Mark Dery’s claim that “African Americans, in a very real sense, are the descendants of alien abductees” (180). The way the Oankali effectively determine the lives and breeding of the humans in their possession quite clearly refers to slavery, especially the experiences of black women slaves, as has been noted by critics too numerous to mention.66 In terms of affect, Gabriele Schwab writes that “Lilith

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66 These interpretations are well documented by Melzer, Canavan and Dayal.
experiences a form of ‘social death’ similar to that which slaves would have experienced “in response to the withdrawal of all familiar rules of sociality, communication, and emotion” (217). This is also something that, in her exile, the mythical Lilith experiences, forced as she is to lose her children daily. Thus the Lilith of *Lilith’s Brood* possesses these affective connections to other realms (both historical and mythical) of trauma. Taking this reading alone, however, risks a reductive interpretation of the novels that Butler was keen to avoid in her works.67

Elaborating on the work of Mark Rifkin, Smaran Dayal prefers to view the trilogy as a critique of settler colonialism in which the humans are “a people being deprived of their land and their right to exist there autonomously of a foreign (here: extraplanetary) power” – and the Oankali are prepared not only to occupy the space but also to use it up in a way that will exhaust and poison the land (102-03). Not only this, but the option for an independent human colony on Mars delivered after great struggle and agitation by Akin on behalf of the resisters, comes to represent a kind of indigenous reserve that clearly references the history of the US – a “less-than-hospitable […] space that is decidedly not their ancestral land—or here, planet” (Dayal 104). When viewed alongside my thesis, which highlights how biblical narratives of beginning and end feed into these issues, we are reminded that much of the rhetoric surrounding settling in the Americas appeared to promise a kind of Eden.68

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67 While countless scholars and reviewers note critiques of slavery occurring throughout her work, in an interview in 1996 Butler states: “[...] so many critics have read [“Bloodchild” (1984)] as a story about slavery, probably just because I am black. [...] The only places I am writing about slavery is where I actually say so” (Potts 332). She then goes to name a few novels, none of which is *Lilith’s Brood*. Still, the relationship of Oankali to human is more like that of captor than rescuer, and readers associate these stories with slavery nonetheless (Boulter 176-77).

68 Zamora writes, “The possibility of achieving in the future the primal unity that was lost in the past, when Adam and Eve sinned and were separated from God, seemed to inhere in the virgin territory of America”
Dawn

Trapped in her featureless, blank room at the beginning of Dawn, Lilith describes herself as experiencing “alternating moods of fear and boredom,” as well as confusion and subsequent rage: “she had shouted, then cried, then cursed until her voice was gone” (Dawn 9, 7). The apparently omniscient “quiet, androgynous” voice asking her questions, finds obvious parallels with the voice of God in the garden, but its detachedness is also that of a scientist in a sterile laboratory. The self-cleaning and hermetically sealed room provides for all Lilith’s needs, much like a garden, yet one that is the very opposite of Eden, which offers plants that are “pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen. 2.9). In its absence, Butler appears to dig deeply not into the physical landscape of the garden but into its affective landscape: probing the reality of awakening in a space that is ex nihilo. Empty, quiet and completely unknown, the space in which ‘adam is created exists “when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up” (Gen. 2.5). Butler emphasises this feeling of vulnerability by placing the reader within this limited perspective, in the form of the ‘adam itself as a female creature: in other words, “[t]he reader’s place within the telling of the narrative is not next to God, looking down on the finished Earth, but as a captive awaking in a new, and very frightening, place” (Walker 110). Of course, the difference between Lilith (and her readers) and the first human(s) in Genesis 2-3 is that she remembers the time before – her mind is already therefore filled with the knowledge of

(8). See also Keller’s assessment of Colón’s impressions of the Americas as a “lost Eden” that itself promised a somehow postapocalyptic, readymade “New Creation” (155-59).
good and evil (or, as I described in the introduction, discernment between pleasant and unpleasant) and all its sticky associations that led to humankind’s self-inflicted nuclear catastrophe. If she has gone “back” to her captors’ idea of a prelapsarian human condition, her captors have failed to accomplish the emotional aspect of that transformation – if anything, they have made it worse for her because she knows the extent of the suffering humans have inflicted on one another and can only imagine what is in store for her. “If you knew anything at all about the human imagination,” she tells her captors, “you’d know you were doing exactly the wrong thing” (*Dawn* 26). Once again, this gives the reader an opportunity to read Genesis 2-3 with empathy for the protoplasts’ likely emotions: perhaps not knowing what you cannot know is a fate worse than death; perhaps this was why it was so easy to eat the fruit.

Readers soon learn that the aliens have been repairing Earth after the catastrophic nuclear war it suffered, and they describe it now as:

*Wild. Forests, mountains, deserts, plains, great oceans. It’s a rich world, clean of dangerous radiation in most places. The greatest diversity of animal life is in the seas, but there are a number of small animals thriving on land: insects, worms, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals. (Dawn 31)*

Even the descriptions provided by Lilith’s interlocutor, Jdahya, seem to follow a biblical ordering – this time resembling Genesis 1 more than 2-3 in its focus first on landscape, sea, vegetation, then animals from sea creatures to small mammals. This land is described to Lilith as a kind of promised land, to which she may return if she correctly fulfils her duties on board the ship first. Jdahya repeatedly uses this promise of a return to paradise to manipulate Lilith to do his and his people’s wishes. Indeed, her imprisonment on board in the sterile room, eating manna-like, nutritionally tailored food that tastes “like cotton and paste” when they clearly have the means to provide
her with earthly foods also recalls the Israelites’ years in the wilderness (Dawn 31). But when Lilith is finally given a banana, I find her reaction suggestive of the garden myth again: “[the fruit] so surprised and delighted her that she took it from his hand without thought or hesitation” (Dawn 27). Compared to what the ship can provide (an entire Earth-like jungle landscape), the sparse, plastic-like conditions of the room seem to have been imposed upon Lilith to create the most affectless of existences. As a result, the promise of returning home that the fruit offers becomes all the more tempting. She takes the banana (and later an orange) without question, simply because the fruit looks fantastic compared to what she is used to, prompting the reader to recall Eve’s feelings about the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Like the biblical Eve, Lilith is not starving; Eve takes it partly because it is “good for food” and “a delight to the eyes” – its promise of wisdom is only part of its attraction (Gen. 3.6). Jdahya similarly offers something desirable in and of itself, but it too comes with knowledge that he knows Lilith cannot resist.

The allusion continues once she is allowed out of her room and looks back to see that her room was contained within “a huge tree [...] heavily laden with fruit” inside the vast ship (31). These scenes clearly provide the reader with a web of allusions that echo and challenge the received ways of imagining a recoverable Eden. The living walls of the ship and its plants form a microcosmic paradise of its own that, interestingly, disgusts Lilith almost as much as the Oankali’s bodies disgust her. Plants and animals are many-limbed and betentacled, walls appear to obey sensory instructions; when she asks if the ship is flora or fauna, Jdahya’s response is “Both, and more” (Dawn 35) – providing Lilith (and therefore the reader) with “a denial of an either/or logic” (Sendur 125). This
“both, and more” concept also pleasingly echoes the “both/and vision” that gained popularity in the 1980s in feminist poststructuralist thought (DuPlessis 276). The Oankali’s interaction with the ship causes one of its human captors to imagine that it “loved” them – an Edenic symbiosis that fails to convince Lilith (Dawn 35). That Lilith’s first responses to the moving “plants” around her are tinged with discomfort, if not outright disgust, is telling, revealing the distance humans have placed between themselves and the environment. To be without it, explains Jdahya, “would eventually mean death” (Dawn 35). This statement creates another subtle allusion to the threat of death given to the first humans in Genesis 2-3, where Adam and Eve do not die upon eating the fruit, but their expulsion from the garden includes a kind of emotional death, since the humans’ relationship with plants, animals and each other moves from hierarchy to domination.

Moving from Lilith’s environment to her embodied encounters with herself and others, we see many more allusions to the creation myths and opportunities for disgust to arise. On discovering a scar on her lower abdomen, Lilith realises that she must have had some surgery in one of her long sleeps. Elif Sendur is quick to draw parallels between this scar and Ahmed’s description of scars as evidence of the failure of our skin in “policing” the border of self/not self (120). But there are also immediate similarities here to Adam’s discovery that part of himself has been removed after his own sleep – a hint at a possible life extracted.69 At times, Lilith also awakens to find a companion in her room: first it is a terrified human child, whose company she enjoys until he is removed

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69 While this is later revealed to be the scar left from a removal of a cancerous growth, its description certainly allows the reader to suspect a caesarean section might have been performed. This also inverts the hint that the scar has allowed something “not me” to enter into “me,” suggesting instead that something “of me” has been taken out into the world.
without explanation. Her grief following the disappearance of this child further evokes the historical severing of children from their mothers during slavery and draws connections with the curse given to the mythical Lilith that a hundred of her offspring will die every day. Lilith then encounters what seems to be a man at first, but which reveals itself to be the Oankali called Jdahya. It is significant that, before she can see it completely clearly, one of Lilith’s first questions is whether the creature is male or female. Nancy Jesser argues that, for Lilith, “[p]art of the creature’s initial horror is that its sex is not discernible” (47). But in addition to this, Lilith’s assumption that he is male tells the reader about our wider associations with masculinity, that it is, as Jenny Wolmark writes, “unambiguously equated with power” (31). Jdahya responds that, while her question is misguided, he happens to be male, but that is where his apparent humanness ends. Though humanoid in shape, the details of his body (when she can see them clearly) are palpably alien – what Lilith had thought was a body largely covered in hair was in fact covered in fine, moving tentacles; thus any human affinity at least for other mammals is barred. After the initial relief at the familiarity of her captor’s gender and what she had thought to be mammalian fur, her next emotional and physiological reaction is immediate and predictable: disgust, pulling and turning away, distancing herself, and freezing.

“Medusa,” she thinks, staring at “a nest of snakes, startled, driven in all directions” (Dawn 13). In the connection between the monstrous tentacles and Medusan snakes, we begin to see more of Butler’s veiled references to the biblical garden narrative. Delilah Bermudez Brataas reminds the reader that the serpent has been associated with Lilith as well as with Eve in literature and art for centuries (92),
though in this instance Butler appears to rely on both Eve and Lilith for inspiration. As such, Lilith’s alien interlocutor becomes a kind of “crafty” talking serpent, or nest of serpents, sent to persuade her not to fear that for which she has been destined. Jdahya is there to provide Lilith with a kind of exposure therapy to his monstrousness, and she feels a horror of being vulnerable around him, “like going to sleep knowing there was a rattlesnake in the room, knowing she could wake up and find it in her bed” (Dawn 20). In Ahmed’s terms, the fear is not so much the presence of the disgusting thing, but the idea that it might get so close to her as to intrude upon her private space. And in the proximity of this monstrous disgusting “other,” Lilith is drawn ever closer to examining its details. As Ahmed notes,

[…] while disgust over takes the body, it also takes over the object that apparently gives rise to it. The body is over taken precisely insofar as it takes the object over, in a temporary holding onto the detail of the surface of the object: its texture; its shape and form; how it clings and moves. It is only through such a sensuous proximity that the object is felt to be so ‘offensive’ that it sickens and over takes the body. (Emotion 85)

It is also worth noting that Lilith’s anxiety about her closeness to this being makes her think about herself in bed: a space associated with defenceless sleep, and of course with sex. Hence we see again the relationship between the serpent and Eve as something implicitly sexual; the phallic shape of the tentacle supersedes her earlier thoughts of Medusa, and is compounded by the knowledge that this alien is in some way male. Though she does not yet know it, this anxiety is a foreshadowing of events to come, since the Oankali intend to breed with their captive humans. As Sendur observes, we also see in the descriptions of the Oankali a distinct anticipation of Haraway’s description of what she calls the Chthulucene, along with the idea that a Medusan figure is a useful one for imagining such a tentacular vision of life, a story with which to tell
other stories (Sendur 121, 123; Haraway, Trouble 52-54). Butler’s tentacles are certainly meant to make the reader feel squeamish, and Haraway reminds us that “[...] tentacle comes from the Latin tentaculum, meaning ‘feeler,’ and tentare, meaning ‘to feel’ and ‘to try’” (Trouble 31). As is evident in the photograph at the start of this chapter, it is a priority for Butler to “Make People FEEL! FEEL! FeeL!” what her characters feel; in this case, the disgust that Lilith endures in her first alien encounters. And in this first encounter alone, early in the trilogy, not just one story but multiple stories work through these characters intertextually, generating what Moore would call an “interaffectivity” that tells the reader how to feel about what they are reading (“Rage/Joy” 206-07).

What is also significant in Lilith’s initial encounters with the alien is not only their physical difference, but that their emotional responses differ so much from those of humans. Lilith comes to detest their calm, affectless voices and seemingly detached relationships to each other, even when they are in mortal danger or under great stress (Dawn 231-32). Schwab notes that these aliens seem to “lack [...] the fundamental anthropological universals, namely laughter and tears” (217). But while they first seem emotionless, they are revealed to express a wide range of feelings from joy to grief, only displaying these emotions physiologically rather than through language or tone of voice (Schwab 217-18). Their affective repertoire is therefore closer to the biblical descriptions of emotion discussed in Chapter 1. Lilith’s first observation of this is that the “snakes” of Jdahya’s body react to her own heightened emotions, reaching towards her whenever she raises her voice or flinches away. I picture this scene as a very literal example of Ahmed’s description of disgust as a phenomenon where “the objects seem to have us ‘in
their grip’, and to be moving towards us in how they impress upon us, an impression that requires us to pull away” (Emotion 84). As Melzer notes, and Ahmed describes in granular detail, this involves the Kristevan horror of the abject: “the fundamental psychic fear of that which threatens our illusion of a whole self” (Melzer 73) – an anxiety that only increases throughout the novels as alien and human mix together. While these first examples seem to show only curiosity, the human characters learn that the Oankali display various other emotional tells: when they are amused, their tentacles flatten back, smoothing out against their bodies; when they feel strong negative affect, they remain “rock still, their head and body tentacles drawn into thick, dark lumps that looked […] like grotesque tumors” (Dawn 206). Extreme grief can even affect other Oankali or the living ship or building surrounding it: as in one scene the environment surrounding an ooloi “turned yellow […] developed swellings. Rough, diseased patches appeared on it. Its odor changed, became foul. Parts of it sloughed off. Sometimes it developed deep, open sores” (Imago 554). In these examples we find an increased affective intimacy between the alien and the environment, though one that is fraught with danger as negative affect becomes akin to disease. The reader may observe through these examples why the Oankali find it impossible to resist their desires, since the unfulfillment of those desires can lead to physical as well as emotional chaos that damages not only the individual but also their environment.

In true Butlerian fashion, these aliens can therefore “feel, feel, feel” in a complex tangle of physiological and psychological affect. If anything, the ability for their

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70 The Parables series by Butler, two novels of which were published in the 1990s and further plans left incomplete after her death, features an illness called hyperempathy. Affected individuals can feel the physical emotions and sensations of those around them.
negative affect to seep out of their bodies reveals that they feel even more strongly than humans. But to the humans, the Oankali’s indirect violence evokes feelings of despair and rage that lead to further violent retaliations. In a sense, then, the humans’ negative affect can also spill out into the environment, just in physical rather than chemical action. And yet, despite the apparently broad emotional range of the Oankali, they still seem to lack the empathy to understand the suffering they inflict on humans, preferring to gaslight their human captors. Christina Braid explains, “[t]he Oankali interpret the Human reactions and sense of betrayal, angst, blame, hatred, and revenge as metaphors for the ‘Human Contradiction’” (54). In Bray and Moore’s terms, then, the Oankali have deduced: “How might angst diagnose a society that contains at its core the ‘human contradiction’ of intelligence combined with hierarchical thinking?” The reader, on the other hand, might be far more likely to sympathise with the humans and use the following construction: “How might angst diagnose a society that has been removed from their indigenous land, isolated, experimented upon without their consent and forced to interbreed with nonhuman partners?” While this reads a little surreally, this is essentially the chief misunderstanding between the Oankali and the humans, and it is one that Butler intends her readers to trouble themselves over, since the two statements are effectively both true.

While I have focused much of these introductory paragraphs on creation myths and Dawn, I now turn to some of the allusions to Revelation that are evident in Butler’s work, particularly with regards to Lilith’s initial disgust again. Lilith learns early that one of the many functions of the Oankali’s tentacles is their ability to “see” with them. In fact, because of their surfeit of tentacles, they “can’t not see” (Dawn 18). Reading this
alongside Revelation (and its reference to Ezekiel 1.4-13), one cannot miss the reference to the creatures “full of eyes in front and behind” and “full of eyes all around and inside” (Rev. 4. 7-8). It is an image Keller fittingly calls “congested with vision” – evoking a sense of overwhelm, almost illness (35). In another context altogether, but pertinent to this example, J. Adam Johns reminds readers that Butler has an “inability to not ‘not see’ many things” (397) – the complexity of her fiction is thanks in part to Butler’s many unclosing insights. Though they are literally omniscient in this respect, the Oankali possess a lack of interest in allowing humans access to knowledge – even of their own past. Jdahya angers Lilith when he tells her that they destroyed any remaining ruins left after the war. He tells her, “We’ll put you in areas that are clean of radioactivity and history” (Dawn 34), seeming to equate the damage done through nuclear war with everything else human civilisations have produced, “as though these were comparable toxins” (Wallace 108-09). Similarly, the Oankali child sent to teach Lilith (called Nikanj) also tells her she cannot have access to pen and paper, nor to any of the remaining books or technology they salvaged from Earth (Dawn 62). This erasure of history again makes the critical reader think of what Samuel Delaney calls the “massive cultural destruction” inflicted upon slaves entering the USA, who were separated from familial, linguistic and cultural ties and whose records were destroyed (Dery 191). For Delaney and other writers and artists creating Afrofuturist works, this obliteration of history can inhibit the ability to imagine futures. In this act of what Braid calls “ethnic cleansing,” the Oankali demonstrate a similar kind of “intellectual [... and] cultural chauvinism” shown by colonising nations (55, 58). These scenes are apt illustrations of the Oankali urge to anaesthetise humanity (and by extension, themselves) of its uncomfortable
history. Read alongside Revelation, they echo the author’s willingness to purge the world of everything that it deems unclean (ergo disgusting) at any cost in an act that is also implicitly connected to the longing for a return to Paradise.

Before we turn to the ways in which Butler evokes disgust in her descriptions of Oankali-human mating, I wish to cover one more facet of the human reaction to Oankali ethos. What Lilith calls her family’s “curse” of an inherited genetic predisposition to cancer is referred to by Jdahya as a “talent” – something that is in genetic terms “beauty beyond Human comprehension” for these advanced extra-terrestrial beings (Dawn 22; Imago 551). Cathy Peppers identifies Butler’s use of cancer as the Oankali’s desired tool as “particularly frightening” (particularly affecting) because of its existence “on the border of me/not me” (52-53). Indeed, Ahmed reminds us that the desire to feel safely protected from “the not” is defined by the “insecurity” of such a category (Emotion 76). Cancer is a disease so common and so potent that it is guaranteed to have affected (emotionally and/or physically) every reader in some way throughout their lives. Knowing as we do from Butler’s archives that she was interested in the “HeLa” cells extracted from Henrietta Lacks still used in medicine today (Streeby 724; Canavan, Butler 81), the implications of the Oankali’s use of Lilith and others’ DNA are significant. These harvested cells bring about positive advances for the aliens (and for humans willing to interbreed) but invade the privacy of (and fail to renumerate) the individuals from whom the genetic materials are taken. Butler’s use of DNA in this way works as a metaphor that is suggestive both of creation and destruction, while also linked to a topical controversy of Butler’s era that highlighted injustices towards women of colour in the US health system.
Conversely, the Oankali see something disgusting in what is often lauded as a kind of ambition in humans: what they call the “Human Contradiction” of intelligence plus hierarchy. Jdahya in fact compares this to a malignant cancer in its destructive potential when these two things are combined. Jessie Stickgold-Sarah remarks on the effectiveness of forcing the reader (and Lilith) to picture such societal problems as an inner, bodily problem, all the while imagining cancer itself to be something possessing great beauty and potential: human ambition therefore, “trigger[s] in [the Oankali] the response that cancer generally evokes in humans” (427). Thus the “not me” of the problems within society becomes absorbed into the DNA of “me” and the cancer that is utterly abject to the human imagination is fetishised, forcing two simultaneous disgust reactions. Interestingly, Brataas observes the significance of the “Human Contradiction” as it is described in terms that resemble the consequences of original sin: intelligence being the consequence of eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, and hierarchy being the consequent imbalances doled out in God’s punishments (93). That the Oankali are snake-like and seductive but disgusted by the consequences of the Fall adds a further level of irony to Butler’s constant biblical allusions.

The Oankali also believe that male humans have more of this “Human Contradiction” than females, a judgement that features throughout the trilogy and reveals an essentialist view of gender at the Oankali core (Zaki 241). Because of this, Zaki seems to view Butler’s understanding of humanity as “a biologically-determined entity” (242), but I think Zaki makes two critical errors here: the first in drawing an implicit connection between Butler’s views and those of some of her characters; the second

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71 There is an ongoing disagreement over whether the trilogy promotes or criticises biological essentialism. Critics such as Zaki, Johns and Yoo argue the former, whereas the majority of other readings
being that her main characters tend always to disagree with each other anyway.

Michelle Erica Green adds another caveat, that “Butler’s ‘essentialism’ is tricky; her novels focus on the exceptions to the rules she posits as human norms rather than on those who exemplify them” (167). Indeed, if we are to delve into Butler’s personal views, we find that while she concedes that biology does control behaviour “to some extent,” she still argues that “we can work around our programming if we understand it” (Potts 333). Like Melzer, I find it easier to believe that Butler engages with and challenges both constructivist and essentialist ideas, offering neither as a simple explanation for the motives and behaviours of her characters (98-99). This is an issue that I return to at several points in this chapter.

Let us now move to one of the larger triggers of disgust in the novels, which will take us through the following two novels in turn. The issue is Oankali sex and mating, with their aim to interbreed with humans in order to create a new hybrid species. If we recall Jdahya’s “gift” of fruit for Lilith, we find that he effectively uses this gift to bribe his way into her bed – at first in a nonsexual way, but still plainly alluding to the extrabiblical narratives that equate Eve’s eating of the fruit with sexual knowledge. Morse notes that while in the Hebrew this is not particularly hinted at, the Septuagint (LXX) “allows space for a more grotesque, sinful animal–human relationship” – and further, the postlapsarian enmity between the woman and the snake could suggest that

either offer a compromised opinion or a complete rejection of essentialism in the novel. Jesser argues that Butler endorses gender essentialism while undermining racial essentialism (39-40). Having said this, in the body of work surrounding Butler (particularly in discussions of race and gender) I notice a great deal of critics assuming that the views expressed in Butler’s narratives are her own. While this is something Butler has admitted to in some contexts (e.g. Lauren in Sower (Canavan, Butler 103)), it would be a mistake to conflate the narrative voices behind Lilith, Akin and Jodahs with their author. What this thesis focuses on instead is how the novels in question reflect the debates of their time, not the opinions of their authors.
before the Fall, “the snake and the woman were the opposite of enemies” (*Eve’s Afterlives* 22). But the first time Lilith is penetrated (through the base of her skull) by one of the Oankali tentacles, the action is not explicitly sexual: she “allows” her brain chemistry to be altered by an ooloi to improve her memory, though she is still horrified by the idea. The young ooloi Nikanj is given the task and is supposed to take her by surprise, but it lets her know of its intentions. I write “allows” in quotation marks above because she is given no real choice: either Nikanj will do it with her consent, or the elder (and more dislikeable) Kahguyaht will do it by force. In true Butlerian style, this dilemma is complicated by the fact that the young Nikanj is not old enough to make the experience pleasurable for her, whereas Kahguyaht *would* be able to do so. The text reads:

Nikanj had stretched out beside her as usual. It looked limp and dead. How would it be to awaken with Kahguyaht there instead, lying beside her like a grotesque lover instead of an unhappy child? She shuddered, fear and disgust almost overwhelming her. (*Dawn* 79)

I highlight this scene not only because it conveys disgust rather literally in Ahmed’s terms (i.e. that it might track across multiple societal taboos, as well as threaten the borders of herself and thereby make her less human), but also because the purpose of the operation is to impart *knowledge*, which in its usual form is out of reach because the Oankali will not allow her basic writing materials so that she can help herself learn the language. But importantly – and this is something oft overlooked in the criticism surrounding the trilogy – while Lilith awakens with her memory improved, she also perceives in herself a suspicious change in her emotions, as she “tried to feel alarmed” at Nikanj’s closeness, but now does not (*Dawn* 81). Here Butler’s Lilith reacts differently
to Eve after gaining this knowledge: Eve becomes afraid; Lilith knows she ought to be, but is not.

Butler is renowned for creating uncomfortable scenarios such as these in her speculative fiction.\(^\text{72}\) I am sure I am not alone in experiencing my own disgust response to Butler’s descriptions of Kahguyaht showing Lilith its hidden “sensory hand” (betentacled sexual/creative organ) within its “sensory arm” (extra limb) that gives off an “oddly flowery” odour, and Lilith’s comparisons of these features to a worm, a starfish, a snake and an elephant trunk (\textit{Dawn} 109-10). The triadic rather than dyadic Oankali bonding practices are not hugely shocking to most human readers, but the three-gendered matings are also generally incestuous, with males and females usually being siblings or cousins and the ooloi being the outsider. In this combination, particularly when these matings cross species boundaries, Aparajita Nanda argues that, “Butler seems to be challenging the masculinist and heteronormative presumptions of humanism, as well as its taboos against bestiality and incest” – the foundations of which are of course laid in biblical texts (“Human-Animal Divide” 118). I would not say “challenging” as Nanda does above, as again I do not propose that Butler offers the Oankali way as any kind of alternative to heteronormativity; instead I would write that Butler “troubles” these presumptions by forcing the reader at least to view them with a critical eye. Another layer of discomfort is added when Lilith discovers that the ooloi in the relationship is usually sexually immature and “brought” into sexual maturity by its male and female mates – as Lilith is supposed to do with young Nikanj (\textit{Dawn} 106). Thus

\(^{72}\) The most commonly cited dilemma of Butler’s being her time-travelling character’s decision in \textit{Kindred} to allow her slave-owning great-grandfather to live so that he might continue to rape her great-grandmother; a gruelling reinterpretation of the grandfather paradox in \textit{SpF}. 145
another taboo is woven into the dilemma for Lilith. Somehow, she must tolerate all this if she wishes to achieve for herself and her fellow captives a return to the promised Eden the Oankali have been supposedly (re)creating on Earth. At least for the first novel, her plan is to stay with this trouble until she can escape, but as her embittered conversations in later novels reveal, she never does so.

While the triadic relationships and third-gendered ooloi can be read as queer in their representation of other kinds of familial relationships, their bondings still always constitute a female-ooloi-male trio, overlooking, for example, what would have happened to those who may have been same-sex attracted, nonbinary73 and/or trans. While such individuals may simply not exist in Oankali life, they are still peculiarly absent from Lilith’s human companions. Some critics have questioned, as a result, whether the structured social order and the gender-morphing ooloi constructs belie a conservative current within Butler’s work.74 But Canavan offers an interesting alternative to why all of the humans awakened seem to be cisgendered and heterosexual: “perhaps, more sinesterly, some have been subtly altered by the Oankali so they are straight and cis-gendered now” (Butler 87). Certainly this is something the Oankali have done with other cases, revealing an ableist bias, “with the Oankali specifically refusing to allow certain types of bodies, conditions, and genetic predispositions to persist into the future” – something that Lilith unconsciously repeats as she selects which humans to awaken from hibernation (Canavan, Butler 87; see also Yoo 674). If this is the case, it is strange that Butler does not probe the problem more within the novels; this lack of exploration

73 Importantly, the ooloi are not nonbinary but another gender entirely.
74 See Zaki (244); Haraway, Visions (380); Brataas (86); Wallace (120-21); Jesser (45); Nanda’s contribution also suggests a colonial anxiety at work within this structure (“Mimic Man” 132).
has led many critics to read the trilogy as surprisingly uncritical of the nuances between
gender, sex, and sexuality being discussed, considering these were important topics for
feminist debate in the late 1980s. This is one of the reasons Zaki labels Butler herself as
an essentialist (241), though as I have mentioned, most take issue with this reading or
see it on a more complex level. For example, Melzer argues at length that the nature of
Jodah’s gender fluctuation according to its mates’ desires in *Imago* appears to anticipate
Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, though it is still biologically led (237-41).
Similarly, Jodahs’ sibling Aaor, who would have become female if Jodahs had been male,
suffers hugely as Jodahs becomes oooloi, eventually turning mollusc-like when unable to
find mates. The societal blueprints in *Lilith’s Brood* therefore demonstrate some facets
of essentialism as well as constructivism, through which Butler could instead be aiming
to convey how any set blueprint can create problems for those who find themselves
outside the norm.

For Erin Ackerman, the fact that Lilith slowly acclimatises to the Oankali is
instructive: “[...] through her desire Lilith is finally able to accept the Oankali and
overcome her repulsion toward them, in the process ultimately embracing a molecular
subjectivity and significant otherness” (31). But a more granular reading can uncover
countless details that prompt the reader to question this positive interpretation. Though
drawn to Nikanj because of their increasingly strong biological bond throughout the
trilogy, Lilith still retains a vein of rage, knowing how she has been manipulated. Her
accusations of “interbreeding” and “crossbreeding” are met with deflective euphemisms
like “genetic engineering” and “trade” that are chillingly eugenicist in their bent (*Dawn

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75 Here, as elsewhere, many misguidedly conflate Octavia Butler’s views with those reflected in her novels.
40, 42). Imagining her future offspring in this new relationship, Lilith thinks again of the monstrous: “Medusa children. Snakes for hair. Nests of night crawlers and eyes and ears” (*Dawn* 43). Osherow again links this aspect of Lilith’s fate to that of the Lilith of Jewish legend, who becomes “the incubator for a type of devil’s spawn” (75). And just as when Carter’s Evelyn flees his girlfriend Leilah/Lilith in *New Eve*, Lilith thinks of the desire she has experienced as a kind of sexually transmitted infection, “spreading its own genes like a disease among unwilling humans” (*Dawn* 64). In another example, Lilith describes the tentacle wrapping around her like “an oddly comfortable noose” (*Dawn* 158). “The noose,” writes Mann, “simultaneously encompasses the pleasure and pain, history and futurity, and abjection and subjection that constructs late twentieth-century black life” (62). Similarly, the following oxymoronic depiction of the alien as predator and comforter reveals a level of discomfort below the surface as it reaches for fellow human captive Tate “in a move that seemed impossibly swift, yet gentle, nonthreatening [...] like a striking cobra” (*Dawn* 187). As her partner Gabriel tries and fails to intervene, we see in this scene another representation of the garden myth, with Tate reaching for her serpentine companion, hesitating slightly, and being met by it, and with the man (more cautious, more prone to disgust) looking on in dismay.

I write “more prone to disgust” above because there is a recurring theme of male characters having much more visceral and resistant reactions to the ooloi than their female companions. When Nikanj wants to incorporate Lilith’s partner Joseph into its own relationship with Lilith, Joseph cries, “‘No!’” and “struggled violently” (*Dawn* 188-89). But as he settles Nikanj responds, “‘You see. Your body has made a different choice’” and even tells him “‘Be grateful, Joe’” (*Dawn* 189-90). It is incomprehensible
that Butler, as a self-identified feminist writer, intends for this to be a comfortable scene for anyone to read. Yet while scenes throughout the trilogy, particularly early on, “have clear overtures of rape” (Graybill 56), the word “rape” is never used to describe Oankali behaviour, though it is used frequently in human-human behaviour (Bonner 57). Joshua Yu Burnett astutely points out that, on top of this, there is “a stunning critical omission” in the scholarship surrounding Lilith’s Brood, in that it also tends not to equate the Oankali behaviour with rape (110). For example, Nolan Belk reads uncritically when he writes “In essence, Nikanj is right about Lilith’s body knowledge, as she goes on to prove through repeated pregnancies […]” (383). What Belk massively devalues is the fact that Lilith’s “bodily knowledge” (which Belk wrongly in my estimation likens to Lorde’s “erotic”) is a drugged state. Jim Miller, too, criticises other scholars for being “reductionist” if they write off the Oankali for their predatory or colonial tendencies (343). More recent feminist biblical scholarly engagement with the aliens and the issue of rape in these novels is provided by Meredith Minister, who reads scenes such as these as opportunities for opening up more nuanced discussions about sex “outside of the binary of consent and rape” (“Sex/Alien” 166). Minister’s work forms part of a recent wave of research in feminist biblical studies that considers new feminist and queer interventions into rape narratives in the Bible. 76 In this I am reminded of Moore’s description of the treatment of the Jezebel as another such omission from earlier biblical criticism, which repeatedly chose to translate the Son of God saying, “I am throwing her

76 For more on this issue the recent monograph by Rhiannon Graybill, Texts After Terror, which also incorporates Ahmed’s “sticky” affective theory as well as Haraway’s “non-innocent reading practice” into its analysis.
on a bed” (Rev. 2.22) in a nonsexual manner, encouraging the reader to feel disgust at *Jezebel* rather than at the attacker (*Torment/Bliss* 67).

It is thought-provoking that so many of the texts covered in this thesis feature at least one scene or reference to a man or boy being raped, often by someone or something that does not identify as a cisgendered male human. Perhaps this is to maximise the cognitive estrangement in the reader and thereby awaken them to the frequency of violence against women in both biblical texts and popular culture. In the examples of rape in *Lilith’s Brood*, the crux of the matter is in the idea of bodily versus emotional/verbal consent. This, to me, is another convincing reason not to separate (or privilege) physiological affect from psychological emotion, for the two are far more complexly intertwined. For Ackerman, what is problematic in this scene is that the alien perceives Joseph’s feeling of desire as consent, whereas Joseph is actually feeling both desire and disgust (and many more interconnected feelings and emotions), hence he withheld verbal consent (something the Oankali do not value) (37).

For many of the human men involved, then, the stronger resistance to the Oankali seems to be based in certain ideas of masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality. Butler’s character Gabriel, a former actor, explains their predicament:

> He’s taken like a woman and... [...] He knows the oooli aren’t male. He knows all the sex that goes on is in his head. It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t fucking matter! Someone else is pushing all his buttons. He can’t let them get away with that. (*Dawn* 203)

In another instance, though Peter himself attempts to capture and rape one of the women in the group, he deems what the Oankali do to him far more depraved: “to demean himself in alien perversions. His humanity was profaned. His manhood was taken away” (*Dawn* 192). In this instance, Peter’s manhood is bound up in his sense of
humanity, and vice versa; and these are qualities that are based in the sense that the original human creature is a masculine body at the top of the hierarchy. Amanda Boulter observes that in these moments, “[t]he spectre of homosexuality haunts the inter-species group matings and is constructed as potentially more threatening to ‘human nature’ than the aliens themselves” (175). As is evident in the examples above, for the humans in Butler’s trilogy, experiencing intense emotional pleasure with an alien who is both “other” and seemingly masculine causes men in particular to experience deep shame and anger. Yet, as I have mentioned above, this is complicated by the fact that the more the Oankali behaviour is seen as a blatant disregarding of consent, the less the humans’ fearful reactions read as irrational (Burnett 116). When Peter attacks his ooloi and causes the ooloi to reflexively sting and kill him in what initially reads as a fit of gay panic, then, (after much critical reading) reads more like justified self-defence in the face of rape (Burnett 116). Hence Lilith half fears and half admires the two men who continue to react like this and will only cooperate with the nonhumans after being heavily drugged (Gabriel and Curt): “Were they strong, then?” she asks the reader to consider, “Or simply unable to adapt?” (Dawn 201). Beneath the question lurks its opposite: are the women and other men weak, then? Or better able to adapt?

Dorothy Allison neatly sums up three ways in which relationships with the Oankali threaten human norms:

The men feel as if they have lost authority (they have); the women feel as if they are being bred like animals (they are); and all feel some horror of what might be hidden homosexual desires—after all, there is no way to be sure an ooloi is a man or a woman. (477)

To Allison’s list of anxieties above I would add three more: first a discomfort with group sex, second the horror of bestiality, and third, the horror of incest for some pairings
(such as Jesusa and Tomás). All of these concerns find their roots in the blueprint(s) for heteronormative coupling in Genesis: the man has authority; the woman finds her redemption in childbearing; the coupling is heterosexual; there are only two of them; they are necessarily both human; and they are not related to each other (though, as Rashkow points out, Adam and Eve are “brother/sister, now husband/wife” (63)). Where we find such sexual taboos, then, we find a comfortable home for the mythical Lilith, whom Rivlin describes as “a convenient totem for men and women frightened by their inner desires” (97). What is faintly ironic about these concerns is that Oankali sex is actually a strangely unsexual act in its lack of genital contact: the male and female participants do not even touch (because each lies to one side of the oooloi), thus “[i]t is even impossible to separate the ‘act’ from ‘fantasy’” (Melzer 236). The Butlerian twist of this arrangement being that what follows is an inability for human partners to touch each other sexually or even affectionately after they have experienced this intimacy as a triad, thereby keeping them in a kind of forced innocence where there can be no normative human intimacy. Readers may be reminded that the mythical Lilith has been blamed for a similar sexual problem completely lacking in physical touch: that of “natural nocturnal emissions” (Rivlin 97).77 Butler’s Lilith receives the same blame for essentially the same crime, positioned as she is as a mediator between Oankali and human.

77 Aviva Cantor adds, “By sapping the men’s ‘life-fluid’ while they are asleep—a metaphor for reducing them to powerlessness—she weakens their ability to function as men; that is, she damages their masculinity” (19). Cantor connects this anxiety and the time of its writing to the fact that Jewish identity was itself under extreme threat during the Middle Ages in Europe (20). This perhaps resonates with Butler’s characters whose survival has been threatened on a global scale.
Part of her role as mediator involves training her fellow humans to survive when they will be placed back on Earth. Their “training ground” (still on the ship) is an Earth-like island, essentially a smaller, temporary Eden, described in similar language to that of Genesis 1: first dwelling on light and shape, then plant life, then animal life. It comes complete with a multitude of creeping things that creep upon the earth, “snakes, centipedes, mosquitoes and other things Lilith would have preferred to live without” – perhaps a reference to Genesis 1.26. These chthonic creatures are the animals that had managed to survive the nuclear wars, thereby comprising a Chthulucene like the one favoured by Haraway. Butler has Nikanj’s language also echo Genesis 1 when it first introduces the group to the area:

“Let the humans get used to being here now. Let them explore and see for themselves that they are in a forest on an island. Let them begin to feel what it’s like to live here.” It hesitated. “Let them settle more firmly into their places with their ooloi. They can tolerate one another now. Let them learn that it isn’t shameful to be together with one another and with us.” (Dawn 199-200)

The repetition of “let” is instantly recognisable as God’s creative commands, as in “‘Let there be light,’” “‘Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters,’” and “‘Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear’” (Gen. 1.3, 6, 9, etc.). The final sentence uttered by Nikanj also recalls the condition of being “not ashamed” from the second creation narrative, in Genesis 2.25: that is, before having eaten the fruit. What is interesting about the presence of this phrase “not ashamed” in Genesis 2 is that the condition of being “not ashamed” necessitates a knowledge of what shame is, which of course the first couple do not yet know. The author(s) of this biblical passage rely upon the readers’
knowledge of shame in order to make the point about its absence: an affectless experience that is by definition not achievable.

In *Dawn*, as we have seen above, Lilith and her fellow humans in this group know the shame of their new intimacies all too well. But there is also a fascinating interplay between sexual shame and fear here that is equally discernible in biblical scholarship on the garden narrative. Referring to other instances of nakedness in the Hebrew Bible, Jonathan Magonet provides insight into why the first couple’s new awareness of their nakedness should not be about sexual shame but instead understood to be about vulnerability (43). The knowledge of good and evil is connected therefore in the sense that they now know how utterly vulnerable they are. “We focus on the thought that Adam was afraid because he had been disobedient,” writes Magonet, “But it is also the first time that fear and the seeking of shelter and protection have entered the Garden, both being consequences of their understanding of their human frailty” (44). Just as Adam hides from God, the humans attempt to hide from the Oankali by running away within their enclosed Edenic training ground. It is this vulnerability to the far greater power and intelligence of their captors, with the knowledge of their implicitly shameful pleasure in their company, that drives the humans into (fruitless) hiding. Curt’s anger and disgust at the aliens’ intrusion in this garden (however artificial) leads to a violent confrontation, not only with the aliens but also with Lilith and her partner Joseph: “This is a human place!” he shouts, “It’s off limits to you and your animals” (*Dawn* 227). Again Genesis 2-3 is implicitly cited here in the way it places borders between what is animal and what is human; Adam was not satisfied with the company of animals and needed his human companion.
As a friend to these “animals,” Lilith is seen as a “Judas goat” in her community, a term that conjures images of the betrayal of Judas and the use of a scapegoat (*Dawn* 67). Also seeing it as such, Rachel Stein describes this phrase as “an ambiguous term that implies that she is betraying others and/or that she is being betrayed, as well as acting as the scapegoat” (215-16). Lilith sums this ambiguity up when she continues to describe herself “either as a traitor or as a ticking bomb” in their midst (*Dawn* 241). This language is again suggestive of the depictions of Eve and Lilith in Christian and Jewish cultures as a *femme fatale*, whether a traitor of her kind (in Lilith’s case) or simply a liability (in Eve’s case). Yet (because the narrative perspective is partial to her thoughts) the betrayal enacted by Butler’s Lilith is at least initially based in her dedication to her species:

Ironically, it is Lilith’s very desire for environmental justice—for humans to return to earth, their home environment, and to reinhabit the restored planet, as well as her desire for humans to find some way to continue as a species, outside the terms of the trade—that leads her to assume the role of “first parent,” responsible for convincing fellow captives to cooperate with each other and with the Oankali. (R. Stein 215)

Citing the work of Vandana Shiva, Rachel Stein argues that in Lilith’s “compromised position and underground resistance,” Butler further links her protagonist to black women whose rights and freedoms have been abused not only in the history of slavery but also in the heavily prejudiced contemporary medical and environmental spheres in the US (216). Thus Butler carefully links the insidious sexism and racism at work within the Eve and Lilith myths to the intersecting issues affecting women, particularly women of colour, in her own time.
What eventually binds the human captives to the Oankali more powerfully than anything is the knowledge that they cannot conceive children without them (Dawn 245).78 Nikanj’s revelation of this fact to Lilith again reflects biblical language:

“Is it an unclean thing that we want, Lilith?”
“Yes!”
“Is it an unclean thing that I have made you pregnant?” [...] “I have made you pregnant with Joseph’s child. I wouldn’t have done it so soon, but I wanted to use his seed, not a print [...]” (Dawn 246)

In this community of would-be parents, naming again becomes significant: readers might notice in this group several characters associated with unusual parentage in the Bible: as well as Lilith there is a Leah (perhaps referring to the infertility narrative of Genesis 29), a Joseph and a Gabriel (suggestive of the virgin birth) (Dawn 246). But it is Nikanj who comes to represent a skewed biblical Gabriel figure: he is the messenger who tells her that she is going to have the baby, even if she says she doesn’t want it. This subversive retelling of the immaculate conception links Butler’s Lilith now to Mary, mother of Jesus, but in this case the child’s otherness is monstrous rather than divine:

“It will be a thing,” she groans, “A monster” (Dawn 247). Here we see again the Kristeuan horror of the abject because “[h]er pregnancy is a literal absorption of the ‘other’ into the self, so that the child she will give birth to will be both flesh of her flesh and an alien corruption of her humanity” (Boulter 176). This corruption has severed the border (which in Ahmed’s terms is already dirty) between the me and the not-me, in which once again “what threatens from the outside only threatens insofar as it is already within” (Emotion 86). As a future mother of what she calls monsters, we begin to see

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78 The fact that the Oankali have forcibly sterilised humans is something Dayal and other scholars have noted is an official act of genocide (105). That they do so without their consent further marks the act as rape, something Burnett criticises Nanda in particular for seeming to overlook when she writes that she “lets herself be impregnated against her will” (Nanda, qtd. in Burnett 114-15).
Lilith taking her place as her mythical namesake does in relation to creation – as well as embodying Revelation’s “great whore, who corrupted the earth with her fornication” (19.2).

**Adulthood Rites**

Strangely, the construct human-Oankali child Lilith is pregnant with at the close of *Dawn* barely features in the next two novels. Perhaps playing to the sometime role of Lilith as inverted Madonna, Butler leaps forward to her later Messiah-like hybrid child, Akin, whose perspective enables readers both to empathise with Oankali aims and to mistrust them. Akin, who starts life genderless as all Oankali and then becomes male, also finds himself increasingly sympathetic to the separatist humans who kidnap him, allowing the reader to see them more complexly too. *Adulthood Rites* (henceforth *Adulthood*) introduces readers to life as it now exists on Earth: with hybrid communities such as Lilith’s as well as resister communities of separatist humans. What is immediately striking, on reading this alongside Genesis 2-3, is that the conditions the resisters are allowed to live in are strangely similar to those of Eden, so the Oankali have to some extent held to their promise. Humans living in Oankali communities lead long lives without illness, have an easy reliance on the land for sustenance, and experience no “natural” procreation. But as I stated in the introduction to this thesis, the negative aspects of the garden narrative highlighted by Trible and others also show themselves all too clearly in these villages – through loneliness, boredom, a potentially toxic environment and a very persuasive serpent-like monster. Through Akin, these negative
aspects provide powerful insights into both Oankali and human nature. Citing Joan Gordon and Donna Haraway, Nanda calls Akin in his liminal state between species an “amborg,” a blending of animal and cyborg which “dismantles the established hierarchies of power-fraught anthropocentrism by recognizing its unique subject position that draws on the human-animal hiatus only to blur the boundaries” (“Human-Animal Divide” 115-16). For Nanda, these blurrings come to represent a kind of hope— but as is evident in this chapter, this is a claim I frequently challenge. This is again largely based in Butler’s use of disgust, which returns as a central motif in Adulthood.

By nine months, Akin has the intelligence of an adult, but still looks like a nine-month-old baby—this fact (and the knowledge of his hybridity) disgusts multiple human characters who come into contact with him. For the reader, too, several aspects of his character generate discomfort: Akin’s anxiety about weaning, his contented knowledge that his sister will likely become his mate, and the fact that he uses breastfeeding to “read” his human mother through her skin. Despite the fact that he looks fully human, these characteristics lead his human kidnappers to associate him more with his alien Oankali parent than with his human parents. His alienness in turn highlights his animalness, and again we see humans comparing his Oankali nature to a serpent, even though he has no tentacles: for example, his kidnapper “held him as disgustedly as he had once seen another man hold a snake” (Adulthood 317). But this disgust is tempered by his human desire to have his own children: in similar terms to those of Ahmed and of Haraway, Butler describes the man’s inner conflict as he experiences “the kind of curiosity that made some Humans turn over rotting logs—so they could enjoy being disgusted by what lived there” (Adulthood 328). Other characters, particularly those who
are more used to human-Oankali interaction, grow to love Akin; and it is through these relationships that Akin’s allegiance sways eventually from Oankali to human.

One of the main factors in Akin’s change of heart is his discovery that their use of Earth is temporary: they will one day depart in their ships, “leaving the Earth a stripped ruin” in search of another species to “save” and planet to strip for resources (Adulthood 404). He discovers that, when they depart Earth, they will leave it “less than the corpse of a world” – a fate that is worse, in terms of ecological holocaust, than the human-caused nuclear wars that at least some vegetation and animals survived (Adulthood 365). In this light, many of the humans who had been open-minded and less anthropocentric, seemingly more willing to mate with Oankali, come to realise that the Oankali themselves have an Oankali-centricity that is even more damaging to biodiversity than humankind has been. Readers encountering this twist will identify a powerful ecological critique of anthropocentrism in Butler’s writing, though one that is delivered indirectly. “Oankali acquisitiveness, then, is not merely generative; it is also catastrophically destructive,” writes Rachel Greenwald Smith, “The eschatological scenario looms either way” (560). While Greenwald Smith argues that the Oankali plan is still more hopeful than the human nuclear genocide, the image of Earth-as-wasteland and “lucky” few escapees still reads to me (and other critics such as Molly Wallace) as a deliberate provocation by Butler. If (as Haraway writes) “it matters what worlds world worlds” (Trouble 35), then the Oankali who are “worlds in themselves” only ever reproduce temporary versions of themselves in every planet they colonise, before discarding them in search of another trade (Adulthood 365).
I also cannot help but identify this vision of a future barren Earth with its exclusive alien pods with Revelation’s New Jerusalem, outside of which everything is utterly unliveable. Dale Knickerbocker concurs that “[…] the godlike Oankali’s intervention into post-nuclear holocaust Earth’s history and its metaphorical ‘judgment’ of humanity’s genetic ‘sins’ clearly parallel St. John’s apocalyptic model […]” (352). Like many contemporary biblical scholars reading Revelation, Lilith (and later Akin) sees the privileged few survivors at the end of the world as potential villains rather than heroes (Moore, Torment/Bliss 93). Nevertheless, Lilith feels that she must stay with the trouble anyway, whereas Akin agitates for separatists to have their own human colony on Mars.

Both are uncomfortable compromises; this is a trilogy in which “the process of demolishing existing boundaries in order to begin any kind of restructuring is accompanied by equal measures of pleasure and pain” (Wolmark 32). I would go further than Wolmark to argue that the pain far outweighs the pleasure, but Lilith works hard to find moments of meaning in a dilemma over which she has no real control. This is clear in Lilith’s behaviour in the latter novels, as she forever experiences a kind of “conflicted grief” at what has been lost (Greenwald Smith 561). This conflicted grief of the compromised survivor continues to highlight the problematics of the biblical Revelation, and because of its indeterminacy, “[o]ne hardly thinks the prophet of Patmos would approve” (Knickerbocker 349). That mixed legacy of hope and grief in Lilith forms a fascinating interaffectivity between the creation myths, the Lilith myth, the Book of Revelation, and the Reagan-era apocalyptic fears at the time of Butler’s writing. Because of its lack of neat resolution, Greenwald Smith concludes that the trilogy “shows that thinking eschatologically need not be reckless, utopian, sacrificial, or heroic” (560). In a
sense, Greenwald Smith anticipates Haraway’s *Trouble* by uttering these words, since staying with the trouble involves acclimatising to discomfort and working through it rather than seeking any mythical “cure-all” solution.

Though we see less of Lilith and are not partial to her perspective in *Adulthood*, readers still learn new information through her son’s observations and new character Tino’s encounters with her. For Tino, an ex-resister who becomes Lilith’s new human partner, Lilith is an “[u]nusual name loaded with bad connotations” (*Adulthood* 285). At first, readers might think this is at last a recognition of the mythical Lilith, as Tino recounts the rumours “that she was possessed of the devil, that she had sold first herself, then Humanity,” but then adds, “that she was the first to go willingly to an Oankali bed to become their whore and to seduce other Humans…” (*Adulthood* 298). As we have already seen in Carter’s work, the figure Lilith is often portrayed as a black woman (Wood 89), but readers learn that Tino’s society has produced its own myth perhaps unconsciously based in this same archetype, about Lilith Iyapo. It undoubtedly includes some of the details of the “original” mythical Lilith, as Butler’s Lilith admits, “‘they hear my name, they assume I have horns. Some of the younger ones have been taught to blame me for everything—as though I were a second Satan or Satan’s wife or some such idiocy’” (*Adulthood* 297). But Butler’s Lilith also believes it is she who has made the name famous in their world: “‘I’m not just someone stuck with an unpopular name, Tino. I’m the one who made it unpopular. I’m Lilith Iyapo!’” (*Adulthood* 297). It is as if the original Lilith myth has never existed and, instead, this is its origin story, even though it has clearly been fed by the earlier myth, thereby demonstrating how some associations are particularly sticky. Lilith’s response to some of these rumours is to erupt
into “startling, terrible laughter” – a Medusan response that frightens Tino (Adulthood 299). Her laughter is that of a woman resigned to her reputation, and determined to continue surviving regardless, and Tino’s terror is certainly revealing in that it stems from her laughter rather than the stories about her.

When laughter is not enough, Lilith deals with her “flares of bitterness” by isolating herself in the forest (Adulthood 273), and Akin observes, “[t]here was so much suppressed emotion in her, so much deadly tension in her body” (Adulthood 355). These flares of bitterness are perhaps brought about by the dissonance between what she had believed herself to be able to achieve, i.e. an Edenic life back on Earth with a loving family, and what she really feels. Ahmed describes this phenomenon as follows: “Anger can fill the gap between the promise of a feeling and the feeling of a feeling. We become strangers, or affect aliens, in such moments” (“Creating Disturbance” 35). When the affect alien is a black woman, as in this case, her anger often becomes relegated to a stereotype rather than considered for what it reveals about her environment – something that is reinforced even by the Oankali who live with Lilith. For example, when Nikanj tells Akin: “She needed to hate me for a while so that she could stop hating herself” (Adulthood 300). This gaslighting technique directs the blame away from the Oankali and places it on Lilith’s shoulders. “To speak out of anger as woman of color is then to confirm your position as the cause of tension;” writes Ahmed, the result of which is that “your anger is what threatens the social bond” (“Creating Disturbance” 36). For the Oankali, Lilith’s anger disrupts their bond, whereas her anger might instead be written differently, as in Bray and Moore’s formula: “How might anger diagnose a
situation in which someone is kidnapped, taken from their home, promised paradise on return to that home, but then finds it wanting?”

But there are also elements of Lilith’s “flares of bitterness” that hint at the garden narrative. When asked directly, Lilith says she leaves for a period of time, hates Nikanj, then misses her children, then misses Nikanj (Adulthood 301). This emotional process seems to mirror the final biblical punishment given to the woman after she has eaten the fruit: “‘I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; / in pain you shall bring forth children, / yet your desire shall be for your husband, / and he shall rule over you’” (Gen. 3.16). The emphasis of Crislip’s article on emotions in Eden is on the fact that what the NRSV translates as “pangs” and “pain” have more traditionally been interpreted, from the Septuagint to Augustine, as emotional rather than (or as well as) physical suffering, hence the KJV’s use of the word “sorrow” for both terms (109-11, 126, 128). Certainly Lilith lives a life free of physical pain, thanks to the Oankali’s medical interventions, yet she is destined to experience the same sorrow promised to the transgressive woman in the garden. Clearly the Oankali’s “garden” world (re)created for the surviving humans and hybrids is not one that is emotionally prelapsarian. Canavan’s observation that Lilith’s feelings illustrate a kind of Stockholm Syndrome could equally be applied to Gen. 3.16 (Butler 96). This again reads like a postlapsarian world, where the dissonance between the stereotypical heterosexual monogamous couple becomes part of the accepted patriarchal family dynamic: hard to live with, but harder to live without. Green observes that one recurring feminist project in Butler’s works is “to make male characters experience sex and reproduction from the position of females in male-dominated culture” (170). Brataas concurs, adding that, in human-Oankali sex and
reproduction “the penis is useless” – the betentacled “sensory arm” instead producing a phobic reaction in the human men for whom the phallus has always been a symbol of their dominance (89). As such, resister Tino also becomes “[v]ery much attached to the family [...] yet poisonously resentful and bitter sometimes” – experiencing the same conflicted desire for his mate(s) as the biblical Eve (Adulthood 306). Thus by making the problem of sexual inequality applicable to male humans as well as female ones, Butler allows the reader (through cognitive estrangement) to transplant the biblical ruling into another paradigm, where sexual submission might seem more unusual and therefore more easily identifiable as abusive.

In this way, Butler’s Lilith continues to represent an Eve figure as well as a Lilith figure as she carries on surviving in this “fallen” situation as the “mother of all” (Osherow, 76), even tending her own growing place that they refer to as “Lilith’s garden,” a refuge that exists outside of the Oankali organism in which their community resides (Imago 559). Lilith’s gardens are always on the outside of the mainstream community – partly for Lilith and her human companions’ benefit and partly to allow resisters to take any food they might need. This may be a gesture of Butler’s to Alice Walker’s influential 1974 essay, “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” which was taken up by womanist thinkers across multiple disciplines, including those within global feminist theologies. Additionally, what Lilith represents as a parent, lover and leader is close to what Delores S. Williams describes as the “wilderness experience,” important to womanist theology, which includes processes that involve “the activity of survival, of community building, of structuring a positive quality of life for family and community”

79 See Letty M. Russell et al., Inheriting Our Mothers’ Gardens (11-17); see also Kathleen Sands (55).
and “female-male [i.e. inclusive] intelligence and ingenuity in the midst of struggle, creating a culture of resistance” (160). Early on, Lilith explains how she sees her inclusive strategy to Akin:

Humans persecute their different ones, yet they need them to give themselves definition and status. Oankali seek difference and collect it. They need it to keep themselves from stagnation and overspecialization. [...] When you feel a conflict, try to go the Oankali way. Embrace difference. (Adulthood 329)

This passage, oft quoted by critics, shows Lilith giving Akin a clear lesson on staying with the trouble: on tolerance, on resistance to disgust or anger. Countless critics are right to highlight this moment of Lilith advising her son on a key feminist, posthuman, anti-racist lesson, but I would argue that it comes not from the Oankali but from Lilith herself. She offers the middle ground of staying with the trouble, neither reactionary and xenophobic like many of the human characters, nor homogenising like the alien characters. Nanda notes that Akin “utilizes [this] Oankali trait” (which I have argued is actually a Lilith trait) and nevertheless uses it to the advantage of all opposing sides (“Human-Animal Divide” 120). And it is the very human emotion Akin feels – anger – that is the key ingredient for this lesson: “Despite his initial incomprehension of this new emotion (anger), Akin’s experience allows him later to empathize with the anger and hopelessness of the human resisters [...] as well as the fears and violent reactions that stem from these emotions” (Nanda, “Mimic Man” 124). While Nanda does not place this exploration of affect into biblical terms, I find it resonates with my argument that emotions such as fear, disgust and anger draw the experiencer away from the present in search of soothing stories that present the world in easier, more divisive terms. Both the creation narratives and the Apocalypse of John establish “definition and status” through emotionally loaded anxieties about difference, and how to keep those differences
separate. Thanks to his mother’s advice, Akin’s ability to “stay with” these mixed feelings enables him to mediate between the two opposing societies.

As this liminal figure between species and cultures, Akin is also able to provide the reader with a more informed idea of what exactly Lilith experienced in the first novel when she had her body manipulated by an ooloi. He experiences the same thing himself, but can picture it with more precision:

It was delicately controlling his nervous system, stimulating the release of certain endorphins in his brain—in effect, causing him to drug himself into pleasurable relaxation and acceptance. His body was refusing to allow him to panic. As he was enfolded in a union that felt more like drowning than joining, he kept jerking toward panic only to have the emotion smothered in something that was almost pleasure. He felt as though something were crawling down his throat and he could not manage a reflexive cough to bring it up. (Adulthood 454).

Moore notes that this kind of reflexive gagging is “[...] the predominant (e)motion that Revelation seeks to induce in its audience, a heaving of the stomach, obtained by rhetorically thrusting its fingers down the audience’s throat” (“Retching” 524). After generating this feeling of disgust, the reader is more easily swayed by the promise of catharsis. Through this image, Butler does the same for the reader, forcing them to imagine the horror of overwhelm and then the relief of being “smothered” by the pleasure of oblivion. Seeing it at work even on half-Oankali Akin, we now see that this narcotic tool makes the ooloi fully capable of swaying the minds of others, using affective landscapes to alter their physical ones. Their power is strong enough to change resister Tino’s mind, creating for him “the half-remembered feeling he had come back [to the Oankali] for” (Adulthood 302). This is the nostalgic longing also offered by the garden myth that Haraway calls “the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness,” to which she warns her readers not to succumb (“Cyborg” 55). The brief surfeit of pleasure
offered by the Oankali provides a sort of short-term anaesthetic that can operate either as a mini affectless Eden or a sparkling New Jerusalem to which the humans can escape. The drug quite literally stops them from staying with the trouble – they forget the loss of their world, their inability to touch and connect with each other, their infertility, the rape of their planet. While this relief is sweet in the moment, the result on waking is the realisation that things are just as compromised as they had been before the sleep.

Scenes like this form an analogue of the individual who, observing a polluted landscape, closes their eyes and dreams of sweeping it away and creating paradise from scratch, when there is no scratch.

Through Akin again, readers also learn more about the way the Oankali manipulate the genetics of other life around them to serve their purposes. A telling example of this is in Akin’s struggle to reconcile his new distrust of Oankali with elements of their society that seem kinder, more advanced, than humanity: “Humans put animals in cages or tied them to keep them from straying,” he reasons, “Oankali simply bred animals who enjoyed doing what they were intended to do” (Adulthood 446). Zaki highlights this as a post-industrial accomplishment that “obviates class strife” (243), but I would question whether it truly does. Waste-free and biodegradable living technology may be a laudable aim, but given the Oankali’s general inability to empathise with humans, and their talent for manipulating even their own kind (as Akin is swayed), how can the reader be sure that their servant animals truly enjoy their servitude? Is this not a reiteration of propaganda for eugenics and slavery? My instinct is to suppose that Butler has written this scene in order to make readers question Akin’s
thoughts on the matter. If these aliens “treat the Humans like an animal species that is greedily adopted to satisfy alien pleasure” (Braid 59), and we know that this creates suffering for the humans that the Oankali cannot recognise, how can readers know for sure that the same was not done with whatever trades helped them develop their work-loving slaves? I find another parallel in this with the instruction given to the first human in Genesis 1.26, where God commands, “‘let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’” Depending on the nuances of the word translated as “dominion,” this pericope can seem to endorse anything from complete control to gentle stewardship, as feminist scholarship has shown (Trible, 85). Reading this pericope alongside Dawn, it is hard not to imagine Butler’s intention being to awaken the reader to the same question.

Fascinatingly, what helps Akin understand humans better is the art of storytelling – something he initially does not understand. Gabriel (who used to be an actor) performs some of King Lear for him, which enables Akin to open himself to abstract empathic thinking: “Somehow [...] he felt what Gabe seemed to want him to feel. Surprise, anger, betrayal, utter bewilderment, despair, madness...” (Adulthood 408). This helps Akin understand humans better, and why at least for them, “it matters what stories tell stories” (Haraway, Trouble 35). This, in turn, conveys to the reader why it matters that these SpF novels are told through the lenses of biblical creation and apocalypse, as well as the associated myth of Lilith. The reader need not take the Lilith’s

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80 And yet a few critics cite an interview with Butler that seems to imply that she herself supports the idea of this kind of strategic breeding (N. Jacobs 104; Belk 377). My own reading of the Larry McCaffery interview in which she speculates about the matter is that Butler’s enthusiasm for “breeding humans” (62) is ambivalent at best – she is more than conscious of the nuances and dangers of genetic engineering.
Brood novels as fact, just as they may not wish to take biblical myth literally, in order to understand the affective message being woven through their intertextual relationship to one another. Understanding it in terms of Oankali’s manipulative abilities, Akin effectively explains the role of the author to the reader: “Sometimes you have to [...] use a feeling you have about one thing to help someone understand something else” (Adulthood 409).

Akin comes into contact with another biblical narrative at a resister salvagers’ site, where he tastes and is almost poisoned by a tacky motion card of Jesus preaching at the Sermon on the Mount (Adulthood 388). Nanda notices the irony that Akin, himself a Christlike figure, experiences extreme disgust and abjection of the tacky Jesus figure he encounters. He knows nothing of the figure on the card, but is in fact poisoned by the plastic – one of the only things the Oankali ships cannot consume. But “subtextually, readers can also perceive his reaction as a response to the knowledge of, or more specifically, to knowing and tasting Christ’s suffering in an immediate and tangible way” (“Mimic Man” 126-27). In a kind of inverted eucharist, Akin learns of this poison by tasting the card, since his tongue is his most intelligent sensing tool. The act of his tasting is also, of course, suggestive of the forbidden fruit, but which is the very opposite of “good for food” in this scenario. Nanda’s reading of this scene is, again, a more hopeful interpretation of an allusion to Eden in which “Butler literally transforms the ‘tasting’ of knowledge in the Bible, noted as the cause of fall and death, to a necessary means of life and restoration” (“Mimic Man” 127). Mary Grover’s more pessimistic interpretation posits that Akin’s disgust at the plastic Jesus “transmits a critique of
evangelical Christianity in consumer culture” (75). She goes on to delineate the effect of
the juxtaposition of “Plastic Christ” with “Akin”:

Plastic Christ disseminates patriarchy in its most toxic form—unquestioned male
authority. Unlike Akin, who, significantly, will always be short, looking up to others even
after his metamorphosis to adulthood, plastic Christ holds forth from on high. Incapable
of listening, plastic Christ proclaims. Without a participating audience, his preaching is
literally and figuratively mechanical. (75)

Whichever interpretation the reader prefers, Butler’s intentions both to critique
environmental pollution and to juxtapose Akin and Christ are clear. Akin becomes the
“new Adam/Eve” experiencing and reacting to the extreme suffering in his environment.
As he goes on – again in a Christlike way – to quite literally feel and transmit the
suffering of the human separatists to the Oankali back on the ship (through their
seamless betentacled connections), “Akin shows us that separate and self-contained
beings can overcome empathy aversion” and “manage the terror’ of self-dissolving
closeness with the Other” (Grover 81, 83, 84). These, again, read as arguments for
staying with the trouble through the act of resisting traditional ways of reading (and
consequently feeling the emotions associated with) certain influential stories.

*Imago*

*Imago* further probes the taboos portrayed as merely abstract in the first two
novels, as readers encounter Oankali-style sibling relationships in human siblings for the
first time. Brother and sister, Tomás and Jesusa81 are pursued by Lilith’s first oooli

81 While not particularly pertinent to the focus of this thesis, it is worth pointing out that Jesusa and
Tomás seem to mirror characteristics of the biblical Jesus and “Doubting” Thomas, only in reverse. Jesusa
is immensely suspicious of Jodahs, whereas Tomás unquestioningly accepts his own healing wounds. But
Jesusa also possesses Christlike qualities in the fact that she heals Jodahs by her presence (Brataas 95).
construct child, Jodahs. Jesusa and Tomás belong to a rare fertile community of humans who have had to interbreed to bear their own children, all the while unfortunately also transmitting another terrible genetic disease that disfigures them. Their community has developed a myth of its own, complete with miraculous birth from their “First Mother” known as “Maria de la Luz” – her human son, of course, is named “Adan” (Imago 662). In other overt allusions to Genesis 2-3, Maria is said to have worked in the gardens and a tree is planted at her shrine. Peppers notes how the human separatists use and adapt these stories of creation and incarnation to maintain their identities as essentialist, pure humans (51). With their history of inbreeding in their separatist town however, with the aid of Butler’s constant references to Genesis 1 and 2-3, readers may now be doubly reminded of the necessarily incestuous begettings of the Bible’s first descendants of Adam and Eve. Many have pointed out that the complicated three- or four-way procreative relationship between Adam and Lilith, or Adam and Eve, and God in biblical myth creates similar problems: Danielle Storper-Perez and Henri Cohen-Solal ask, “[is] Lilith … original mother, twin sister or wife of Adam?” (298).

Having left this community, Jesusa is horrified at the idea that Jodahs wants to mate with her and her brother. She tells it that, though their community had to do that in the past, “Like the children of Adam and Eve,” that wasn’t necessary now (Imago 637). It is interesting that this society does speak about Adam and Eve, when Tino clearly knew nothing of the original Lilith myth that seems to have fed into myths about Lilith Iyapo. Perhaps this is another example of the “othered” Lilith figure being more easily erased than the canonical figure of Eve. Despite her initial disgust at the idea, through

Citing Gloria Anzaldúa, Delilah Bermudez Brataas describes how this matriarchal Spanish-speaking community, with its feminine Jesus, reflects some Central and South American Christian societies.
contact with Jodahs, Jesusa soon acclimatises (with suspicion, like Lilith) to this implicitly sexual relationship with the “devil” Oankali and her own brother. Later, there is “fear, anger, envy, and fascination” on the faces of the fertile resisters who witness their connection with Jodahs (*Imago* 736). Human elder Francisco is “afraid and confused and ashamed and powerfully drawn to the idea of potential Oankali mates” (*Imago* 739). This description of such a quick succession of conflicting emotions shows a real-time journey of the push-pull of desire and disgust (as described by Ahmed, *Emotion* (87)) at work within these characters.

Disgust is reemphasised again in another Butlerian scenario when, in order to be healed by the Oankali, a woman who has been beaten and raped by other human separatists must be penetrated by ooloi tentacles. Since the penetration occurs nowhere near the genitals, this could be portrayed by Butler in a less distinctly sexual way, but Jodahs describes its contact with her as follows: “The pull of the female, injured, alone [...] was overwhelming” – and later, “The beauty of her flesh was my reward” (*Imago* 577). Later, it is as jealous as a possessive lover: “I didn’t want to share her with [Nikan]” (*Imago* 577). After reading passages like these, it is easy to see why Butler has her human characters perceive this third gender as stereotypically masculine, and their affect-inducing penetration as sex – they are the hunters, decision makers, instructors, healers, penetrators, and they are the ones who leave home in search of mates. Disturbingly, soon after this “sexual healing,” this woman enjoys and continues a flirtatious dalliance with Jodahs. Again, I can only imagine that Butler, as a feminist writer, intends this inexplicably fast recovery of the woman’s sexual interests to be another example of the manipulative powers of the alien species. Wallace astutely
observes, “Jodahs uses this knowledge to give them what they ‘want’—or, rather, to make them want different things” (117). In another example, observing Jesusa’s emotional pain at the thought of returning to her family and becoming ill again, Jodahs remarks, “Both my mother [Lilith] and Nikanj had warned me that not every pain should be immediately healed” (Imago 687). While the Oankali are experts at preventing humans from staying with the trouble (through their dream-sex-healing-eating, or by putting troublemakers into suspended animation and exiling dissenters to the ship), the ones who know humans well know that some human suffering is even more useful to them.

There is a clear shift in how the reader perceives the Oankali as each novel moves down another generation of Oankali-Human construct. Interestingly, the further the perspective moves into Oankali genetics, the less sympathetically they are portrayed. The ooloi gender of Jodahs in particular (always seen as the most masculine in human terms) appears not only predatory but vampiric by this final novel. Kendra Parker notes that there was a resurgence of interest in vampire culture that aligned with homophobic responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s, which may well have affected Butler’s writing and indeed her characters’ homophobic reactions to being “taken” by an Oankali (81). What Akin calls trade, Tate calls looking “to infect or afflict or whatever you call it” – clearly alluding to the fears of sexually transmitted disease (Adulthood 364). Wallace also sees the Oankali’s desire to blend with humans not as a

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82 The connection between Lilith and vampirism is highlighted in recent Netflix teen drama First Kill. An established vampire family by the name of Atwood (of course!) repeatedly emphasise their mythical connection to Lilith: one scene reads, “Tonight a young legacy [vampire] will bond with the […] serpent just as Lilith the first keeper did in the garden of Eden. The Atwood family is honoured to uphold the name of Lilith, both in practice and in lineage” (“First Fight” 28:30-29:00).
hopeful celebration of difference (as argued by Zaki, Haraway and others in earlier criticism) but as “a kind of biopollution” (105) that even Jodahs describes as something that is “bound to affect—to infect—plants and animals” (Imago 682). The use and repetition of such verbs as infect, afflict, affect, particularly when uttered by an Oankali-human construct, makes me far more inclined to agree with those who have read the Oankali’s aims more sceptically. As their ulterior motives become clearer, we see that the Lilith myth becomes inverted: Butler’s Lilith is not that which feeds on its prey but that which is fed upon. She is not Lilith the baby-killer, baby-stealer; instead it is the Oankali who feed upon their human mates.83

Using Judith Lee’s observation that the three novels form a pattern that can be summarised as Creation, Incarnation and Apocalypse respectively, Stacy Magedanz also observes that the ending of Imago is the picture of “the New Jerusalem [as] a living spaceship ‘planted’ on a riverbank, a symbiont that will eventually devour the earth it grows in and take its residents to a new life among the stars” (57, emphasis mine). While Magedanz seems to overlook its inclination to “devour the earth,” seeing it as a mostly hopeful image, I would argue instead that this image is one that uncovers (as in Revelation) the reality of the imagined city as a product of extreme violence. As has been shown in this chapter, whether the trilogy can be taken as utopian or dystopian is a debate that rages on in its criticism.84 Greenwald Smith aptly sums up this broad range of criticism of Butler’s trilogy:

The vision of a posthuman future in the novels is thus so fraught with promise and pain, hope and violence, that the vast archive of critical literature on the trilogy includes

83 “Nikanj […] stored some of the eggs and consumed the rest. […] ‘We feed on them every day’” (Imago 680).
84 See articles by Wallace, Knickerbocker and Canavan for overviews of the opposing interpretations of Butler’s trilogy as utopia, dystopia or critical utopia.
arguments that vary from reading the novels as producing a feminist, queer, or postracial utopia of the first order to seeing the world they describe as a dystopian critique of practices of exploitation ranging from slavery to forced organ harvesting. (554)

I would argue that those who see only the utopian aspects of the Oankali wilfully obscure the evidence of colonialism, eugenics, manipulation, sexual violence and hypocrisy riddled throughout the text. Canavan concludes that Butler may have set out to write a utopia, but has failed because “it comes only at the barrel of a gun” (Butler 87). I agree that this is an important failure – a productive one in that it reveals to the reader that the utopian outcomes hoped for in the foundational myths of creation and apocalypse cannot fully be realised without huge loss.

Jim Miller similarly concludes that the utopian principle is thus bound up in dystopian thinking (somewhat anticipating Atwood’s neologism “ustopia”) and uses the phrase “post-apocalyptic hoping informed by the lessons of the past” to describe Butler’s Lilith’s Brood and Parables novels (336). But where the critic writes that Butler “reinvents the desire for a better world” (336), I would instead argue that Butler reinvents the desire for a different world, with the full knowledge that “better” is too simplistic a term to apply to human nature. Similarly, other scholars have echoed Tom Moylan’s description of Butler as writing “critical utopia,” in which

“Critical” in the Enlightenment sense of critique – that is expressions of oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation. As well as “critical” in the nuclear sense of the critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction.

A central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition, so that these texts reject utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream. (10, italics in original, underlining my emphasis)

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85 I find it fitting that “unveiling” i.e. revelation is used to describe critique here.
Or indeed others, like myself, have argued against the use of the term “utopia” at all to describe these works. Above, I have emphasised “while preserving it as a dream” because this is the part I have taken issue with. The utopian dream, in this thesis, is the thing causing half the trouble in its affective push-pull backwards to Eden and forwards to apocalypse. The suffering depicted by Butler in the Oankali pursuit of “the utopian dream” is aimed more at raising awareness of (or discerning, Morse’s preferred translation for the “knowledge” of good and evil) our own propensity to fantasise about an impossible perfection. Johns reminds readers that “it is Lear, not hope, that inspires Akin to assert humanity’s rights (393).

The emotions shown by the Oankali reveal further intriguing observations about our own ideas of utopia. Readers who initially perceive the Oankali’s laconic nature might imagine them to be admirably stoic and truthful, for example. Dayal touches upon a brilliant observation that, though the Oankali at first seem to represent a kind of Western liberal ideal, beneath their veneer, they are a “structurally destructive, eliminatory, and violent speculative incarnation of the actual history of European settler colonialism in North America” (110). Thus a (typically white) SpF reader who might initially admire the Oankali’s phlegmatic attitude may come to recognise the Oankali as an all-too-familiar representation of their own Western society; this is the powerful function of cognitive estrangement (see Dillon 173). Looking at this from the point of view of emotion and biblical myth as always, I am reminded once again that the clinical, organised and serene New Jerusalem admired by the writer of John’s Apocalypse comes only at the cost of so much violence.
To myself and to many other critics, the negative undercurrents that Butler emphasises by focusing on the *emotions* tied to such ideals completely undermine the “success” of the Oankali ethos. This is typified in the Oankali themselves, who (at least in the first novel) act as frustratingly unreadable characters, partly because of the different ways they express emotion, and because of their tendency to withhold information rather than lie. In this respect, the Oankali are much like the serpent in the garden, who in its ambivalence “can symbolize evil and chaos, as well as healing, life, wisdom, and fertility” (Yee 72). As Yee goes on to note in her reading of Genesis 2-3, the serpent’s line of questioning focuses (cunningly) on “God’s prohibition instead of God’s generosity [... implying] that God is an unreasonable and oppressive being” (73). Similarly, the Oankali focus only on the negative qualities of humankind, the “contradiction” of hierarchy plus intelligence, rather than on any of the positive qualities humans might possess. While the Oankali claim surprise when Lilith’s first encounter with another human male results in his trying to rape her, it is possible to read the scene and its aftermath as a way for the (supremely intelligent) Oankali to manipulate Lilith towards their line of thinking by placing her in a room with a known rapist – a reading few critics provide, with the exception of Canavan (*Butler* 85).\(^{86}\) Lilith is therefore manipulated in much the same way as Eve: where the serpent’s questioning is along the lines of “isn’t God petty and jealous,” the Oankali’s question observes the same about humanity.

Nevertheless, Lilith and others demonstrate remarkable staying-power and potential for adaptation to their changing surroundings. As with much of Butler’s

\(^{86}\) Canavan’s scepticism also extends to the same suspicion offered by Tino that the Oankali may themselves have instigated the nuclear apocalypse. “The possibility is never returned to,” writes Canavan, “and yet I find the idea too tantalizing to give up” – despite the fact that Butler herself denies it in correspondence with a reader (*Butler* 90).
creative work, there are multiple contradictory ideas at play: tolerance, empathy and acts of love on the parts of individuals (whether human, Oankali or hybrid) on the one hand; and a wider critique of a vast colonising culture on the other. Writing in the early 1980s, Barbara Hill Rigney remarks that many women writers are “now exploring the connections between feminism and ecology, perceiving a link between sexual rape and the rape of the earth. In their novels, they are depicting nature in metaphoric terms as a place of escape, as sanctuary, as revelation” (68). What is interesting about Butler’s novels is that the longed-for Edenic paradise where technology meets a waste-free and balanced interplay with environment seems to be offered by the very creatures that have, in fact, arrived metaphorically and literally to rape the planet and its people of everything they have. The humans who fear the snake-like Oankali are constantly escaping into the natural wilderness, only to be pursued and brought back to those walled, immaculate gardens. Brian Attebery concludes that “Butler’s cyborg, like Haraway’s, rejects origin myth in favor of new directions” (104). Is her character successful in doing so? I would argue that Attebery answers my question when he follows with, “Lilith makes unprecedented choices for all of humanity and is frequently blamed for her choices” (104). To me, this reads exactly like a description of the biblical Eve. Here we see that, while the trilogy may constitute a critique of turning to biblical stories, Butler must still use these myths in order to show the reader their immense affective power.
Chapter 4: The *MaddAddam* Trilogy (2003-2013) by Margaret Atwood

Christianity generally looks back to the Day of Creation and forward to the Day of Judgment.

*Anne Primavesi*, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, 2

The waiting builds up in you like a tide. You start wanting it to be done with. You find yourself saying to the sky, *Just do it. Do your worst. Get it over with.*

*Margaret Atwood*, *The Year of the Flood*, 239

Like the preceding chapter on Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy, this chapter begins with a brief summary, followed by an overview of the relevant criticism to this thesis, and finally my own contributions to these debates. The *MaddAddam* trilogy consists of *Oryx and Crake* (2003, henceforth *Oryx*), *The Year of the Flood* (2009, henceforth *Flood*), and *MaddAddam* (2013). The novels deal explicitly with gender and biblical themes of apocalypse and creation, and also participate in the recent trend of climate fiction or “cli-fi” in which humankind is “punished for the rapacity with which we have fecklessly consumed Earth’s resources” (Balkan 844). Atwood’s take on this is that, rather than being delivered by God or Nature, the punishment happens to be delivered specifically by one individual, Crake, with others partly culpable. As Richard Alan Northover explains, the deadly pandemic that is termed the “Waterless Flood” by an eco-Christian cult is ironically not caused by climate change but is “the consequence of a bioengineered virus meant to forestall such a collapse by killing off all humans” (81). The near-future in which this takes place forms a caricature of extreme late capitalism – what Canavan calls “our mad world, gone even madder” – a satirical strategy typical of
the SpF genre and one that is recognisably Atwoodian (“Hope” 140). Part of what makes this near-future world dystopian even before the pandemic, and what forms a vital part of this study of the trilogy, is its “emotional dysfunction” and “emotional impermanence” and the effect this has on both adult and child members of society (Dunning 90). Besides nonhuman animals and plants, which are untouched by the “Waterless Flood,” what remains of human life after the pandemic is a new breed of artificially developed people known as Crakers (created by Crake) and only a scattering of surviving, traumatised “original” humans, who serve as narrators or offer third-person perspectives of the trilogy.

The above constitutes the fabula of the trilogy, but Atwood’s syuzhet provides multiple subjective accounts told in alternating flashbacks and present-day narratives. All three novels cover roughly the same time frame and push the present-day timeline only marginally forward (particularly for the first two novels). For this reason, Atwood writes that they “are not sequels or prequels; they are more like chapters of the same book” (“Ustopia”). Elsewhere in a recorded interview Atwood has used the word “simultaneal” (which no two critics have spelt the same way) to describe this particular collection of accounts (Keck 26; see also Bergthaller 737). But if we recall Pippin’s statement that “every [apocalyptic] retelling is a sequel” (1), we see the MaddAddam trilogy actively participating in this same circularity:

[...] apocalyptic fear breaks the boundaries of a linear space—time continuum; the terror lies behind, ahead, violating all the set canonical boundaries—engaging in multiple terrors, multiple fears, created and re-created at every turn, with every reading and performance. (114)

Thus, the trilogy behaves like an apocalyptic text, with each novel in the series revealing only more of what has come to pass, the terror and fear breaking up the present time.
The protagonist of *Oryx and Crake* is Jimmy, who tells the Crakers to call him “Snowman” (after the Abominable Snowman) in an act of rebellion against his former friend Crake (real name Glenn), who forbids abstract names. “Existing and not existing, flickering at the edges,” Jimmy-Snowman gives the reader an immediate impression of the ephemeral nature of his life – how easily it could melt away (*Oryx* 7, 81, 224). In the opening pages of *Oryx* readers learn Jimmy-Snowman believes himself to be the last “original” human survivor of this global pandemic. In several analeptic reflections, Jimmy recounts how his childhood friend Crake secretly developed and released a fatal plague under the guise of a Huxleyan aphrodisiac-birth-control pill called BlyssPluss, for which Jimmy unwittingly produced the ad campaign. Readers slowly learn that Crake does this only after creating his own bio-hacked, “improved” human race, known by his colleagues as “Crakers” or “Children of Crake.” These Crakers are vegan, peaceable, gentle humans with a love of communal songs and stories. Within the “Paradice” lab that forms their garden before the pandemic, they are taught by a woman whose codename is Oryx, who happens to be the love interest of both Crake and Jimmy. They also have, programmed into their DNA, an inbuilt bug deterrent, the capacity to recycle their faeces as food, and the ability to heal their wounded through purring. In the eyes of the “original” humans who encounter them, these Crakers are beautiful, healthy and varied in natural skin colours (apart from their disturbing blue genitals, which signal seasonal mating) but in terms of intellect, the humans find them extraordinarily dull. In particular, it is their emotional attitude that irritates Jimmy: “their naïve optimism, their open friendliness, their calmness” infuriate him (*Oryx* 153), and this chapter investigates
how Atwood’s presentation of their apparent lack of negative affect raises deeper questions about the connections (at least in Crake’s mind) between creation and emotion.

Though Crake’s intention is for the Crakers to start the human race afresh without racial division, sickness, war, violence (to each other or to animals) and, importantly to Crake, religion, their encounters with surviving “original” humans seriously thwarts his efforts. In his own programmer’s bias, Crake has also built in blind spots that become problematic, too. On top of this, Oryx, Jimmy and later others cannot help but provide the Crakers with a worldview and set of stories that compound these biases and ironically place their maker Crake as a sky-god in their eyes, and Oryx as a lesser goddess in charge of animals. When Jimmy approaches Oryx’s dead body and hallucinates, hearing her say, “Paradice is lost, but you have a Paradice within you, happier far,” readers are prepared for the irony (Paradise Lost 12.87; Oryx 308).

Katherine Snyder notes,

The voice’s quotation of Michael’s consolatory line to Adam at the end of Paradise Lost is ironic not only because of the patent absurdity of its suggestion that Atwood’s bereft last man may now enjoy a post-apocalyptic paradise within but also because of the attendant assumption that he had ever enjoyed a prelapsarian paradise without. (478)

Readers know by this point that there is no felix culpa for Jimmy, and so “Atwood’s allusion is, on the surface, highly ironic” (Dodds 120-21). Reading this scene from the point of view of affect, the words are poignant because the “Paradice” within Jimmy constitutes his bittersweet memories of a past that is only happy by contrast to his present reality. At the end of this first novel Jimmy faces one of his darkest moments by returning to the Paradice Dome where Crake orchestrated the almost-complete obliteration of humankind, murdered Jimmy’s beloved Oryx before his eyes, and gave
Jimmy cause to shoot him dead. Here and throughout the trilogy, Atwood weaves in layers of intertextuality, satirical inversions and dark humour, troubling any simplistic readings of good and evil into her work or its myriad references. The novel’s ending is left ambiguous as he encounters what must be some more surviving “original” humans and deliberates over what he should do.

The second novel, *The Year of the Flood*, investigates the beliefs and practices of the eco-Christian cult, God’s Gardeners, who operate under an ecological reinterpretation of the Bible. Ending not long after the conclusion of *Oryx*, *Flood* also switches between flashbacks and the immediate aftermath of the plague, told from the perspectives of two women, Ren and Toby, who were each involved in the God’s Gardeners at different times in their lives (Ren as a child and Toby as an adult). Unlike Jimmy-Snowman and Glenn-Crake, who grow up in privileged corporate-run compounds such as OrganInc Farms and HelthWyzer, Ren and Toby are familiar with life in what the privileged call the “pleeblands”—the dangerous cities inhabited by the majority of citizens (*Oryx* 27). Each survives the Waterless Flood by a combination of chance and of skills learnt while living in the pleeblands or with the Gardeners. After spending part of her childhood in the Gardeners’ compound known as “Edencliff Rooftop,” Ren is taken back to HelthWyzer by her mother, where she briefly dates Jimmy at school. After leaving school, she happens to survive the plague because she is locked in a biohazard room (aptly called the “Sticky Zone” (*Flood* 280)) at a bar called “Scales and Tails,” where she is employed as a dancer and sex worker. Toby spends her early life in the pleeblands but is rescued from a violent gang by the God’s Gardeners and trained in mushroom lore and beekeeping by her mentor Pilar, before having to leave the Gardeners because of
the gang’s revenge attacks. She survives the Waterless Flood by shutting herself away in the high-end spa (itself a highly abstracted idea of a natural spa) where she is employed under the name Tobiatha. Alongside these two women’s narratives, the diegetic landscape is further expanded by the interspersion of songs and sermons between chapters from the God’s Gardeners’ leader, Adam One. Through these and Toby and Ren’s recollections, readers learn that elders in the Gardeners’ leaders are known as Eves and Adams, and that Adam One operates alongside his archetypal opposite, Zeb (Adam Seven), sometimes known as “The Mad Adam” (61). The Gardeners appear to be dedicated to environmental activism, but essentially constitute a “doomsday” cult, preparing for an imminent apocalyptic event they term the “Waterless Flood” (*Flood* 6). As is already clear, their prediction is bound to come true, but questions about Adam One’s enigmatic persona and his culpability are raised throughout this middle novel.

Some (but not all) of these questions find their answers in *MaddAddam*, when Zeb’s voice is more fully realised in his recountings to his now-lover Toby. Toby discovers that Zeb and Adam have been raised by the same father, known as “The Rev,” as Zeb tells her about his and Adam’s childhood and early adulthoods, particularly of their negative reactions to the didactic and hypocritical Rev’s “Church of PetrOleum” – another caricature of so-called “prosperity gospel” evangelical American megachurches (*MaddAddam* 110). Here readers learn that both Adam and Zeb have been involved in the online game that Jimmy and Crake played when at school: *Extinctathon*, moderated

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87 Bianca del Villano finds it noteworthy that the term “Waterless Flood” is as oxymoronic as Adam One’s own attempts to bring together ideas about the biblical beginning and ending (167). Though the term is indeed oxymoronic, I do not find it unusual that Adam One incorporates imagery from Genesis in his eschatological sermons, since the Apocalypse does exactly this.
by “MaddAddam.” When appointed to an undercover position at Healthwyzer, Zeb (aptly named Seth) inadvertently becomes an avuncular figure to young Glenn-Crake. He teaches him coding and hacking, which become future weapons at Crake’s disposal; Zeb recalls, “And who was to foresee the consequences? Which is usually the way with fun” (MaddAddam 238). In Oryx we only learn suggestions of these tangled connections, but by the end of the trilogy there is a clearer idea of just how many people have been involved with Crake throughout his short life – and how their motivations and styles differ. It is not until the third novel that the rebel Zeb becomes a heroic figure, and the straight-laced religious leader Adam turns out to be “mixed up with someone for sure” (MaddAddam 195). It transpires that many of the survivors are Gardeners who have been master players of Extinctathon (whose usernames are, like Crake and Oryx, those of extinct animals), some of whom have had to work against their will in Crake’s “Paradice Project” or have prior connections with Adam.

What remains, at least in their corner of the world, is a strange truce between the “original” humans, the Crakers, and a community of sentient pigs (“pigoons”) developed by corporations for providing replacement human organs and brain tissue. Because of their intelligence, affective behaviour and social rituals, pigoons in particular appear to the reader to “problematize species and bodily integrity” in their almost-humanness (Narkunas 8), even more so than the Crakers because of their depth of feeling. For Lars Schmeink, who also reads the MaddAddam trilogy alongside the work of Haraway, “the pigoons completely undermine any conception of human exceptionalism and frightfully cast into doubt the neat boundaries of nature/culture and human/animal that liberal humanism builds subjectivity upon” (89). They are one of many chimeric
hybrids including wolvogs, rakunks and snats created by scientists and religious fanatics alike (since “create-an-animal was so much fun [...] it made you feel like God”), but the pigoons are the only ones who appear to be able to communicate in a human-like way (Oryx 51). By the end of the trilogy, Atwood’s ever-broadening landscape of what it means to be human incorporates not just the narrative viewpoints of the various “original” human characters, but also those of the Crakers (through the eyes of a character called Blackbeard) as well as the pigoons and their wordless but complex society.88 Viewing this tangle of surviving connection and compromise and varying human reactions to their uncomfortable closeness, Michaela Keck argues that “Atwood employs an evolutionary grotesque aesthetic that erodes clear-cut distinctions between humans, animals, and post-humans” (26). By its close, the trilogy provides what Haraway searches for in Trouble: “stories in which multispecies players, who are enmeshed in partial and flawed translations across difference, redo ways of living and dying attuned to still possible finite flourishing, still possible recuperation” (10).

As with Lilith’s Brood, the lines of debate for the MaddAddam trilogy that apply to my research comprise three topics: Haraway’s cyborg and posthuman philosophies;89 discussions about the use of biblical stories or rhetoric;90 and explorations into the characters’ affective or psychoanalytic landscapes.91 As with previous chapters, this

88 A cultured society that is suggestive both of Orwell’s Animal Farm and of the pig-men in Wells’ The Island of Dr Moreau (White 395-96; S. Wilson 44-45). Eric White remarks of Dr Moreau that he represents “a stereotypical sadistic fantasy of affectless mastery and transcendence” that is “merely a disguise for unacknowledged fear and rage” (396) – which is just how I describe Crake later in this chapter. Atwood has written on the subject of Dr Moreau (Other Worlds 150-67), so it would be arguable that Crake is partly inspired by the scientist: both are the archetypal mad genius obsessed with making a little Eden.

89 Lacombe; Ciobanu; Schmeink; Defalco; Jennings, “Anthropocene;” Muñoz-González, “Posthuman Cure.”

90 Appleton; Bosco; Bouson, “Using Up;” Snyder; Hoogheem; Canavan, “Hope;” Bahrawi; Trauvitch; Villano; Dodds; Northover; Keck; Koosed, “Primordial Myth;” Minister, “How to Live;”; Strømmen; Walsh.

91 Dunning; Staels; Appleton; Snyder; Kroon; Harland; Defalco; Hummel; Du; Minister, “How to Live.”
section also notes where aspects of the novels intersect with feminist debates of their “third wave” era. Many of these form useful counterpoints or bolsters to my thesis, while my own research aims to draw these strands together in a way that has not yet been fully realised. Hope Jennings, for example, similarly makes use of Haraway’s *Trouble* to identify how each of the novels in this trilogy “challenges its readers to confront humans’ apocalyptic patterns of destruction” (“Anthropocene” 17). Though I would quibble with Jennings’ use of the term “Anthropocene” because of Haraway’s distaste for it (Haraway, *Trouble* 49), her argument makes a compelling case for Keller’s concept of “counter-apocalypse” (avoiding the apocalyptic prefix “anti-”) at work within the trilogy (Jennings, “Anthropocene” 18; see also Keller 19-20). Writing from the perspective of affect and crip theory, Minister argues that in *Flood*:

> The biblical flood is not recreated but adapted. This adaptation creates an affect constellation for survival. Atwood’s fiction, thus, also works by creating an affective response to climate change. Rather than telling us that we will die if we fail to change, Atwood weaves a story that will allow her readers to feel that. (“How to Live” 296)

Again, while I fully concur with Minister’s position on affect being a key factor in biblical re-vision in Atwood’s trilogy, my argument aims to highlight the many ways in which negative affect still sticks to the stories the characters are trying (and failing) to fully revise or escape.

Much of the scholarship focuses on the apocalyptic genre in this trilogy, whereas surprisingly few have delved into Atwood’s engagement with the biblical creation myths also at play. This chapter addresses both, since the central thesis of this project holds that the two are intrinsically linked in the Western affective landscape – particularly by nostalgia and disgust – so much so that they can prevent characters from staying with the trouble of the immediate present (Haraway, *Trouble* 31). As for the smaller portion
of scholars who have explored themes of creation in the *MaddAddam* novels, Keck criticises these for inadequately addressing the “tensions involved in the nexus of gender, myth, and religion” (25). Like Keck, I aim to redress this gap, but focusing more on how our affective ties to biblical creation and apocalypse can affect our ability to stay present. Though Keck acknowledges the function of myth “as a means for humans to attain a reflective distance from the threatening and terrifying powers of the world that surrounds them” (28), her paper does not fully explore the ambivalence I find in myth’s ability also to *intensify* those emotions.\(^9\) The next few sections of this chapter explore tensions like these at work in Atwood’s novels before focusing on the “new” creation stories told by Jimmy and Toby to the Crakers themselves, and how these new myths still have a sticky residue from their biblical predecessors.

Overall, this chapter aims to prove that Atwood’s novels portray, through their characters, various Western tendencies either to become stuck in nostalgic longing for an Edenic past, or to participate in a “sterilizing narrative of wiping the world clean by apocalypse or salvation” (Haraway, *Trouble* 150). It makes use of the fact that Atwood sees it as important to reveal how the characters’ early lives, their memories and traumas, contribute to their outlook on the now postapocalyptic world they inhabit, and the stories they tell themselves about what that means. In other words, how the emotional landscapes of their past affect the emotional landscapes of their present. For the few characters who demonstrate an ability to stay with the trouble, such as Toby, herself a reluctant Eve, we see a greater tolerance for uncertainty, for compromise and

\(^9\) Keck instead centres her argument on feminist revisionist mythmaking, i.e. how the trilogy “produces two versions of paradise: Crake’s techno pagan and Adam One’s eco-millennialist paradise” – both of which have their accompanying Eve figures (25-26).
for overcoming her own disgust at the non- or post-human “other.” But as in the chapter on Butler’s Lilith’s Brood trilogy, I also aim to highlight where the author avoids easy solutions that suggest utopia is possible, in order to further dispel the stereotype that SpF written by women can become “preachy agitprop” (Watkins 119).

**Genre and Form**

Atwood famously avoids the term SF to describe much of her fiction, in favour of SpF (“Utopia”). As a result, running through the criticism of Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy is a quarrel over the terminology used to describe the genre, and as we shall see, this is partly thanks to Atwood’s further interventions into the discussion and her rejection of the terms “dystopia” and “apocalypse” to describe these novels. In 2017 the Financial Times calls Atwood “queen of dystopia” (E. Jacobs) and the New York Times similarly names her the “prophet of dystopia” (Mead) – to which she rather predictably responds with a 2018 Guardian interview entitled, “I Am Not a Prophet” (Allardice). Readers know to expect that a dystopian novel will portray a society gone horribly wrong, and Atwood is famed in particular for the theocratic dystopia portrayed in The Handmaid’s Tale. But instead of dystopian, Atwood herself suggests the MaddAddam trilogy be described as “ustopian,” a neologism “combining utopia and dystopia – the imagined perfect society and its opposite – because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other” (Other Worlds 66). Atwood notes in another definition of literature in general (ustopia included), “every landscape is a state of mind, but every state of mind can also be portrayed as a landscape” (Other Worlds 75). I find this definition
useful in my own readings of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, given the focus of this thesis on emotional landscapes and the ways that they are informed by biblical myth.

Reading Atwood’s interventions into the terminology used to describe her works, many deem “u-topia” a useful term, but others have already expressed the same concept without the need for a new word, since to some extent “‘utopia is maintained in dystopia’” (Baccolini, qtd. in Bahrawi 254). Nazry Bahrawi goes on to argue that *Oryx* and *Flood* come to represent “critical dystopias” which “‘expose the horror of the present moment’” (Moylan, qtd. in Bahrawi 262). But Atwood still takes issue with the word dystopia being used in relation to the aftermath of the Waterless Flood, as she notes that there are not enough human survivors of the Waterless Flood to constitute a dystopian society (*Other Worlds* 93). Nevertheless, as I have noted, the world described before the virus certainly qualifies as a dystopia, even if the world afterwards does not.

For Canavan, the affective landscapes of the pre- and post-worlds are inverted:

“Atwood has effectively destabilized the typical affective coordinates of post-apocalyptic fiction, in which the post-apocalyptic landscape is a horror and the pre-apocalyptic landscape the longed-for object of nostalgia” (“Hope” 141). In my view, this depends on which definition of apocalyptic genre the reader is using: certainly Canavan is right that in contemporary dystopian novels the postapocalyptic world is usually the one filled with negative affect, however in the biblical apocalyptic tradition the author tends to emphasise the horror of the *pre*-apocalypse – the forces of evil overwhelming the forces of good. Thus Atwood twists both generic traditions by inverting the popular apocalyptic tradition and by undermining the ancient apocalyptic genre. Nevertheless, Canavan touches upon an important point here, which is that the function of dystopian literature,
like apocalyptic literature, is not so much to reveal how things might go wrong, but instead to prompt readers to think deeply about how they are already wrong.

Despite this, Atwood still rejects the term “apocalyptic” (at least for the first two novels⁹³) because “in a true apocalypse everything on Earth is destroyed, whereas in these two books the only element that’s annihilated is the human race, or most of it” (Other Worlds 93; “Utopia”). For Shayna Sheinfeld, the MaddAddam trilogy is unique in that it “combines a secular and a religious approach to apocalypses in contemporary culture” (211). Mark Bosco’s article also provides an extensive look into the apocalypse in literary tradition, placing Oryx firmly within that same category. “Contemporary dystopian fiction,” writes Bosco, “is a variation of apocalyptic literature, for it serves to critique actual cultural trends—political, economic, or social—observable in some form in the present situation of an author’s life” (160). Koosed, on the other hand, posits that the trilogy cannot truly be defined as it would be in biblical studies, as “apocolupsis (‘unveiling’)” – because “there is no alternative and ultimate reality revealed through visions and/or the aid of a heavenly mediator” (“Primordial Myth” 137n). As mentioned above, one might be tempted to settle on Jennings’ use of Keller’s term “counter-apocalypse” to describe the distinctive trilogy: this is defined by “a critical framework that takes seriously the power of apocalypse by challenging and changing its narrative paradigm” in creative rather than simply oppositional ways (Jennings, “Anthropocene” 18; see also Keller 19-20). Looking at the novels in this way helps the reader to understand that purely apocalyptic thinking divides issues in dangerously oppositional terms – something these novels attempt to foreclose. Sheinfeld’s article concludes in a

⁹³ In Other Worlds was published before the release of MaddAddam.
similar vein, which is that “[i]n portrayals of apocalyptic in popular culture we see an acknowledgment that our lives are not black and white, not dualistic, but instead are complex, with a wide variety of shades of gray” (215). Thus, even if she eschews the term, Atwood still plays with our expectations about the apocalyptic in order to interrogate the genre’s qualities.

Interestingly, Canavan claims that apocalyptic writing, MaddAddam trilogy included, acts as a lens through which “we can see capitalism more clearly, without the distortions of ideology, complacency, and reaction that ordinarily cloud our view” (“Hope” 139). But in general, my research finds that (like the other authors in this thesis) Atwood prefers to trouble the waters of a problem rather than to clarify it. In MaddAddam in particular, which had not been published when Canavan was writing, the lens of apocalypse only ever makes contemporary life and capitalism harder to unravel because of each character’s complicity in the system. With each revelation of accidental culpability on the part of seemingly “good” characters such as Pilar, Jimmy, Oryx and Zeb, the reader becomes more aware of the interconnectedness of societal responsibility and the compounding tangles of ordinary people living in late capitalism. This lesson filters into Toby’s own creation narrative to the Crakers, where she explains Crake’s reasoning for wiping out humankind: “each one of them is doing part of the killing, whether they know it or not” (MaddAddam 291). All must find a messier solution to this chaos than Crake’s attempt at a reboot, since, as Pippin notes, “Chaos is everywhere, past, present, and future” (72). In this way, we understand Atwood’s version of apocalypse, or counter-apocalypse, “not as final end but as permanent possibility” (Northover 83).
Instead of Babylon, the oppressive society that must be overcome in the *MaddAddam* trilogy’s apocalypse is a particularly American brand of corporate capitalism, which we see (in the pleeblands) directly impoverishing and disempowering women, children, people of colour, and the natural environment. For John of Patmos, the immense power of Rome cannot be overcome without celestial intervention, and the same has been said about capitalism in recent years. Canavan cites Fredrick Jameson’s famous claim that the end of the world is easier to imagine than the end of capitalism, which Jameson has revised more recently to mean that it is easier to imagine the end of capitalism by imagining the end of the world (Canavan, “Hope” 138; Jameson 76). Strangely, Crake is an outwardly successful product of this capitalist regime, with little experience of real life outside the corporation’s walls, and yet he appears to hate it more potently than anyone. Crake’s apocalypse is therefore inverted because of his realisation that his own kind is the oppressor, and must be wiped out wholesale. In this way, Koosed adds that Crake’s apocalypse is “not for us”:

> The post-apocalyptic worlds of Daniel and Revelation are utterly devoid of animals – these tales are not just anthropocentric, they are anthropo-exclusive. Crake’s vision is the photographic negative – a post-apocalyptic vision utterly devoid of the human. (“Primordial Myth” 153)

Unlike the biblical apocalypses, then, Crake’s apocalypse is devoid of the building blocks of Anthropocene; once the infrastructure has completely collapsed, the world left over will be the complete opposite of what Keller calls the “impossible, colossal cube” that is New Jerusalem (82). Northover, too, calls Atwood’s inversion of the biblical apocalypse “a radical anti-type to the Bible’s anti-ecological vision of the New Age” (94). Atwood’s trilogy plays with the apocalyptic genre in these ways to draw out the dangers of
thinking in oppositional terms of who or what is evil and who or what is good, regardless of the imagined potential utopia.

As for the novels’ ecological message, the style is like that of the novels addressed earlier in this thesis in that the author undercuts her own apparent surface message. As J. Brooks Bouson observes, the character Crake “gives voice to part of Atwood’s serious message in the novel as he recounts the environmental ills plaguing humanity – even as he plans his grandmaster act of bioterrorism” (“Game Over” 146). The novels’ ambivalence allows the reader and their own standpoint on the importance of humanity to determine whether Crake is seen as a diabolical mass murderer or the bringer of a “naturalist felix culpa” (Nuttall, qtd. in Dodds 143-44). Ever the devil’s advocate, Atwood herself is quoted as saying that “From a certain perspective [...] Crake is the most altruistic person around” for exactly this reason (qtd. in Bethune). But when ecologically minded philosophers such as Haraway make statements like “I think our job is to make the Anthropocene as short/thin as possible,” few would interpret this as Crake does in such literal terms (Trouble 100). Crake’s thinking reflects a much more extreme version of deep ecology that does not only seek to “decentre” humans from nature but destroy them completely: something closer to Evan Calder Williams’ “Dark Mountain Manifesto” (Canavan, “Hope” 150) or the Voluntary Human-Extinction Movement (Bouson, “Using Up” 10), even though neither of these would advocate mass genocide. Taken out of context, then, the language and objectives of ecological activism are shown to be as dangerous as any religious text.

For these reasons, despite Atwood’s clarifications, I and other critics continue to employ the terms “apocalyptic” and “dystopian” to these novels since on some level all
qualify as dystopian or apocalyptic for either generic or thematic reasons; as the author herself writes, “it is always the reader rather than the writer who has the last word about any book” (*Other Worlds* 93). Yet Atwood’s particular style does mark a significant departure from one aspect of traditional dystopian and apocalyptic writing, which typically use only one point of view. Instead, the three texts in the trilogy work on each other to disrupt the idea of a monologic retelling of one story. Susan Watkins highlights this act as one that is specific to contemporary women’s apocalyptic writing, which features:

- a stress on circularity and repetition, not only in terms of plot, but also in terms of form and narrative structure. This idea of repetition works in both negative and positive ways: in terms of the human capacity for casual self-destructiveness [...] or through] strategies of intertextual allusion and palimpsestic accretion in their work. This practice of “rewriting” might suggestively be called “reproductive.” (120)

Watkins therefore divides *Oryx* and *Flood* into oppositional categories in which the masculine narrative is tragic and the feminine comedic:

> What contemporary women’s apocalyptic writing avoids is the tragic, fundamentalist narrative of blame, judgment, the sheep, and the goats. Instead, it suggests the importance of plural, hybrid narratives and spaces that reproduce or rewrite the contortions or conundrums of the apocalyptic future(s) that face us. (135)

Northover corroborates this view with the additional observation that the counternarrative of Adam One’s very earnest sermons bathetically aids this juxtaposition of high and low register (83-84). Viewing the trilogy as a whole, Northover adds, its “comic and polyphonic structure [...] absorbs the apparent tragic pessimism and monologism of the male voices that dominate *Oryx and Crake*” (84). While this effect is certainly achieved by the direct contrast between the male and female counterparts in the first two books, I argue against viewing the whole trilogy along such gendered lines. The warmth, humanity and hopefulness of both Zeb’s and Blackbeard’s narratives in
MaddAddam certainly complicate this claim, as do the many ways in which Jimmy’s narrative shows him in a feminised light, as I shall discuss below. As W. J. Keith remarks, it is a fallacy to think “that because Atwood is a writer interested in feminist issues, she must accept this viewpoint and that, as a result, her stories must be compatible with the theory” (256).

For many, what is also represented by the increase in narrative voices with each new novel is a growing sense of hope and possibility:

Whereas hurt dominates the narrative in Oryx and Crake and hope seems absent (the narrative alternating between Jimmy’s painful past and tortured present), hope manifests throughout The Year of The Flood in both Ren and Toby’s alternating narratives – despite the presence of almost overwhelming hurt – and in the sermons of Adam One, the leader of the God’s Gardeners – despite the deep pessimism that infuses his eco-theology. (Northover 87)

By showing multiple characters’ struggles for survival, Atwood’s novels certainly enact a very literal kind of staying with the trouble, forcing us to look at it in multiple ways, never closing the door on it. This trilogy does what Tina Pippin says of the Apocalypse of John: “it opens forward and backward and sideways and all ways into other spaces” (xi). But does this make it more hopeful? All narrating characters experience trauma in one way or another, and while many are able to find community after the disaster, Canavan claims that Atwood’s aim is “to imagine a future that is frightening (as ecological science tells us it must be) without at the same time being final (as it so often seems it will be)” (“Hope” 155). That sense of frightening, but not final, exactly conjures the kind of chthonic trouble that Haraway so passionately champions. And yet, as with the preceding chapters of this thesis, I do not consider the trilogy to be as hopeful as many critics have claimed. Differences in opinion about the novels’ hopefulness may be in part due to the gap between the publication of the second and third novels, in which much
scholarship was published that highlighted hopeful elements of *Flood* that were later troubled with the publication of *MaddAddam*. If I touch on the novels’ hopefulness at all, I do so from the perspective of Minister’s “*survival without optimism*” as demonstrated by characters such as Toby (“*How to Live*” 290) or Bianca del Villano’s “*fear/hope knot*” (166). Villano observes that Adam One ties apocalypse and creation together on purpose to compound this knot so “*cosmogony is presented as eschatology and vice versa*” (166). I find this “*fear/hope knot*” to be reminiscent of Keller’s description of fundamentalism as a belief system that “*makes the cause of fear into the source of hope*” (55). But what Villano only touches upon briefly – the *emotions* associated with such ways of thinking, and the potentialities of those stories for *manipulating emotion* – I aim to prove more comprehensively in this chapter.

**Jimmy-Snowman and Glenn-Crake**

Early in the first novel, seeing the naked Craker children playing on the beach, Jimmy “*watches them with envy, or is it nostalgia? It can’t be that*” (*Oryx* 6). He cannot quite grasp the feeling the young Crakers give him, as their happiness does not remind him of his own childhood. I posit that he is right in thinking the nostalgia he feels is not for his own childhood, but that it is instead for the nostalgic dream of Eden. He feels envy doubly, then, because he knows the dream is an impossibility in both senses. An impossibility not only for him, but also for the Crakers themselves, because they have inherited a home full of “[b]ooby traps from the past” (*Oryx* 7). Eleonora Rao sums up how Jimmy is feeling aptly in her description of him as an exile, existing in liminality:
Like an exile, he has to cope with loss: loss of his previous life, but more importantly, the loss of his beloved Oryx. Like an exile, he is haunted by nostalgia and by the presence of absence. Like an exile, he is in that liminal condition between longing and belonging. Like an exile, Snowman constantly desires another place, other company, another future. He is in a state of suspension between two dimensions: a past he cannot recover and a future that is unimaginable. (57)

In this condition, Jimmy is like Adam and Eve immediately after the expulsion from the garden, yearning for that lost innocence so rudely represented by the oblivious Crakers in his care. Unable to experience it with them, Jimmy counts their “naive optimism” among the qualities of the Crakers that irritate him the most (Oryx 153). This phrase is suggestive of Berlant’s “cruel optimism” – that which threatens to trap the thinker (or perhaps the not-thinker) in dangerous situations. Berlant writes, “the affective structure of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that this time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way” (2). The Crakers’ optimism is naïve because they do not know the vision that preceded it; Jimmy however sees it through Crake’s vision and knows it to be cruel because it will not succeed. In the relationship between Jimmy as reluctant caretaker and the childlike Crakers, we see a constant tension between Jimmy’s dangerous knowledge of what has come to pass and his mixture of yearning and envy for their childish innocence, and the impossibility of each as they are played out in the three novels. Dunja Mohr observes, among others, that Oryx both begins and ends with Jimmy looking at his broken watch and noting that the time is “zero hour,” which acts as a kind of “caesura” marking “first the fear of extinction or nothingness, secondly, the slim hope for a fresh start, and thirdly, the danger of a circular movement” (30). Using this picture both at the beginning and the end of the first
novel, Atwood clearly wishes to stress the ephemerality of Jimmy’s predicament: life as he knew it has ended for him, and has not yet begun for the Crakers.

In his flashbacks to his teenage years, Atwood contrasts Jimmy, a “word person,” with his archetypal opposite, the “numbers person” Crake, and their unlikely friendship. The ways each of them deals with their emotions plays directly into their potential careers as adults: as J. Paul Narkunas observes, “in a world where affective value (passion, emotions, and sensations) is useful only for monetization,” Jimmy’s artistic degree leaves him with an unfulfilling advertising job, whereas Crake’s propensity for science propels him ever forward in the corporate industries that run like city states (10). Their viewpoints are subsequently backward- and forward-looking respectively: Jimmy is “paralyzed with self-pity and resentment, seeking solace in manufactured nostalgia or fantasy” (Narkunas 11); Crake, on the other hand, seeks solace in whatever can be made new, which is (as I have argued throughout this thesis) essentially a return to the beginning. I find it interesting, for this study, that Atwood’s aim does not seem to be to champion Jimmy (or Crake) but to emphasise the affective pull of the sticky stories that influence both characters.

Even the games they play as teenagers, such as Three-Dimensional Waco, Barbarian Stomp and Kwiktime Osama (Oryx 40, 77-86), stress the idea that in order to excel in their society the boys must be able to detach themselves from their own emotional reality. The aim of Blood and Roses is to trade colossal human atrocities with artistic achievements in a “Benjaminian” assertion that civilisation and barbarism go hand in hand (Oryx 80; Canavan, “Hope” 143). “One Mona Lisa equalled one Bergen-Belsen, one Armenian genocide equalled the Ninth Symphony plus three Great
Pyramids,” recalls Jimmy, “but there was room for haggling” (Oryx 79). The game itself is based in ideas of creation (of artworks) and apocalypse (in the sense of genocidal violence), and teaches the boys that this kind of trade can be experienced as an enjoyable game. Extinctathon is another such game that particularly makes use of biblical myths of creation and destruction; it is a game Koosed calls “a perverse inversion” of the creation and naming of animals in Genesis 2 (“Primordial Myth” 138) and Mohr aptly summarises as “a sardonic extinction marathon showing where the Anthropocene is heading, that unravels history, evolution, and Christianity backwards” (32). To these I would add, as Esther Muñoz-González does, the observation that Atwood uses a palindrome for its master, MaddAddam, in order to play upon the idea of time sweeping backwards as well as forwards, or of “eternal return” (“Posthuman Cure” 206). Upon entering the game, the screen ominously reads: “Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones. Do you want to play?” (Oryx 80). It is interesting to note, from the point of view of affect, that some of Koosed’s questions upon encountering this mad Adam are, “is he angry? is he crazy?” (“Primordial Myth” 138). We might invert these questions as Bray and Moore do to diagnose the societal problem at the root of such imagined states of mind: let’s ask, “How might anger diagnose a society that demands we ignore the mass extinction our species is causing?” and “How might madness diagnose a society that demands we carry on despite this knowledge?” Whatever the impetus behind them, it becomes ever clearer for the reader that these games seem to foreshadow some of what will later be played out in the coming catastrophe, after which Jimmy seems finally to understand the meaning of
“Blood and Roses”: “the Blood player usually won, but winning meant you inherited a wasteland” (Oryx 80).

When not bartering with life and death in games, the two bored, curious and unsupervised young boys turn their time to the internet: viewing everything from child pornography to public executions, from animal torture to a livestream of a woman reading Shakespeare aloud while on the toilet, and never quite knowing what is real or fake (Oryx 84). For Stephen Dunning, this kind of leisure time spent together-but-apart on their computers creates “profound divisions within the self, including the fundamental splitting off of the body from the locus of self-consciousness” (92-93) – something that compounds the already emotionally deprived environment of the corporate cities they inhabit. Ariel Kroon concurs that the detachment from the gory spectacles the boys view online creates the perfect environment for learning to resist being emotionally affected by what they see, which may or may not be staged (24). But for other theorists, these games paradoxically serve to emphasise the characters’ absolute craving for the experience of strong emotions, which they are denied in real life. Amelia Defalco, for example, notes that the devaluing of affect in Jimmy’s and Crake’s in-person society (itself a hyperextension of twenty-first-century American culture) naturally leads to a desire for emotional experiences, hence the enthusiastic uptake of Crake’s boobytrapped BlyssPluss pill:

In this society, a lack of affect is valued, while communication and emotionality are dismissed or derided, producing a hierarchical distinction between so-called “numbers people” and “word people”. This cultural derision toward feelings produces a paucity of sensation that Crake exploits with the development of his deadly BlyssPluss pill, which promises extreme, pleasurable embodied affects, but, in fact, obliterates the bodies that consume it. Crake’s bioform is a gruesome reminder of subjects as vulnerable, affective bodies. (437)
Jimmy, looking back on the events that have led to his recent apocalypse, recalls that “Desire and fear were universal, between them they’d been the gravediggers” (*Oryx* 273). He knows this all too well himself, having worked on the advertising campaign that manipulated consumers to purchase the pills. But were desire and fear the gravediggers, or was the real culprit the society that provokes-and-yet-forbids such strong emotions, and Crake the master manipulator of this affective paucity? If I were to frame this in Bray and Moore’s diagnostic language, I might ask “How might *unquenchable sensual desire* diagnose a society that provides a surfeit of commodified sexual availability in place of meaningful connection?” and “How might *unacknowledged fear* diagnose a late capitalist society that operates in full knowledge of its irreversible negative impact on our environment and society, and forces its citizens to participate in this or risk expulsion or death?”

As a sensitive teenager witnessing these things online, real or fake, Jimmy clearly absorbs their effects, often feeling queasy on his way home. Crake, on the other hand “didn’t seem to be affected by anything he saw […] except when he thought it was funny” (*Oryx* 87). Where Jimmy has observed Crake grinning through assisted suicide livestreams, he later learns from Crake, “it showed flair to know when you’d had enough” (*Oryx* 84). Crake also describes his mother’s death, which he witnessed (perhaps caused), as “impressive” – which Jimmy assumes is Crake “preserving his dignity” in grief, but to the reader forms another clue to his potential psychopathy (*Oryx* 177). For Snyder, the formal qualities of the novel (i.e. the flashing backwards and forwards in time) reflect Jimmy’s state of mind as a man who has not only been traumatised by witnessing the mass murder of humanity, but was also traumatised
multiple times over as a young boy, and for whom the traumas of his youth are reawakened by the more global disaster:

The pandemic—a singular traumatic event of global proportions, yet one that replays past private traumas for the protagonist—marks the moment at which these two registers of the narrative collide, or the moment at which they are revealed to have been one all along. (479).94

Canavan’s analysis concurs with Snyder’s, as he writes, “we might say that the entire plot of [Oryx] unfurls through the recovery of Jimmy’s buried traumatic memories of the unhappy hypercapitalist system of which he is now the last survivor” (“Hope” 142). To which I would add that the sticky stories of apocalypse and creation act as catalysts for the emotions evoked by these memories. By narratively inserting Jimmy’s difficult childhood and teenaged memories amidst the events of the recent past and present trouble, Atwood multiplies the emotional impact of her story (and does so again with Ren, Toby, Adam One and Zeb in subsequent novels), using frequent biblical allusions and motifs to suggest their part in catalysing those emotions. For example, in one of his flashbacks, young Jimmy understands from his father that their Compound separates them from the “pleeblands” – that they are the privileged few, and that the compound functioned like the castles of old: “Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside” (Oryx 28). The separation of us from them pictured in the image of the medieval castle, combined with the apocalyptic events Jimmy recalls, prompts the reader to picture the New Jerusalem described in Revelation – but to sympathise not with the privileged few as Jimmy’s father does, but with the “everybody else” outside.

94 Anecdotally, this point has become even more compelling in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which (though on a scale not comparable to the MaddAddam trilogy) has nonetheless had a long-term impact on people’s mental as well as physical health.
For Jimmy this becomes only too real when his mother leaves the compound in order to pursue activism against the health corporations that provide life-saving transplants only to those who can afford them, and “vitamin supplements” that actually create chronic low-level illness, for which sufferers feel the need to purchase more supplements. Before his mother leaves, Jimmy recalls his father describing her as overly emotional (in terms of hot and cold) – whereas Jimmy himself is only ever rewarded for seeming unflappable (Oryx 17). Reading these novels alongside Ahmed’s work also, Kroon identifies the fact that the compounds act “as a society where a disaffected response to suffering is not interpreted as insanity or madness, but in fact characterizes the practice of science and the capitalist economic system itself” (21). In his mother’s depression I am reminded again of Bray and Moore’s affective diagnoses, one of which reads: “How might depression diagnose a society that demands we be ever more efficient and productive but systematically denies us the feelings necessary to perform optimally or even adequately?” (6). Paul W. Harland expresses a very similar viewpoint, citing different theorists, on the subject of ecological grief in the MaddAddam trilogy, where traditionally psychologists would be more concerned with “finding illness within the individual, rather than in the society that has created the devastation” (584).

In the characters committed to corporate life, Harland observes “psychic numbing,” a term that describes the “psychological condition of willful blindness and political paralysis” felt (or rather, not felt) by those who have witnessed and had to adjust to traumatic circumstances (593). To this I would add that the biblical myths of

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95 Kroon uses Ahmed’s concept of the “happiness dystopia” (The Promise of Happiness) and Lauren Berlant’s Cruel Optimism in her assessment of affect in Oryx, but does not do so in relation to biblical myth.
creation and apocalypse serve as additional anaesthetics that distract and soothe those living in the trouble. Crake’s “Paradice Project” for example, receives boundless funding because it promises the kind of affectless bliss of Eden for those looking for genetically enhanced, healthy, attractive, intelligent IVF babies. For those outwith the corporate compounds, living with uncontrollable climate change and unchecked crime, cults such as God’s Gardeners promise a similar solace in the greater meaning offered by the promise of apocalyptic renewal. But without either science or a belief system to soothe Jimmy, the claustrophobic and unhappy mise en scène of Jimmy’s nuclear family begins to form a microcosm of the wider late capitalist environment in which they all live: Jimmy feels a “cold lump in his stomach” on hearing his parents’ arguments, knowing that, soon, his personal disaster will hit (Oryx 58). “If there was going to be a catastrophe, some final collapse,” he thinks, “he needed to witness it” (Oryx 57-58). While these words refer to his parents’ relationship, the prolepsis is evident to the reader who already knows Jimmy is narrating from a postapocalyptic world in which he does witness the catastrophe (Tate 63).

It is telling, then, that Jimmy goes on to study emotion at university. His dissertation is entitled, “Self-Help Books of the Twentieth Century: Exploiting Hope and Fear.” Readers also come to learn that his first job after university is to write advertising copy for “AnooYoo,” a cosmetics and lifestyle brand, where “Hope and fear, desire and revulsion, [...] were his stocks-in-trade” (Oryx 249). Clearly well informed in how emotions might be manipulated through language and imagery, Jimmy provides the reader with an early hint of the role affect is to play not only in his own but also in the other characters’ lives. And yet, we also see that after the pandemic Jimmy becomes
“alienated from his own affects” (Defalco 440-41), as instead of crying he only notices
“salt water is running down his face again” and his “breath […] coming in gasps” (Oryx
11). Reading disaffection in other works of fiction, Emily Horton notes that “[t]his
disjointed affective and spatial-temporal experience is not uncommon in the twenty-first
century novel, where in various instances disembodied voices register affective
estrangement or removal” (355). In characters such as Jimmy, “detachment takes the
place of overt panic” – and the obvious absence of that panic becomes an issue in itself
(Horton 356). I am reminded here again of Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings* in which sometimes an
inappropriate feeling (or in this case, lack of feeling) creates an “unpleasurable feeling
about the feeling,” thereby compounding Jimmy’s unhappiness at not being able fully to
experience them (10). Through his flashbacks, however, Atwood allows the reader
further insight into his grief and the dangers it poses. When he learns of his mother’s
death and he is drinking alone in his room, the narrative reads,

[...] but he had to dull the pain. The pain of what? The pain of the raw torn places, the
damaged membranes where he’d whanged up against the Great Indifference of the
Universe. [...] What he really wanted was revenge. But against whom, and for what? (Oryx 260)

This extract aptly portrays the channelling of his grief into an unfulfilled desire to cause
pain. This, we imagine, is the revenge Crake also seeks, having lost his father in similar
circumstances; the only difference being Crake has far more power to enact his revenge
fantasy.

This difference in the way these two boys process their emotions continues into
their separate lives at university, where Jimmy is shocked to discover Crake’s emotional
detachment from the experiments being conducted, particularly those performed on
animals. In this the reader begins to see just how easy it is for Crake to wreak his
revenge on humanity. It is during this time at university that Jimmy discovers MaddAddam is more than a computer game. Crake tells him:

I thought at first they were just another crazy Animal Liberation org. But there’s more to it than that. I think they’re after the machinery. They’re after the whole system, they want to shut it down. So far they haven’t done any people numbers, but it’s obvious they could. (Oryx 217)

By this point in the novel, readers are beginning to understand how Crake’s character, his “rationalistic and game-like – and utterly affectless – approach to life” can find power and consequence to the extent that the human race will be almost entirely wiped out (Bouson, “Game Over” 146). Koosed reiterates the observations of many before her when she states that Crake “lacks empathy, an ability to understand and feel the emotions of other people” (“Primordial Myth” 143). However, as has been discussed above, Koosed adds that while Crake appears to lack empathy on an interpersonal level, he possesses a kind of “deep ecological altruism” that reveals a desire to give other species a chance by resetting the imbalance caused by the dominance of humans on Earth (143). Thus the Crake who murders most of the human population including his lover proves himself at least, in vast ecological time, to be concerned for the diversity of all other life on the planet.

And yet, importantly, many critics can be said to have overlooked the hints by Atwood that Crake does indeed experience emotional suffering, even empathy. It is only with the more recent turn to affect that some have investigated the ways in which Crake has been written off as a psychopath when he may simply be processing his feelings differently to others. For example, Jimmy discovers that Crake experiences horrific nightmares that make him scream in his sleep; something Dunning calls his “unacknowledged personal agony” (93). There are multiple clues that Crake may have
Asperger’s Syndrome, and has clearly not received the kind of support or understanding for it that he, in his troubled upbringing, should have. Sharon Wilson argues that this may be part of his descent into genocidal thinking, as “his buried resentment over his father’s murder helps precipitate the disgust that culminates in his species murder” (47). Interestingly, Hannes Bergthaller also uses the word disgust in relation to Crake’s state of mind: “[...] it is quite clear that Crake, underneath his veneer of cynical aloofness, nourishes a deep disgust of the world he grows up in, and is motivated not by greed but by a genuine desire to change it” (735). Writing about Kristevaan abjection and Oryx, Hilde Staels also sees Crake’s behaviour as expelling, or abjecting, “the human feelings, desires, and bodily drives that he wishes to extinguish in himself, and which he sees grotesquely reflected in Jimmy, his repressed dark shadow” (II). It is through these small revelations into Crake’s painful interior world and his lonely connection with Jimmy that Atwood enables the reader to empathise with his otherwise diabolical actions; an authorial strategy many have likened to Mary Shelley’s in *Frankenstein* (Ingersoll 167; Staels II).

Retrospectively, Jimmy recalls that he is now living what must have been Crake’s nightmares, but he may also have been living Crake’s past in the expression of his unprocessed childhood trauma. If Crake were truly devoid of interior emotion or affect, why would he feel so strongly about ending humanity? Rather than diagnosing Crake as the archetypal villainous scientist with no emotions, I would instead diagnose the society he grows up in as grossly neglectful of his childhood feelings. Again, in the style of Bray and Moore I might ask, “How might Crake’s apparent *emotional numbness* diagnose a society that fails to care for neurodiverse, traumatised children *and in fact*
rewards those children for their apparent emotional detachment?“ Crake’s “improvements” to the human race (in the form of his Crakers) therefore reveal far more about his own emotional pain than a surface reading of the novels suggests, which is the benefit of reading these texts through the lens of affect theory. When Ren overhears Crake telling people he is “working on solutions to the biggest problem of all, which was human beings – their cruelty and suffering, their wars and poverty, their fear of death” (Flood 305), we understand Crake’s own fear and suffering, his internal battles and interpersonal poverty, his own fear of what brought about his father’s death. And these “improvements” are, of course, highly informed by the promise of bliss delivered by the biblical garden narrative, or the New Jerusalem. In its blatant satire (hinted at by its Swiftian epigraph), Crake’s “Paradice Dome” containing his Craker floor models is “quite deliberately framed by the novel as an over-the-top return to Edenic perfection” (Canavan, “Hope” 152). But not seeing the satire himself, Crake tends only to his obsession with order and division, with detaching himself from his pain. The Crakers are a nostalgic dream for an innocence he cannot regain, while the plague-carrying96 BlyssPluss pill is the apocalypse that must bring it about.

Even within the Paradice Dome, Crake continues to draw lines of division that reveal his inner anxieties: most notable in its grim humour is Crake’s plan to eliminate sexual competition and the “problems” of bonding and unrequited love by introducing an oestrus cycle in females that signals fertility by turning their abdomens blue. The males in turn perform a naked mating dance with their equally blue genitalia and four are selected to be the “fourfathers” to mate with this one woman (who has had her

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96 The virus is named JUVE “Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary” (Oryx 341). Jimmy thinks this is a nod to RejoovenEsence (the company that employed Crake) but the name is also suggestive of Jove or Jehovah.
vulva strengthened by premeditative Crake) (Oryx 165). This forms a typically Atwoodian parodic inversion of the heteronormative, polygamous model provided by later chapters of Genesis, and not unlike the message that Atwood conveys in *The Handmaid’s Tale.* Yet Crake’s vision of Edenic sex is surprisingly Augustinian in its interpretation of Genesis 2-3: Augustine imagines that the first man and woman would not have been driven by lust and would instead have been able to choose to stir their loins calmly, and at will (Greenblatt 116-17). Similarly troubled by the complications of lust, Crake instead imagines a mating process that is routine and devoid of romantic feeling. For Crake, as for the authors of Genesis, procreation is a priority,97 the major difference being that in Crake’s creation “there can be no establishment of paternity, and therefore no patrilineal descent” (Canavan, “Hope” 145). Though he thinks of them as nothing more than “hormone robots,” Jimmy also acknowledges that their ways mean that there will be “[n]o more *No means yes,* [...] No more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the price, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape” (Oryx 166, 165). With these alterations, Crake attempts98 to ensure that all manner of negative affects to do with pair bonding such as jealousy, dejection, loss, longing, or physical or emotional abuse are done away with: after all, as Crake himself demonstrates, “Extreme emotions could be lethal” (Oryx 166). In Crake’s energies here, I identify Ahmed’s insistence that, “fear does not involve the defence of borders that already exist; rather fear makes those borders, by establishing objects from which the subject, in fearing, can flee” (*Emotion* 67). Yet this statement is highly ironic in the wake of Crake’s apocalyptic plan to end humanity as he knew it: in his desire to sweep away negative affect, Crake creates far

97 See, for example, Genesis 1.28a; 17.1-8; 30.
98 I write “attempts” here because, as this chapter goes on to show, his efforts are not successful.
more of it for the people who had been living in his time. The result is that the “solutions” to our “imperfectly monogamous” way of life may not convince readers that there was a worse problem to begin with (Oryx 166).

Others may wonder, for instance, why Crake would have it that the lack of paternity places all the childcare back into the female Crakers’ hands – Crake’s sexism is made clear in his conversations with Jimmy, for example when he declares, “Female artists are biologically confused” (Oryx 168). And this sexism is lived out in the Crakers he creates, as the first time the reader meets adult Crakers they are described as follows: “here come the men, carrying their torches, and behind the women [...] carrying his weekly fish” (Oryx 99, 100). Even among their own men, longstanding human hierarchical behaviour reveals itself as the tallest man naturally becomes the “spokesperson” (Flood 409). Not only this, but while much has been written about the inequalities programmed into the Crakers between the genders, there is little exploration into the absence of homosexual and homoromantic love in Crake’s new creation. Total nondeviation from the heteronormative coupling set out in Genesis 2-3 seems also to have been biologically built in to the Crakers, just as it is in the Lilith’s Brood trilogy. As is becoming evident, Crake is led by a genetic essentialism not unlike the Oankali of Butler’s trilogy. What readers learn, witnessing Jimmy’s subsequent suffering after the pandemic, is that this failure of biological essentialism to produce the grounds for happiness, as Crake sees it, is compounded by the myths of creation and destruction that also promise such happiness.

For example, Crake’s plan in doing away with sexual rivalry and competition highlights one major problem for Jimmy at least: his own loneliness after the pandemic,
even amidst the Crakers. In his separateness from them, Jimmy becomes an odd ‘adam figure, prior to the creation of Eve. The detachment reinforces the hierarchy imposed in Genesis 2.18-21, where animals are created for the man and he finds them wanting; only for Jimmy the “animal” Crakers, in their beauty and innocence, seem superior to him, which makes Jimmy feel more like the animal in that relationship. Lonely monster that he is, Jimmy cries “Crake! […] Where’s my Bride of Frankenstein?” (Oryx 169). This is one of a handful of direct references to the fact that, as Emelia Quinn argues, Oryx constitutes “an overt re-writing of Frankenstein” (157), which itself of course multiply references Paradise Lost. Readers picking up on this intertextuality will recall that, in his own terrible loneliness, Frankenstein’s creature cries out for his own Eve. The image of Jimmy-as-Frankenstein’s-Monster also serves, of course, to further identify Crake with Dr Frankenstein. This is certainly the case in Karen Stein’s reading, where Crake-Frankenstein and Jimmy-monster are two halves of a “divided self,” where “Frankenstein is the obsessive intellect, and the creature is the feeling, emotive, vulnerable self who craves human connection but is also capable of violence” (144). But while K. Stein writes, “[Crake’s] narrative, like Frankenstein’s, points to the dangers of pride, of valuing reason at the expense of emotion and empathy” (154), I would instead argue that while Crake favours rationality himself, he actually values emotion and empathy, understanding that storytelling is a tool for manipulating those qualities in others. Why else would he name his laboratory “Paradice” and his pill “BlyssPluss,” if not to tempt potential customers with the promise that things can not only be Edenic, but better than Eden. And to convince original humans like Jimmy that it is not Crake’s creation that is monstrous, but the preexisting (fallen) human.
For Michèle Lacombe, Jimmy’s monstrous liminality is also informed by Haraway’s cyborg figure and “revisits feminist theory’s understanding of de Beauvoir’s woman-as-monster by transforming the aging Jimmy into a parody of a woman” (III). In his progressively lower state, suffering with hunger, mothering his Crakers, limping with an infected foot, wearing his floral bedsheets toga, Jimmy is repeatedly feminised by the narrative. It is for this reason that I do not support Watkins’ and Northover’s argument that he stands in masculine contrast to the female voices of Flood. If the abject is conceived as a typically feminine phenomenon, Jimmy certainly becomes an abject figure for the Crakers, who are morbidly fascinated by his emotional and physical too-muchness. For Staels, it is the “concealed squalor of affect inside his body that uncontrollably erupts and breaks the barrier of repression” (II), seen in stark contrast to the mild, content Crakers. But Atwood asks: are these seemingly disaffected Crakers an improvement on the human condition, even in Jimmy’s state? Through these Crakers, Atwood reveals Crake’s insecurities, his instincts to curb and control human passions and make them like the “brute beasts that have no understanding” of the Book of Common Prayer, rather than Adams and Eves.

In another instance of Crake’s misguided (re)creation, readers find his paradoxical vision of paradise seems to permit free polyamory while actually enforcing highly conservative rules about how that sex may take place. The sex act is so biologically determined and “innocent” for them that, in an amusing episode, they think Jimmy’s swearing is an address to a person: “How to explain to them what ‘Oh fuck’ means?” wonders Toby, “They would never believe that the word for copulation could mean something bad: an expression of disgust, an insult, a failure. To them, as far as she
can tell, the act is pure joy” (*MaddAddam* 146). Unfortunately for the surviving original humans, the Crakers’ supposed innocence leads to a “major cultural misunderstanding” when the males mistake the scent of non-Craker women for a mating signal, which in at least one case leads to rape (*MaddAddam* 13). Rather than rid humanity of their “carnal lusts,” then, Crake has instead made them slaves to it, and slaves to the consequences of such “misunderstandings.” While Crake’s plan may have imagined “perfect” beings, in that they cannot help but obey their DNA, he has not allowed for the difficulties that arise through contact with the *Other*. Crake’s plan would only have worked, as Rhona Trauvitch posits, “Were they to live in a vacuum” like, we can suppose, the Paradise Dome in which they began (175). It is only Toby’s intervention and the gentle nature of the Crakers that allows them to learn it is wrong to assault the non-Craker women, yet they are dissatisfied and confused by this discovery. Toby hears the Craker men conferring, “*They are not like our women, they are not happy, they are broken*” (*MaddAddam* 100). Thus unrequited affection, sexual shame and confusion are reintroduced into Paradise, but only as a consequence of Crake’s own biases.

Another corporal tweak of Crake’s that does not necessarily achieve his aims is the territorial urinating performed by males, which is intended to deter predators from entering their camps. Crake programs this ritual in to give the male Crakers “something important to do, something that didn’t involve child-bearing, so they wouldn’t feel left out” (*Oryx* 155). Crake’s interpretation of gendered roles here echoes the overly romanticised ideas of matriarchal societies warned against by Armstrong, who argues that “an unconscious resentment of the female” was always evident beneath its veneration of her (39; see Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis). While Canavan calls the
pissing ritual “passive, community-oriented” (“Hope” 146) other critics judge it to be another of Crake’s fallacious returns to phallocentrism. For example, Narkunas dubs the urine ritual a failure in that, “by creating a relationship between the penis and marking territory, Crake reasserts the patriarchal norms he had tried to engineer out of existence” (15). Given Crake’s other decisions to tie his male and female creations to more animalistic biological functions I am more inclined to agree with Narkunas – that the “dance of dongs” (15) and territorial urinating ritual are intended by Atwood to be Freudian products of Crake’s vision of “masculine” science over “feminine” nature. This line of urine draws a metaphorical as well as physical line not only between human and beast, and male and female, but also between civilised and uncivilised in the “original” humans’ minds.99 On the surface, examples such as these show that while Crake’s scientific methods seem to blur the boundaries between animal and human, his genetic tweaks only ingrain pre-existing divisions.

As well as weeding out our propensity to experience “harmful symbolisms” which lead us to covet wealth, wage war, experience jealousy or develop racist attitudes, Crake also determines to rid humankind of its need for religion (Oryx 305). Crake’s rationale is Orwellian: “to eliminate from the Craker’s mind the very capacity to conceive of God, whom the atheistic Crake scornfully declares is merely ‘a cluster of neurons’” (Canavan, “Hope” 136; Oryx 157). But the fact that the Crakers nevertheless develop and engage in their own belief systems to satisfy their feelings, urges and questions, absorbing the stories told to them by the surviving humans, goes to prove

99 For example when Crozier, a young God’s Gardener, joins the Crakers in their ritual, Toby wonders if he is “going native” – again forgetting that they themselves are the natives (MaddAddam 31). Ivory Bill corroborates that this was how Crake must have seen the Crakers – as indigenous peoples: “and Homo sapiens sapiens as the greedy, rapacious Conquistadors” (MaddAddam 140).
that religion and other forms of power are based in “the economies of affect—
economies of pleasure, economies of rage and wonder, economies of sensation, of
shame and dignity, of joy and sorrow, of community and hatred” (Schaefer, quoted in
Bray and Moore 6). As a later section of this chapter shows, the Crakers crave an origin
story to help them understand and process their feelings about themselves and the
world around them. By giving them their creation story, which I will address in more
depth further on in this chapter, Jimmy allows them to deify their sky-god creator Crake
and his consort Oryx, through whom the Crakers process their feelings of awe, fear,
disgust and desire. They act as a case study for demonstrating how important affect is,
not only in producing apocalyptic endings à la Crake, but also in formulating any concept
of beginnings, as the Crakers must do in order to understand themselves.

Another by-product of Crake’s attempt to make the Crakers incapable of abstract
thought is supposedly to achieve immortality, because in Crake’s mind, they cannot
conceptualise death (Oryx 303). Instead, the Crakers are programmed simply to drop
dead aged thirty and not worry about it before then – though readers may notice that
Crake does not seem to have provided for what happens in the remaining Crakers’
minds when their kin start dropping dead. It is as if, in submerging his own grief, Crake
has forgotten that others will form connections and grieve their dead, as indeed they do
– even the deaths of non-Crakers. In their Paradice Dome, at least before any of them
turns thirty, the Crakers may well be like Adam and Eve, not knowing death (nor even
the threat of it, unlike Adam and Eve). Comparing them to Milton’s first couple, Andrew
Tate notes that in this respect, the Crakers have not yet fallen when they leave their
Paradice because “they are yet to experience the kind of sadness or lack of their literary
predecessors” (73). But do the biblical Adam and Eve truly know death at the expulsion either? Their not knowing the meaning or the certainty of death is precisely what the serpent relies upon to tempt them to eat the forbidden fruit – and indeed, the snake is correct, as the debates about whether or not God lied suggest. Indirectly, this facet of Crake’s creation references a gap at the emotional climax of Genesis 2-3, which is that the protoplasts have no concept of death and therefore no understanding of the consequences of the prohibition. “With no prohibition,” writes Lara Dodds, “[the Crakers] do not risk that the known unknown of death will prompt another Fall into knowledge and history” (133). The effect of this on readers is a paradoxical one, since readers cannot imagine unknowing such a thing. Highlighting the lack of this “known unknown” to readers, Dodds aptly illustrates the dual nature of the transgression, where “Eve is tempted by knowledge, but the myth tempts its interpreters with the opposite state, the possibility of escaping knowledge in order to return to an always-already lost state of innocence” (136). Therefore through the survivors and their interactions with the Crakers, Atwood demonstrates that innocence is “always-already lost,” and emphasises why such a project such as Crake’s would be wasteful of the art of “learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present” (Haraway, Trouble 1).

But before they know any kind of negative affect, the Crakers and their children are like Butler’s Oankali in many ways. They barely even express anything like positive affect in the way we would recognise it; Jimmy is discomfited when he notices in the children “[n]o nudging, no giggling” (Oryx 8). They are content, of course, but in a way that seems distastefully boring to Jimmy. When Jimmy asks about whether or not they are capable of joking, Crake replies in the negative: “‘For jokes you need a certain edge,
a little malice [...] I think we've managed to do away with jokes” (Oryx 306). It is this apparent lack of strong affect that seems to distance the Crakers from humans more even than the pigoons, who later form an important part of the survivors’ society. If what makes us human is our complex emotions, one might ask (especially when reading about the Crakers) if the first couple of Eden were human at all until they ate the fruit. Crislip invites readers to ask the same when he writes, “Genesis’ compressed, terse narrative of Eden and its aftermath posits mortality, toil, and emotional suffering as the sine qua non of humanness” (108). Along similar lines, Trauvietch notes that the Crakers’ passivity is a significant deviation from rabbinical understandings of Genesis 1-3, where the cerebral act of naming and the more physical act of tending (the garden) was part of what differentiated mankind from animals:

The Crakers [...] are not designed to collaborate or in any way participate in developing their surroundings. Moreover, the Crakers do not share Adam’s role in characterizing and classifying the animals, that is, they are not portrayed as recognizing the intrinsic qualities of or having dominion over the animals that share their space. We see therefore that the Crakers participate in maintaining God’s creation even less than Adam does, if at all. Without this attribute of naming and recognition, and without a role in the development of creation, the Crakers’ role is not very different from that of the animals. (177)

As a result, this new creation of Crake’s is bound purely to instinct, completely lacking in free will, and therefore incapable of achieving that which separates humans from animals even before the Fall. This gives us a bit more insight into Crake’s plans for humanity, which is really to say that, without the qualities we possess that have led to mass extinctions, pollution, war, famine, etc., is his new creation really human? This is the same question Atwood herself asks of her readers: “How far can humans go in the

100 As free will is understood in the commentaries used in Trauvitch’s study, those of Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki) and Rabbi Elie Munk.
alteration department before those altered cease to be human?” and “What is the little dystopia concealed within such utopian visions of the perfected human body – and mind?” (Other Worlds 91, 95; see also “Utopia”). But in these novels the question is not so clear-cut, because of the existence of the pigoons, who in their rituals, logic and relationships represent something close to human. In this case, then, Crake seems less informed by the more commonly received interpretation of the creation stories as myths that keep separate humans from animals, and more concerned with ridding humanity of the ability to think of themselves as separate, perhaps because these creation stories generate much of the division and hierarchies that lead to emotions like disgust in the first place.

God’s Gardeners and their “Green Eschatology”

I begin this section with a summary provided by Sheinfeld, which neatly sums up the ways in which the God’s Gardeners cult, and their leader Adam One, blend apocalypse and creation together for their particular belief system:

Apocalyptic eschatology—the expectation of an apocalyptic end time—is fundamental to the God’s Gardeners theology, but for Adam One the apocalypse is tied specifically to the current environmental and ethical crises happening in their world: Adam One provides a reinterpretation and use of Genesis especially as the ideological grounding for the God’s Gardeners. (213)

Canavan observes that this cult is first portrayed as merely a collection of manic street preachers in Oryx, and then more sympathetically rendered in Flood (“Hope” 154). Writing before the publication of MaddAddam, what Canavan accurately suspects is that
Atwood will change the way the reader sees them again in the final text of the trilogy.\textsuperscript{101} After having toured the US with a real gospel choir and inspired many musicians and churches to adapt and use the hymns from *Flood* (Mallick), Atwood presents them again in *MaddAddam* as at least partially responsible for causing the “Waterless Flood” they so accurately foresaw. In doing so Atwood models a hermeneutical strategy of reading and rereading the same events through different characters’ biases and motivations – which is, in fact, exactly how the Gods’ Gardeners read the Bible. An added effect of this is that her audience, who may have been taken by the Gardeners’ ethos, will feel viscerally the disappointment of their let-down. Unlike some mainstream branches of Christianity, which were famously castigated in 1967 by Lynn White Jr. for using Genesis in particular to preach anthropocentric views on creation (Koosed, “Humanity” 4), the Gardeners interpret the creation myths and other related texts in ways that deprioritise humans. Like Crake’s ideology, their belief system appears also to be based in deep ecology, though from a more overtly biblical perspective. Still, Bouson sees a strong similarity to the way the Gardeners are portrayed in the “apocalyptic environmentalism” of such ecological movements as “Earth First!” (whose activists see themselves as a kind of “chosen people” to rebuild the world) (“Romp” 347–48) – which does to some extent imply that the Gardeners paradoxically see their supposedly humble role as particularly special.

Keck describes the Gardeners’ particular blend of eco-theologies as “an Evangelical environmentalism with a New Age eco-consciousness and contemporary

\textsuperscript{101}Canavan notes that others have wondered if Atwood is genuinely trying to create an eco-religion, but suspects she would not be so “frankly naive” (“Hope” 158) – and he is right, in my estimation, especially after the publication of *MaddAddam.*
ecological and evolutionary knowledge” (32) – a community that is rare among Christian circles but not unprecedented (Maier 254-56; Quinn 154). Like the Green Bible, the ecological-leaning version of the NRSV published in 2008, the Gardeners’ sermons and hymns glean “green” interpretations from the Bible – and they also try to reconcile them with contemporary science. Hannah Strømmen calls this their “Eco-Bible” and provides a comprehensive overview of the ways in which the Gardeners take ecocritical readings of particular biblical passages (37-38), some of which I investigate in further detail in this chapter. While his biblical references are many, this chapter will focus only on those Adam One uses from Genesis 1-3, as well as any apocalyptic language (particularly from the biblical flood narrative) that finds its way into his rhetoric. Fittingly, at the start of Flood, Adam One’s sermons and hymns “take up many of the traditional problems of the Fall, including the identity of the fruit, the nature of the prohibition, and the meaning of ‘dominion’ over the animals” and read them against the grain (Dodds 146). This section looks at these interpretations alongside those of some feminist biblical scholars and theologists, making particular note of the ways the Gardeners engage or fail to engage with the connection between the subordination of nature and the subordination of women and people of colour.

The first sermons that appear in the novel, “Creation Day” and “The Feast of Adam and All Primates,” describe some of their key hermeneutical strategies. An important aspect of this is the demotion of the Word, logos, which is traditionally held in much higher esteem. Rather than considering it to be the inerrant word of God, or even

102 Atwood claims not to have known about the Green Bible when writing The Year of the Flood (Bouson, “Using Up” 18). In her acknowledgements to Flood, she however remarks, “The Gardeners themselves are not modelled on any extant religion, though some of their theology and practices are not without precedent” (Flood 433).
God-inspired, the Gardeners repeatedly refer to the Bible as “The Human Words of God” written in what they believe to be a flawed, anthropocentric way (Flood 11). This allows the Gardeners’ “day-age creationism,” for instance, to concur with scientific theories of evolution and geology – a strategy that is not unprecedented in some Christian teachings (Hoogheem 61). This only works, however, if the reader takes Genesis 1 (as Adam One does) to be the definitive description of the order of creation, rather than 2-3: “According to Science,” says Adam One, “this is the same order in which the species did in fact appear on the Planet, Man last of all. Or more or less the same order,” he hedges, “Or close enough” (Flood 12).103 This is a first clue as to how Adam One tends to cherry-pick elements from both creation narratives as if they are a seamless and monologic lesson, without making reference to their dissimilarities or the different traditions that may have authored them. In doing this he glosses over the complication presented by the “unscientific” order in which God creates living creatures in Genesis 2-3, where the ‘adam is created first, followed by the animals and finally the woman is extracted from this ‘adam. Favouring Genesis 1 in this sermon, Adam One declares, “He created us through the long and complex process of Natural and Sexual Selection, which is none other than his ingenious device for instilling humility in Man” (Flood 52). As Deborah Sawyer notes, the idea of the imago dei in Gen. 1.26 (that humans are created in the image of God), “constructs a multi-stratified hierarchy with absolute power at the pinnacle, and a recognizable but diminished power in its human reflection” (God 19). But by portraying the hierarchy as a downward one, reminding his followers to be

103 Mark Harris provides a helpful outline of the ways in which Genesis 1 has interacted with such scientific interpretations throughout history, stressing the important difference between understanding it as metaphor or as a parable/fable (39-41). He warns, “pigeon-holing it as a ‘metaphor’ of creation (or, worse, as “poetry”) simply introduces confusion” (49).
humble, Adam One’s re-vision of creation “rewrites one of the most dominant discourses of Western thought simply by eliminating anthropocentric comparisons between God and man” (Hummel 993). This, of course, implicitly blurs the boundaries between human and animal in a way that is reflected in much of the Gardener ethos, as this chapter later shows. In order to commit to this reading, Adam One would also have to ignore the declarations made by God in Genesis 1 that his works are “good” and finally “very good,” once he has made mankind. Not only this, but like recent liberationist biblical scholars he must reinterpret the expression “have dominion over” in God’s instructions in Genesis 1.28. Fortunately for Adam One and his followers, this can easily be done, since scripture is only “The Human Words of God.”

Ken Stone argues that there is plenty of ground in Genesis for these kinds of teachings to be taken seriously; indeed, “we, like Adam One, may be as impressed by the biblical writers’ perception of similarities between humans and animals as by their perception of differences” (“Queer Animalities” 275-76). K. Stone reminds the reader not only of the talking serpent, but also of the fact that God makes both human and nonhuman animals from the same ’adamah (soil) and all contain nephesh (life/a soul), so “[t]he line between humans and animals in the Garden is thus far from secure” (“Queer Animalities” 276). Concentrating on these less common interpretations allows the Gardeners to unlearn the strict divisions that allow, in their society, for the rampant consumption and experimentation on animals. For example, Adam One reads a vegetarian lifestyle into both creation accounts; and though this reading is not

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104 Quoting the Sanhedrin, Kristen E. Kvam et al. point out that a similar point has been made by a talmudic sage about the creation of animals before humans in Genesis 1 (7). This, of course, is the opposite strategy of the “best-till-last” argument offered in the Querelle des Femmes, but serves a similar purpose.
mainstream, he is not the first to notice that “Man in his unfallen state was not yet a carnivore” (Year 13). Trible notes that, for humans and animals in Genesis 1, “Both were created on the same day; both eat the same food” (1); and though they are created at different times in 2-3, God commands, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen. 2.16-17). For this pivotal verse in Genesis 2, the overwhelming focus has tended to be on the prohibition rather than the diet, but Adam One’s reading has drawn out the vegetarian inference instead. It is the Gardeners’ dedication to such practices that convinces Toby and many others over time that an organic, foraging, pacifist and plant-based lifestyle is a very effective way of staying with the trouble. But as this chapter later explores, Atwood also deeply undermines the Gardeners’ ethos by revealing multiple hypocrisies at work in the community.

Part of Adam One’s seemingly egalitarian strategy in this flawed pan-species egalitarianism is to take a biblical pericope that has usually been intended to address humans and recast it as a universal address to all creatures. Traditionally this kind of task has been taken up by feminist theologians and biblical scholars in order to replace the masculine-gendered term with something inclusive of two or more genders. But Adam One takes it further: for example, imploring his followers not to harm any animal or insect, he turns to the New Testament to paraphrase Matthew 25.40: “Insofar as you do it unto the least of God’s Creatures, you do it unto Him” (Flood 53, emphasis mine). Here the Greek has been interpreted in multiple ways: the KJV has used “brethren,” the ESV

\[105\] John W. Rogerson provides an overview of historical interpretations that have drawn these same inferences from Genesis 1, from as far back as the third century CE (24-27).

\[106\] “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food” (Gen. 1.29).
“brothers,” whereas the NIV favours two genders in “brothers and sisters” and the NRSV uses the broader “family.” By choosing to interpret the term as genderless, species-less “Creatures” Adam takes the issue of linguistic equity past androcentrism and anthropocentrism through to an acceptance of all life as equally sacred. In doing so he echoes some biblical scholars who have done the same with the creation narratives in Genesis outlined in the introduction to this thesis. As we have seen, many scholars take the Hebrew ‘adam and translate it (retaining the pun) as either “earthling,” “human” or “earth creature” rather than man (Kvam et al. 27; Morse, Eve’s Afterlives 14; Trible 78).

But Adam One is not consistent in this kind of posthuman teaching: the Gardeners’ hymn “The Water-Shrew that Rends its Prey” may allow for a greater flexibility of biblical interpretation (Minister, “How to Live” 298), but the same hymn elsewhere creates separation between animal and human: “But we are not as Animals – / We cherish other Creatures’ lives” (Flood 348). How can Adam One’s ministry straddle two such opposing views about the animality of humans? Koosed explains the variation within the Bible that allows for this ambivalence:

> Arguably, the Bible begins as a speciesist manifesto—only humanity is created in the image of the divine, only humanity is given dominion over the rest of creation. However, the Bible also contains multiple moments of disruption, boundary crossing, and category confusion: animals speak, God becomes man, spirits haunt the living, and monsters confound at the end. All of these stories explore the boundaries of the human in ways that destabilize the very category of the human. (“Humanity” 3)

While Minister’s reading of this particular hymn choice of Adam One’s emphasises the productive way “loss and its accompanying grief” are incorporated into their survival

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107 Modern commentaries on this pericope argue that the term (which can be inclusive of two genders) refers specifically to Jesus’ disciples as representatives of himself (France 844-914; Nolland 1021-37). Adam One takes a bit of liberty, then, when he extends this out to all creatures.

108 This hymn is also immediately preceded by a concession by Adam One that the Gardeners might have to reject their vegetarianism in the face of famine (Flood 347).
(“How to Live” 298), my observation is that Adam One’s hymns still sometimes fall back upon the more mainstream interpretations of the biblical creation myths that privilege human life over animal life to serve his own interests in ways in which, ironically, Crake does not.

In Adam One’s use of the word *creature*, we also find another interesting link between Haraway and the Gardeners. As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Haraway speaks of the significant relationship between human and soil (*Trouble* 11-12, 55). Just as Lerman’s Ishtar referred to the destruction and recycling of her creation as “mulch for the new plantings” (*Ishtar* 10), Atwood’s Ren recalls the Gardeners sharing a similar view: “They had the idea that turning into compost would be just fine” (*Year* 59). This is where the Gardeners’ ethos takes care to acclimatise its followers to what is usually abject: the stickiness, the dirtiness of dirt, and the idea of the self decaying amidst that earth. But though both Adam One and Haraway share this same fascination with the levelling event of flesh decaying in soil, Haraway would identify Adam One’s stance as dangerous, occupying as it does the “vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures” she warns against (*Trouble* 1). As we discover, especially later on in the novel, Adam One’s philosophy is grounded in a strategy that would rather wash the world clean with a “Waterless Flood” than grapple with the present trouble of life as it is. Take, for example:

Let us pray [...] that the Waterless Flood has cleansed as well as destroyed, and that all the world is now a new Eden. Or, if it is not a new Eden yet, that it will be one soon. (*Flood* 345).

and,

It is not this Earth that is to be demolished: it is the Human Species. Perhaps God will create another, more compassionate race to take our place. (*Flood* 424)
Haraway would indeed take umbrage at any implication that such a “reboot” of humanity would in any way represent her desire for a short Anthropocene (*MaddAddam* 334), since “[t]here is nothing in times of beginnings that insists on wiping out what has come before, or, indeed, wiping out what comes after” (*Trouble* 2).

Another interesting factor in Adam One’s use of the flood narrative is the rhetorical impact of such an image. In her analysis of affect in political speeches, Ahmed highlights politicians’ use of words like “flood” as metaphors (in that particular case, to describe immigrants) in order both to dehumanise the Other and to inspire fear, anxiety and a feeling of loss of control in the audience’s mind (*Emotion* 46). Though readers are not yet aware, we later learn that Adam One may have deliberately used the idea of the obliterating, overwhelming Waterless Flood to frighten his followers into obedience so that he might help Crake carry out his genocidal plan. 109 Here Atwood paints a picture of a certain kind of biblical interpretation that: a) welcomes or at least accepts as necessary the violence promised in its apocalyptic texts; or b) longs nostalgically for prelapsarian

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109 There are several clues in *Flood* as to Adam One and other Gardeners’ involvement in the Waterless Flood. Earlier in the novel Adam One remarks, “I was a scientist. I studied epidemics” (*Flood* 40). He also tells Toby, “the CorpSeCorps run the mobs, and [...] they’ve declared us off-limits” (*Flood* 48). Glenn-Crake is clearly familiar both with Pilar and Zeb from a young age (*Flood* 145-47). Zeb then alludes to more of Adam One’s involvement in the Waterless Flood in *MaddAddam*: while “[Adam] couldn’t go on the offensive, not directly” he uses other people (including Zeb and Crake) to do his violence for him (*MaddAddam* 333). When Toby asks Zeb if Pilar knew what Crake would do with the fatal pill she gifted him (via Adam) Zeb replies: “All the real Gardeners believed the human race was overdue for a population crash. It would happen anyway, and maybe sooner was better” (*MaddAddam* 330). In another of Adam One’s sermons he again speaks suggestively of at least some involvement in the creation of the Crakers as well as the Waterless Flood when he says, “No, my Friends. It is not this Earth that is to be demolished: it is the Human Species. Perhaps God will create another, more compassionate race to take our place” (*Flood* 424). In making Zeb “the Mad Adam,” Adam One continues what he has always done with his brother, which is to have Zeb do the dirty work while he pulls the strings. Despite all this, some scholars seem not to interpret Adam One’s role as dubious by the end of *MaddAddam*. Deborah Bowen, for instance, views the Gardeners more and more sympathetically, given Atwood’s involvement with Christian activist organisations such as A Rocha (700). Northover also places Adam One among potential Christlike figures in the novels (93). This connection to Christ in my reading could only work as a satiric inversion, and an interesting connection to Crake-as-God, since it is possible that Adam One could be Crake’s father.
perfection, which Haraway among many others has warned against in recent years. Grappling with the task of reading such texts ethically, for example, Pippin asks, “Have we become co-conspirators with God, enabling global disasters and mass genocide?” (23). The unusual portrayal of Adam One certainly suggests he might be exactly that.

In another instance, Adam One again uses Genesis 2-3 as an opportunity to remind his followers that they too are animals in an affective sense:

Our appetites, our desires, our more uncontrollable emotions are all Primate! [...] Our Fall from the original Garden was a Fall from the innocent acting-out of such patterns and impulses to a conscious and shamed awareness of them; and from thence comes our sadness, our anxiety, our doubt, our rage against God. (Flood 52)

Of particular note for this thesis is Adam One’s reference to “our more uncontrollable emotions,” which are distinctly “Primate!” (Flood 52). For Adam One, such out-of-control emotions are innocent until we become aware of them, thus the knowledge and self-awareness that sets us apart from the other primates only leads to further negative feeling. This is an important deviation in Adam One’s theology from accepted ideas about innocence because it has consequences for the female members of his community. For example, a Gardener who attempts to rape Toby is not in any way punished for his behaviour, as Pilar (Eve Six) tells Toby, “Even the ancient Australopithecus can come out in all of us” (Flood 104). Pausing on scenes like this, it is easy to identify that, while the Gardeners’ reading of Genesis 1 champions equality and care across species, it frankly ignores the portrayal of man and woman as equal in that same image\(^{110}\) – an interpretation central to much feminist biblical interpretation (Primavesi 207). But the fact that Adam One makes this point through the lens of

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\(^{110}\) See Lapointe, Narkunas, K. Stein, and Watkins, all of whom notice this hypocrisy in the Gardeners’ community.
negative affect is a significant one, since he seems to teach and practise a prelapsarian attitude towards lack of shame, not allowing for the fact that they live in a postlapsarian world. His nostalgic dream of innocence therefore creates more trouble than it attempts to prevent. Furthermore, his assessment of the Fall as moving “from a joyous life in the moment into the anxious contemplation of the vanished past and the distant future” simply highlights his own clear obsession with the vanished past of Eden, which he knows he can only reach through the not-so-distant future apocalypse (Flood 189).

Several of Adam One’s teachings thus seem to contradict themselves as Adam One (and anyone else involved in the Waterless Flood) ignores his and his followers’ potential to help others experience “life in the moment” because they are too busy trying to get back to the oneiric past.

Having used evolutionary theory and the Genesis accounts to link us to our primate ancestors, Adam One again turns to the symbolism of Genesis 2-3 and various uses of the Serpent to make another similar point:

Serpent Wisdom – I propose – is the wisdom of feeling directly, as the Serpent feels vibrations in the Earth. The Serpent is wise in that it lives in immediacy, without the need for the elaborate intellectual frameworks Humankind is endlessly constructing for itself. [...] We cannot know God by reason and measurement; indeed, excess reason and measurement lead to doubt. Through them, we know that Comets and nuclear holocausts are among the possible tomorrows, not to mention the Waterless Flood, that we fear looms ever nearer. This fear dilutes our certainty, and through that channel comes loss of Faith; and then the temptation to enact malevolence enters our Souls; for if annihilation awaits us, why bother to strive for the Good? (Flood 234)

But Adam’s theology here is garbled: not only does he use a logical-seeming persuasive strategy to “prove” that reason and measurement are dangerous, but he then attempts to reason that fear results in a loss of faith, which results in “the temptation to enact malevolence.” Knowing his part in the Waterless Flood, readers will notice the irony that
Adam One highlights a loss of faith as a trigger for violence, when his insistence upon faith in a certain apocalyptic outcome actually produces that violence. Making use of the ambivalence of the serpent image once more, Adam One ends his sermon with the image of the serpent eating its tail representing “wholeness of Being” (Flood 235). Readers familiar with the symbolism of the ouroboros however will know that it is as much a symbol of destruction as it is of renewal. And Adam One is not so committed to the circularity represented by the serpent: his declensionist view of the future is one that is disturbingly linear, since the Fall is “ongoing” and “ever downward” towards what he foretells will be the Waterless Flood, with no mention of any felix culpa (Flood 52, 189). Instead, the implication is that the Fall is only the beginning of a long apocalyptic descent: a stance that resembles what Haraway would call “the self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse” in which there is no option but complete obliteration (Trouble 35). This is a position that turns out to be more dangerous than first appears, as readers learn in MaddAddam that the Waterless Flood was indeed self-fulfilling because Adam One has at least some part in bringing it about.

In a style her readers are familiar with, Atwood undermines Adam One’s teaching through satirical accounts of petty “squabbles” over issues like whether the original couple developed carnivorous teeth before or after the expulsion from the garden (Flood 240). The Gardeners are also marked by a hypocrisy that jars with Toby, particularly when she is promoted to Eve Six, as she witnesses their furtive stashing away of forbidden laptops “in direct contravention of Gardener principles” (Flood 188). She also finds issue with the idea that the Adams and Eves are equal in spiritual but not material terms, as she sees their Adam and Eve numbered rankings taken very seriously,
despite their claims that the numbers do not confer importance (*Flood* 45). In a less dramatic but no less insidious instance than the attempted rape Toby experiences, sexism rears its head early on when Toby finds herself instructed by Nuala to grow her hair long because “the aesthetic preference was God’s” (*Flood* 46). This is surprising because we already know the Gardeners consider the Bible to be the “human words of God” — and that this aesthetic preference for long hair is purported to be written by a human, Paul (1 Cor. 11.5-16). Thus, “while the Gardeners play fast and loose when interpreting the biblical creation story, they hew to a pious literalism when it comes to delineating gender roles” (Hoogheem 67). Watkins observes that Atwood may be drawing a connection here between conservative Christianity and a submerged conservatism that also finds its expression in some “green” movements (123). Greta Gaard also raises this issue when writing about ecofeminism’s complex history: that despite the myriad branches of feminist ecological thought that have never been essentialist nor goddess-focused, “the contamination lingers” (from the goddess culture of the 1970s lampooned in chapters 1 and 2) to the extent that many women’s ideas are overlooked or have had their ideas recycled without recognition (32, 40). In her portrayal of the Gardeners, Atwood demonstrates how many attempts to get “back to the garden” involve some recapitulation to essentialist stereotypes regardless of whether they arise in the religious or secular imagination.

For the reasons described above, when critics have called Adam One’s teachings “comical” (Northover 87), “silly” (Bergthaller 379; Defalco 447), and more still have taken the teachings as generally hopeful, I and others have found them unnerving. They are much like the Oankali of Butler’s trilogy in this respect, in that it is possible to read
them as utopian, but only by deliberately overlooking their problematic flaws. Though the Gardeners’ song lyrics are drawn from Blake, Bunyan, and the hymn books of the Anglican and United Churches of Canada, there is still something unsettling and insincere about their tone and delivery (Watkins 129). For example:

We cannot always trace Your path
Through Monkey and Gorilla,
Yet all are sheltered underneath
Your Heavenly Umbrella

And if we vaunt and puff ourselves
With vanity and pride,
Recall Australopithecus
Our Animal inside. (Year 54)

If Adam One were a more visibly relaxed and natural character, the tone of these could imply that he has a sense of humour. But we gather from Toby’s and later Zeb’s descriptions of him that he has always been oddly formal and sober, and “could make just about anyone except Zeb think he was innocent as an egg un laid” (MaddAddam 116). We even question Adam One’s private beliefs when he reminds Toby that “‘action precedes faith’” and “‘We should not expect too much from faith’” when she experiences a touch of imposter syndrome over her promotion to Evehood (Flood 168-69). His “instructive rhymes” such as “It’s better to hope than to mope!” and “The No Cup is bitter, the Yes Cup is yummy – Now, which one would you rather have in your tummy?” are aimed to make his teachings more memorable and child-friendly, but often ring false (not to mention condescending) to Toby (Flood 19, 89, 113). But Keck finds these charming: “Playful, irreverent, even anarchic, these elements invite a parodic, undogmatic reading of the Bible (as opposed to the totalitarian theocracy in Atwood’s Republic of Gilead in The Handmaid’s Tale)” (32). I however find that they are more like the rhetoric of the Aunts in the Gilead regime of The Handmaid’s Tale, and come across
as creepily sanitised or corporatised; oddly in opposition to the eco-friendly, low-key New Age image they are keen to represent. This is not to say that Adam One’s “green eschatology” doesn’t have ecological or theological value, but rather to convey Atwood’s tendency never to portray any belief system without undermining it somewhere else. As Jennings aptly puts it, “Atwood does not expect us to take seriously, or even accept, their version of environmental apocalypticism” (“Comic” 13) – even while it may have its merits. While I concur with Minister’s take on Atwood’s refusal of hope in the Gardeners’ biblical reinterpretations, Minister still appears to take the Gardeners’ hymns and sermons as signs of an active and productive (though not very hopeful) faith (“How to Live” 298). I do agree that Atwood does this “in order to challenge interpretation practices that would leave us stuck in the past and unable to survive” (Minister, “How to Live” 301), but my interpretation of the tone of the Gardeners’ writings has always been to read them as prime examples of Atwood’s most cutting satire.

These points seem to coalesce around a similar concluding opinion about Adam One’s leadership: his teachings may look persuasive on the surface because they are eco-conscious and survivalist, but a closer look at his underlying philosophy seems “to adopt a positioning of inaction, which leads to an apathetic retreat from the present and a complete failure of ethical responsibility” (Jennings, “Anthropocene” 28). Though Jennings does not say so explicitly, her implication here is that Adam One fails to stay with the trouble, as I have argued above. In her portrayal of this elusive character, whose words are never mediated by a narrative voice but presented in sermon-form within Flood, Atwood parodies a particular brand of American fundamentalist
evangelism in which “believers are told not to worry about or be responsible for the possible human ending of the world through nuclear accident or environmental pollution” (Pippin 98). For Adam One, the soothing myths of paradise and of inevitable destruction provide a conduit for channelling feelings of responsibility or guilt away from the individual. This is ironic, of course, if you take the reading that I do, which implicates Adam One heavily in Crake’s apocalyptic plan: his preoccupation with creation and apocalypse both inspires his acts of violence and relieves his guilt for doing so. In my reading, he repeatedly does this by amplifying particular emotions associated with biblical stories in his audience, whether fear (of the Flood), disgust (at the polluting and violent “exfern world”) or through a studied indifference to the suffering of some members of his own community. As Ahmed aptly observes about disgust, the emotion is not really a gut feeling in and of itself; instead “our relation to our guts is not direct, but is mediated by ideas that are already implicated in the very impressions we make of others and the way those impressions surface as bodies” (Emotion 83). Calling the inhabitants outside the God’s Gardener circle the “exfern world” creates exactly this kind of distancing that at once marks them out not only as external (not me/us) but also infernal, as if they already inhabit the fiery wasteland surrounding the postapocalyptic new city. It is in fact the Gardeners who make those outsiders “exfern,” rather than the outsiders themselves. This is how readers can surmise that Adam One’s teachings

111 Harry Maier adds, “Studies consistently show that the more literally American Christians read the Book of Revelation and expect an imminent Second Coming, the less likely they are to show concern for environmental issues, and the more likely they are to be skeptical or hostile towards environmentalism, especially when it is linked with governmental agencies” (254). Bowen also writes, “It is true that North American conservative evangelical Christians seem to have a harder time embracing environmentalism than some others do” (698). See Keller (63) for some notable exceptions to the rule. While Adam One’s father, the Rev, represents the stereotype more flagrantly, there are hints of it in Adam One’s philosophy too.
are really aimed at surviving the coming plague rather than making the present trouble better. Why involve religion at all, then? Because Adam One understands the power of biblical myth to manipulate the feelings of his followers. “I must sometimes say things that are not transparently honest,” he admits, “But it is for the greater good” (Flood 184).

To conclude this chapter section, I now provide a summary of some of the uncomfortable similarities between Adam One’s understanding of “the Fall” and Crake’s “solutions” to it. Where Adam One blames human greed for mass extinctions and cruelties upon other species, Crake makes meat repulsive to Crakers and borrows from rabbit DNA the ability to eat their own faeces (Canavan, “Hope” 146; Oryx 158); where Adam One claims humans fell “from simple signals into complex grammar, and thus into humanity,” Crake fiddles with the FOXp2 gene to avoid a symbolic language capable of belief in God (Flood 188, 316); and where Adam One claims humans fell “from seasonal mating into an incessant sexual twitching,” Crake provides the blue genitalia to signify seasonal oestrus in females and the polyandrous mating ritual that follows (Flood 188). Because of this, I disagree with Keck’s assertion that “Crake does not deliberately engage with specific myths of paradise, whereas Adam One explicitly draws on biblical myths” (30-31). Instead, as I have argued above, both appear to be as equally influenced by the sticky affective myths of paradise and the promise of either religion or science (or both) to restore it, just in different ways. While both are determined to return the world to an idealised Edenic order, they can only achieve this aim by developing (or at least helping to distribute) the deadliest chaos upon mankind. Pippin draws a similar conclusion about the Apocalypse of John, where the New Jerusalem seems to offer a
technological paradise, and yet it is the draw towards the chaos, the unfathomable destruction and the bottomless pit/abyss/deep (tehôm) for which the revelation is remembered (68, 86). Both Adam One and Crake, remaining attached to Edenic longing, driven by disgust at the present state of the world, resort to apocalyptic thinking instead of staying with the trouble.

For some feminist readers, this kind of instinct is a distinctly masculine one (Pippin 99; Keller 28). While the example certainly holds true for Crake and Adam One simply because they are men, I would not go so far as to say that Atwood intends her trilogy to provide such a black-and-white vision of masculine versus feminine thinking – which is why both Jimmy and Zeb’s more ambivalent narratives are important counterparts to Crake’s and Adam One’s. For those who tire of Adam One’s straightlaced earnestness, the balance is frequently provided by the Esau to his Jacob, his half-brother Zeb (Flood 242). “Zeb was the bad one who was good at bad things, Adam was the good one who was bad at good things,” Toby clarifies to the reader in *MaddAddam*, “Or who used good things as a front for his bad things” (114). By pairing up the oppositional views of the differing male characters in this way, Atwood avoids criticisms of essentialist thinking and instead portrays ways in which, in the scientifically advanced world only just beyond our own, strong affective impulses can create catastrophic change in the world. Regardless of whether Atwood presents the pull

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112 Adam has a controlled, ordered, detached manner; meanwhile Zeb is the self-titled “‘real raw deal,’” who hunts, fucks, jokes, wreaks havoc, survives, and rides the chaos (*MaddAddam* 111). Like Apollo and Dionysus, both share (or believe themselves to share) the same powerful and violent father: “The Rev” of the Church of PetrOleum, whose interpretation of Genesis is another Atwoodian satirical takedown of American “prosperity gospel” megachurches. But though each brother reacts differently to his childhood – Adam with strict control and Zeb with lusty rebellion – they remain loyal and forgiving comrades in each other’s lives. Ironically, it is through this unlikely relationship that Atwood most damningly undermines Adam One, and yet the combination of their oppositional characteristics provides the best framework for survival for Toby, as will be discussed further on in this chapter.
toward apocalypse as a gendered problem, the question of how readers receive apocalyptic texts is still an important one for feminist biblical interpretation and feminist theologies, which read texts with the problem of institutionalised violence in mind.

“What is the usual response to such scenes of violence?” asks Pippin, “Because this text is sacred scripture to Christians are we taught to ignore the violence and to repress our revulsion?” (83). The Crakers themselves, inexperienced at ignoring human violence, would certainly be revolted to encounter texts such as Revelation, as Blackbeard is revolted upon discovering the bodies of his beloved Oryx and Crake. Thus as characters try to survive after the sweep of Crake’s scythe, Atwood opens up an untidy middle ground, where each novel ends with an unknown situation or encounter, “a moment that cannot be reduced to clean, empirical measurement, and which can only be tackled by dirty and messy humanistic thinking” (Canavan, “Hope” 153).

“Make Kin Not Babies:” A Garden of Eves

Several of the papers published about the trilogy, particularly Flood, focus on the female protagonists Ren and Toby and what their narratives (in the shadow of Crake, Adam One, Jimmy and Zeb) represent in terms of feminist ecologies and ideas of kinship. Coral Ann Howells judges the second book in the trilogy to be a celebration of solidarity between women (177). Bouson goes as far as to argue that Ren and Toby’s generational differences directly reflect differing second-wave feminist and postfeminist attitudes of the time:

[...] while the middle-aged (feminist) Toby is aware of the potential brutality of male-female relations, the younger (postfeminist) Ren, who grows up both in the privileged
world of the Compounds and in the communal world of the God’s Gardeners, seemingly chooses, or at least accepts, her own sexual commodification and humiliation. (“Using Up” 14)

And through Ren and her fellow sex workers:

[...] Atwood accentuates her fear [...] that the recent gains women have made as a result of the feminist movement may be short-lived and that there is a thin line, indeed, between the postfeminist’s embrace of her sexuality and the sexist world of the prefeminist past. (“Using Up” 15)

While there may be some truth in both Howells and Bouson’s readings, I would hesitate to read them as direct representatives of gender difference or generational trends in feminism alone. Not least because of the multiplicity of strands of feminisms and postfeminisms across each generation, but also because I think there are other equally powerful factors at work within the central characters such as race, class and traumatic experience. Later sections on Oryx and Katrina Wu shall also show how race factors into the different ways the Eves are portrayed in particular, and also provides a reading in which sex workers act as revisions of both the fallen Eve and the Whore of Babylon.

But first the Gardeners: Toby grows up in the pleeblands, where her parents are financially oppressed and her mother is slowly killed by the “medication” she is taking. After her father takes his own life in despair, Toby is forced to take up a series of demeaning and corrupt jobs to support herself and ends up in the employ of a gang leader, Blanco. Katherine E. Hummel describes the “slow violence” inflicted upon her by gangs and corporation culture:

She first sells her hair, and then her ovum, a procedure which sterilizes her. Toby’s extreme circumstances illustrate how slow violence operates: a desperate attempt to earn money inflicts violence that affects not only Toby’s body, but also her now-extinct offspring. (991-92)
It is in Toby’s trajectory of healing from this slow violence, and in her relationships with
Ren, Zeb and her mentor Pilar, that the Gardeners’ ethos works most effectively. This in
turn makes her an effective survivor of the Waterless Flood, which is not to say that the
narrative in some way justifies the violence Toby has experienced, but instead offers a
view into how her experience makes her well placed to resist the numbing myths of
beginning and end. On top of this, the time she is given to heal and gain “kin” in a
supportive community greatly aids her ability to stay with the trouble later on. This is
why many scholars have written about kinship (both human and nonhuman) in relation
to Flood: Hummel employs Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “strange kinship,”
which “conceptualizes humanity and animality as a lateral continuum rather than a
hierarchy” (987). Similarly, I turn to Haraway’s work on kinship when reading the trilogy
because Toby’s adaptive ability to form connections with bees, plants, Crakers, pigoons
and other humans, while unable to have her own biological children, holds to Haraway’s
call to “make kin not babies!” (Trouble 102).

Often in Atwood’s fiction, biological mothers are absent either literally, as with
Toby, Adam and Jimmy, or emotionally, as with Crake, Ren and Zeb.113 In this trilogy,
alternative, unrelated kinships with a generational age gap are often found: Pilar and
Toby; Toby and Ren; Toby and Blackbeard; Zeb and Crake. In these relationships the
connection is often based in teaching rather than in direct caregiving. Pilar and Toby,
who call each other family at the moment of Pilar’s death, form a particularly deep
bond, which Watkins notes “attempts to replace the idea of maternal neglect or
desertion with such ‘female solidarity’” (Flood 179; Watkins 126). If we are to look at

113 Atwood’s previous novels, Surfacing, The Handmaid’s Tale and Alias Grace are other such examples.
this theme of co-working kin in relation to the biblical creation narratives, we recall that Eve does not become a mother until after the expulsion, where she receives her name, which means “mother of all living” (Gen. 3.20). Eve’s responsibilities in the garden are the same as those given to Eves at Edcneiff Rooftop: “to till it and keep it” or, one could say, to practise kinship with it (Gen. 2.15). So too in the Gardeners’ sect is biological motherhood rarely mentioned; instead it is scientists, ecologists, poets and activists who are sainted for their work. When Pilar becomes seriously ill and ends her own life painlessly using a combination of the amanita mushroom and poppy, she leaves Toby with the knowledge of how to use such plants as a weapon, a painkiller, a consciousness-raising drug and as euthanasia for herself one day. This equips her to stay with the trouble Pilar knows she is bound to encounter, and to manage her pain both through and beyond it. Significantly for this thesis, one of Toby’s roles at Edcneiff is to teach “Affective Herbs” (Flood 178), where the link between plant life and positive affect is emphasised in a way that attempts to model the prelapsarian garden. If it were not for the dark underside of Adam One’s teachings, this aspect of the Gardeners’ ethos alone portrays a powerful model of staying with the trouble; it is only thanks to Toby’s scepticism and her ignorance of Adam One’s larger plans (at least before she becomes an Eve), that this ethos proves productive. Strømmen argues something similar when she notes that, though the God’s Gardeners clearly do not represent the perfect solution to the problems presented in the preapocalyptic world, “it is noteworthy, nonetheless, that they form a strong and committed counter-strategy to the scientific and consumer-

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114 The saint days include Maori leader Ngāneko Minihinnick, naturist Dian Fossey, author and conservationist Rachel Carson, labour union activist Karen Silkwood, and scholar and activist Vandana Shiva (Flood 350, 311, 372, 319; MaddAddam 208).
capitalist way of life that has become the norm and normative in the world that collapses in the trilogy” (39).

Crucially, both Haraway’s and Merleau-Ponty’s understandings of kinship and strange kinship must include nonhuman others. Atwood illustrates this particularly persuasively by portraying Toby’s changing attitude towards the nonhuman other over time: “Through these embodied exchanges,” writes Hummel, “Toby and the bees approach an affective relation” – an ecofeminist aim that occurs “at the site of an ethical encounter” (997). While she is grateful to be safe, she is initially sceptical of the Gardeners’ beliefs, in particular Pilar’s instruction to talk to (as well as care for) the bees at Edencliff Rooftop. “If you didn’t tell the bees everything that was going on,” she tells Toby, “their feelings would be hurt and they’d swarm and go elsewhere. Or they’d die” (Flood 181). Citing Claire Preston, Keck notes that the bee lore that Pilar teaches Toby references both pagan and Christian tradition (35). Preston explains that in both European and Middle Eastern lore the bee was said to be “the only creature to escape the Garden of Eden before the consequences of Adam’s fall could be visited upon it with all the rest of creation” (76). Similarly ambivalent in its pagan and Christian referents is the mushroom mentioned above; through it, Atwood “reconfigures ancient matriarchal fertility rituals […] with the biblical story of Eve eating from the tree of knowledge” – where sometimes the forbidden fruit has been portrayed as an amanita mushroom (Keck 35). On the rooftop, Toby works through her cynicism until she has immersed herself in Gardener practices so wholeheartedly that “she finds herself unable to set their rituals, myths and practices aside” (Northover 90). As a result, she is later one of

115 Interestingly, “telling the bees” and ancient mushroom lore feature in Ishtar as well, marking out a certain kind of woman who believes in the “Evil eye and that kind of stuff” (Ishtar 97).
the human survivors most adapted to overcoming her disgust at the not-quite-humanness of the pigoons and Crakers, and even accepting both as kin.

The fact that the pigoons contain human neocortex tissue and show signs of very human affect and culture produces deep discomfort in multiple characters. In their disgust, I am reminded of Ahmed’s statement that “Kristeva shows us that what threatens from the outside only threatens insofar as it is already within” (Emotion 86). Crucially, it is the humanness of the pigoons that is disgusting, rather than their pigness, particularly since pigoons have been hunted and eaten by human survivors, thus what is “already within” is literally within some of them, as it came from human-pig hybrid cells in the first place. “Hence, disgust can move between objects through the recognition of likeness” (Ahmed, Emotion 88). Perhaps this is why the Crakers, in their seeming animalness, are not disgusting, but the pigoons, in their seeming humanness, are. This adds a level of complication to recent work by Isaac Alderman, which argues that “animal reminder disgust” (the human being reminded of their animality) is used within Genesis 2-3 to police the borders between animal and human. “Disgust of this kind is a defensive reaction,” writes I. Alderman, “guarding against the recognition of our creatureliness, which then serves as a defensive posture to keep death anxiety at bay” (62). Why, the reader may wonder, is the creatureliness of the Crakers less disgusting than the humanness of the pigoons?

As I have mentioned, for many critics Toby allows for a hopeful reading of the trilogy. And yet, Atwood teases the reader with the suggestion that the bees with whom she forms such a bond might be invaded by an “abomination […] a bee cyborg spy” used for communicating messages back to the CorpSeCorps (Flood 277). If so, the bee lore to
which Pilar refers when she teaches Toby, and the strong affective tie Toby feels towards them as a result, is deeply undermined by Pilar’s part in Crake’s plot to destroy human life. Because Toby is an important Eve figure among many other Eves in the novel, it is significant (and very Atwoodian) that her personally restorative connection to the bees, the “messengers of the dead,” may have accidentally fulfilled their folkloric task (Flood 100). Haraway addresses this kind of tangle when she describes her own discovery that the HRT medication she relies upon, Premarin, contains horse urine obtained by cruel methods. “Did I forget, never know, not look—or just not care?” she asks herself (Trouble 111). She presents this (and the more recent fears about HRT) as a tangle of interests and concerns for animal rights activists, women’s health advocates and Big Pharma, with no easy solution. “There is no innocence in these kin stories,” laments Haraway, “and the accountabilities are extensive and permanently unfinished” (Trouble 114). Haraway’s proposed rejoinder to this problem, as with the rest of her work, is in our ability to respond – our “response-ability” – to those tangles in productive ways, to engage with each issue as it arises and use it as an opportunity to flex “a muscle critical for caring about flourishing” (Trouble 111, 116). For Howells (177) and for Jennings (“Anthropocene” 29), Toby represents exactly this kind of response-ability when she encounters such tangles, for example in befriending the pigoons whose kin she had once shot because it was destroying her vegetable garden. Similarly, Hummel offers an interpretation of Toby’s affective relationship with the bees that provides emotional healing, despite whatever else the bees might have been hijacked for:

In sharing her grief with the bees, Toby additionally experiences a different reaction to her second maternal loss. Rather than succumbing to further instances of slow violence, as occurred following her own mother’s death, Toby’s body becomes even more enmeshed in her sense of place following Pilar’s death. (998)
This sticky middle ground of strange kinship is a much more attainable response to what Haraway has criticised as the lazy or destructive narratives of starting afresh: nostalgia for the garden or the slate-wiping flood of apocalypse. For it is also important to acknowledge, as Bouson does, that as well as being a heroine, Toby also “represents the average person who has long ignored the warning signs of the coming apocalypse” (“Using Up” 23). While in my opinion the novels certainly do not offer the “fantasy of renewal and hope […] in her version of a New Jerusalem” as described by Howells (181), I would instead take Toby’s character trajectory as a practical rather than hopeful reading; one that takes into account the emotional consequences of any action and seeks to find more liveable and cooperative alternatives.

Toby’s adaptability is also plainly reflected in a motif of name changing throughout her life (and through the MaddAddam series as a whole). Initially using her own (typically masculine) nickname and surviving in the tough world of the pleeblands, she is then reluctant to take on the title of Eve Six after Pilar (the former Eve Six) dies. Keck notes that Toby’s unease is reflected in the number six as an ambiguous one, carrying both good and bad connotations (35). As this thesis has suggested, obtaining the title of such a heavily loaded mythological figure as Eve weighs on Toby: she admits, “She could feel the Eve Six title seeping into her, eroding her, wearing away the edges of that she’d once been” (Flood 188). On leaving Edencliff after threats are made to her life from her ex-boss Blanco, Toby must later change her name to Tobiatha and work at a spa – an action that eventually protects her from the Waterless Flood. The name, still similar enough to be recognisable as her old self, may allude to the New Testament Tabitha, whom Peter resurrects in Acts 9 (Northover 90). Her resurrection is mirrored in
Toby’s own reappearance after the plague, which, along with her vision of the liobam during her mushroom trip, marks Toby as a Christlike figure as well as an Eve figure in the novels (Northover 93-94). During her time at the spa, she is also given a MaddAddam (Extinctathon) name, “Inaccessible Rail,” which has obvious connotations of remoteness, reflecting her metaphorical and literal isolation in the spa (Flood 269). On the “Feast of Serpent Wisdom” day, she identifies with the serpent itself as she considers her next name change: “Yet another whole new me,” she thinks, “fresh as a snake. How many would that add up to, by now?” (Flood 237). But if we compare her to the other Eve figures in Carter’s New Eve or Alderman’s The Power, we find her remaining human rather than becoming deified or defined by any of the titles given to her, nor running away with the power that the name Eve connotes, nor the shame. Perhaps because she inherently knows that “to get stuck to something sticky is also to become sticky” (Ahmed, Emotion 91), Toby is one of few characters not to be emotionally swayed by the sticky objects circulating around her. This is despite Toby having deeply felt the pull of apocalypse while at Edencliff, as she expresses exactly the feeling of dread that Adam One promotes:

_We’re using up the Earth. It’s almost gone._ You can’t live with such fears and keep on whistling. The waiting builds up in you like a tide. You start wanting it to be done with. You find yourself saying to the sky, _Just do it. Do your worst. Get it over with._ She could feel the coming tremor of it running through her spine, asleep or awake. It never went away, even among the Gardeners. Especially – as time wore on – among the Gardeners. (Flood 239)

It is in this manner that even members who are not “in the know” about the Waterless Flood are conditioned to think – and feel – in end-times terms. One of Toby’s final

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116 A hybrid animal (lion plus lamb) spliced together by religious extremists in order to speed along the apocalypse.
chapters involves a (one-sided) conversation with God, asking several questions about their situation. This scene bears much similarity to another in Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*,\(^{\text{117}}\) where protagonist Offred composes her own version of the Lord’s Prayer.

“Supposing you exist,” Toby begins, “Tell me […]”

> Are the new people Your idea of an improved model? Is this what the first Adam was supposed to be? Will they replace us? Or do You intend to shrug your shoulders and carry on with the present human race? If so, you’ve chosen some odd marbles: a clutch of one-time scientists, a handful of renegade Gardeners, two psychotics on the loose with a nearly dead woman. It’s hardly survival of the fittest […] (*Flood* 413)

Like Offred, in asking these questions Toby provides the reader with a framework for critically assessing their own preconceived ideas about what “original innocence” could possibly look like. These two longer reflective quotations, taken together, show Toby addressing some of the central questions of this thesis. She feels the emotional weight of human concepts of beginning and end, and yet she resists being carried away by them by asking critical questions.

By portraying multiple complex Eves with many names, Atwood ensures that no one “identifies with either traditional devaluations of women as sexualized and domesticated, or with (eco)feminist celebrations of women as fruitful and close to nature” (Keck 37). Yet Atwood *does* however provide characters who, for others, fall into exactly these stereotypes. The difference is that the readership, in my opinion, is expected to notice this variance in the ways in which Oryx and Katrina Wu are described by other male characters. While neither appear as God’s Gardeners (or not fully in Katrina’s case\(^{\text{118}}\)), both still represent Eve figures that are heavily side-lined not only by

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\(^{\text{117}}\) Richard Walsh and others have too observed this similarity (125n).

\(^{\text{118}}\) Despite being the “Eve One” to his “Adam One,” Katrina “never sets foot in Adam One’s urban eco-paradise” (Keck 34).
their male counterparts (Crake and Adam One) but also by their white female counterparts (Pilar and Toby). Katrina Wu is initially a successful businesswoman, performer and co-founder of Scales and Tales, where high-paying customers could enjoy “Dragon ladies winding around them, snake women slithering over them” (Flood 307).

But much of what readers know about Katrina is delivered through Zeb’s dialogue, which sets the tone by describing her early on with a sexist and xenophobic pun on her name, calling her “Katrina WooWoo” (MaddAddam 171). Katrina is also a love interest of Adam One’s, and in another scene (again narrated by Zeb) she is either aptly dressed in a snake costume or “as a fruit cluster with a fetching set of tooth marks embroidered on one apple-shaped boob” (MaddAddam 310). A conversation about Katrina and her other performers follows between Toby and Zeb:

“What is it about women and snakes?” says Toby. “Or women and birds, for that matter.”

“We like to think you’re wild animals,” says Zeb. “Underneath the decorations.”

“You mean stupid? Or subhuman?”

“Cut me some slack here. I mean, ferociously out of control, in a good way. A scaly, feathery woman is a powerful attraction. She’s got an edge to her, like a goddess. Risky. Extreme.” (MaddAddam 172)

But Anna Bedford observes, “In a society that exploits animals and destroys the natural environment, the association [between women and animals] is a dangerous one” (82). Bedford’s intention here is to suggest that this is a dangerous association for women, however the clientele are equally at risk in their scaly hands, for example in their capacity to deliver a fatally poisoned “Taste of Eden kicktail” (MaddAddam 304) or encouraging the dissemination of the BlyssPluss pill. And yet, the majority of the employees at Scales and Tails is never party to the evils being done; instead, these
women are usually pawns in a wider game played by the powerful men surrounding them. Thus the “danger” they represent tends to slide back and forth ambivalently between them and their mostly male clientele, with the performers being portrayed as either a potent goddess (as in Katrina’s case) or a fragile victim (as in Ren’s case) – more qualities reminiscent of de Beauvoir’s description of woman as “an idol, a servant, the source of life, a power of darkness” (175). In Keck’s judgement, Katrina’s use of the serpent/dragon/bird in her industry shows another side to the association between woman and serpent, to “revise the traditional associations of Eve with the serpent in terms of female weakness and susceptibility into an empowering flexibility and adaptability” (34). This aligns with some feminist interpretations that have stressed that the word ’arum, translated as “crafty,” used to describe the serpent does not necessarily imply evil but wisdom. Morse notes that the word “is employed throughout Proverbs in reference to the prudent or the clever (Prov. 12, 13, 14, 22, 27)” and the Septuagint and Vulgate translations reflect this neutrality (Eve’s Afterlives 14). Having argued this, Morse is quick to point out that the serpent’s words and actions certainly do make it “an agent of disruption” who is undoubtedly opposed to Yahweh Elohim (Eve’s Afterlives 15). In the same way, Katrina (in her connection to Adam One) represents this same agency: the reader is left wondering whether she is crafty or evil, but is less likely to finish the trilogy thinking of her the way Zeb first described her.

Neither a Gardener nor a Scales and Tails dancer, but just as ambivalent a figure in the trilogy, the character Oryx is arguably the most clearly paralleled with the biblical Eve and (to a lesser extent) the mythical Lilith. Her first appearance in the novels is in
the child porn scene witnessed by Jimmy and Crake, where she seems (to Jimmy) to occupy “the century-old role of Eve—childlike, playful, and sexualized” (Keck 33). Keck observes that her piercing look into the camera “elicits feelings of guilt, shame, and desire in Jimmy” as he is forced to acknowledge her “as a human subject rather than a virtual sex object” – something from which he never seems to recover (34). This moment (and its legacy in Jimmy’s memory) is a persuasive example of the ways in which the myth of Eden has been used to amplify feelings of desire and shame in the viewer; shame that is compounded by Jimmy’s own encounter with his conscience. Later, Oryx moves from this (ironically) sexualised-but-innocent figure to embody the (equally ironically\textsuperscript{119}) fallen Eve as she becomes “the mother of all living” (or at least for the Crakers, the mother of the Children of Oryx) when Crake hires her as their teacher. In the highly symbolic scene in which Jimmy first sees her in the Paradise Dome, Oryx acts as an Eve-like temptress for Jimmy himself, since she is placed there, naked, by Crake (rhymes with snake) in the garden. It is her presence in Crake’s laboratory that truly seduces Jimmy into acting on their behalf, unknowingly marketing the plague-containing BlyssPluss pill to the world, though even he suspects Crake’s motives for sourcing this girl-of-his-dreams. “He wanted to touch Oryx, worship her, open her up like a beautifully wrapped package,” the narrative reads, “even though he suspected that there was something – some harmful snake or homemade bomb or lethal powder – concealed within. Not within her, of course. Within the situation” (Oryx 311-12).

\textsuperscript{119} In a traditional interpretation where Eve is innocent and nurturing before the transgression, and sexual and disobedient afterwards, women become divided into pre- and postlapsarian archetypes of good-nurturer and bad-temptress. For Jimmy’s perception of Oryx, it is the other way around – and yet she gets the title of the fallen Eve.
Because of her apparent underlying threatening nature to him, Jimmy also imagines Oryx in the form of an owl, visiting his feverish dreams as he battles infection \textit{(MaddAddam 289)}. This owl image could be an allusion to the screech owl associated with the Lilith myth, particularly because of the way it visits and torments Jimmy in his sleep, just as Lilith does to men in the succubus lore. It is not insignificant that Atwood would align Oryx with Lilith as well as Eve, because of the historical association with the fiendish figure as a woman of colour, as I address in the earlier chapters. In domains of white masculine power, women of colour tend to be placed into the latter category of temptress (whether as a fallen Eve or as a Lilith figure), which is certainly the case for Oryx and Katrina compared to Pilar and Toby \textit{(Keck 37-38)}.

But in her changeling existence, “it is Oryx who,” in Lacombe’s view, “most clearly illustrates the mixed inheritance and qualified potential of cyborg identities suggested by Donna Haraway” \textit{(V)}. Lacombe reminds readers that part of Haraway’s description of the cyborg involves the following details, which match Oryx in every way: the cyborg “is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends); it takes irony for granted” \textit{(Haraway, “Cyborg” 65, qtd. in Lacombe IV)}. Certainly Oryx repeatedly leans toward the ironies of her existence in the employ of Crake, as she is quick to laugh in the face of Jimmy’s endless questioning. For Susan Hall, Oryx powerfully resists her commodification through a kind of Medusan laughter, though one that differs slightly from that which Hélène Cixous describes:

\begin{quote}
Oryx’s laughter is not of the kind invoked by Hélène Cixous in “The Laugh of the Medusa;” Cixous strives to overturn myths that stigmatize woman as lacking, such as the myth of woman as castrated [... Cixous] imagines a liberation of women’s creativity that is linked to a full expression of their eroticism. Oryx’s laughter, in contrast, is most often
\end{quote}
mocking and scornful. Yet, it is not Oryx who lacks but Oryx who forces her viewer to face a lack in himself, the lack of an object that would satisfy his drive. (185-86)

But her laughter also performs another function in that it is “a way of holding at bay painful or unpleasant memories,” as when she interrupts Jimmy’s questions about her abuse (Hall 194). The laughter of Oryx is therefore self-protecting both outwardly in how it affects Jimmy and inwardly in preventing herself from dwelling on her traumatic past.

Nevertheless, despite her laughter and her resistance to Jimmy’s manipulative stories, her fate is still dictated by the powerful white man who uses her, fetishises her and then murders her. Jimmy recounts that Oryx – her MaddAddam name – was sold at a young age from “some distant, foreign place” into begging, then on to sexual slavery and later sex work, where she encounters Crake, who employs her in his lab (Oryx 115, 136). The story of her early life throws Jimmy into a rage of pity, obsession and shameful jealousy, whereas Crake sees it with alarming pragmatism: “You can’t couple a minimum access to food with an expanding population indefinitely” (Oryx 119-20). The response of both is to try to “save” her, which Jimmy attempts on a local level through food, sex and revenge fantasies, and Crake attempts first by hiring her to teach his Crakers, and then by “mercy-killing” her as his plague takes hold of the world. For Jimmy, the individuals are to blame; for Crake, the entire system. Neither approach involves staying with the trouble, as both are controlled by the narratives of purity that promise escape or redemption from the troublesome present.

Compounding all this is the fact that Atwood never gives Oryx her own narrative perspective – or even a real name – so she will always remain distant and othered through the eyes of the more clearly drawn white characters who tell her story. Hall provides a substantial overview of the differing critical responses to the way Oryx is
portrayed, particularly through the “colonizing gaze” of Jimmy (180). While Atwood has been criticised by some for offering a primarily Eurocentric viewpoint, Hall’s conclusion is that “Atwood invokes the stereotype of the exotic Asian woman in order to criticize it, and she highlights the diverse structures, both political and psychic, that impinge on Oryx’s ability to speak in a meaningful way” (180). I would concur in this case, because of Atwood’s insistence on portraying her through the clearly flawed archetypes within Jimmy’s and Crake’s imaginations. For example, Jimmy recalls that, seeing her in person for the first time, he experiences “a moment of pure bliss, pure terror” (Oryx 308). This reads again like the bliss and terror described as the extremes of feeling incited by woman, as described by either de Beauvoir or Kristeva.

Oryx also hints at his stereotyping of her when she tells Jimmy, “You have a lot of pictures in your head, Jimmy. [...] Why do you think they are pictures of me?” (Oryx 114). Jimmy never quite understands her meaning, though he does acknowledge that there are many versions of her story. “Was there only one Oryx, or was she legion?” he later asks himself (implicitly aligning her with the demonic, as in Mark 5.1-20 or Luke 8.26-39), before tellingly adding, “But any would do” (Oryx 308). Sarah Appleton even goes as far as to suggest that Oryx’s name may have been chosen by Atwood because of its homophony with the word zero when read backwards (15). Readers who are conscious of intersectional feminism are likely to pick up from these clues and evasions that Atwood deliberately obscures our view of this important character while drawing attention to that which has obscured her. Chiefly, Oryx survives by keeping parts of herself protected from their grasp, while playing to their expectations, even to the extent that she must comfort and reassure Jimmy as he maddens himself over what is
actually her pain. Clearly both Oryx and Katrina can only gain a certain type of power by playing to their sexualised and “othered” identities in these ways. And yet, still each falls prey to the paradises with which their male counterparts are obsessed: Adam One cannot stop Katrina from being killed, nor can Jimmy stop Crake from slitting Oryx’s throat. The reader is left with the option to interpret this in Jimmy’s simplistic terms, or to acknowledge that there is something of each woman character that has been hugely obscured and reduced. Jennings reminds readers that imagining apocalypse from a white, masculinist perspective “ignores a history of ‘end times’ that have been experienced by indigenous peoples, species, and ecosystems, and it is only recently that those privileged by global imperialism are awakening to this ‘nightmare’” (“Anthropocene” 20). For Oryx and her family, certainly, life has been unsustainable for some time before the Waterless Flood.

While Sharon Wilson sums up Oryx’s marginalisation by concluding, “[t]here is no sign of her returning the gaze or of really seeing” (44), Atwood does provide some clues to interpreting Oryx as having had greater agency in the Waterless Flood. A rereading of the first novel does, in fact, leave open the possibility that she and Crake had planned the plague and its consequences together, since she tells Jimmy, “if I ever got the chance, it would not be me down on my knees” (Oryx 92). She later adds, “‘I believe in Crake, I believe in his’ – she groped for the word – ‘his vision’” and “There are too many people and that makes the people bad. I know this from my own life” (Oryx 322). Though it isn’t clear how much of his vision she is party to, her role in Crake’s plan and her significance in the title of the novel could be taken to suggest that this “Eve/snake” figure, as Sharon Wilson calls her (39), quite deliberately chose to cause the Fall. In her
discussion on women as doorways or gateways in Atwood’s oeuvre, S. Wilson points out that the picture of Oryx as a child even acts as a physical gateway to the MaddAddam website (41). Though S. Wilson does not explicitly do so, I would liken this immediately to the quotation by Tertullian that, thanks to Eve, women are “the gateway to the devil” (I.L.2). Jimmy does wonder, retrospectively, how much Oryx knew (in other words, whether she was a crafty serpent or a credulous Eve), but he cannot seem to imagine this goddess-figure whom he has deified to be capable of something so appalling.

Lacombe sums up this kind of contradictory playfulness typical of Atwood at the end of her chapter: “As in all her work, [... Atwood] offers the reader—within carefully crafted limits—the freedom and pleasure of reaching her own partial conclusions” (V). If I were to continue Lacombe’s assertion that Oryx is a cyborg figure, I might argue that her involvement in the Waterless Flood reveals “the power to survive not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (Haraway, “Cyborg” 55). Though such a pessimistic interpretation of her character would not render her a heroine, it would certainly be an act of revenge worthy of recognition as an affective response to her own trauma, just as has been discussed about Crake and his own trauma above (and just as Mother Eve does in Alderman’s *Power*). At the heart of this interpretation is a contradiction: since Oryx-as-cyborg must avoid “original innocence,” why would she play a part in a plan to “restore” an Edenic perfection such as that of the Crakers? Atwood’s characters are rife with such tensions, indeed, they are most comfortable in such tensions.
“I Could Hardly Tell Them the Truth:” Two Creation Stories for the Crakers

This section observes how first Jimmy and later Toby take or leave elements of the Genesis and other ANE creation myths as they provide a “stock of lore” for the Crakers (Oryx 8). In Oryx, where readers are only party to Jimmy’s internal (and sometimes external) monologue, it is Jimmy’s utter loneliness that comes across most strongly. Narkunas sees Jimmy’s retreat into the world of words, both before and after the plague, as a consequence of his lack of status in a society: “Jimmy’s utilitarian failures cause him to escape into a mythic past and monumentalize words and books, where words have contingent and multiple meanings” (11). By contrasting both Crake and Jimmy and their tendencies towards extremes of thought in this way, Atwood allows readers to see the downside of both types of thinking: Crake’s mathematical coldness and Jimmy’s indulgent dreamtime. What emerges from the later texts is Toby’s ability, once again, to put both in balance in her revised creation stories, and her willingness to use this way of thinking to stay with the trouble.

But first to Jimmy, who is of course not alone: he knows the human-ish Crakers are nearby and he can visit them whenever he likes. Nevertheless, as I have already shown, like the Adam among the animals of Genesis 2-3, Jimmy finds no adequate partner or helper in their society. Instead, he dwells perpetually on Oryx, his lost Eve/Lilith, who had been the Crakers’ teacher in the Paradice Dome before being murdered. Keeping his distance and feeling he must be alone among all humans – a SF trope that Narkunas notes may be an homage to Shelley’s The Last Man (4)\(^{120}\) – his

\(^{120}\) Calina Ciobanu also observes that though Oryx may well form an homage to The Last Man, the further books in the novel trouble this. So much that, “the trilogy as a whole insists that any possibility of
relationship with the Crakers cannot help but become hierarchical. By the time Jimmy has reached adulthood, then, he has clearly forgotten his childhood openness to nonhuman others such as his beloved pet rakunk (raccoon-skunk hybrid) and accepted the exceptionalist view adopted by the scientists around him, reinforced by the Genesis creation myths. It suggests a hierarchical interpretation of both Genesis creation narratives that emphasises mankind’s difference to the animals, and a status “above” anything that is not deemed to be truly “human” – in other words, made in the image of God, or in their case, Crake. He finds the Crakers’ peaceable naïveté so irritating that his descriptions of them are uncomfortably reminiscent of the imperialist idea of the “noble savage” (Bouson, “Using Up” 17). This is emphasised by his frequent allusions to colonial rhetoric in books he remembers from school and his “problematics” degree at the Martha Graham Academy, such as his recognition that the euphemism “refrain from fraternizing” likely means “refrain from raping” and was unlikely to have been observed (Oryx 188, 5). According to Canavan, Jimmy’s thoughts reveal the “tight relationship between fantasies of apocalypse and fantasies of the frontier—the notion that after the end of civilization the entire world becomes again free and open land, to be once again molded and ‘tamed’ by heroic individuals” (“Hope” 141). In an Atwoodian inversion of the trope however, we remember that it is Jimmy who is the native and the Crakers who are the unintentional colonisers of new land – an irony the Paradice scientists also ponder in MaddAddam (140). Drinking stolen whiskey, hiding in a tree and “whimpering ridiculously, jerking off all by himself in the dark” (Oryx 110), Jimmy is far from the idealised colonial hero of fiction.

imagining a posthuman future will depend not just on situating humankind as one species among many, but on unsettling mankind’s primacy in relation to womankind as well” (154).
As such, the reader is primed to consider his creation myth as potentially suspect, even manipulative: to have them believe that they ought to bring him a fish once a week, even though the idea repulses them; to speak to Crake through his broken wristwatch because it happens to be a useful way to persuade them to do his bidding; to tell them Crake has become a tree when he cannot be bothered to explain something. The watch itself, blank and broken, “causes a jolt of terror to run through him” because it acts as a reminder that he is outside of time; the apocalypse has come and gone, that he is alone (Oryx 3). At first, because of Jimmy’s biased and imperialist depiction of them, the Crakers seem to “lack the creative vitality of humanistic thought” — but it is only after their contact with Toby and the others that readers realise that they do in fact have this capacity (Canavan, “Hope” 146-47). While Jihun Yoo argues that Jimmy’s new creation story is successful in helping to create “a new type of community based on mutuality and tolerance” (676), I argue the opposite here. In my reading, it is clear that the myths Jimmy spins are heavily influenced by the biblical creation stories and reveal a reflection of his attempts to control his chaotic and frightening environment. This, as I shall demonstrate, says more about the fragile ego of the dying empire than it does about the colonised peoples themselves. By the end of MaddAddam readers know enough to feel sure that the Crakers would have accepted the ugly truth of their origins just as readily as they accepted the beautiful myth — as the subsequent discussion on Toby’s storytelling shall show. His desperation to intoxicate himself with stories, food

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121 When Jimmy cannot formulate enough reasons as to why the Crakers cannot see or visit Crake himself, he instinctively resorts to the symbol of a tree when he says, “‘He’s turned himself into a plant,’” and then continues, “‘It’s not a plant you can eat […] It’s more like a tree’” (Oryx 362). Walsh’s pertinent note on this point reads, “Ironically (?)” (124n) — a reaction I am sure many readers have also experienced.
and alcohol may momentarily soothe his discomfort, but he will keep waking to the reality of his trouble.

Looking at Jimmy’s myth itself, we observe multiple thematic and formal elements that are clearly borrowed from Genesis. “In the beginning, there was chaos,” Jimmy tells the Crakers early on in the novel, but this is a chaos defined by its fullness rather than emptiness implied by the tohu wabohu (formless void of Gen. 1.2) (Oryx 102). Effectively describing a “reverse creation” (Tate 75), Jimmy explains how “[t]here were too many people, and so the people were all mixed up with the dirt” – in Jimmy’s formulation these people already existed and they were figuratively blended with dirt rather than created from it (Oryx 103). This image, with Jimmy’s accompanying demonstration of a dirty bucket full of water and earth, is intended to provoke disgust in the Crakers, which is in opposition to the agrarian image of the first man being made from fertile soil in Genesis 1. Jimmy’s generative chaos is necessarily informed by the apocalypse he has just witnessed, and the chaos through which he led his Crakers out of Paradise, and so there are elements of his creation stories that read more like the Apocalypse of John than the Genesis myths. Jimmy thus cleverly reinforces the Crakers’ natural disgust response to the smell of decay in the aftermath of the Waterless Flood with the general concept of otherness and the need to be rid of it. “The chaos smells very bad,” they tell him, after he explains away the carnage they are witnessing for the first time (Oryx 352). The suffering of victims of the plague around them are simply “a piece of a bad dream that Crake is dreaming [...] so you won’t have to” he tells them (Oryx 352), further distancing the Crakers from the misery they are seeing but not
understanding. The Crakers only respond, “It is sad that [Crake] suffers on our behalf” (Oryx 353).

In order to further evoke disgust in his audience, Jimmy uses the Crakers’ greatest taboo, the eating of meat, to emphasise exactly what the chaos involved. He then tells the Crakers, again hinting at Oryx’s greater involvement, “Oryx said to Crake, *Let us get rid of the chaos,*”\(^{122}\) and pours the muddy water out of the bucket, saying “this is how Crake did the Great Rearrangement and made the Great Emptiness” (Oryx 103). The Crakers, laughing and celebrating along with the emptied bucket of muck, absorb this euphemism without question, understanding it as a necessary purge in order to clear the ground for them (and, they are reminded, the “Children of Oryx” (animals) too). Inventing this myth, Jimmy actively participates in teaching the Crakers how to avoid empathising with the other, and how not to stay with the trouble. As such, Jimmy’s storytelling seems to convey what Pippin suggests, which is that “Chaos represents Otherness (*différance*)” (72), and that otherness must necessarily be eliminated. If Crake’s aim was to create a new kind of humanity capable of living more peaceably with animals and other humans, he has failed in that his elected storyteller reinforces an anxiety of difference between so-called good and bad people. Jimmy seems to feel this error on a deeper level, for as the Children of Crake cheer, “Oh, good, kind Crake!” the narration reads, “Is there no end to [Jimmy’s] shameless inventions? He feels like crying” (Oryx 103).

As for Oryx’s part in Jimmy’s creation narrative, we see more shared details both with biblical and with other ANE creation traditions. While in reality Oryx suffers the fate

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\(^{122}\) Bosco points out that, in echoing the language of Genesis here, “[Jimmy] even uses the hortatory subjunctive of Hebrew scripture in his mythmaking” (163).
more like that of the Whore of the Apocalypse, in Jimmy’s interior mythmaking, he casts her instead as “a variety of Mother Goddess, bringing together the only two versions of the female in the economy of his desire—mother or whore” (Ingersoll 169). It is much easier for Jimmy to convey to the Crakers (and to himself) that she is not “just another little girl on a porno site” but now the mother of all animals (Oryx 90); not “Glenn’s main plank” but a creator-goddess (Flood 306); not dead but immortal. This transformation can be viewed in two very different ways: it can be considered a re-vision that removes the violence—especially towards women and animals—of the biblical symbolic repertoire for a culture that is innocent of these associations; or readers can interpret this as another attempt to whitewash such violence and give it meaning that in some way continues to uphold hierarchical structures that unfairly privilege and excuse powerful men such as Crake. I would posit that Atwood would be happy to leave both options open to the reader, as the knowledge of both opens up opportunities for dialogue and perspective sharing—again, a tactic that befits Haraway’s idea of eating “at table together” (Trouble 11).

Among the non-biblical ingredients and images in Jimmy’s creation myths are details he has to hand in their immediate environment: inside the Paradice Dome, which is described as an egg, Crake makes the Children of Crake (Crakers) from coral and mangoes; Children of Oryx (animals) are hatched from an egg laid by Oryx herself. Oryx also lays another egg full of words, but these are all eaten by the Children of Crake (humans) before the Children of Oryx (animals) have hatched, an aetiological

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123 Aply named, as the word “raqia” appears in the Hebrew of Genesis 1, which “conveys the sense of a sheet stretched out, or a lump of metal beaten out flat” – translated as “dome” (NRSV), “vault” (NJB) and “firmament” (KJV) (M. Harris 42).
explanation of why Crakers have language and animals do not (Oryx 96). Even though the details present a different picture from the two Genesis accounts, an investigation into their inferences about hierarchy and separateness brings up interesting parallels. For example, Jimmy’s creation story continues to enforce a division between the Crakers and the animals in the same way that the Genesis accounts can be said to do – this, we imagine, is because he is driven partly through his own fear and disgust at his own animality, and as Ahmed notes, “disgust is crucial to power relations” (Emotion 88). In fact, Jimmy goes to greater lengths to separate them in his own myth than is implied in Genesis 2, in that they are made from different ingredients, unlike the animals and humans made from the same ’adamah (K. Stone, “Queer Animalities” 276).

As well as dividing humans from Crakers, and Crakers from animals, Jimmy also unconsciously perpetuates the hierarchical division between men and women by making Crake the father of Crakers (human) and Oryx the mother of animals.¹²⁴ “Not coincidentally,” writes Earl Ingersoll, “in this new cosmogony the human-like creations are made in the Garden by their Father, while the other fauna can be relegated to the Earth-Mother, whom this male deity supplants and dominates as his consort” (169). Their methods of creation are also important: Crake constructs intelligent, speaking humans from beautiful earthly ingredients, whereas Oryx lays animals lacking in speech, implying subtly gendered differences regarding agency that are tied to Oryx’s physical body (especially as an animal body that lays eggs rather than gives birth). In other words, while Jimmy enjoys deifying his atheist ex-friend, he also unwittingly promotes the mass murderer above his friend and lover, Oryx. The separation then tends to divide

¹²⁴ This is despite the fact that, as K. Stone argues, multiple male characters are also identified with animals throughout the novels (275).
itself between the male and female Crakers who identify with those gods, as Jimmy stops himself from catching and eating a rabbit because “it would be a bad idea to offend the women” (Oryx 96). The Oryx-worshipping women thus become implicitly more closely aligned with animals, who in turn are explicitly associated with wordlessness, reproduction, emotion (in being easily offended) and separation by the phallus (literally a line of male urine in their case).

This is reinforced in the retellings of Jimmy’s creation myth in MaddAddam, when the Crakers are told that Oryx was sad to see the suffering of animals in the “Chaos,” after which “Crake was sad because Oryx was sad” (3). Yet again, feeling sorrowful at the treatment of animals becomes a feminine emotion, and the masculine deity only becomes sad when his consort is sad; she can empathise with animals but he may only empathise with her. These small dividing lines drawn by Jimmy’s mythmaking therefore have much larger effects on society as a whole, reflecting how the biblical creation narratives have done the same for Western societies. I do not posit here that Jimmy deliberately creates these divisions through any kind of active misogyny, but simply that his stories are “shaped by histories that ‘stick’, making some objects more than others seem fearsome” (Ahmed, Emotion 67). Add to Jimmy’s subconscious the trauma of his mother’s departure and subsequent murder, his guilt over multiple failed relationships, his shame over the origins of his attraction to Oryx, and we see a recipe for presenting an unequal myth to his Crakers that both deifies and debases womanhood. As I noted in Crake’s creative process above, we see here again how fear creates rather than defends existing borders (Ahmed, Emotion 67). Though he claims to have been inspired by a moon-goddess-worshipping ex-girlfriend, this creation myth
provides a framework for gender and species that has the potential to be just as problematic as either biblical creation myth in creating, identifying and maintaining difference (Oryx 169). Perhaps once again Atwood’s point is not to suggest that men’s narrative perspectives cannot help but reinforce hierarchies, but that all myths – even pagan feminist ones, as the first chapters of this thesis demonstrate – can fall into the trap of stereotyping.

In MaddAddam, when Toby becomes a part of the society of survivors of the Waterless Flood and Jimmy is incapacitated, it is she who becomes the storyteller to the Crakers. For those survivors of the Waterless Flood now gathered together, their makeshift safehouse and its surrounding area are of particular significance, as it is based in what used to be called the “Tree of Life Natural Materials Exchange” (MaddAddam 95). Before the pandemic this was a marketplace where they sold their natural products and preached their Gardener message. Its name, the Tree of Life, recalls both the tree of Genesis 2-3 and that same tree seen again in Revelation – the only natural plant life described in the city of New Jerusalem. Since they are in effect living in the post-apocalyptic world, their environment becomes a radical antitype to the city described in Revelation. Their only accommodation is a small cobb house, and their surrounding environs are overgrowing with plant life, particularly kudzu, to the extent that they are constantly having to cut it back. Crake’s animal- and plant-friendly apocalypse reflects one completely unlike either the deluge of Genesis 9, in which all land-based life is destroyed, or the technological cubic megalopolis that is New Jerusalem.

Taking over this role as storyteller in her naturalist New Jerusalem, Toby begins by questioning Jimmy on some of the trickier elements of his story so far. He responds,
“‘Well, crap, [...] I could hardly tell them the truth’” – to which she replies “‘that’s the story we’ve got. [...] So we have to work with it’” (MaddAddam 265). This realisation of hers is, in itself, an act of staying with the trouble, of keeping to the story and editing and embellishing it until the “‘bogus fraud’” of a story serves a better purpose (265). By necessity, Toby chooses to remain in the stickiness of their heavily influenced creation myth rather than to sweep it away with another all-encompassing new beginning. But I would argue here again that while the issue Atwood raises may be informed by gendered experience, it is also importantly influenced by class: pleeblander Toby has experienced a far more complicated and challenging life than corp-grown Jimmy has, and her approach demonstrates more tact and concern about the impact of the stories she tells, particularly when she introduces the Crakers to written language. “What comes next?” she asks, “Rules, dogmas, laws? The Testament of Crake? How soon before there are ancient texts they feel they have to obey but have forgotten how to interpret? Have I ruined them?” (MaddAddam 204). In an attempt to mitigate this, she employs (knowingly or unknowingly) feminist and womanist strategies to cancel out the inequalities she notices along the way as she delicately re-visions and expands upon their stories. Daringly, she tells them “Crake was not always right about everything” (MaddAddam 290). “Crake is not in charge of bears,” she corrects the Crakers at another point, “Oryx is in charge of bears;” and she also credits Oryx for the Crakers’ ability to sing (MaddAddam 85; 290). These examples try to undo the fact that the Crakers seem to value males and humans more than they value females and animals. To the reader at least, if not to the Crakers, Toby draws attention to the fact that Crake, their sky-god and
our mass murderer, receives constant praise and reverence whereas Oryx, who taught them all their skills in the Dome, remains a secondary character.

Interestingly, Toby ensures that eggs\textsuperscript{125} remain an important part of the symbolism within the story, but revisits the word-eating narrative with a corrective that the animals \textit{did} eat some of the words, but they communicate language in a different way (290). Atwood has engaged with egg symbolism before, both in \textit{The Handmaid’s Tale} and in her 1983 collection \textit{Bluebeard’s Egg}, which includes a short story by the same name. Like Shelley Boyd, I would argue that calling the curious Craker Blackbeard may be “the author’s mischievous way of alluding to her own short story” (175). In “Bluebeard’s Egg” a woman named Sally attends a literary class in which she and her classmates are assigned a creative writing task on the subject of Grimm’s \textit{Bluebeard}. The fairy tale has been noted for its clear references to restrictions on female curiosity, having parallels with Eve and Pandora (Morse, \textit{Eve’s Afterlives} 122). Sally contemplates the various things that the symbol of an egg can mean: “a fertility symbol, or a necessary object in African spells, or something the world hatched out of. […] Women with dirty eggs get murdered, those with clean ones get married” (\textit{Bluebeard’s Egg} 157). Sally is gripped by the idea of the egg’s perspective, but gets stuck contemplating how she might “transpose it into real life without making it ridiculous” (\textit{Bluebeard’s Egg} 157). The short story ends without resolution, but Sally’s last thoughts are of that problematic egg and what might emerge from it.

\textsuperscript{125} Appleton calls the egg “a potent Atwood symbol” as it appears in meaningful ways throughout her works (20). Eggs are important symbols across many of the other novels in this thesis, too: for example, like Atwood, Lerman links language and egg-symbolism: “Often I have been euphemistically referred to as The Word. I am neither The Word nor The World Egg. I am the Lady who is The Source of All Things” (\textit{Ishtar} 76). Ahmed too uses the image of an egg to demonstrate how physiology and emotion cannot easily be separated (\textit{Emotion} 210).
I mention *Bluebeard’s Egg* specifically because Atwood’s depiction of the Crakers (especially Blackbeard) could constitute a “ridiculous” adventure into what Sally imagines the egg’s perspective to be. In the fairy tale, the egg is tainted by the blood of the characters around it when they bring it into a forbidden room full of murdered women (Bluebeard’s previous wives). In *MaddAddam* the Crakers, who have emerged from an egg-shaped dome, are themselves the oblivious eggs being tainted by the surviving humans in their midst, who live among the ruins of Crake’s mass murder. The Crakers, as eggs, are the promise of renewal, “blank and pristine and lovely. Stupid, too,” hatched into the future but defiled by the blood of human error (*Bluebeard’s Egg* 157). Critics note *Bluebeard’s Egg* for its Swiftian “satiric trap” where “The whole story, we now see, is about ‘point of view’” (Keith 252). *MaddAddam* also functions as such a satiric trap, designed so that certain characters’ “truths” can only be revealed by readings of the same events from other characters’ perspectives. Though Blackbeard is ironically named after a different fearsome legendary bearded character, the two (like the eggs) seem semantically (or stickily) linked in Atwood’s symbolic imagination. By giving the pirate’s name to a peaceful Craker child, Atwood again reworks an idea to remove its association with death and conquest to instead create a jarring image for the reader. Whereas Blackbeard will mean to future generations of fictional Crakers, “teacher” or “prophet,” in the world presented to readers (and to the survivors of the Waterless Flood) the words mean both “notorious murdering pirate” and “sweet child” (*MaddAddam* 92). In turn, the egg becomes transformed in the Crakers’ creation myth, now a symbol of life and language, and later life after death, acting to obfuscate the terrible reality of the Crakers’ reason for existence. By juxtaposing these stories and
their characters or symbols for her readers, Atwood implores us to notice shifting layers of meaning and not to take things at face value. This is in turn a kind of strategic thinking that refrains from the extremes Haraway warns about and is demonstrated most effectively by Toby.

It is also through Toby that the Crakers explore and challenge their disgust in a deeper way than they did with Jimmy. Whereas Jimmy’s narrative preys on their distaste for eating meat and has the chaos immediately cleared away, Toby lets the Crakers explore their feelings, noting how they are “obsessed” with the original humans’ bone broth, asking her to tell and retell the story of the “smelly bone” (*MaddAddam* 45). It becomes clear to Toby (and to the reader) while observing the Crakers’ fascination with the original humans’ food that disgust is something, as Ahmed notes, “deeply ambivalent, involving desire for, or an attraction towards, the very objects that are felt to be repellent” (*Emotion* 84). Staels and Muñoz-González both note that Atwood makes great use of the Kristevan abject in *Oryx* and *MaddAddam* respectively, in the various ways characters are attracted to that which repels them (Staels I; Muñoz-González, “Anthropocene” 48). One could argue that the Crakers are drawn to the original humans’ grotesque habits just as the Compound dwellers had been drawn to the dangerous, smutty pleeblands. Toby seems to understand this motive as she thinks, “who wouldn’t want to peek from behind the curtain at the trolls’ revolting feasts?” (*MaddAddam* 93). Her closeness with the child Craker Blackbeard gives him the confidence to challenge what he finds disgusting in her habits, as he asks, “How are you eating them, Oh Toby. The legs of the Children?” (*MaddAddam* 93). By altering the language used to describe meat that is consumed, Atwood cleverly interrogates any
carnivorous reader also, since throughout these novels the nonhuman animals have been referred to as “Children of Oryx.” Like ours, the Crakers’ creation story does not proscribe meat-eating, but it makes it much more taboo to do so by changing the language used to describe them.

Looking at the trilogy and its increasing narrative diversity, culminating as it does in Toby teaching Blackbeard how to read and write, Calina Ciobanu sees this as a hopeful conclusion, where Toby’s motherhood is not biological but artistic because she can “write herself into the future that is yet to come” (161). Muñoz-Gonzáles also sees this as “an exercise of imagination ultimately aimed to decentralize the human and to portray life after the Anthropocene” – though she does recognise that the ending may imply editorial control over Toby’s words by the young scribe, as happens in The Handmaid’s Tale (“Posthuman Cure” 212, 216). Northover’s article comes to the same conclusions as Muños-Gonzálés’ in that the narrative moves “from men, through women, to the post-human Crakers,” giving “hope for a new age” (94). I think this conclusion overlooks two problems however. The first is that Northover (following Watkins) tends to divide narrative technique along gendered lines (i.e. arguing that Atwood’s female characters offer “feminist, comic and optimistic polyphony” to contrast with the “masculine, pessimistic and tragic” narrative of Jimmy) (93). I have argued above that Jimmy in particular is often associated with the feminine, the monstrous and the other in ways that preclude any generalisations about his voice reflecting the masculine Word. My second issue is that the critics mentioned above assume control has been given to completely egalitarian post-humans for whom gender is not a predictor of power. As I have already shown, the Crakers tend to operate in rather
essentialist roles that are sharply marked by a difference in power and leadership (a fact that Muños-Gonzáles later acknowledges (“Posthuman Cure” 218)). In my reading, this signals a suggestion from Atwood that the cycle of masculine association with the Word may continue, not because it is innate, but because it has been biologically programmed in by Crake, modelled by Oryx’s mythology in the Paradice Dome, and reinforced (through affective connections to sticky myths) by the humans who have survived to interact with the Crakers. They have made Bluebeard’s egg run blood red.

Atwood does not reveal why she has Toby teach only one male Craker the skills that will give him power and authority in his tribe, nor why no female Craker ever becomes fully fleshed out as a character like Blackbeard. Perhaps she does so to avoid, as always, any simplistic interpretations about “solving” the problem of patriarchy. But overall, it is Toby’s actions, stories and relationships that demonstrate Haraway’s strategy for living and dying in the “thick present” between nostalgia for Eden and apocalyptic dreaming (Trouble 55). When faced with the decision of what to do with the murderous survivors who ambush them, she delays the decision and prepares a meal for everyone to celebrate the Gardeners’ Saint Julian and All Souls’ day, which is a festival of forgiveness (Flood 428). “Forgiveness must be offered, loving kindness must be practised, circles must be unbroken,” Toby recalls (MaddAddam 10). As mentioned above, Haraway’s Trouble celebrates the idea of eating together, and she discusses how the root derivation of “companion,” is cum panis, meaning “with bread, [i.e.] at table together” (11). Again, the reader may recall that Trible uses similar language when she

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126 Readers might assume Jimmy’s repeated failures at distinguishing the females’ names is one of many signs of his inbuilt casual sexism: “the Empress Josephine, or else Madame Curie or Sojourner Truth” (Oryx 101, 157). But Toby also fails to connect with any particular Craker woman. One can perhaps assume that this is because Crake has programmed his women to be passive and speak very little (Flood 411).
describes animals eating with humans together in Genesis 1: “With the human creatures, they partake of time and table. Both were created on the same day; both eat the same food” (15). This of course is undercut once more by Atwood as the Crakers help the prisoners escape, leading to more deaths later on. As ever, no simple solutions are offered. All Toby can do is stay with the trouble.

So too with Atwood’s mythmaking: rather than “justifying the ways of Crake towards men, or semi-men” as Jimmy does, Toby builds on their growing collection of stories, taking them from a message of pure disobedience to one more focused on metamorphosis (MaddAddam 101; Dodds 138-39). She understands that the Crakers’ need to hear stories about their origins, the mistakes their creators made, and their own mistakes, directly influences their ability to cope with both good and bad news. Thus in her feminist re-vision, rather than having Crake simply clear the chaos, she describes the BlyssPluss pill as a “seed” that was supposed to make you happy but would really make you very ill, reflecting again something rather similar to the forbidden fruit (MaddAddam 257). Toby knows what to tell and what to withhold, and in doing so informs the reader of her process of mythmaking: “There’s the story, then there’s the real story, then there’s the story of how the story came to be told. Then there’s what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story too” (MaddAddam 56). Here Toby expands upon the concept that “it matters what stories tell stories” (Haraway, Trouble 35). Recounting the events of Zeb’s and Pilar’s lives, she introduces myths that involve shape shifting between human and animal, and in doing so permits a posthuman perspective that frequently crosses boundaries, but she also leaves out details that will confuse the Crakers and unnecessarily complicate their myth. Rather than working against the grain
like the Gardeners to draw posthuman interpretations from Genesis, or reworking the same stories with different ingredients like Jimmy, Toby opts again for a messy compromise.

One of these messy compromises is in her choice to include the sex workers in Scales and Tails as snake-women, since, as she says, “It seems appropriate, a woman who is also a snake” (*MaddAddam* 257). Her new myths allow for blurring between species boundaries (something the Crakers are already quite comfortable with, as they explain that pigoons are both Children of Crake and Children of Oryx) (*MaddAddam* 268). This kind of thinking also resounds with Haraway, who suggests, “With a shell and a net, becoming human, becoming humus, becoming terran, has another shape—that is, the side-winding, *snaky* shape of becoming-with” (*Trouble* 40, emphasis mine). In Toby’s story, these snakes are not tricksters: “They were very kind. Because that is how Oryx made them. And they were her Children, because they were part snake. So they had nothing to do with Crake” (*MaddAddam* 258). In these few words, Toby undoes the association between snakes and women that depends upon the craftiness of the snake and the susceptibility of the woman, and also on the implicit sexual relationship between the two. On this point, Toby makes another departure from the garden narrative, since the reader knows that many of these snake women are sex workers. This image re-visions both Genesis 2-3 and also the apocalypse of John: it avoids the association then between Eve as fallen woman, while also redeeming the Whore of Babylon pictured in Revelation. In Toby’s retelling the snake-women (Katrina Wu and later Ren) become reversed figures who try to *prevent* a damaging pill (“[a] seed [that] would make you sick if you ate it”) from being eaten (*MaddAddam* 257). Not only this,
but the tree figure itself becomes a woman – it is now Toby’s deceased mentor, Pilar, who is the source of much of Toby’s knowledge, and who is buried under an elderberry bush (MaddAddam 257). And so we end with two trees as in Eden; the tree of life represented by Pilar, and the poisonous, fruit-bearing tree into which Jimmy transformed Crake.

Dodds refers to this exchange of knowledge from survivor to Craker as a kind of reverse Fall, which allows for a “diverse, posthuman community” (137); the Crakers do fall into knowledge but their knowledge gives them new opportunities for symbolic associations (without the need for a felix culpa). Blackbeard’s fall into knowledge is a momentous one, however, as he sees Oryx and Crake’s dead bodies where they lie: “His face and body register ‘the sudden fall, the crash, the damage’” – and Toby worries he may never recover (Dodds 140; MaddAddam 359). Yet with Toby’s help, even he learns to reframe this story to make it tolerable, imagining their dead bodies as empty eggshells and their lives metamorphosed, which he is able to retell to his people (350). Even in the event of Toby’s death, he and the other Crakers create new myths “that imagine her trans-corporeal transformation” into a bear, just as in her story of Zeb (Hummel 1002). By the end of the MaddAddam trilogy, Atwood depicts such a society that is finding a way to acknowledge the brokenness of reality but also bring it into balance with a mythical landscape that makes staying with it bearable rather than escapable.

This chapter has shown that the differing points of view portrayed by characters such as Adam One and Zeb, Crake and Jimmy, and Toby and Blackbeard can come to

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127 At this moment Hummel again cites Stacy Alaimo on “trans-corporeality” – a phenomenon also seen in Toby’s affective connection with the bees in her care (997).
represent hugely diverse ways of dealing with (and responding to) the trouble of a
dystopian world. Yet even Atwood’s portrayals of these characters resist easy
judgements: Crake’s Crakers present a theoretically utopian post-human society that is
physically resilient, nonviolent and trusting; Adam One’s readings of Genesis present
environmentally friendly interpretations that inspire activism and emotional healing
within a turbulent society; Zeb offers a joie de vivre rarely seen in dystopian narratives;
Pilar’s guidance and kinship helps Toby heal from her trauma; yet all are complicit in the
mass murder of almost all the world’s human population. These contradictions are in
themselves useful ways of viewing what Haraway means by staying with the trouble,
because they remind readers of their own tangled complicity in the state of the world as
it is. This is why I would avoid an overly optimistic response to the close of the trilogy,
which “threatens to soften Atwood’s Swiftian satire” (Dodds 118). Instead, by
highlighting the pitfalls of our culture’s binary modes of thinking, the trilogy “provides a
savage critique of the folly and inadequacy of most responses to our current global
crisis” (Dodds 118-19). What is left is an inducement to think the problems over deeply,
creatively, collaboratively, rather than imagining we could retreat to a blissful innocence
or fast forward to “Blyss”-ful annihilation.

Putting this in binary terms of masculinity and femininity – an argument to which
Northover subscribes – would also, in my mind, overlook the deeper message of
Atwood’s work. The apocalyptic impulse may read as masculine, but this is because it is
the status quo, a system in which boys and men like Crake are rewarded for behaving as
such and girls and women are punished. Staying with the trouble involves
acknowledging that “another world is not only urgently needed, it is possible, but not if
we are ensorcelled in despair, cynicism, or optimism, and the belief/disbelief discourse of Progress” (Haraway, Trouble 51). Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy demonstrates the myriad ways in which characters’ despair, cynicism and optimism get in their way, fuelled by biblical stories of impossible perfection or a fresh start by obliteration. In the two differing apocalyptic mindsets of Crake and Adam One, for example, I am reminded of Keller’s statement that “[t]he relentless inevitability [of apocalypse] can be inferred from a cool calculation of the facts or dramatized with the hot desire of fundamentalism” (ix). Apocalypse (and the promise of a new creation) are such sticky stories that they can influence thinkers of either persuasion, as Crake and Adam One show. By portraying this phenomenon under the guise of satire, Atwood shows readers that other characters are capable, like Toby, of bringing these extremes into balance so that they can live without the panacea of potentially dangerous myths. Harland ends his article with the statement, “Atwood’s apocalyptic trilogy has taken a major step in sensitizing us to our ecological grief and showing us how to contend with it” (600). In this chapter I hope to have reinforced this point, but added the importance of affect as it works within the biblical myths to tease out and amplify those emotions.
Conclusions

We wish for messianic solutions and end up doing nothing, for we get locked into a particularly apocalyptic either/or logic—if we can’t save the world, then to hell with it. *Catherine Keller, Apocalypse Now and Then, 14*

Were our hopes to rely on perfect beginnings and ends, this would surely be cause for despair. But if hope, instead, is our messy, multiform continuance, then what we need is rather to mourn and laugh and dance until our flesh remembers how the world goes on. *Kathleen Sands, Escape from Paradise, 168-69*

This concluding section brings together the main findings of this doctoral research, noting similarities and differences across the selected novels and how each responds to the central thesis outlined at the start of this project. It also identifies areas in which my own research may be potentially biased or insufficient, and thus where more research might be conducted to continue pursuing some of these questions to their fullest. First I invite the reader to recall the central thesis of this project:

The “sticky” push-pull of negative affect (Ahmed) can be intensified by the biblical myths that provide blueprints for how to feel (Keller/Moore/Bray). These myths may soothe or invigorate the thinker, but can make them feel worse in the long run (Berlant). It is easier to indulge/purge these ugly feelings (Ngai) than to stay with the trouble (Haraway).

In each of the selected novels, in different ways, intense negative emotions have drawn the observer backwards to creation and forwards to apocalypse. These “sticky stories” take characters (and therefore readers) into the myths’ affective landscapes, inscribing meaning onto the objects before them that may not have had great meaning (in any ontological or eschatological way) before. Certain characters who are aware of the manipulative power of these myths, such as Alderman’s Mother Eve or Atwood’s Adam One, can also use the emotions invoked by these stories (of creation and apocalypse) to
influence those around them about their place in the world. But through repeatedly moving backwards and forwards to these mythical affective spaces, we find the emotions associated with them are often unexpected: if our nostalgia brings us to Eden and we explore the garden properly, we find it full of imbalance and anxiety; if our rage and disgust brings us to Revelation and we explore our apocalyptic thinking, we find that it is itself disgusting, rather than a route out of disgust. Not only this, but we find as readers and imaginers that, of course, both mythical spaces have taken us out of an ability to deal with our own present trouble. Thus characters often end up putting themselves and others in more danger by viewing the world through these narratives than if they had chosen to stay with the trouble of, for example, working to change systemic inequalities or trying to arrest the destruction of natural environments.

What is perhaps most striking in this body of research is the fact that myths of creation and apocalypse can be both soothing (in that they take us out of negative affect) and agitating (by intensifying negative emotion to the point of exorcising it). As a result they are ambivalent tools that can act as manipulators either for trancelike inaction or violent action. Though these may look like very different behaviours, they are in fact both natural reactions to different stressors: for example as Ahmed notes, fear is “an impression that overwhelms us and pushes us back with the force of its negation, which may sometimes involve taking flight, and other times may involve paralysis” (Emotion 65). Ngai also acknowledges that one of the differences between emotions that have objects and those that don’t is that “an objectless mood like nostalgia or depression [tends] to have a de-animating effect on those affected by them” (Ngai 31). Disgust, on the other hand, has a very clear object, and is the emotion more readily
open to energetic violence (Ngai 335). If we look more deeply at nostalgic longing to retreat to Eden for example, we see that the feeling itself can be de-animating until it finds a “disgusting” object to fixate on, permitting violent emotions that lead to further negative affect in the long run (as in Berlant’s cruel optimism). This is how Ahmed pictures disgust becoming “sticky” for individuals because, once the object is identified, the subject’s feeling about it becomes so intense that the object comes to represent the essence of that feeling: “I feel sick, you have sickened me, you are sickening” (Ahmed, *Emotion* 85). Once “you” (and all you represent) are sickening, I must eliminate you in order not to feel sick anymore. We see this at work in the novels under scrutiny in this thesis, for example in Ishtar’s nostalgia for what she saw as a perfect matriarchal creation, which quickly turns to disgust and disappointment with the state of things in modern American life; and this allows her to enact her rage in eschatological violence so that she might give herself permission to (try to) get back to her imagined paradise.

Similarly, Carter’s Mother goddess-surgeon imagines that by inverting the conditions of creation in favour of a feminine divinity, she might create a separatist feminist society, although in her rage at the impossibility of such a task she falls into the same essentialist traps that led to inequality in the first place. The Oankali hold the possibility of an Edenic return to Earth as a tool for distracting the humans from their ulterior motives; in turn, some of the resister humans use their own disgust at the aliens’ difference to fixate on origin myths that express ideas about purity and human separateness, which leads to further suffering as they refuse all outside help. Both Adam One and Crake (in different ways) call upon creation narratives to soothe their peers into believing an Edenic world is achievable, while using this distraction to hide the violence necessary to bring this
about, all the while nurturing disgust in their followers’ minds about the “exfernal” world. Lastly, in the text that inspired this investigation, Alderman’s Mother Eve establishes herself as a goddess/messiah figure explicitly aligned with Eve, providing comfort for those who have been traumatised only to use their trauma (and her own) to bring about the Cataclysm that simply inverts gender inequality.

The negative emotion that primarily seems to be at the centre of these violent actions, as I have identified across this corpus of primary texts, is disgust. Whether the feeler of disgust wants to be soothed or have their emotions exorcised, it is usually still because they are uncomfortable simply sitting with their negative feeling. In turn, this feeling can often be connected to issues under discussion in feminist debates of the last few decades. For example, I have connected concerns about the environment to ecofeminist debates following Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* within these texts, revealing how disgust at the state of, for example, chemical pollution in *Ishtar* or mass animal extinctions in the *MaddAddam* trilogy can lead the viewer to dream about the possibilities of a new (or old) creation. I have also connected feminist debates about technology and science to Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” and later work on the Chthulucene as concerns about bodily integrity and what makes us human are revealed in these novels, for example in the anxieties about interbreeding of humans with Oankali in the *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy. In several of these works, we see the “spiral dance” between these figures in Haraway’s famous declaration that she would “rather be a cyborg than a goddess” (“Cyborg” 68). These can then lead the reader to interrogate what exactly creates the feeling of disgust when human boundaries are threatened, either by
mythology or technology, and how we may find the roots of these feelings in myths of human exceptionalism in creation or apocalypse.

The theories I have found most useful for exploring this disgust have largely come from the recent affect-led biblical criticism of Karen Bray and Stephen D. Moore, as particularly exemplified in Moore’s use of Sara Ahmed’s concept of stickiness and disgust in his paper entitled “Retching on Rome.” The format of Bray and Moore’s questions regarding affect as social diagnosis has also been a particularly useful one for turning this perspective outwards, as a strategy for revealing how negative emotion is often generated by societal inequalities, rather than revealing a sign of insufficiency in the person feeling those emotions. I hope I have been able to demonstrate convincingly the connection (or the interaffectivity, to use Moore’s term (“Rage/Joy” 206-07)) between these negative feelings, the troublesome situations presented in the novels, and the resultant turning of the character(s) to myths that embody those emotions.

I now turn to some key similarities between the novels and their treatment of these issues, before outlining the ways in which they differ. What is most noticeable in chapters 1 and 2, as well as the case study preceding them, is a universal lampooning of goddess culture. Ishtar, Mother, and Mother Eve all form caricatures of the goddess figures found lurking within the garden in many feminist oeuvres of the women’s movement. Interestingly, though they act as satirical takedowns of such figures championed by goddess-culture feminists, they do so while also carefully highlighting why these feminists may have sought such figures in the first place. In other words, the treatment of these goddesses is nuanced, and informed by critiques of patriarchy as well as critiques of feminist strategies that aim to challenge patriarchy by resurrecting the
goddess. As Keller notes of the varying responses to Revelation, “Is this the book of cosmic-historical revolution? The book of paranoid patriarchy? Or does it cut, like its own double-edged speech, both ways?” (41). For these authors, it certainly does cut both ways. For example, the reader familiar with texts such as The Feminine Mystique would be deeply sympathetic to the anxiety and rage that causes Ishtar’s general dissembling. Similarly, New Eve’s tumultuous journey through her gender reassignment reveals countless opportunities for social diagnosis (à la Bray and Moore) that leads to an understanding of Mother’s suffering, particularly as a trans woman of colour. In Alderman’s Power, The young foster child Allie, who becomes Mother Eve, has suffered various intersecting levels of oppression and abuse. And yet each of these novels portrays an unhealthy oppositional response that is equally – if not more – violent than the oppressive force under which they were subsisting. While Lerman’s and Carter’s novels are both clearly a product of this trend in the 1970s, Alderman’s text, published many decades later, clearly inherits the issues raised in its predecessors, recasting them in a way that highlights twenty-first century intersectional feminist concerns.

In the later trilogies assessed within these projects we still find a global critique of essentialism, with the potential exception of Butler for certain theorists (though I have argued strenuously against this in Chapter 3). In these trilogies, the focus moves away from the goddess and towards questions of technological posthumanism and the place of the human in the natural environment. One of the more redeeming features of the Oankali, indeed the feature that is most likely to distract the reader from their other more negative qualities, is their apparently symbiotic relationship with their environment: their living dwellings that respond to their touch; their dislike for plastic;
the fact that their emotions are so in tune with their environment that they can actually affect the plant life around them. The same can be said for the God’s Gardeners of the *MaddAddam* trilogy: their eco-conscious, sustainable Edencliff community; their decentring of humans from scripture; their sanctification of environmental activists. In a similar way to the satirical goddesses of chapters 1 and 2, the authors’ undermining of these seemingly admirable eco-conscious communities is not intended to criticise environmentalism per se, but to point out areas in which readers should stay alert to biases inherited from myths of creation and apocalypse that might be dangerous (or indeed, helpful in more nuanced contexts).

Each of the novels in question also has a somewhat optimistic surface reading followed by a deeper, more ominous reading. This, in turn, reveals the breadth of interpretative possibilities for the myths in hand. It is worth noting at this point, however, that though some of the texts may seem on the surface to represent a consolatory reading of Revelation, few if any of these interpretations stand up to deeper scrutiny in these novels. *The Power* appears to show women embracing their strength and enacting revenge, but soon becomes a genocide. The Oankali seem to be utopian rescuers and later prove themselves diabolically controlling. And Crake’s post-human Crakers seem (at least initially) to offer a fresh start that would be unachievable for us “fallen” humans, but they come at the cost of near total genocide. These details cannot be overlooked for long. As Moore notes,

Recognizing that the New Jerusalem is not an actual city does not dispose of the problem of its earth-obliterating size, any more than recognizing that Babylon is not an actual woman disposes of the problem of the misogynistic violence to which she is subjected. Metaphors matter. They embody and perpetuate ideologies and as such shape social, and even natural, worlds. (*Torment/Bliss* 97).
All these readings, both shallow and deep, are possible because of the way these authors interweave themes of creation and apocalypse and their associated affects into their characters’ lives. Readers bring as much of their own affective landscapes to these texts as the texts do to the readers. The stories are stickier than they first seem.

Similarly, the Eves and Liliths of these novels are often left in a deliberately ambiguous space, though authors go about this in vastly different ways. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is not a global “redeeming” of Eve across these texts, nor are they universally critical of Eve. For Lerman’s Ishtar, Eve is a figure of disdain; for Carter she is a complicated individual too (understandably) concerned with her identity to focus on the bigger picture; for Butler she is a distant relic for separatists to cling to; for Atwood she can be all sorts of things, as her Eves are many; for Alderman she can be used to draw vulnerable people close and use their hurt to cause absolute disaster. There is similar variance with regards to Lilith characters: for Lerman she is a complicated, angry narrator looking for revenge; for Carter she is misunderstood, underestimated, a force to be reckoned with; for Butler she is something much more complex, serious and nuanced; she barely features in Atwood (appearing only as a bird, just as in the Hebrew Bible); and for Alderman she is surprisingly absent. In the variance in these characters we can perceive multiple opportunities for diverse critical readings: neither of these figures is particularly held up as a role model or saviour for feminist engagement with myths of origin. Instead, the characters tend to be used as “sticky” objects where stereotypes and their affective ties are satirised and taken to their logical conclusions, or where characters (such as Butler’s Lilith or Atwood’s Oryx) deliberately subvert the expectations of the reader, getting stuck in unfamiliar situations. They demonstrate how
easy it is for these female figures from biblical creation myths and surrounding legend to act as emotional vectors, or objects to which multiple affects can attach and contaminate other objects. In turn, the authors of these novels tend to show how easily the Eve (or Adam, or Lilith) figures can be drawn to destruction as well as creation, for the same reasons.

In this project I have chosen to use Ahmed’s theory of emotion, a direction that diverges from much of the other still developing critical area of affect theory. In doing so, I have elected not to pursue other perhaps more mainstream lines of affect theory, for example that of Deleuze, Guattari and Massumi. I have found Ahmed’s line of inquiry, when used in conjunction with the work of Moore and others, to be a useful framework for working with these novels. By focusing on Moore’s treatment of negative emotions such as disgust (and some connected emotions such as fear and depression) over other affective states, I have perhaps risked overlooking some different factors at work in these myths. By looking into negative affect such as disgust, I aim to redress some of the balance in the scholarship that has largely been in favour of hope within feminist speculative fiction. That is not to say that any of these works of fiction is lacking in hope, in my opinion, but that I have found disgust and other negative emotions to be particularly powerful factors in their association with creation and apocalypse.

In another area perhaps neglected within my study I note that these novels contain multiple portrayals of motherhood. The focus of this project has been primarily on the prelapsarian garden narrative and pictures of Eve in particular before she becomes the “mother of all living.” I acknowledge that this may mean that there are avenues yet unexplored in which motherhood plays an important factor in the portrayal
of characters and their interpersonal relationships. Not to mention the importance of mother-child relationships in psychoanalysis, as this relates to affect theory. While this is something I touched upon in my master’s research in respect to Eve Sedgwick and Melanie Klein’s “lost object,” I have not pursued such questions in this thesis and would urge others to chase these lines of enquiry.

Lastly, in my analysis of some brief Hebrew Bible texts, Jewish legend and New Testament apocalypse, I am conscious that many other texts would provide yet more interesting routes into the selected novels. In particular, I am aware that Revelation is the only apocalyptic text I deal with explicitly. Though I note aspects of the apocalyptic genre that are of course relevant to many apocalyptic texts within both canonical and extracanonical traditions, I have relied mainly on Revelation because of its predominance in cultural portrayals of disaster narratives. My focus has therefore often been based in Christological perspectives in which creation and apocalypse are seen quite literally as bookends not only to the Bible but also to chronological time itself. This is not in any way intended as a supersessionist reading of the texts, but one that responds to the themes at work in these typically Western novels.

It is fitting at the end of this doctoral thesis to speak about endings, both biblical and literary. One could easily identify on first reading that none of these novels has a conclusive ending. To bring any of them to a satisfying close would be to admit to an apocalyptic finality that these texts all aim to criticise in some form or another. Equally, not one of these novels provides any sense of affective closure for the Adam-, Eve- or Lilith-identified character either. Their open-endedness is instead another invitation to hold the affective space open, for to bring it to an emotionally satisfying close would
also be the same as falling backwards into nostalgic bliss or tumbling forwards into apocalyptic annihilation. The reader of each of these sticky stories is always left in the midst of the trouble, as Haraway would have it. This doctoral thesis has aimed to respond to several currents throughout literature, biblical studies, feminist/womanist traditions, and affect theory, finding an area in which they can all be brought into dialogue with one another. Recent work within all of these areas has aimed to identify, and in several cases redefine, how our emotional response to complex, intersecting injustices can be shaped by the stories we share with each other. Just as Ahmed writes, “rather than asking ‘What are emotions?’ I will ask, ‘What do emotions do?’” (Emotion 4), I have asked the same of the emotions circulating throughout these texts, both biblical and literary. In identifying what the “sticky” emotions associated with the myths of creation and apocalypse do in fiction that projects us into the future/past, we can understand their power and resist the effect they can have on our ability to stay with the discomfort, uncertainty and ambiguity of the present moment.
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