

Chapter 1

**A Feminist Marvellous: Chloe Aridjis and
the *Female Human Animal***

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“...most of us don't even leave behind a brushstroke”
Chloe Aridjis (2013:112)

Abstract

The recent revival of interest in Leonora Carrington has prompted a number of new approaches to the legacies of her multifaceted oeuvre. A magpie for such debris herself, “Carrington” comes down to us imbued with meaning. Some of the most interesting quotations of Carrington in recent years can be found in the work of the Mexican, London-based novelist Chloe Aridjis (b.1971). Aridjis was a family friend of Carrington in Mexico City, and is known for having co-curated the landmark exhibition of Carrington's work, *Transgressing Discipline* (2015), with Tate Liverpool, and for using this curatorial platform within *Female Human Animal* (2018) directed by Josh Appignanesi. Her novels, *Book of Clouds* (2009) and *Sea Monsters* (2019), contain uncanny references to Carrington which might be said to constitute a more nuanced assessment of Carrington's cult status. This chapter will use the ekphrastic thinking of Chloe Aridjis in order to re-explore Carrington's feminist marvellous.

Keywords: quotation, intertextuality, Surrealism, marvellous, curatorial, feminism.

In the wake of the centenary celebrations of her birth, and as we come to terms with the vastness of her legacy, we find ourselves at the crossroads in

Leonora Carrington studies.¹ Part of this juncture concerns her multifaceted interpretation within a range of contemporary creative practices, which since 2017 appear to be accelerating. Indeed, it is striking how Carrington has been appropriated by a variety of emerging and established twenty-first-century artists and writers as a starting point or catalyst for reviewing their own practices. This chapter will explore such legacies, primarily focussing on the creative works of the Mexican-born, London-based writer and curator Chloe Aridjis (b.1971), which conjure what I term a “feminist marvellous.” The marvellous is both a medieval notion and Surrealist technique which locates a sense of the magical in the quotidian, “a rupture in the natural order” (Foster, 1995:19). André Breton, the Surrealist movement’s leader who both knew and championed Carrington, theorised the critical significance of the marvellous in numerous texts, drawing a well-known correlation between the marvellous and the beautiful followed by an assertion of their imaginative possibilities: “In the realm of literature, only the marvelous is capable of fecundating works which belong to an inferior category such as the novel, and generally speaking, anything that involves storytelling” (1972 [1924]:14). Almost a century later, in the wake of Surrealism, feminist theory and revisionary scholarship, and especially in the realm of narrative art forms, the marvellous remains. I argue that Carrington, not Breton, has emerged as a driving force for a feminist marvellous, providing a younger generation of creative practitioners with a strategy to unhinge and dislodge previously unchallenged discursive patterns.

Carrington and her work make cameo appearances in novels such as Aridjis’s *Book of Clouds* (2009) and *Sea Monsters* (2019), Ali Smith’s *Artful* (2012), and China Miéville’s *The Last Days of New Paris* (2016). Fictional biographies of Carrington have also been prepared by Elena Poniatowska (2015) and Heidi Sopinka (2018). In the realm of contemporary art, Carrington has become a site of investigation and “disassembling logic” for those such as Glasgow-based conceptual artist Lucy Skaer (2008), and London-based interdisciplinary artists Samantha Sweeting and Lynn Lu (2011). The unique iconography and cult status of Leonora Carrington has permeated the realms of pop music videos and fashion photography, from Madonna’s *Bedtime Story* (1995) directed by Mark Romanek and written by Björk, to Tim Walker’s collaborations with actor Tilda Swinton, firstly for *W Magazine* (2013) then for

¹ This chapter was first presented as the keynote address for the Leonora Carrington Centenary symposium at Edge Hill University (30 June 2017). Since then, *Female Human Animal* has been released to wide critical acclaim, particularly striking for its contemporaneity with the #MeToo campaign (Higginson:2018).

i-D Magazine (2017). In these colourful and sumptuously upholstered scenes with their eccentric perspective, Swinton inhabits the irrational corners of the imagination, embodying the characters of Carrington's visual narratives and borrowing from her distinctive iconography. Swinton portrays figures such as the medieval jester in Carrington's painting *Darvault* (1950) and the robed creature in *And Then We Saw the Daughter of the Minotaur* (1953), among others. Filmmakers, both studio and independent, have been equally alert to the potential of Carrington's fantasy realms for their costumes and conceptual design. Ally Acker's *The Flowering of the Crone* (2015) and Pamela Robertson-Pearce's *Gifted Beauty* (2000) present interview-led, documentary approaches, while Lea Petrikova uses her research into Carrington's intermediality as a starting point for her own audio-visual practice. Carrington's many contributions to the theatre have also been recognised and resurrected, both through adaptation of her own plays as well as the spawning of new performances, for example Double Edge Theatre's *Leonora and Alejandro: La Maga y El Maestro* (2018), Alice Allemano's *About Leo* (2018), and Caracola Producciones's rendition of *La Dame Ovale*: "to understand the profoundness and magnitude of Leonora Carrington's thinking one has to search beyond the visible anecdote in her stories" (2017). Indeed, Carrington's sense of criticality is increasingly apparent. The English folk musician Laura Marling has made reference to Carrington's rebellious tactics, querying stereotypical gender roles in a podcast series entitled the *Reversal of the Muse: An Exploration of Femininity in Creativity* (2016) in which she explores female leadership in the music industry often concerning engineers like Catherine Marks who work in gendered isolation. Carrington, who was surrounded by male Surrealists, famously declared that she had no time to be anyone's muse, and her quotability is interesting to ponder as is the political action her statements incite. In 2017, the Canadian singer-songwriter Clara Engel also paid homage to Carrington in her album *Songs for Leonora Carrington* featuring watercolour album art by Manfred Naescher, another intermedial fusion of audio with Carrington's visual culture. In a similar vein, we are witnessing new curatorial approaches to Carrington exhibitions. Following blockbuster retrospectives including *Surreal Friends* at Pallant House Gallery (2010), *Leonora Carrington* at the Irish Museum of Modern of Modern Art (2013), and *Transgressing Discipline* at Tate Liverpool (2015), a new species of smaller scale, experimental shows are emerging which tend to be more text-, sketch-, and audio-based, and often feature some kind of reproductive emphasis. An important example of literary curating was *Houses Are Really Bodies* (2017) at Cubitt Studios in London curated by Helen Nisbet. Primarily based on Carrington's writing, the title was a direct quotation from her novel *The Hearing Trumpet*: "Houses are really bodies. We connect ourselves with walls, roofs, and objects just as we hang on to our livers, skeletons, flesh and blood

stream" (2005 [1976]:13). At Cubitt, the space was divided into two separate zones, one reading area with three select examples of prints and drawings and a small critical shelf of literature, and one more aurally immersive space featuring lavender lighting based on the "violet flavoured lozenges" (ibid:55) sucked by Carmella in Carrington's novel, and tarpaulin-protected settees where visitors could lounge and immerse themselves in the soundscapes of Carrington's short stories being through recordings by a number of different voices, among them a reading of *Down Below* (2017 [1944]) recited by Aridjis. Carrington's significance to contemporary practices is, therefore, far-reaching; something about her and her work pervades the cultural imagination, an idea Joanna Moorhead also picks up on in her recent biography: "she has a band of very dedicated followers: once people fall for her, they are usually smitten" (2017:266). As Harold Bloom further emphasizes in his Oedipal study, *The Anxiety of Influence*, when one "falls in love" (1997 [1973]: xxiii) with the work of an artist or writer, they are automatically inclined towards bias or what he calls "poetic misinterpretation" (ibid.). Any appropriation or idolisation of a precursor on a later artist or writer's part is, therefore, always already a creative interpretation or what Mieke Bal might term a "wilful misreading" (2001:7). Indeed, such quotations of Carrington are not to be confused with mere influence or likenesses (the "Carrington-esque") but are active embodiments – the next generation maker is acting *on her* rather than merely following a model of passive reception. The media in which such quotations are made often present starkly different outcomes from the detailed visual narratives and aesthetic excesses found in her own art and writings. As I have suggested previously, and as I hope to develop further in this chapter, Carrington has rather become a dialogic and marvellous *medium* to be channelled, worked in and through (McAra, 2017:179).

Revisionary scholarship has been crucial to this venture and nuance, especially in terms of Carrington's historiography. Much of Carrington's introduction to new generations of artists and writers has been through such publications. This often underpins the experiences of those who knew her, such as the subject of this chapter – the literature, film, and exhibition-making of Aridjis who has become a kind of spokesperson for Carrington's legacy. Building on the work of Susan Rubin Suleiman (1990:173); Anna Watz (2017:92) and Natalya Lusty (2007:47) have both presented compelling cases for a strategy of "feminist intertextuality" in their own scholarly writings on Carrington. Here I prolong the relevance of this discussion, extending feminist intertextuality into the next generation of creative practice by way of the well-known Surrealist technique of the marvellous. Suleiman wrote *Subversive Intent* in the late 1980s, responding to a series of feminist revisionary critiques by Gloria Orenstein, Whitney Chadwick *et al.* (Allmer 2016:370) and much of Marina Warner and Angela Carter's work on Carrington was prepared and

published around the same moment. Waves of appropriation art were already shoring up this notion of artistic and intellectual quotation. Sherrie Levine's 1981 appropriation of Walker Evans's 1936 *Sharecropper's Wife* photographic portrait, for example, doubly represents a Surrealist gesture of cultural borrowings in 1942 when Marcel Duchamp used the same image by Evans as a "compensation portrait" for Carrington. Here Carrington became a "symbolic avatar" for Levine (Hopkins 2003:67), an example of a new generation of artists identifying with Carrington from the 1980s onwards. This is true too for feminist novelists and critical writers, especially those who have become known for postmodern modes of rewriting and overwriting. Indeed, it strikes one as deeply telling and significant that Angela Carter was acquainted with Carrington's work, anthologising her in *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women* (1986) and reviewing her work for *Vogue* magazine in 1991 upon the occasion of Virago's reissue of *The Hearing Trumpet*. Carter was particularly struck by Carrington's "unconventional brand of feminism" (1991:30), perhaps one of the principal lures of Carrington's aesthetic universe. This is particularly the case with feminist revisionary scholars in the 1980s such as Marina Warner who claims she first came across Carrington's rich oeuvre at the home of British Consul, Maurice Cardiff. Carrington's work was also recently included in the *Strange Worlds: The Vision of Angela Carter* exhibition at the Royal West of England Academy in Bristol (2016-17) curated by Marie Mulvey-Roberts and Fiona Robinson. Carrington's effect on Carter was represented by work from English public collections including *The Old Maids* and *The Pimps of the Subsoil* (both 1947), and *I am an Amateur of Velocipedes* (1941), a drawing which features a female figurehead driving a tandem. This drawing can be found collaged within the text of Miéville's novella, *The Last Days of New Paris*, a rewriting of Surrealist post-war history, demonstrating Carrington's hold over the creative imagination as well as art historical discourse.

Carrington offers a touchstone for revisionary feminist aesthetics and judging by the recent reissues of her writings by the Silver Press and The Dorothy Project, this appears to be another dominant trend. In her afterword to the former, Warner notes that Carrington "disliked grandiose male assertions of heroic status," and that for Carrington: "Painting is like making strawberry jam, really carefully and well" (2017:151). If we do not wish to speak the language of the father or of a hard-edged modernism associated with a certain brand of machismo, then recourse to Carrington's clutter of the imagination provides an epistemological alternative that is deeply rooted in a feminist ethos. Her universe presents a highly developed and shrewd knowledge of source texts, for example, children's picture-book illustrations; a recipe which amalgamates myriad ingredients; a voice which is polyphonic. Carrington's own aesthetic surfaces are quilts of quotation: a Surrealist magpie

borrowing from a range of existing texts in order to conjure new imaginative possibilities. Thus, it is entirely logical that future feminists wish to utilise her work, to make reference to, and ideally demystify, this following or “cult” of Carrington.

Some of the most interesting quotations of Carrington in recent years can be found in the work of Chloe Aridjis who became friendly with her in Mexico from the early 1990s, introduced through her father, the poet Homero Aridjis. The family would usually visit Carrington at her home on Chihuahua Street in the Colonia Roma on a Sunday afternoon for tea and/or whiskey. Aridjis explains in a public interview at the *London Review of Books* that Carrington was a family friend and that she has always had a “strong affinity with her work” (2017). As someone who grew up in a culture where women were often expected to be very reserved and devout, Carrington’s command of her own self-hood and association with the feminist movement in Mexico impressed the twenty-something Aridjis who would also meet outspoken American women at the Harvard University. For Aridjis, “the cult of Carrington” manifests itself in a productive and long-term haunting. Her curatorial interests in Carrington, borne out in her co-curation of the Tate Liverpool show *Transgressing Discipline*, no doubt link back to her academic studies; Aridjis earlier obtained a doctorate on the topic of magic shows and French poetry from the University of Oxford. She has regularly promoted Carrington’s legacy through articles for *Tate, Etc.* (2015) and *Frieze* (2017), an ‘A-Z’ of Carrington for Manchester University Press (2017), and has published three novels, *Book of Clouds* (2009) and *Asunder* (2013), and *Sea Monsters* (2019).

Book of Clouds begins with a hallucinatory encounter. The context is Berlin in the mid-1980s before the Wall came down. Following a rally, the young Mexican protagonist, Tatiana, and her family pile into a U-Bahn carriage with crowds of punks and other non-conformists. And then she sees Hitler as an old woman:

And then I noticed one bird, a bird with unusual plumage, which unlike the others, didn’t seem to want to draw attention to itself. Sitting directly in front of me was a very old woman, nearly a century old I would say, wearing a scarf that framed a wide forehead, which peered out like an angry planet. She had dark, deep-set eyes and a square, jowly face that was remarkably masculine [...] Everything seemed horribly familiar and I felt as if I had seen this face before, but in black and white. [...] The more I stared the more certain I was [...] Yes, that it was Hitler, Hitler as an old woman, riding westwards. This is Hitler, I said to myself, there is no doubt that this is Hitler.

(Aridjis, 2009:5-6)

Fig. 1.1: Leonora Carrington's Kitchen and Cat. Photograph by Chloe Aridjis (c.1998).



This is later recapitulated when Tatiana returns to Berlin as an adult. Once again on public transport, she seems to spy her employer, the historian Doktor Weiss, dressed in drag. She can't be sure, there is scant evidence other than a shawl and a used lipstick in his bathroom. But again her hallucination speaks of something Surrealist in essence, certainly an inheritance of that legacy, a traumatic re-encounter with history (O'Hanrahan, 2014:61). This is something which Carrington also lived through and overlapped with, and something her scholarship has had to come to terms with – the writing of her history as an older woman while she was still very much alive and working into the twenty-first century. The idea of living throughout the twentieth century through modernism and postmodernism marked by a series of significant and punctuating historical events – the Second World War, the student revolutions of May 1968, the 1985 earthquake in Mexico, the fall of the Berlin Wall, among others are all represented in the historical entity of Carrington. Moreover, the idea of Hitler still being alive and disguised as an old woman is fanciful and unsettling but has a kind of absurdist logic in the context of this novel. Aridjis's writing conjures such encounters through a sense of productive daydreaming, and the spirit of Carrington is positioned at the forefront of this practice, as a mechanism for displacement. The conceptual artist, Lucy Skaer, comes close to providing a parallel visualisation of Aridjis's alternative perspective on Carrington. Skaer has described Carrington as "a wild card" or trickster, disassembling the logic of her image

making (2008), and a similar force is at play within Aridjis's literary imagination. Interestingly, in their respective photographs of Carrington's house in Mexico City, both were drawn to documenting her kitchen cupboards collaged with postcards of the royal family, as well as to the visual poetics of Carrington's front door. Later, Skaer made a series of photographs outside of Carrington's house, *Harlequin is as Harlequin Does* (2012), subsequently screen-printed with ghostly moons and diamond-like lozenges. Whether in a visual or literary terrain, Carrington is best evoked at one remove. Rather than mimicking Carrington stylistically, the emphasis is on narrative disruption and an elicitation of the marvellous.

Much ink has been spilled on the marvellous since the Surrealist notion was first promulgated by André Breton in his first "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1972 [1924]:14), but what does it mean to quote or pursue it almost one hundred years later? Is creative quotation itself a marvellous pursuit or manifestation of the marvellous? As one of the most genuine techniques of Surrealist discourse, the marvellous has a shifting status within contemporary art practice. As China Miéville cautions us, Surrealism was a political movement and should not be misread as "kooky" or quirky (Heller, 2016). Rather I would suggest that Aridjis's achievement is to relocate the notion of the marvellous in an everyday feminist politics through a process of productive daydreaming, coincidence and poetics of the chance encounter. Aridjis's twenty-first-century literature is not Surrealist *per se*, but I would argue that it *is* marvellous and *does* collage. Hal Foster reminds us that the marvellous was co-opted by Surrealist thinking as a:

fascination with magic and alchemy, with mad love and analogical thought [...] These enthusiasms suggest the project to which the Surrealist marvelous is implicitly pledged: the reenchantment of a disenchanted world, of a capitalist society made ruthlessly rational.

(1995:19)

Foster also notes other variations of the marvellous, the medieval being a source which Carrington herself is known to have found interesting as richly otherwise and various as pseudo-scientific discovery and Arthurian legends. Carrington, therefore, becomes a primary Surrealist device or medium through which an evocation of the feminist marvellous can be achieved. In this respect, Aridjis could be said to be haunted by Carrington but it is an effect generated and observed by and through Aridjis's reflections on her own psychology.

In *Book of Clouds*, Carrington makes a brief cameo during a rare exchange between Tatiana and Doktor Weiss:

'I was once there, in Mexico City, many years ago. 1967.
I had a good friend, a photographer from Budapest named Chiki Weisz.
Ever come across him?'
'No.'
'He was married to Leonora Carrington.'
'I don't know them.'

(Aridjis, 2009:41)

In this passage, the real-life figures of Carrington and Weisz are enrolled within the fictional domain of Aridjis's story, an authenticating gesture which endows the ageing character Doktor Weiss with greater credibility as a historian. His namesake further bears this thought as a process of translation. Bal has described such a technique as "the glamor of historical reference, the historical 'reality effect'" (1999:15). In *Artful*, Ali Smith also enrolls Carrington within the narrative of reading a lecturer's notes as an "expert in liminality" (2012:111). Carrington uses a similar intertextual embedding in her own novel, *The Hearing Trumpet*, where her nonagenarian protagonist Marian Leatherby mentions her fleeting encounter with the Surrealist movement, a biographical fragment from the author's own life story. Or, in another example, one finds the real-life publication *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) embroiled within the fictional domain of Carrington's short story 'The Debutante' (1937), as an intellectual distraction from the social chore of the coming out ball. Returning to *Book of Clouds*, it should be noted that, in cameoing Carrington, Aridjis excuses herself from direct autobiographical association with her protagonist, Tatiana — as we know, the Aridjis family were, in fact, well-acquainted with Carrington and Weisz in Mexico City. Here, it is also refreshing that it is Weisz who is married to the famous artist; his social status is defined in relation to her. Developing the aforementioned flurry of revisionary scholarship, Aridjis adopts Carrington's feminist intertextuality but uses it to re-present an avatar and alternative viewpoint; to conjure the marvellous. In doing so, she creates a believable historical context both linked to and displaced from her own biography.

An emphasis on psychoanalytic archaeology and a layering of realities and sur-realities recurs in Aridjis's second novel *Asunder*. Suggestive of explosive fragmentation, objective chance, and possibly even orgasmic convulsions, the title is inherently marvellous. Carrington is not mentioned explicitly by name, in this case, but mathematicians do get lost "amongst the Surrealists" (Aridjis, 2013:37) in the bookshop, and the emphasis on art history and painterly engagement go some way to revisiting or inheriting Carrington as a mediumistic guide. Here the narrative is focussed on a museum invigilator called Marie, the fictional great-granddaughter of the museum guard who tried to stop the real-life historical figure of the suffragette Mary Richardson

from vandalising Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* (c.1647-51) at London's National Gallery. Marie tells us that she loved her great grandfather ever so slightly more for tripping and enabling the suffragette to achieve her political action in the nick of time. At home Marie has her own eccentric hobby, crafting tiny landscapes out of eggshells populated with dead moths: "From one collection to the other [...] and only very occasionally did I feel like prying open a space between the two in that nebulous area called real life" (Aridjis, 2013:21).

This peculiar and engrossing pastime is reminiscent of Carrington's delicate and acutely detailed egg tempera technique as well as her political painting with the butterfly title, *Lepidoptera* (1968). Gradually the reader witnesses a collapse of surfaces as the museum invigilator learns of the phenomenon of "craquelure" on the surfaces of the paintings she watches over (Aridjis:60). The effects of historical disintegration begin to infiltrate her daydreams; from the languid pace of hours spent quietly guarding the paintings, towards more violent fantasies of seizing a visitor's phone and smashing it: "watch the screen crack into lightning bolts" (ibid:69). This is underpinned by her great grandfather's view that "comets and suffragettes" are metaphorically and (marvellously) "equated" (ibid:59). Beyond the novel, this is something which occurs both within and on the surface of Carrington's paintings too. Her visual narratives are filled with feminist activities and glowing orbs as well as more ancient and static tableaux, while the crust of her paintings are subject to the consequences of ageing. For Aridjis, this cracking effect embraces ekphrastically the history of art and the passage of time but also summons the marvellous between the tiny fissures, suggesting our reality is only a thin veneer masking something else beyond. Gestures of scratching and cracking recur during a French excursion when Marie meets the chatelaine, a tragic figure, who cuts her cheek in retaliation when her curiosity finally gets the better of her and she pursues him through his crumbling château. This gesture mimics Richardson's slashes to the Velázquez painting, and, in doing so, complicates the gendered positions of action and the gaze; as the suffragette hacks the beauty of the mythological nude, so the male chatelain slices into the face of Aridjis's protagonist after looking in her direction with aesthetic appreciation: "an expression of astonishment and nostalgia" (ibid:165). Later, Marie further underscores this gender reversal by telling her flatmate that she was "scratched by a feral cat" (ibid:175) – usually a female animal in her universe. Marie's own animal instincts have already been hinted at; she yearns to stroke fur, visits a snow leopard at the Parisian zoo, and when a tour guide in The National Gallery enrages her by contrasting the drab uniform of the gallery assistants with the beauty of the mythological nudes, she experiences the wildness of silent wrath building up inside her: "[an] animal was awakening, cracking its joints and flexing its claws" (ibid:67). Certainly, there is an economy of imagery within this novel as well as a

carefully depicted, episodic sensibility which makes it operate much like a series of narrative vistas or even as a gallery in its own right. Aridjis's writing evidences an author who has spent a lot of time researching the museum demographic through the very practice of invigilation and observation in situ. The novel's structure also flits between past and present as well as between reality and the transformative magic of artistic media and found objects. Aridjis has explained in an interview that one of her greatest frustrations is that she is not a painter (McAra, 2014), yet *Asunder's* poetics and ekphrastic techniques, what intermediality theorist Liliane Louvel might call "embossed stamping" (2011:60-61), go some way to resolving this.

Aridjis's third novel, *Sea Monsters*, continues her investigations into the marvellous. Set in Mexico in the late 1980s, against a soundtrack of Joy Division and Depeche Mode, and in the wake of the 1985 earthquake, it follows the story of high school student, Luisa, who runs away from home to a coastal beach in Oaxaca in the hope of finding "twelve Ukrainian dwarfs on the run from a Soviet circus touring Mexico" (2019:129). The premise itself suggests connections to Surrealist poetry. Again, Aridjis collages selectively from cultural history, and the novel includes references ranging from William Burroughs to Charles Baudelaire and Isidore Ducasse – one of Surrealism's chief icons. At times, *Sea Monsters* also appears to inhabit a scholarly dimension. And, though not mentioned precisely by name in *Sea Monsters*, one can infer that Carrington makes a further cameo as one of "two aging émigrés" – the other presumably Carrington's husband Weisz:

I was on my way to the stationery store when I came upon two aging émigrés. Our local enigmas, they had fled a Europe in ruins to live, later, among our slightly more humble ones. I'd often see them at the VIPS diner on Insurgentes bent over their coffee and *molletes*, the woman with a hand on her purse and the man with a hand on his cane, as if ready to leave at the slightest prompting. That day they were accompanied by their ancient dog, whom they'd take on walks around the neighborhood, the man in his black beret—the street kids called him Manolete—and the woman in gray with her hair swept into an irreverent bun. Yet it seemed that this trio, dignified and decrepit, had run into trouble, for they'd come to a standstill and the dog lay with his hind legs splayed behind him.

(Aridjis: 2019:20-21)

Contrary to *Book of Clouds*, this time Aridjis openly acknowledges her friendship with Carrington and Weisz. Their guest appearance occurs relatively early on in the narrative, and, in typically marvellous terms, coincides with a significant moment for the protagonist, Luisa, when she relocates her stranger. While she converses with these elderly "local enigmas" and assists their "ancient

dog" (the real-life Maroush) in front of an enormous pile of ruins on Chihuahua (the real-life street where they lived in the Colonia Roma area), the mysterious male goth, Tomás, whom Luisa has been pursuing, magically reappears and momentarily breezes past this rendezvous before vanishing again. The protagonist is initially irked at missing her moment with Tomás, while feeling socially committed to finishing the neighbourly conversation with Carrington and Weisz: "Once he was back on all fours the émigrés thanked me, though not as profusely as they should have considering what I had just sacrificed in stopping to help them" (ibid:22). Yet, Carrington's shamanic presence appears to be enough to engineer, however indirectly, this kind of chance encounter, to oversee this version of mad love. Indeed, the Carrington/ Weisz cameo at this particular moment in the story was surely a conscious and deliberate choice for Aridjis; a seemingly quotidian congregation on a street corner ends up serving as a catalyst, setting in motion the chain of events for the rest of this quest narrative.

Stylistically and thematically, Aridjis carries over many elements from her two earlier novels; where there were interests in weather science and artistic conservation in *Book of Clouds* and *Asunder* respectively, the third novel depicts the author's intrigue in marine archaeology. Moreover, the fragile surfaces of paint, glass, moths, dust, and eggshells, not to mention architectural ruins, shipwrecks, and the anachronistic collapse of time periods common to all three novels, partially resurface in the film *Female Human Animal* (2018). Indeed, I would suggest that a fuller understanding and interpretation of this film can be achieved through concurrent immersion in both Aridjis's novel writing and Carrington's visual imagination. Shot on antique video, psycho-thriller *Female Human Animal (FHA)* directed by Josh Appignanesi and produced by Jacqui Davies, stars Aridjis in the lead role. Importantly, the credits also acknowledge that the film is "haunted by Leonora Carrington." Aridjis tells us that Leonora: "brings re-enchantment to a world that is a little bit too sure of itself." The film at first appears to be a documentary-style pseudo-fiction, set against a backdrop of Aridjis's real-life co-curation of the Tate Liverpool exhibition, *Transgressing Discipline* (2015), and the finalising of her *Sea Monsters* manuscript. *Female Human Animal* switches frequently between London and the North, and oscillates between hectic social scenes and the quiet of her domestic reality and the unsettling silence behind-the-scenes of the live installation. Indeed, the subtext to this film is an understanding of Carrington in progress. We witness Aridjis undergoing photocalls at the *London Review of Books*, interviews, attending exhibition previews, parties, balls and nightclubs, meeting with her publisher, giving readings as well as other memories, dreams and flashbacks – the everyday trials and tribulations of our collective fantasy of a famous author's lifestyle. But, of course, in the tradition of Carrington, Aridjis has a much more meaningful relationship with her pet cat, Ludwig.

The inclusion of the cat prolongs Carrington's eco-feminism and interest in dæmons and witch familiars. Aridjis knew both Carrington's Siamese cats Ramona and Monsieur, one of whom appears in her photographs of Carrington's kitchen next to silhouettes of cutlery and the rest of her domestic toolkit. For both, the figure of the cat represents an uncanny or marvellous presence, domesticated in his/her habits yet wild and unpredictable in his/her instincts. Aridjis explains in the film that Carrington "was expelled for behavioural problems" and "identified with feral spirits." Moreover, like Carrington, Aridjis claims that she also identifies as a "female, human, animal but not necessarily in that order." It is interesting to note that Aridjis's protagonists, Marie, Tatiana, Luisa, and even the version of herself which she plays in *Female Human Animal*, are all introverts, content to "carry out life at low volume" (2013:14). Inquisitive and, at times, verging on socially awkward, Aridjis's female characters prefer to inhabit their imaginations and the security of their domestic environments, whilst daydreaming and longing for true communication with another member of their species.

Like Marie's invigilation in *Asunder*, the Aridjis of *Female Human Animal* is drawn to particular paintings which seem to resonate with her – and this is especially the case with the painting *And Then We Saw the Daughter of the Minotaur* whether in reproduction or in exhibition. This leads to a series of painterly tableaux including the writer sitting at her desk. The film includes snippets of imagery from Aridjis's own novels as well as a reference to Carrington's unique iconography – one the of the most prominent being Aridjis's ride on the carousel horse during her date with the mysterious man. Continuing her own themes from *Asunder* and *Book of Clouds*, a range of translucent surfaces provide a recurrent motif in *Female Human Animal*. There is an obsession or fetishisation with these tactile membranes, giving the effect of being trapped or partitioned in the artwork itself, as if behind glass. This claustrophobic feeling deliberately contradicts Aridjis's aspirational assertion that Carrington was "the sort of woman who never wanted to feel confined" (*FHA*). These substances suggest feelings of suffocation and drowning – particularly the clear plastic used for packing artworks, the plastic cagoule she wears to a nightclub, the ill-omened shower curtain, or even a simple carrier bag buffeted by the wind. In *Book of Clouds*, a similar fragment appears to embody the nephological aspects of her book's title:

A plastic bag, the discarded ghost of the object it once carried, was blown toward me and clung to my leg for a few seconds before I managed to shake it off. Birds twittered nervously in the trees but were nowhere to be found, not a single beak, claw or feather when I looked up. And then they fell silent. The sky had grown a shade or two darker, a slate grey cumulonimbus blotting the horizon.

(Aridjis, 2009:13)

Clouds themselves often have a strange, hallucinatory appearance. In the film, the drifting plastic bag later appears stretched between the branches of a tree, and appears to conjure the feline features of the central figure in *And Then We Saw the Daughter of the Minotaur* as if the audience were coming face-to-face with a ghost, inner creature or some other kind of phantasmagoria. Writing on Carrington's novel, and in relation to her animal-interests, Kristoffer Noheden has described this phenomenon as a "spectral ecology" (2018:250), and points out that "[f]or Carrington [...] the categories of humanity and animality are not so much markers of species, as they are contingent upon opposing authority" (ibid.), again bringing to mind Aridjis's feral-feminist familiar. Aridjis continues this line of inquiry: "Leonora's work teemed with hybrids – a bestiary of human-animal composites and extravagant cross-breeds – where even human figures seem feral" (2018:16) ultimately describing the film itself as a hybrid.

Fig. 1.2: Leonora Carrington's Kitchen and Cat. Photograph by Chloe Aridjis (c.1998).



Throughout *Female Human Animal*, Aridjis is often shown at the point of awaking, another narrative device that complicates the boundaries between dream and reality. Soon the film morphs into a neo-gothic romance and horror genre. Found footage of Carrington, courtesy of Joanna Moorhead, *TateShots* (2015), appears to discipline her: "You are trying to intellectualise something, desperately, and you are wasting your time!" (2000). Aridjis encounters a shadowy character, a man who is possibly dangerous, reminiscent of Luisa's friend Tomás or the alluring merman in *Sea Monsters*

and Marie's encounters with Camden goths and the ghostly chatelain in *Asunder*: "[i]t was like a scene from a dark children's book" (2013:164). In the film, he begins to appear recurrently in the background of her social life as well as within the private recesses of the exhibition installation. Her association with him is conflated with the imaginary death of her cat. But the cat seems to come back to life after the ominous male presence is extinguished – as if a spirit animal, possibly Carrington's feminist marvellous, has been reincarnated.

But, who or what is the female human animal? What kind of beast are we dealing with? Carrington's own essay "What is a Woman?" (1970) uses the character of the female-human-animal to absolve women from the violent aspects of so-called civilisation, and in doing so presents a feminist stance: "If all the Women of the world decide to control the population, to refuse war, to refuse discrimination of Sex or Race and thus force men to allow life to survive on this planet, that would be a miracle indeed" (1998 374; 2008:12-13). This statement presents Carrington as a trailblazer for the feminist cause, querying the gendering of women within an ecological context. Carrington has also provided fertile ground for the continuity of a feminist imagination in literature and film. In the wake of her centenary, Carrington's living legacies are multiple. She and her work appeal to contemporary feminist discourses because they act a force of disruption with which to question political realities. She has also become a highly quotable entity and paradigm shifter for a feminist marvellous. Her imaginative claws are sharp and catch us but she recoils from our own grasp, forever out of reach.

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