"Eve was Framed": Ideostory and (Mis)Representation in Judeo-Christian Creation Stories

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Adam's last will and testament read, "Don't believe Eve's version"
—Jewish Folk Saying

Few women in the Bible have received as notorious a reputation as Eve. While Delilah, Mary Magdalene, Salome, Vashti, and Lot's wife all have reputations as promiscuous seductresses and disobedient wives, none has the inauspicious distinction of causing the downfall of all humankind. As the first representative of the female sex in the Old Testament, Eve arguably provides an interpretive schema for all the women in the Bible. Moreover, the depiction of Eve, particularly in the account of the fall, has been employed to rationalize the subordination of women in Western culture. Ruth B. Bottigheimer notes in her historical study of children's Bibles that "Ideas about the meaning and significance of Adam and Eve's Fall from Grace have penetrated every aspect of Western culture, powerfully influencing people's justifications of existing relations between the sexes" (*Bible for Children* 198). As ideologies surrounding gender shifted in the late twentieth century, retellings of creation and the fall for young readers inevitably began to negotiate the religious canon and changing expectations for gender relations.

When Eve's story is retold for children, what choices the author makes says more about the author's context than about Eve. Many scholars who study a variety of different traditional literatures acknowledge the influence of the author's own cultural zeitgeist on the process of retelling. John Stephens and Robyn McCallum coined the term "re-version" to emphasize the impossibility of replicating the "original" text. Just as the narratives told in the Bible are influenced and limited by the historical period in which they are written, contemporary retellings of these same stories are infused with the cultural

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perspectives of their historical period even when they appear to reproduce the source. A "re-version," according to Stephens and McCallum, is "a narrative which has taken apart its pre-texts and reassembled them as a version which is a new textual and ideological configuration (4).[1] The term can be applied to a variety of genres of retold stories; however, Bible stories are laden with a different ideological authority from that of secular narratives. "In a society in which Christian humanism is still a pervasive—albeit implicit—ideology, readers approach Bible stories with a reverence for authority different from what informs their approaches to most other kinds of literature" (Stephens and McCallum 30). The perception of divinity camouflages the imprint of changing cultural mores for many readers. However, in her study of eight centuries of Bibles for children, Bottigheimer concludes that children's Bibles are not immune to the influence of a historical moment on the retelling of an existing text:

> Children's Bibles express values and standards that are not universal and eternal but particular and ephemeral. Bound by place and time, they adapt an ancient and inspired text to changing manners, morals, ideas and concerns. For authors, buyers, and readers in nearly every age children's Bibles have seemed to be texts faithful to the Bible itself. But their authors' common effort to use the Bible to shape a meaningful present has produced Bible stories that mingle sacred text with secular values. (218)

Bottigheimer alludes to the importance of these texts for an audience of practitioners, historically as well as currently the most prominent audience for Bible stories. The need to "shape a meaningful present" and connect spiritually and philosophically with a text thousands of years old and set in a culture acutely different from our own is unique to religious narratives. Unlike retellings of Cinderella, for example, narratives from the Bible are encumbered with the distinction of being sacred to practitioners of Judaism, Christianity, or both. As such, there are limitations on the ways in which Bible stories are retold, just as there is an expectation of fidelity to the sacred text on the part of a substantial portion of the audience. These limitations are one reason that the more subtle influence of cultural changes is often overlooked. For a story such as that of Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden, the history of abuse by patriarchal ideologies is another reason subtle shifts in narration may be difficult to recognize.

Eve's story is the primary justification for the religious subjugation of women in Judeo-Christian cultures. In *The Woman's Bible*, first published in 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton alludes to the parallels between Eve's story and the social and political situation of women at the end of the nineteenth century:

> The Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race [. . .] Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, [. . .] and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital question of the hour, she was commanded to ask her husband at home. (7)

Bottigheimer notes how enduring this logic has been. For over five hundred years, in many children's Bibles "Eve functions as a Judaeo-Christian Pandora, a figure whose curiosity loosed evil and introduced death into the world" ("An Alternative Eve" 73). Eve's narrative has a history of being (mis)used as religious justification for the patriarchal status quo, what Mieke Bal refers to as an "ideostory."

Bal coined the term "ideostory" to describe figures whose stories have been misrepresented and attract "ideological abuse." Ideostories are often reduced to stereotypes with "clearly opposed characters, easily seen as goodies and baddies" (88). As with the narrative of creation and the fall, ideostories rely on traditional interpretations that have been handed down without returning to the pre-text for close examination.[2] An ideostory can be referenced in broad generalizations that represent one interpretation: "Fixed as images [. . .] they can be used against women without reference to the stories' precise content. The comparisons and distortions are based on the form of the text rather than on a detailed analysis of its substance" (89). Bal's concept of ideostory melds the history of the fall as justification for women's subordination with the understanding that retellings are a product of the culture in which they are (re)written. Her term gives a name to the (mis)use of this narrative.

Many children's and young adult texts about Eve are informed as much as, or more, by the ideostory's traditional interpretation as they are by the actual account in Genesis—let alone the original Hebrew from which it was translated. The iconic association of an apple with the "fruit" from the tree, the assumption that Eve was privy to God's prohibition directed to Adam against eating the fruit, and the assumption that Adam was not present during the conversation with the serpent are all examples of traditional interpretations of the narrative gaps in this ideostory.

This article examines the events of the story of creation and the fall presented in various children's and young adult texts. My analysis is limited to the three events I believe to be most revealing of the ideology of gender in a given text: 1) creation of the first humans; 2) temptation and moment of choice; and 3) outcome of choice and dispensation of punishment. In examining the creation of the first humans, my primary interest is in whether the text depicts the simultaneous creation from Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them"; or the asynchronous creation described in Genesis 2:22, "And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man."[3] With regard to the temptation and moment of choice, this analysis is concerned with the manner in which Eve is tempted and the implied impetus for her decision. Finally, in examining the outcome of choice, I focus on whether the immediate outcomes indicate distinctly negative ramifications or allow for positive conclusions; with regard to the dispensation of punishment, there is a similar concern with the positive or negative connotations, but also with how the distinctly gendered punishments are negotiated.

Competing Versions of Creation

In choosing which version of events to portray, every text that recounts the story of the Garden of Eden establishes an ideological stance on the seemingly conflicting accounts of the creation of woman. Genesis 1 describes what many scholars interpret as the simultaneous creation of man and woman, either as a hermaphroditic creature or two separate beings, while Genesis 2 describes the first woman being created from the side, typically the rib, of the first man. Which version is utilized in a retelling establishes immediately an ideological framework of gender in the narrative. Even those texts that begin after the dramatic scenes of creation demonstrate a conflicted view on the creation of woman by the very act of having omitted that aspect of the narrative. For example, Stanton eloquently describes the insult of the "rib version" of creation compared to the seven-day account of Genesis 1: "There is something sublime in bringing order out of chaos; [. . .] wholly inconsistent with a petty surgical operation, to find material for the mother of the race. It is on this allegory that all the enemies of women rest their battering rams, to prove her inferiority" (20). Contemporary biblical scholars continue to wrestle with the implications of the dueling versions of creation. Leland Ryken interprets the first two chapters of Genesis as companions, the first a macrocosmic account of creation, the second a microcosmic account: "Genesis 1 is unified by the catalogue of God's acts of cosmic creation; Genesis 2 is controlled by the catalogue of God's acts of provision for the human race" (96). Pamela Norris has attempted to reframe in a positive context the second account in which Eve is molded from Adam's rib: "[T]here is an argument for Eve to be seen, in the words of Milton's Adam, as 'Heaven's last best gift': she is God's final creation and is formed not of dust but of the raw material of humanity, [. . .] the rib story confirms that Eve is part of Adam and therefore cannot be inferior to him" (19–20).[4] However, as John A. Phillips illustrates, not all scholars are satisfied with this inversion of traditional interpretations: "The suggestion that Eve's creation is deliberately placed as the last of God's acts because she is the crown of creation is wishful thinking. Given the other features of the story and the purpose of her creation, that notion is utterly impossible" (33). Re-visions of the myth of creation provide the opportunity to explore how deeply the patriarchal interpretations of the rib-version are embedded in our cultural consciousness. Ultimately, retellings of the Garden of Eden for young readers establish a position, whether discernable or ambiguous, on the constructions of gender in the Bible.

Accounts of creation in children's books provide a range of interpretations that in many cases only become evident upon close reading. The dominant version appears to be the asynchronous creation of humans, or the rib-version of the story. This version, while lacking the epic qualities of the seven-day account to which Stanton refers, provides a strong narrative plot and characters. However, some retellings, such as Gwendolyn Reed's *Adam and Eve*, merge the

two accounts of creation into one unified narrative that begins with the seven-day account and concludes with the creation of woman after the monumental first week. This approach, along with subtle changes in modern translations of the Bible, may account for the general lack of awareness among many readers that there are in fact two accounts of creation in Genesis.[5] The preference for the second account suggests sexist ideologies regarding gender, as Phillips illustrates:

> If the woman is created simultaneous with the man, she is "perfect" also, and shares equally in the work of lordship. If she is created after him, she is somewhat less than perfect and belongs to the realm over which he exercises lordship. In preferring the second account, then, interpreters prefer an Eve who is religiously, socially, politically, and sexually under the control of her husband. (30)

While it may be more narratively rich, the second account of creation, particularly when used to introduce the tenets of a religion to an audience of children or adolescents, is troublesome because it includes outmoded social and political gender ideologies. Therefore, a number of the children's texts that privilege the second account of creation attempt to carefully negotiate the patriarchal history of this version with contemporary ideologies about gender.

Many accounts that include the rib-version of creation accomplish this negotiation by modifying traditional interpretations or diminishing the importance of that aspect of the story. Deborah Bodin Cohen's *Lilith's Ark* is told in the first person, from the perspective of Eve. The narration begins with Eve opening her eyes for the first time and viewing a boy with a "thin, bloody wound cut from his chest to his back," which begins to heal before her eyes (6). The narrative assumes familiarity with the account in Genesis and immediately asserts contemporary gender ideology through the first dialogue exchanged:

> "Are you my helper?" said the boy. "I call myself Adam."
> "Are you my friend?" I replied. (6)

The nonconfrontational adjustment in approaching relations between the genders establishes a tone meant to undermine the patriarchal ideology of the rib-version of creation.

In his collection *The Triumph of Eve*, Matt Biers-Ariel demonstrates another subtle shift in retelling the rib-version that reveals a more contemporary understanding of gender. The first human is never referred to as male prior to the creation of the second human: "So while Human lay on the ground sleeping, God removed a rib, divided the soul, took a bit more clay, and transformed Human into two creatures, one male and one female" (2–3). While this adjustment retains the familiar reference to a rib being removed, it also indicates that the soul has been divided and therefore neither male nor female should be seen as superior to the other. Furthermore, Biers-Ariel's account makes it clear that gender did not exist prior to the creation of the second human.[6] This conscious shift in language illustrates the importance of a single word in any

text. Alice Bach and J. Cheryl Exum illustrate the importance of language choice by explicitly informing the reader that they have drawn their retelling from the original Hebrew. They also consciously do not gender the first human until after the creation of the second one. In the notes following the story of the Garden of Eden, Bach and Exum explain that the word that traditionally is translated as "rib" can also be interpreted as "side," and in fact is not translated as "rib" anywhere else in the Bible (16). According to Bach and Exum, the tradition of referring to the second human as being created from a rib is as textually unjustified as the tradition of associating an apple with the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Both of these accounts incorporate the troublesome rib-version while also negotiating contemporary ideologies of gender that conflict with the traditional interpretations.

Many of the texts that utilize the simultaneous creation of man and woman either tell only the story of creation or recount the stories of creation and fall as two separate narratives. Gerald McDermott's *Creation* and Lisl Weil's *The Very First Story Ever Told* both indicate visually and textually that the first male and female were created at the same time. Weil's retelling implies an order to creation in the two page-spread that introduces Adam and Eve. Reading the text and images left to right shows that the boy, Adam, is depicted first and the girl, Eve, second.[7] McDermott, on the other hand, refers to the creation of "man and woman" textually, but visually the female figure is placed on the left-hand side of the illustration, and therefore "read" first. More radical interpretations of the simultaneous creation can also be found in children's books. Fran Manushkin's collection *Daughters of Fire* explicitly describes the creation of the first human as something resembling a set of Siamese twins, echoing the Platonic account of the creation of man in the *Symposium*: "Gathering forth dust of red and brown and white and yellow, from all corners of the earth, God shaped one human with two faces, female on one side, and male on the other" (1). Not only does Manushkin's retelling draw attention to the gender bias of traditional interpretations, it also attempts to represent various races in the first human.

Yet another approach in retelling the story of creation in children's texts is to suggest the creation of many humans at once. In *God and His Creations* by Marcia Williams, the account of the creation is told separately from the story of the Garden of Eden and depicts comical variations of humans in all shapes and sizes with indistinct gender and having, literally, rainbow-colored skin—one human having red, yellow, green, and blue stripes. Marc Gellman offers another multicultural message in the short story "Painting People Purple." In this comical midrash, God sends the first human to the "painting room," with a note instructing the angels to "Paint this one your best color, and no fighting! Love, God" (27). Unsurprisingly, the angels do fight, and their attempts at coloring the first human are disastrous: "The first person came out with one black arm and one tan foot and one yellow toe, along with pink toenails and turquoise hair and violet eyes—a mess!" (27). After God takes over the job, the angels are surprised by the introduction of many different humans in

all varieties of shapes and colors, "but each one looked just right" (28).[8] The simultaneous creation of multiple humans typically is used to promote an appreciation for the diversity found in all human beings, but it also coincides with the changing ideologies regarding gender equality because it does not imply a gender hierarchy.

Temptation and Choice

The narrative of the fall has an even more ominous history of being used to malign the female sex: "The myth [of the fall] was both symptom and instrument of further contagion. Its great achievement was to reinforce the problem of sexual oppression in society, so that woman's inferior place in the universe became doubly justified. Not only did she have her origin in the man; she was also the cause of his downfall and all his miseries" (Daly 46). Tertullian refers to woman as the "Devil's Gateway," explicitly placing blame not only on Eve herself, but on all women as the descendants of Eve: "You are the one who opened the door to the Devil, you are the one who first plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree, you are the first who deserted the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not strong enough to attack" (Deferrari 130). According to Tertullian's interpretation, Adam had too much moral strength for the serpent to even consider tempting him. The serpent's temptation of Eve and her subsequent disobedience have been used to verify the inferiority of women initially established by her secondary place in the sequence of human creation. The importance of how this narrative is re-visioned for young readers is made evident by Rosemary Radford Ruether's argument that this interpretation requires continual reassertion:

> Because women are in fact not inferior, but full human persons [. . .] the task of suppressing women into dependence on males is a never-ending struggle. It is not a "coup" accomplished once upon a time in some mysterious victory of patriarchy at the dawn of history. It must be reiterated generation after generation, by repeating the myths of woman's original sin to the young, both male and female. (169)

Given the notoriety of the narrative of the fall, it is not surprising that feminist scholars and authors of children's literature have returned to this story to revision its treatment of Eve as the "Devil's Gateway."

Traditionally, the serpent's choice to tempt Eve rather than Adam has been attributed to her inferiority as a woman. However, Eve is not tempted with riches or flattery, but with the promise of wisdom, suggesting not an inferior mind but a superior intellect. In fact the scripture provides an unusual glimpse into the workings of Eve's choice. According to Nehama Aschkenasy, "Scriptural style is known for its terseness and economy of language; it also rarely delves into the protagonists' inner deliberations. Therefore, the brief but condensed sentence that divulges Eve's reasons for picking the fruit and

eating it is extremely meaningful" (41). Eve chooses to eat the forbidden fruit because she "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise" (Gen. 3:6). Because she is aware of the possible consequences, her choice could be interpreted as brave and admirable: "The act of violating God's order is not described by the biblical author as the surrender to temptation of a silly, empty-headed person, but as the daring attempt of a curious person with an appetite for life to encompass the whole spectrum of life's possibilities" (Aschkenasy 41). The possibility for a more flattering depiction of Eve created by the terse language of the pre-text makes the moment of temptation and choice a pivotal point in the narrative for contemporary retellings.

There do not appear to be any contemporary retellings of the fall that condemn Eve's actions because of her gender. However, some approaches do retain much of the biblical language and imagery and in doing so depict the serpent tempting Eve with the promise of becoming "as gods."[9] The various retellings of the temptation scene employ one or more of the following motivations for Eve's decision to eat the fruit: desire to be God-like; desire for knowledge; being tricked or manipulated by the serpent; and desire for freedom and equality. In addition to the desire to be God-like, representing Eve as motivated by a desire for knowledge is also influenced by the biblical text. While in the account in Genesis the serpent never tempts her specifically with general knowledge, Eve does see that the fruit will give her wisdom. Many texts re-vision the serpent's temptation as a promise of wisdom and knowledge in the general sense, not simply knowing good and evil. In Manushkin's retelling, the serpent promises "every kind of knowledge," and "Eve so yearned for knowledge and every source of wisdom that she ate of the fruit" (4). This idea of a thirst for knowledge is not inherently evil, nor is it ever described as such in either Manushkin's retelling or the pre-text; in fact, it is generally considered a desirable quality that we want to instill in young readers. Framing her decision as being motivated by a thirst for knowledge deconstructs the patriarchal interpretations of Eve's choice.

Some retellings enhance the serpent's role and characterize it as much more deceptive, which alters our perception of Eve's situation. In Genesis, the serpent has only one line of dialogue in which to tempt Eve; because of this terse narrative, it may appear that she is easily persuaded. Most retellings for young readers extend the scene by incorporating extended dialogue between the characters; this alone alters our perception of Eve in that she requires a bit more convincing and gives more thought to this momentous decision. Some retellings take this even further by enhancing the serpent's trickery. In Manushkin's retelling, the serpent takes advantage of Eve's overzealous description of God's interdiction adding that they could not even touch the tree: "Upon hearing this the serpent smiled wickedly, for God had *not* forbidden Adam to *touch* the tree, only to eat from it" (4; emphasis in original). After Eve refuses to touch the tree, the serpent pushes her against it, proving that she will not die and suggesting that eating the fruit would have the same result. The serpent takes pleasure in its trickery and

is even more clearly characterized as the villain. Biers-Ariel employs a similar plot device in his retelling: After Eve proclaims that she will never even touch the fruit, the serpent tosses it to her and she reflexively catches it; the serpent taunts, "Three seconds, [. . .] your eternal vow regarding this exquisite food lasted three seconds" (10). Biers-Ariel's Eve is not simply characterized as a naive girl tricked by a snake, however. Her moral fabric is demonstrated after the serpent tosses her the fruit: "Eve held the gold fruit between her palms. Its softness, texture, and fragrance threatened to overcome her. But instead of giving in to temptation, Eve threw it back to the Snake" (10). Holding the fruit in her hands, feeling it, and smelling it enhances the temptation beyond any abstract concept of something that is forbidden, yet she remains resolute for the time being. It is not until the serpent appeals to her desire for a better existence that Eve succumbs to his manipulation.

Several texts actually allude to a feeling of discontent Eve experiences while living in the Garden. This sense that there could be something more, that the Garden is perhaps not a perfect paradise, provides additional context that complicates our interpretation of Eve's choice. Reed's retelling only briefly alludes to the possibility that something is not quite perfect in the Garden: "Adam and Eve lived joyously. But they did not know it, for they did not know what sorrow or suffering were. They did not know what evil was" (n.p.). On the surface, this might be read as an account of their uninterrupted joy and the complete lack of suffering they experienced. But it also suggests that their joy was not as fulfilling as it should be, because of their inability to appreciate it. In Biers-Ariel's *Triumph of Eve*, Eve is actually conscious that something is amiss:

> "Adam, I don't feel right."
> "You shouldn't have eaten so many mushrooms."
> "That's not it."
> "Well, what is it?"
> "I don't know. It's just that I feel sort of . . . you know . . . empty." (8)

Eve cannot correctly name the source of her dissatisfaction, but is acutely aware of it and tries to compensate: "Eve tried to get rid of her emptiness by stuffing her stomach with as much food as she could cram into it. She then had a stomachache to accompany her emptiness" (8). Traditional interpretations of the Garden of Eden imagine it as a perfect paradise, which prejudices us against Eve's choice, leading us to perceive her as an enemy who took this perfection away. By suggesting that the Garden is not quite perfect, Biers-Ariel encourages his readers to sympathize with Eve's decision and consider that they might have made the same choice.

In Elsie V. Aidinoff's novelization of Eve's story, *The Garden*, Adam and Eve make the decision to eat the fruit together. They are fully conscious of the repercussions of this decision, and it is the serpent, Eve's friend and teacher, who makes these consequences clear to them:

> "If you eat the apple, in certain respects you'll resemble God. You will no longer be innocent: you'll know good and you'll know evil, and be able to choose between them. You'll be responsible for your actions. And you'll be free to choose the course of your lives. [. . .] [Y]our freedom comes at a price. You'll have to work for your survival, and bear the result of your actions, good and bad. You'll have to deal not only with evil committed by others, but with your own—the evil you do—and the evil that may be within yourselves. With guilt and conscience. With the suffering of all people, including those you love." (366–67)

Aidinoff's novel is marketed to a young adult audience, and therefore the consequences of this choice are presented in a much more complex manner than in picture books; however, it is clear that both Adam and Eve are very aware of the possible repercussions of their decision before they make it. The serpent's actions are not presented as temptation, even though it is evident that it believes their lives will be more fulfilling outside the Garden. The benefits described by Aidinoff's serpent seem to respond to the discontent described in the retellings by both Reed and Biers-Ariel: "In the outside world, the abilities and talents God gave you will be free to flourish and, like the wind, take on lives of their own. You'll feel emotions more deeply, you'll experience love beyond what is possible here. Because you suffer, your happiness will be more intense; sorrow will give deeper meaning to joy" (368). In this re-visioning of the story, there is no temptation, only a very well-informed decision by two individuals who are brave enough to face the unknown.

Some re-visions of the story of the Garden of Eden are clearly influenced by contemporary feminist ideology in their depiction of Eve's temptation and her choice to eat the fruit. In Cohen's *Lilith's Ark*, Eve initially is motivated to seek out the Tree of Knowledge by a desire for equality. She discovers that Adam has been conversing with God alone:

> "God wishes to record our story in a scroll called the Torah."
> "Should I not also speak to God?" I asked. "Surely God wishes to hear from me as well."
> "God created me first," Adam said. "You were created to be my helper. Can I not speak for both of us?"
> "I wish to tell my own story," I said. (9)

Following this exchange, Eve experiences anger for the first time. As her emotions cool down and she is able to think, she realizes what she needs to do. It is at this point in the narrative that Eve actively seeks out the Tree of Knowledge and the serpent. Because of Adam's suggestion that her role is less important than his and her perspective insignificant enough that he can speak for her, the decision to eat the fruit and gain the knowledge it promises has been made before she even speaks with the serpent. Her exchange with the serpent, the content of which is modeled very closely after the account in Genesis, is thereby less of a temptation and more a reminder or clarification: "As soon as you eat its fruit you will understand both good and bad" (10). Eve's desire for equality

and representation motivates her decision to eat the fruit, not the maneuverings of the serpent; the moment of choice is transformed from a manipulation or inherent flaw of the female gender to a feminist reclamation of agency.

Outcomes of Choice and the (Un)Gendering of Punishment

Perhaps the most blatant evidence of patriarchy in the Genesis account of the fall is the gendered punishments dispensed on the first man and woman. According to God's sanction in this narrative, women will be subordinate to their husbands while men will toil in their labors:

> Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat *of* it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return. (Gen. 3:16–19)

This passage has been used historically as a justification for the patriarchal order of society, and has raised the hackles of feminists for centuries. Stanton asserts that "The curse pronounced on woman is inserted in an unfriendly spirit to justify her degradation and subjection to man" (25). Others have tried to find an alternate interpretation, such as when Lillie Devereux Blake suggests that the passage might be interpreted as a prediction and not a permanent state of affairs: "With the evolution of humanity an ever increasing number of men have ceased to toil for their bread with their hands, and with the introduction of improved machinery, and the uplifting of the race there will come a time when there shall be no severities of labor, and when women shall be freed from all oppressions" (Stanton 27). These alternative interpretations seem like wishful thinking in the face of such a long history of subjugation; however, there are several strategies employed by texts for young readers that negotiate the clearly gendered nature of God's punishments with contemporary gender ideologies.

Very few contemporary retellings actually include the specific reference to woman being subordinate to her husband. Bach and Exum's retelling in *Moses' Ark* does include this proclamation, but in the concluding note on the story, the authors discuss their interpretation and clearly renounce patriarchal interpretations of this particular punishment: "The story does not function as a justification for the subordination of woman to man (a situation that needed no justification in the ancient world). Rather it describes life's universal hardships as women and men experienced them" (16). Bach and Exum attempt to alter the reader's perception of the gendered punishments by contextualizing the story within its historical origins. Other contemporary texts modify or omit the offending castigation; many include some variation of the first half of Eve's

punishment. Hutton's *Adam and Eve* declares that "In sorrow you shall bring forth children" (n.p.), while Reed's picture book of the same title pronounces that "You shall know sorrow" (n.p.). Simpson's *Face-to-Face with Women of the Bible* brings a distinctly Christian interpretation to the story that also serves to soften the gendered punishment of the narrative: "Even though you, a woman, will be blamed for eating the fruit first, [. . .] one day, through a woman, a Savior will be born who will save all people from evil" (15). Another approach to negotiating the gendered punishments is to present them as simultaneously directed at both: "'You have made your choice,' He told them. 'You have chosen the sweat of ploughing and the ache of reaping, the pain of childbirth and the grief of children. The knowledge you have eaten is the knowledge of death. So you have no longer any place in this garden'" (Dickinson 16). Alternately, the simultaneous meting out of punishment is sometimes presented as devoid of any gender-specific sanctions. "To Adam and Eve God said: *Here in my garden you would have lived forever and been happy. But now you must go out into the world to work and suffer, and at the end of your lives—for now your lives* will *end—you will go back into the dust of the earth, for from the dust of the earth I created you*" (Mark 24–25). Still other texts omit the punishment entirely, such as Biers-Ariel's *The Triumph of Eve*. There are many strategies employed, but virtually all retellings in recent years make some effort to comfortably negotiate the reference to female submission because it is so at odds with mainstream cultural ideologies.

A limited number of retellings of the Garden of Eden explore the more radical possibility that Eve's choice of eating the fruit was heroic. However, the idea that Eve can be interpreted as a uniquely brave figure and even a hero has been explored by many feminist scholars and theologians. Norris concludes her study of the historical and literary interpretations of the figure of Eve with the argument that the "original sin" or "fall from grace" is not necessarily her only contribution to the human race:

> Eve had excellent reasons for eating the forbidden fruit: it looked good and was nourishing, and it promised her the priceless gift of wisdom. She took and ate, and was rewarded with the opportunity to pass on her knowledge to future generations. The modern Eve may interpret that destiny in any number of ways; children are not the only gift that a woman can offer the future. Perhaps what is most important is Eve's recognition of the need to challenge boundaries, to make the imaginative leap, however difficult, unpredictable and even dangerous, into a new phase of existence. (403–04)

Both Biers-Ariel's *The Triumph of Eve* and Aidinoff's *The Garden* explore the positive aspects of Eve's legacy. Biers-Ariel's depiction of the changes that occur immediately after Eve eats the fruit implies that this choice was part of God's plan all along:

> Adam rushed to grab Eve and force the fruit out of her. He got within arm's reach and stopped. He was too late. Eve was no longer Eve, or rather, Eve was

> not truly Eve. Her eyes sparkled. That was new. Adam looked into her eyes and saw her soul. It had opened up, and Adam saw the whole universe inside. There was God smiling. (12–13)

Earlier events in Biers-Ariel's narrative allude to a more positive interpretation of what is gained by eating the fruit. In the process of creating the first human, God withholds wisdom, a decision his right-hand angel, Gabriella, questions:

> "Wisdom's not something you give. It's something Human earns through experience, pain, reflection and sacrifice. Give it for free, and Human will despise it."
>
> "But then Human will possess all that power without anything to counterbalance it. Trust me. You're playing with fire." (2)

While it is knowledge, not wisdom, that is bestowed upon the humans after eating the fruit, it is only outside of the garden, where Adam and Eve have the free will to make mistakes and learn from them, that they will be able to gain wisdom.

In Aidinoff's novel, there are no magical or mystical transformations that occur immediately following the eating of the fruit. Neither Eve nor Adam can recognize a difference in how they feel, but the Serpent assures them that they have changed: "'Of course you're different,' said the Serpent. 'You don't notice it yet, but you will soon. You've made a choice: you're free'" (378). The legacy that is established by this choice is more clearly articulated as they contemplate the decision, in particular the passage in which Eve describes their need for free will:

> If we stay in the Garden [. . .] We'll be like the animals, obeying God, turning to the right and the left as he moves his hands. [. . .] Comfortable, but not free. Always we'll be under God's control. [. . .] I'd rather be like the eagle. He refused to join the parade. He's not afraid to go beyond the Garden [. . .] He defied God, to do what was right [. . .] I want to be one of the things that gets away from God and take on its own spirit. A force. Like the eagle. (373)

In Aidinoff's novel, the expulsion from the garden is not simply a punishment; it is also a gift to future generations. The complexities and hardships of life are not ignored, but the humanist celebration of free will and equality is the dominant theme.

As this close analysis of the narrative structure indicates, our perceived understanding of familiar stories from the Bible is highly influenced by long traditions of interpretation. In retelling biblical narratives, the negotiations of traditional interpretations with changing cultural ideologies are manifested in complex ways. It is precisely because the narrative of the Creation and the Fall in Genesis has such a sordid history of ideostory and female subordination that it is subject to alterations large and small in contemporary retelling. The portrayal of Eve and the aftermath of her decision must change in order to communicate meaningfully with the spiritual and psychological concerns

of modern girls and women. Young female readers are inundated with (often problematic) messages of girl power that are at odds with the ideostories linked to Eve.[10] The influence of feminist ideology is an expected part of their lives, as Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards argue: "[F]or anyone born after the early 1960s, the presence of feminism in our lives is taken for granted. For our generation, feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice that we have it—it's simply in the water" (17). Feminist ideology has permeated the zeitgeist of Western culture, manifested even in the retellings of Eve. As Susan J. Douglas notes in her study of the influence of feminism on popular culture, "Today, feminist gains, attitudes, and achievements are woven into our cultural fabric" (9). Regardless of whether a religious institution has embraced the ideologies of contemporary feminism, readers cannot entirely escape the impact of feminism on Western culture.

While not all biblical women have been subjected to misrepresentation equivalent to ideostories, the exceptional cases such as Eve's, in which women's stories have been unfairly framed in support of patriarchal ideologies, only heighten our awareness of the role of ideostory in the process of retelling women's Bible stories as well as other traditional narratives in which women figure largely. Retellings that negotiate the troublesome portrayals or even the absence of representation of biblical women such as Delilah, Miriam, Salome, and Mary Magdalene are necessarily influenced by a larger cultural response to ideostory—a cultural response so pervasive, it is made evident by the development of an entire subgenre of literature: feminist fairytales. The role these figures serve as cultural icons or paragons of feminine propriety is at the heart of Bal's concept of ideostory—images reduced to the traditional interpretations rooted in a past wherein constructions of femininity served primarily to oppress women. The profusion of collections devoted to the women of the Bible warrants a closer examination of ideologies that influence retellings of women's stories. Moreover, other re-visioned stories, whether sacred or not, call attention to the importance of ideostory and feminism as we study how women have been portrayed in the past and our attempts to alter those portrayals today.

Notes

1. "Pre-text" is another term offered by Stephens and McCallum indicating the "original" source from which the narrative was drawn. In the case of religious stories, the pre-text is the Judeo-Christian Bible; however, Stephens and McCallum note that "it is perhaps only a minority of cases in which this source is fixable as a single work by an identifiable author" (4). This is arguably true of the pre-text of religious children's stories as well, in that there are many different translations of the Bible and the "original authors" of the text remain a matter for debate among biblical scholars. Furthermore, the original Hebrew and Greek is also a "pre-text" for any English translation of the Bible. For the purposes of this study, I use the term "pre-text" to indicate any English translation of the Judeo-Christian Bible, because it is rare for an author to identify a specific translation

as the inspiration or source. Those authors who acknowledge the original Hebrew as an influence on their retelling are addressed explicitly.

2. For the majority of readers, the pre-text is limited to English translations of the Bible, which further limits a reader's ability to consider the possible interpretations of the original Hebrew or Greek. Bal's point with regard to ideostory, however, is that the associations made with a story or character often are drawn more from what we are told about a narrative than what we discover as individual readers of the biblical text.

3. Biblical quotes throughout are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted. The use of the KJV rather than other possible translations does not indicate a preference for or elevation of this translation over others. The KJV translation arguably has had the most pervasive influence on Western literature, whereas different English translations may be preferred by specific religious communities or individuals. Therefore, the KJV seems the best choice of translation for an audience of scholars of literature.

4. Phyllis Trible makes a similar argument in "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation."

5. Changes in verb form appear to blur the distinctions between the two accounts of creation in modern translations such as the New International Version (NIV). For example, the King James translation of Genesis 2:19 begins: "And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air"; whereas the NIV translation of the same verse begins: "Now the LORD God *had* formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air" [emphasis added]. Shifting the verb tense to past perfect moves the events of creating the animals to a previous time, allowing the two versions to coincide.

6. The word *adam* in Hebrew means "man" in the generic sense of all humanity. It is only later in Genesis 5:5, when Adam's age and death are listed, that "Adam" explicitly becomes a proper noun. Given this, Biers-Ariel's use of "human" could be a play on translation; however, unlike Bach and Exum, he does not specifically indicate that translation was the motivation anywhere in the text. Without authorial explanation for the choice in translation, readers unfamiliar with Hebrew are likely to interpret Biers-Ariel's word choice as yet another progressive revision typical of the collection as a whole rather than a linguistic maneuver.

7. Weil's picture book retelling is one of a few examples that depict Adam and Eve as children. The choice to visually represent the first humans as children, as opposed to the more common depiction of them as mature adults, suggests an assumption regarding the implied reader. The implications of the depiction of children versus adults in picture book retellings of the Garden of Eden warrant more discussion than can adequately be explored in this article.

8. Similar themes of multiculturalism are found in Cynthia Rylant's *The Dreamer* and Phyllis Root's *Big Momma Makes the World.*

9. "[F]or God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5).

10. It is important to note that the most drastic changes to the characterization of Eve in the retellings examined here are written for an adolescent audience (see Biers-Ariel, Aidinoff, and Cohen). This is not to suggest that all picture books or books intended for younger readers are without radical revisions to biblical accounts (see Root, Rylant, and Lester). An adequate analysis of the presentation of orthodox versus nonorthodox

retellings of Bible stories for different age groups is a project unto itself. Therefore, I have not drawn particular attention to the maturity of the intended audience in my analysis. I hope that in the future we will engage as scholars of literature for young readers on this point.

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