Gender and Hybridity: the Significance of Human/Animal Characters in Magic Realist Fiction

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Introduction

In the wake of genetic and tissue engineering, two concepts which are deeply intertwined have acquired new connotations, not only in the field of science but also in the thick fabric of cultural beliefs and expectations which stem from the former and vice-versa; namely hybridity and purification. Discourses around the purity of the human species abound, and they help to maintain the separation between humans and between humans and nonhuman animals. Birke and Michael,1 following Latour,2 call this process of keeping separate the human and nonhuman ‘purification’. This artificial separation perpetuates discourses and practices of colonialism, racism and sexism, which extend to nonhuman animals through the process I call ‘othering’, which is a desperate attempt at keeping the boundaries between ‘the self’ and ‘the other’, intact. However, this constant policing of boundaries, which Latour sees as obsessive in modernity, covers up increasing anxieties over hybridity -- because, as Birke and Michael note: ‘[T]he notion of hybridity implies boundary -- crossing and mixing -- if not literally, then certainly at a conceptual level’.3 This would confuse, they suggest, issues of humanity, animality and even of individuality. We fear becoming part animal (a good example is fears expressed in debates around xenotransplantation) which would make us lose our ‘humanity’, our individuality, our sense of ‘self’.

Bio-medical narratives of human-nonhuman animal hybridisation have played an important role in the raising of awareness about this phenomenon. However, I want to highlight the importance of these discourses in fictional narratives, such as fairy tales, fables and myths or

2 B. Latour, We Have Never Been Modern (Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hemstead, 1993).
legends. This is particularly true of those works of literature classified as magic realism. Many cultures, such as the Greek, Roman and Latin American ones have attempted to make sense of the making of the world through historical accounts of their travels in which such hybridisation is part and parcel of those narratives.4

It is precisely those cultural fears or beliefs about human-animal hybridity as expressed in the various genres of fiction I have mentioned above, that I explore in this article. I examine some of these representations from a feminist standpoint, particularly where they meet in representations of reproduction, a topic central to gender ideologies. Sarah Bakewell, in her analysis of images of bodily transformation, notes that ‘[p]eople have always been fascinated by stories of humans changing into animals, and animals behaving anthropomorphically’.5 She argues that these tales have to do with issues of human identity and that they are often ‘adapted to elicit either laughter or wide-eyed terror from the crowd around the campfire’.6 I could add to her argument that general public consumption of magic realist and science fiction texts suggests that these genres appeal to people precisely because the boundaries between fantasy and reality, humans and animals, are fluid and interchangeable and therefore help maintain cultural beliefs more or less intact. Moreover, I warn of the dangers of ignoring the cultural powers of these representations.

Transgenic aliens, myths and ‘others’

Current public unease about cross species hybridity seems to invoke fictional monsters ranging from the Frankenstein story7 to bestial beings, such as men with dogs’ heads8 present in the collective memory

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4 See, for example, P. Mason, Deconstructing America: Representations of the Other (Routledge, London, 1990).
6 Ibid.
8 In her reference to Pliny the Elder’s descriptions of his encounters with people of other races in his ‘armchair travels’ Sarah Bakewell comments that many of these descriptions invoked a mixture of animal and human. She quotes Pliny’s assertion that he encountered ‘men with dogs’ heads who are covered with wild beasts’ skin; they bark instead of speaking’. Bakewell, ‘Illustrations from the Wellcome Institute’, p.504. Bakewell presents us with a fascinating collection of images of hybridity reprinted with
and imagination of folktales around the world. This fear is part of the public response to recent experiments with transgenic organisms and xenotransplantation, which reflect public fears of science combined with ancient beliefs about the relationship between animals and humans -- especially when boundaries are transgressed in the literal creation of hybrids. If recipients of heart transplants believe that they might acquire characteristics of the donor,\(^9\) then what happens when the heart received is that of a pig?\(^10\) Does the recipient really believe that they will act ‘piggily’, grunt or worse be ‘re-born’ with a pig’s tail? Implicit here is the culturally-laden fear of becoming less human and more animal.

These anxieties, however, may rest on the separation of humans and animals familiar to us in the modern world. But concomitantly, we seem also to have lost our myths, and thus a tool by which we could explain our role in the world around us, and which once helped us to understand incompatibilities between culture and nature. Rather, in Western culture, we have separated ourselves, created ourselves as superior to any other kinds of living organisms. We have become ‘the norm’ and anything else has become ‘the deviant’, ‘the monster’, ‘the other’. As Birke and Michael note, ‘[s]eparation and autonomy are defined against others - be they nonhuman animals, an ill-defined “nature”, or particularly excluded groups of human others’.\(^11\)

‘Otherness’ extends also to other human beings: the history of colonial conquest in Africa and the Americas relied on treating indigenous peoples as animals, as less than humans.\(^12\) Thus, ‘the savages’ often featured in touring shows in Europe. Edwards illustrates this point with some photographs and pamphlets from 1884 advertising a show of a

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\(^10\) See footnote 7 above.


\(^12\) See Mason, Deconstructing America; E. Edwards (ed), Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920 (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1992); and L. Schiebinger, Nature’s Body: Sexual Politics and the Making of Modern Science (Pandora, London, 1993). Parallel to this, there was the construction of dichotomies of human/animal, rational/irrational which helped to create the narrative of inferior ‘others’ with respect to women, in which women are the closest to nature, the irrational ones, and men are the rational sentient superior beings. This, of course, allows violence and abuse against women, since they are somehow ‘inferior’ and ‘the others’.
group of Australian Aborigines who had been removed from Queensland and toured for public exhibition. One of these pamphlets has captions such as:

First introduction in England of the band of seven Australian Boomerang Throwers consisting of male and female Queensland Black Trackers and Ranting Man Eaters! Veritable Blood-Thirsty Beasts, Lowest Order of Man.\(^\text{13}\)

Note the familiar discourse of animality: *Blood-Thirsty Beasts*, and so on. The photos feature a man and a woman, both naked from the waist up bearing their cultural ornaments such as tattoos and jewellery, and posing for the ‘white’ lens of R.A. Cunningham early in 1883. The separation from the ‘civilised’, thinking, speaking human is emphasised not only in the language used but also in the photographic representation of ‘race’ and difference. I must emphasise here that separation from animals is centrally part of Judeo-Christian heritage.\(^\text{14}\) Modern Christianity demands individual moral responsibility, therefore separation from the collective responsibility for nature. Yet, this is quite recent in history;\(^\text{15}\) Christianity in Medieval times up to the nineteenth century held nonhuman animals morally responsible for ‘crimes’ such as thefts, chattering in church and even murder! (cf. Evans’s ‘trials of animals’).

By contrast, hybrid forms, whatever their origins, threaten and unbalance that separation from ‘others’, hence the fears (ie we might become ‘others’) present in popular representations such as folktales, fables and myths. As I stated above, fear of hybrids is often expressed in fiction but especially in the genres of science fiction and magical realism.

Before I launch into the hybrid characters present in fiction, I want to distinguish human-animal hybrids from allegorical, symbolical representations of human societal life through animals with human characteristics. We are all familiar with jokes and advertisements featuring animals dressed in human clothes and performing human activities such as male beavers ‘busy’ reading the newspaper whilst ‘Mrs Beaver’ (a human female) speaks on the phone to some friend and

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says: ‘No, he’s not busy ... in fact, that whole thing is just a myth’.\textsuperscript{16} The popularity of Gary Larson’s Far Side cartoons illustrates this point.

‘[I]f we meet with imagery that seems to be calling us to look beyond the immediate event and its emotional ramifications, we may suspect we are dealing with symbol or allegory’, writes Alice Landy.\textsuperscript{17} Allegory usually carries moral teachings through animal characters with human qualities. Some writers such as George Orwell have gone a step further in their use of allegory in order to denounce how the politics of language ‘may lose its humane meanings under the pressure of political bestiality and falsehood’.\textsuperscript{18} His Animal Farm is an example, in which pigs, horses, donkeys and farm birds plot revolution against the cruelty of human beings. Pigs in Orwell’s story use their ‘politics of language’ to convince the other animals on the farm that, under their guidance, the world (the farm) will change for the better and that they will all live in a utopian society of equality and respect. But in doing so, they acquire negative human passions, and so the circle starts again. The farm animals attend meetings called by the pigs; these plot against each other and even kill any of their fellow animals who might oppose them. Does this sound disturbingly familiar?

Traditional fairy tales also use animal characters in this way; who can forget the wicked wolf in Red Riding Hood, or the cunning cat in The Cat in Boots, for example? Mainstream as well as feminist literary critics have analysed allegories and symbols present in these stories in depth, particularly when it comes to warning girls of the dangers of going out alone in the woods or at dark, or of getting pregnant outside marriage.\textsuperscript{19} However, they have paid less attention to hybrid characters and their meaning in terms of the cultural fears about becoming less than humans.

Human/animal hybrids in myths, also help justify human dominance over anything that is not human. Ironically, though, some humans create ‘powerful’, mythical hybrids to keep other humans in fear and,

consequently, under control. Take, for example, the familiar mythological -- as well as a Christian character present in the Bible -- hybrid known as Satan, named from an Arabic word meaning adversary. Satan personifies evil. Originally an angel who rebels against the creator, he is punished expelled from heaven, and given animal parts. Satan is usually conceived of as red, the colour of fire and blood, a man with horns, a pointed tail, and cloven hoofs for feet, but older representations emphasise his bestial qualities - showing him as a goat, for example, which is closely associated with lechery and sexual appetite. This, in the folk concept of Satan, would explain his supposedly raping of women and consequently, the reproduction of monstrous beings. Since reproduction is heavily gendered, the fears and the guilt about the reproduction of these ‘monsters’, falls almost always on the shoulders of women. These fears, as well as ideas about motherhood, fatherhood, religion, and the control of reproduction tend to pop up, more often than not, in popular literature, such as magazines, newspaper articles, fairytales, and novels particularly science fiction stories.

By the same token, we can say that the future of reproduction is also about the future of women and therefore of gender. My interest in this topic, as a feminist writer and sociologist, stems from my perception of people’s preoccupation with human-non human animal relationships expressed through folktales and myths, all of which are gendered. These myths then influence not only literature but also science.

It is in the intersection between myth, literature and science, that science fiction writers are able to explore themes of reproduction and hybridity. An example of this is the film *Alien Resurrection*. Here, Ripley, the main protagonist, is impregnated with the alien’s genes to become after several failed attempts at cloning her, a hybrid, with all the monstrous

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20 I consider ‘myth’ as a branch of the folktale. If we think that myths usually explore the world as it was in some past age before the present conditions were established, then we can say that they handle creation and origins. When myth deals with adventures of the gods, we might say that they are almost identical with the fairy tale in that human communications happen through women, who become the ‘others’ and the ‘objects’ of economic and kinship exchange. Folktales have an oral tradition which is generally reproduced by women in the bedside stories they tell their children without realising that, in the process of retelling folktales, they are also reproducing their own alterity. *The Anthology of World Mythology* comments that: ‘In the 20th century, the symbolic interpretation of myths moved from the external environment to the internal environment of the unconscious mind. Sigmund Freud and his followers view myths as the expression of the individual’s unconscious wishes, fears and drives’. D. Rosenberg, *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics* (Harrap, London, 1986), p.xix.
characteristics of her alien parent (corrosive acid instead of blood, enormous strength and extreme insensitivity towards human suffering), yet in the body of Ripley. In turn, she is ‘adopted’ by a mutant baby alien which she later pushes through the suction duct, in a clever allegory for abortion. As the mutant baby disintegrates, his/her terrified face and eyes become almost human and the cries of agony resemble that of a human baby. Ripley sacrificed her adoptive baby to save Earth like the Virgin Mary allowing Christ, her ‘alien’ son - for being only partly human - to die for the whole of humanity. Thus, the film plays with ancient fears of hybridity through women’s reproduction.

Inbreeding as a source of hybrids is another culturally gendered belief originating in creation stories and myths. Whoever the creators are in different cultures, they are always warning humans of the terrible consequences of having sexual intercourse with close relatives: we could bear animals or a mixture of human/non-human animal. People have taken this a step further and included the dangers of practising sexual intercourse with non-human animals, as if animals wanted to engage in such ‘practices’ with humans! Nevertheless, many oral folktales have featured women being ‘raped’ by all sort of animals including snakes and then giving birth to hybrids. This is particularly true of Latin American folktales. Not surprisingly, then, the topic of women’s fear of giving birth to monsters who are neither human nor animals - yet are both - is often explored in the literary genre of magic realism, to which I now turn.

A Hundred years of Solitude and a Millennium of Iguanas

Although magic realism, as a literary term, has been mainly used to describe the works of many Latin American writers, it can also be said that a number of European novelists incorporate magic realism in their works of fiction. These novels ‘explore the unexpected, supernatural and fantastic within a realistic frame of reference’. The genre ‘typically

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21 This is also, of course, a violation of animal rights.
22 Among many others in this genre, I can mention: Angela Carter, Emma Tennant, Salman Rushdie, John Fowles, Elsa Morante and Fabrizia Ramondino.
incorporates elements of dream, fantasy, myth and fairytale within ostensibly realist narratives.24

Magical realism as is also known, ‘has become an almost universal description of the ‘Latin American style’ - exotic and tropical, overblown and unrestrained, phantasmagorical and hallucinatory - it is so ideologically dangerous that it should really be rejected’, asserts Martin in his analysis of Latin American fiction.25 This has helped it gain world recognition through novelists such as Angela Carter in Europe, Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende, to mention just a few in the Americas. But magic realist fiction has also helped record cultural beliefs including many regarding scientific, biomedical concepts. In Latin America these beliefs are refracted through discourses of masculinity and femininity expressed as the ideologies of machismo and marianismo.26 The latter stems from a fusion of the Spanish Catholic dogma of the Virgin Mary (a pure, unblemished young woman) with the indigenous concept of motherhood, which includes Pachamama, Mother Earth (more than a human being, in fact a goddess) according to Aymara myths.27 This blending of religion and paganism in gendered discourses of motherhood is in itself a hybrid, as is the mestizaje that came from the mixing of Spanish and indigenous genes. In this context, Latin American literature is fertile ground for hybrid forms of all sorts and both writers and readers find this phenomenon of b(l)ending rules, norms, cultures, myths and beliefs in general, very ‘natural’ indeed.

Gabriel García Márquez, if not the ‘creator’ of magical realism in Latin America, has been the first Latin American writer to give magical realism world recognition with his novel One Hundred Years of Solitude.29 Generally, readers like the novel ‘because it appears to conjure up a

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24 Ibid.
27 Aymaras are indigenous people who live on the borders of Chile, Peru and Bolivia, therefore influencing all three countries with their culture.
28 Alejo Carpentier and Miguel Angel Asturias are, according to literary critics, the first Latin American writers to explore magic realist fiction in their novels after returning from Paris where they encountered surrealism (See, for example, Martin, Journeys through the Labyrinth).
There is in the novel a blending of reality and fantasy which makes it difficult for the reader to say where one begins or ends. Significantly, the boundaries between humans and animals are fluid and interchangeable, and not always just allegorical.

Briefly, the novel is a synopsis of Latin American historical experience as seen through the life and eyes of the Buendía family. José Arcadio Buendía and some others set out to find an outlet to the sea. Eventually, after 26 months they abandoned the expedition and founded Macondo. I am struck by the parallel here with Columbus and his expedition to the Indias which, took him instead to the coast of Latin America. However, it is as the Buendías’ story unfolds that we encounter the first mention of hybridity:

To the south lay the swamps, covered with an eternal vegetable scum, and the whole vast universe of the great swamp, which according to what the gypsies said, had no limits. The great swamp in the west mingled with a boundless extension of water where there were soft-skinned cetaceans that had the head and torso of a woman, causing the ruination of sailors with the charm of their extraordinary breasts.

Fantasy and reality fuse here such that the reader simply accepts the fantastic narration as reality in the story, though the allusion to the mythological siren (or mermaid) is clear. Within Greek mythology, this sea nymph lured sailors on to rocks by her singing, resulting in cultural beliefs, widespread from medieval times until the 18th century in Europe. So the writer creates or invokes a mythical figure like the mermaid to call our attention to the fact that Latin America is a place where indigenous and occidental cultures mix sexually, indeed inbreed, to produce mestizaje, hybridisation. In other words, the significance here of a mythological character like the siren is that Márquez is playing with the Western belief that mixing with ‘uncivilised’/indigenous women would cause the ‘ruination’ of a ‘civilized’, superior group of people, in this case the Spanish and Portuguese conquistadores. What I find fascinating is that Márquez seems to be conveying that it was the colonisers who ‘ruined’ the original inhabitants of the Latin American continent by mixing with them, usually through the methodic raping of women albeit excusing themselves by saying that it was because of ‘the

30 Martin, Journeys through the Labyrinth, p.224.
31 Cf P. Mason, Deconstructing America
32 Márques, One Hundred Years of Solitude, p.16.
charm of their breasts’. As I commented above, the figure of the siren is not a modern creation. Anthropologist Peter Mason refers, for example, to Columbus’ letters to Luis de Santangel in 1493 in which the explorer reports that on the islands of the Caribs ‘he saw three sirens, although they were not as beautiful as he had been led to believe’.33

The fantastic being in the shape of a siren in A Hundred Years of Solitude, comes as no surprise, then, since the foundation of Macondo, has clear undertones with the colonisation and foundation of Hispanic towns in America. In Márquez’s text, however, the mermaid’s singing is substituted by her alluring breasts perhaps a less subtle sexual discourse on fears of reproducing with the ‘wrong’ species.

Interestingly, Mason also mentions Columbus’ comments in his letters that on this island of the Caribs ‘people with tails are born’.34 Interesting, because this further example of hybridity also appears in One Hundred Years. The original couple, José Arcadio Buendía and his cousin Ursula Iguaran delay the consummation of their marriage because of her fear of incest which could bring about the bearing of iguanas instead of human children. Also, note the name Ursula Iguaran, which can be said to be, again, one of Márquez’s subtle jokes: Could Urs(ul)a, if deconstructed, mean a female bear and Igu(a)n, iguana? Maybe my deconstruction is extreme and bears (excuse the pun) no relation to the author’s intentions, yet as a writer myself I feel tempted to see beyond the obvious; after all, other names in the story are laden with meaning (cf for example, Buendía (Good day in Spanish). But going back to incest and inbreeding, the story of Ursula and José Arcadio Buendía is such that:

Although their marriage was predicted from the time they had come into the world, when they expressed their desire to be married their own relatives tried to stop it. They were afraid that those two healthy products of two races that had interbred over the centuries would suffer the same shame of breeding iguanas.35

To make this fear more believable, Márquez introduces a further, more ‘real’ example:

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33 Ibid., p.102.
34 Ibid.
There had already been a horrible precedent. An aunt of Ursula’s, married to an uncle of José Arcadio Buendía, had a son who went through life wearing loose, baggy trousers and who bled to death after having lived forty-two years in the purest state of virginity, for he had been born and grown up with a cartilaginous tail in the shape of a corkscrew and with a small tuft of hair on the tip. A pig’s tail that was never allowed to be seen by any woman and that cost him his life when a butcher friend did him the favour of chopping it off with his cleaver.36

It is up to Ursula to stop incest by wearing chastity pants for a year, despite her cousin’s efforts to consummate the marriage. This symbolic birth control reflects Latin American gender roles in which women are to control reproduction at any cost whilst men are to prove their manhood by sleeping around indiscriminately, the proof of which is children. When this virility is put into doubt by other men, they blame their women. In the novel, after winning a cockfight, José Arcadio is ridiculed by the angry loser thus:

Congratulations!, he shouted, Maybe that rooster of yours can do your wife a favour.37

On hearing this, José Arcadio kills the other man with a spear in front of the whole town, goes back to his house and orders Ursula to take the chastity pants off whilst threatening her with the spear. Ursula responds:

You’ll be responsible for what happens.38

To which he retorts:

If you bear iguanas, we’ll raise iguanas. But there’ll be no more killings in this town because of you.39

He not only reproaches Ursula for his blemished macho image but also, and more infuriatingly for me as a female reader, blames her for a murder he himself committed and for the potentiality of hybrids through her reproduction (which reminds me of the blaming of women

36 Could this be a symbolic penis?
37 Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude, p.25.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
for bearing daughters). This is the archetype of Latin American *machismo*.

A further and last example of hybridity present in *One Hundred Years*, which unlike the two previous ones, has no connections to fears of reproduction and inbreeding is that of a *snake-man* being toured in a cage by the gipsies in Macondo. The narrator recounts:

> [T]he crowd ... was witnessing the sad spectacle of the man who had been turned into a snake for having disobeyed his parents.\(^40\)

The ‘spectacle’ is peculiarly similar to the aborigines on display mentioned earlier. In that show, it was difference which had to be exhibited, emphasised and played against the ideological constructs of civilisation. In this show, the fears are to do with being ‘unnatural’. Disobedience to one’s parents in Latin American culture goes against the ‘natural’, ‘normal’ behaviour and rules dictated by religious ideologies. Malformation of one’s spirit is punishable and ‘corrected’ through some divine intervention, which draws parallels to scientific intervention to amend physical deformities, even when they present no threat of death to the ‘abnormal’ person.\(^41\)

Modern genetic engineering now gives us the possibility of creating further ‘unnatural’ forms of hybrids between humans and other animals that were hitherto imaginable only in fiction. Feminist historian of science, Donna Haraway, exploring the interweaving of science-fiction and modern genetics, remarks that on learning about Christian salvation stories she has been ‘a marked woman informed by those literacies as well as those given to [her] by birth and education’.\(^42\) She also notes the potential scientific creation of fantastic and exotic hybrid forms through genetic engineering which evoke precisely those cultural themes. Writing about OncoMouse\(^\text{TM}\), the patented mouse bearing the gene for (human) breast cancer, Haraway comments:

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\(^40\) I can’t but help make connections to the Christian creation story of Adam, Eve and the snake in the Garden of Eden.

\(^41\) For example, geneticists might attempt to intervene to improve the ‘normal’, to give the human body qualities beyond those given by nature. However, they first experiment with animals, since animals are constructed as dispensable and inferior to humans.

OncoMouse™ is my sibling, and more properly, male or female, s/he is my sister. Her essence is to be a mammal, a bearer by definition of mammary glands, and a site for the operation of a transplanted, human, tumour-producing gene - an oncogene - that reliably produces breast cancer. Although her promise is decidedly secular, s/he is a figure in the sense developed within Christian realism: S/he is our scapegoat; s/he bars our suffering; s/he signifies and enacts our mortality in a powerful, historically specific way that promises a culturally privileged kind of salvation - a “cure for cancer”.43

The imagery interweaving the fantasies of science-fiction and scientific fact is powerfully explored by Lynn Randolph in her painting of a human-mouse hybrid, created in response to Haraway’s paper ‘Mice into Wormholes’.44 The painting features a being which has the body of a female mouse (with human looking breasts, hands and feet). She is sitting inside a box, like a cage, observed by seven pairs of human eyes as she stares out at the viewer. Significantly, she is crowned with thorns, like Jesus Christ, supposedly to save humanity from cancer. Haraway also makes this point when she comments that:

[Randolph’s OncoMouse] is a [Christ] figure in the sacred-secular dramas of technoscientific salvation history, with all the disavowed links to Christian narrative that pervade U.S. scientific discourse.45

What I want to emphasise is the reproductive aspect, not only of oncogenes, which gender this hybrid (by suggesting with a sole image of a breasted human-mouse, that the hybrid is somehow female) created by genetic engineering and which play into cultural fears of hybrids and of women being the ones to reproduce them. Scientists (usually male) play God to create a monster which can ‘save’ us. But to do that, they must have their victim, their ‘scapegoat’ as Haraway puts it. They must impregnate a female mouse, with the diseased gene of a human, the ‘superior’, the ‘creator’ in order to save the rest of humanity from the awful disease called cancer. Even if we accept the argument that the creation of OncoMouse is justified to save humanity, this glosses over the creation of many other experimental hybrid forms (all of which will

43 Ibid., p.79.
44 Lynn Randolph’s painting is entitled ‘The Laboratory, or The Passion of OncoMouse’.
45 Haraway, Modest Witness, p.47.
be murdered in the name of science). Here, there is a clear hint of the phantasmagorical, something between reality and surreality, between life and death, which is extremely disturbing for some women, since the cross, the cruza continues to fall on our shoulders.

Thus, the fears/anxieties about hybridity, reproduction and gender so eloquently expressed by writers such as García Márquez, Angela Carter, and Carol Emshwiller are evoked again by the literal creation of hybrids in science. Carter’s Nights at the Circus follows a female hybrid (she is the daughter of a male swan and a woman and is called Fevvers, possibly because of her wings and also because of her working class origin) on a circus tour from London to Siberia. This is certainly a novel in which magical realism and gender intersect; as the Bloomsbury Guide to Women’s Literature rightly asserts:

Gender identities are positioned within an interrogation of cultural mythologies of gender, as well as a question of the whole problem of “authenticity”: Am I fact or fiction? asks Fevvers.

As for Emshwiller, her novel Carmen Dog is one in which animals turn into women, while women mutate into birds and other animals. At some point in the process of mutating they are hybrids and we read about women like giant sloths

upside down in the lower branches of a tree. Some are, you know, on the way up, others the reverse.
As I said: woman to beast, beast to woman, and not much point to it all seems to me.

I will not go into the symbolism of this science fiction novel but what is clear from the beginning is that men find it difficult to understand womens’ change and try, of course, to control the whole process in the name of reason and attempt to lead a ‘normal’ life with their hybrid wives and lovers.

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46 This has clear resonance with the fate of the hybrids (including the cloned Ripley) in the film Alien Resurrection.
47 I am playing here with the religious and scientific meaning of ‘cross’ which also means ‘hybrid’ in Spanish (just as ‘cross-breeding’ is used in English).
49 Buck, Bloomsbury Guide to Women’s Literature, p.861.
51 Ibid., p.1.
Whatever scientists believe transgenes can do, the fear of bodily forms that transgress species boundaries (in Randolph’s picture, half woman, half mouse) runs deep in our culture. That is why the picture disturbs. It touches on possibilities which are more than just fictional. It evokes fears that science can now create the very fantastical forms which were hitherto the prerogative of the novelist or storyteller.

*We ignore these fears at our peril.*

**Biography**

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