# Revisions of Eve:
# Narrative Instability and Tragic Action
# in Cary, Lanyer, and Milton

by

Evelyn Nora Bennett

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August 1997

For the living Eve
and, of course, for Russell and Emily

## Table of Contents

## Abstract

Examining the work of Elizabeth Cary, Aemilia Lanyer, and John Milton, this study explores seventeenth-century literary representations of the biblical Eve with the aim of showing how those representations are affected by generic considerations. Both Cary and Lanyer suggest that Eve's literary reimagining within the dramatic genre facilitates her redemption, and Milton's later dramatization of the Fall further challenges Eve's misogynistic stereotype. All three writers destabilize the deterministic and one-dimensional Eve conventionally characterized by patristic and misogynistic writers. Drawing on the literary theories of Bakhtin and Aristotle and illustrating the comparable complexity of dialogic narrative and tragedy, this analysis of The Tragedy of Mariam, Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, and Paradise Lost reveals their similar reenactment of the indeterminacy inherent in the biblical account of the Fall. Ultimately, the categories of gender and genre in these three works are neither rigid nor specific but, like the Genesis story itself, fluid and indeterminate.

## Acknowledgements

Special and profound thanks are owed to Professor John Baxter for his perceptive and expert guidance on this project, for allowing me access to the Whalley text in typescript and in proof, and for generously sharing his time to read and discuss Milton. Thanks are also due to Professors Trevor Ross, Christina Luckyj, and Daniel Woolf for inspiring and fostering my interest in the seventeenth century. This work could not have been completed without the aid and encouragement of my family, especially mother Myrna and sister Susan, who unfailingly provided emotional and practical support when it was needed the most.

# Introduction

The Renaissance saw the escalation of the long-standing debate over the woman question, a verbal and written controversy prevalent in western culture since antiquity. For centuries, female oppression had been justified by Scripture; the biblical Eve, Christian theologians argued, was responsible for the fall of humanity and thus all women are the creators and perpetuators of human misery. There is no denying the importance of Eve's story in the Christian tradition and in popular culture; as John A. Phillips quite rightly asserts, even in the twentieth century "Eve is very much alive, and every member of Western society is affected by her story" (172). In the seventeenth century, attempting to refute the notion that women are fundamentally flawed, possessing unruly natures that must be controlled and contained by more perfect men, also meant challenging the negative stereotype of woman derived from and sustained by the construction of Eve.

Examining the work of Elizabeth Cary, Aemilia Lanyer, and John Milton, this study will explore how literary representations of Eve challenge her conventional role as the model for the misogynistic stereotype of woman. Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam, Lanyer's Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, and Milton's Paradise Lost destabilize the misogynistic delineation of Eve by elaborating on her parabolic role in

Genesis or, in Cary's case, characterizing the reprehensible type of woman derived from Eve's story. These seventeenth-century reconstructions of Eve frame her temptation within stories of female self-determination, inevitably investing her with greater moral agency than is possible for the deterministic and one-dimensional view of Eve figured by patristic writers. Thus these three works demonstrate that the more the familiar narrative of the Fall is explored and embellished, the more problematic and uncertain conventional anterior interpretations become.

Erich Auerbach has shown that the Hebrew Bible embodies a "multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation" (23), an indeterminacy determined by the ancient text's minimalistic style. As Auerbach points out, biblical characters' "thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches" (11). The story of the Fall does indeed cry out for interpretation, and Cary, Lanyer, and Milton fill in Eve's silences, her unexpressed feelings, and her fragmentary speeches. These three writers demonstrate that interpretation of the Genesis story is highly dependent on filling in the gaps left by its Hebrew author, and that the layers of interpretation that lie between the ancient composition and the Renaissance cannot contain the tale's

multiplicity of meanings within a definitive interpretation.[1]

These incompatible views of Genesis as stable and indeterminate are pointed out by Auerbach, who accurately describes the text's inherent tension: "on the one hand, the reality of the Old Testament presents itself as complete truth with a claim to sole authority, on the other hand that very claim forces it to a constant interpretative change in its own content" (16). Patristic writers had conventionally claimed that the story of the Fall is one of absolute authority that unquestionably asserts woman's inferiority and demands her subjection. Yet this insistence on reading and rewriting the Fall as narrative argument captures only half the picture; as Cary, Lanyer, and Milton recognized, the Hebrew text is a story, a creative work that can and should be both read and rewritten as such.

Robert Alter has shown that the Hebrew Bible itself should be considered literature and contends that "prose fiction is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative" (Art 24). The Genesis account of Adam and Eve's creation and fall can indeed be accurately described as prose fiction; more specifically, it is a remarkably pliant short story that readily adapts to and embodies elements of

---

[1] Though there are two versions of humanity's creation, there is only one version that recounts the Fall; it is on the latter Yahwist story of Adam and Eve that this study will largely focus.

poetry and drama. Though the notion of the Bible as literature is relatively new to literary criticism, Cary, Lanyer, and Milton long ago recognized the literary nature of biblical writing, as demonstrated by their collective recognition of its generic malleability. Recognizing the tale's dramatic elements while also acknowledging the text's equally important role as narrative, these writers produce works that are more effectively redemptive than counter polemics written in defense of Eve. By reworking the ancient story within genres conforming to Renaissance notions of "literature," these three writers effectively challenge and destabilize the interpretations of patristic and misogynistic writers who insist that the story of the Fall is one of fixed and indisputable meaning.

Echoing Auerbach's influential argument, Alter rightly points out that even in the twentieth century "[t]he Bible is but one of two matrices of our double-edged, pagan-monotheistic, Hellenic-Hebraic culture" (World 86-7), a point that is most obviously applicable to Paradise Lost. These devout writers do not read or reinterpret the Bible solely as Christians; crucial to their opposing representations of Eve is their use of literary conventions that were, in the Renaissance, defined according to classical models. And, as this study will demonstrate, these writers effectively challenge the type of Eve because

they read and rework the biblical story within classical conventions.

Thus Cary, Lanyer, and Milton illustrate the important role of genre in allowing the construction of Eve to transcend the constraints of Renaissance misogyny; their literary reimaginings of the biblical text endow woman with a dramatic "mortal voice" that destabilizes Eve's conventionally misogynistic representation. Cary's dramatic treatment of Salome, the type of Eve, gives her a voice that allows her to challenge her misogynistic typecast. And although Lanyer's verse and Milton's epic poem are not conventionally dramatic works, both writers use women's voices in their overt attempts to redeem the biblical Eve. All three writers ultimately demonstrate that Eve's literary reimagining within dramatic conventions facilitates her redemption.

## Chapter One

## Ancient Dialogue and Early Modern Narrative

It is most useful to begin by turning to Genesis as a model to illustrate the generic distinctions most relevant to this argument. Written later than the Yahwist version but appearing first, the Priestly account of creation is a narrative that describes the six days culminating in the simultaneous creation of man and woman: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). Though the story records the words spoken by God in his ordering of creation, the Priestly version is clearly a more monologic text than the subsequent tale of Adam and Eve.

The story in which man and woman become named characters with active voices has prevailed in western thought and culture, while the more narrational version has incited little controversy. The lack of attention given to the Priestly story is clearly attributable to the fact that it does not support patriarchal or misogynistic interests,[2] but its generally uncontroversial history is also generically determined. This essentially monologic narrative allows little room for interpretation; it asserts

---

[2] As Alice Ogden Bellis suggests, in the Priestly account "[t]here is perfect equality, with no hint of one being superior to the other" (45).

a far more stable and definitive meaning than is possible for the multivocal Yahwist story.

The Yahwist story of the creation and the Fall, though also a narrative, contains dialogue and exchanges between its few characters.[3] It is from this story that patristic and misogynistic writers draw their arguments: the crooked rib that is moulded into Eve, Eve's eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, and Adam's harkening "unto the voice of thy wife" (Genesis 3:17) have long been interpreted as the causes of humanity's fall from grace and consequent earthly misery. It is the story with human voices that has captured western imagination, and it is this more dramatized version of humanity's beginnings that is invoked to assert woman's inherently flawed nature and necessary subordination.[4]

---

[3] Alter argues that "the primacy of dialogue" is "a general trait of biblical narrative" (Art 65). Though he does not make the connection explicit, Alter's conclusion illustrates the similarity of biblical narrative and drama: "the writer must permit each character to manifest or reveal himself or herself chiefly through dialogue but of course also significantly through action, without the imposition of an obtrusive apparatus of authorial interpretation and judgment" (Art 87). Alter's assertion is clearly applicable to the technique of the Yahwist author.

[4] Elaine Pagels, in her influential study of early Christian interpretations of the story of Adam and Eve, argues that although Genesis 1-3 was initially read as a story of human freedom, Augustine's interpretation of the account as asserting punishment for what he deemed to be original sin ultimately prevailed: "From the fifth century on, Augustine's pessimistic views of sexuality, politics, and human nature would become the dominant influence on western Christianity" (150). And this most influential patristic writer also claimed that "Eve's punishment has fallen on all women" (138); clearly, Augustine focussed on the Yahwist story.

Though orthodox exegesis insists on Eve's moral insufficiency, the Yahwist text allows us only to speculate as to why she eats the fruit at the serpent's prodding and subsequently offers it to Adam: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat" (Genesis 3:13) is the sole explanation Eve gives for her disobedience. And Eve's voice is not subsumed by the Yahwist narrator; though the story makes it clear that Eve disobeys a divine command, the narrator's account of her disobedience does not condemn her:

> And when the woman saw that the tree <u>was</u> good for food, and that it <u>was</u> pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make <u>one</u> wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.
> (Genesis 3:6)

Eve fails to hold fast to the word of God, but the reasons given for her decision seem both admirable and sensible: the tree is attractive, its fruit is good to eat and makes one wise, and Eve generously and freely shares it with her husband. And both Eve's and the narrator's explanations also suggest that the serpent, by deceptively altering Eve's perceptions, is primarily to blame for the Fall. But Eve and Adam must be culpable; even though the lying serpent is "more subtle than any beast of the field" (Genesis 3:1), all three transgressors are dealt punishments that seem equally severe. It is clear that disobedience has dire consequences, but the Yahwist story does not identify a single or primary cause of the Fall nor does it exculpate

Eve, Adam, or the serpent; biblical narrative, as Alter argues, does not impose interpretation or moral judgement.

The Yahwist's unobtrusive style allows for a myriad of plausible readings; as J.M. Evans points out, the surface simplicity of Genesis 2-3 does not determine a simple and clear-cut interpretation; the opening verses of the third chapter comprise

> a model of economy, bringing the characters vividly to life in their brief conversation and carrying the action forward with every phrase. Only the essentials of the story are emphasized, yet we carry away from it a profound sense of underlying complexity. (13)

Genesis 2-3 allows for greater interpretive freedom than the Priestly account, and its infusion with dramatic dialogue compels its ongoing reworking, rereading, and elaboration.[5] Yet the simplistic readings of patristic interpreters and misogynistic polemicists gloss over the biblical story's dramatic complications, emphasizing its essentials while ignoring potentially opposing interpretations. Despite its inherent indeterminacy, this multivocal narrative has paradoxically proven to be an effective means of justifying and sustaining a particular interpretation.

But, as Phillips points out, "[m]odern biblical scholarship regards most earlier interpretations of Eve as

---

[5] As Alter points out, the Hebrew Bible's use of dialogue "suggests how much the biblical writers like to lead their readers to inferences through oblique hints rather than insisting on explicit statement" (Art 183).

prime examples of eisegesis--that is, the reading into the text of the interpreter's own ideas and prejudices" (xiii). Ironically, the interpretive adaptability of the Yahwist story is evinced by its successful deployment as a means of establishing and perpetuating the notion of woman's inherent inferiority and deserving punishment, despite other plausible intentions of the Hebrew author.[6] Orthodox exegetes identify Eve as the primary cause of the Fall simply because she is the first to disobey the divine injunction; arguably, the text's minimalistic style has the potential to invite interpretations that the author perhaps never imagined.

Yet by complicating Eve's representation--elaborating on and reinterpreting the story of the Fall without altering the source--the reimaginings of Cary, Lanyer, and Milton show that the multivocal form of the Yahwist story facilitates the effective challenging of existing interpretations. These dramatic representations of Eve affirm the indeterminacy of the Yahwist story and thus

---

[6] As Katharine Rogers accurately asserts, "[a]lthough later commentators were to darken its misogynistic implications--changing a myth explaining the biological fact of labor pains and the social fact of wifely subjection into a divine condemnation of the female sex--they did not have to distort the original to do so" (4-5). And Evans points out that "Biblical scholars are generally agreed that it began as a straightforward aetiological myth, designed to explain why a man cleaves to his wife and why he is the senior partner in the union, why he has to labour in the fields and she in childbirth, why we wear clothes, why we dislike snakes, and why they crawl on their bellies" (9).

reveal the crucial flaw in the deterministic readings of patristic and misogynistic writers. Drama can thus accomplish what equally self-interested counter narrative cannot, a distinction that can be clarified by considering the secular implications of theological narrative in Renaissance society.

The need to contain unruly woman was constantly reinforced by the English church which, in 1547, issued its first edition of Certain sermons or homilies to be read in churches, and "the official sermons were the texts most people heard" (Aughterson 20). Though not referring directly to Eve, the following passage from An homily of the state of matrimony (1562) clearly alludes to her story:

> thus does St. Peter preach to them: ye wives be ye in subjection to obey your own husband. To obey is another thing than to control or command. . .as for their husbands, them must they obey, and cease from commanding, and perform subjection. (Aughterson 24)

In an age when most people attended church every Sunday, society did not need to be literate to be familiar with the story of woman's natural propensity to disobey; Eve's role in the Fall was narrated from the pulpit on a regular basis, and the consequent necessary subordination of women was repeatedly asserted.

Reading the Yahwist story as asserting narrative and rewriting it as such had become a secular commonplace by the emergence of a popular print culture in the early modern

period.[7] The Jacobeans saw the burgeoning of printed pamphlets arguing both sides of the "woman question." The misogynistic pamphlets are best described as narrative polemics aimed at asserting woman's divinely ordained inferiority. But the misogynistic pamphleteers err; they misread the Yahwist story as purely narrative and reproduce it as such. Yet arguments on both sides of the debate tend to minimalize the story's generic complexity; thus both pro and con debaters produce ideologically motivated interpretations of the Fall that prove to be equally unstable. The insufficiency of narrative argument either to sustain or to challenge misogynistic representations of Eve is illustrated by the seventeenth century's most intense conflict in the querelle des femmes.

This debate, centered on Joseph Swetnam's 1615 polemic, The Arraignment of Lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant woman, confirms widespread contemporary interest in the woman question; there were at least ten editions of this

---

[7] Linda Woodbridge has thoroughly demonstrated that the literary debate about women was widespread in the late Middle Ages and throughout the Renaissance and encompassed a wide range of literary genres. But most relevant to this argument is the generic form the formal controversy had assumed by this point. As Woodbridge points out, "[i]n the Jacobean period, the formal controversy was losing its generic consistency." No longer conforming to classical models, "it is difficult to find in this period a classic, pure example of a judicial oration or a Platonic/Erasmian dialogue" (110).

text published by 1637 (Woodbridge 81).[8] Swetnam's is a vehemently misogynistic tract, and the faults of the biblical Eve predicate his argument. Drawing on the Yahwist account, Swetnam uses the story of creation to illustrate woman's divinely determined inferior and corrupt nature: "they were made of the rib of a man, and that their froward nature showeth; for a rib is a crooked thing good for nothing else, and women are crooked by nature" (193). Creation, Swetnam argues, determined woman's nature and the story of the Fall confirms it:

> she was no sooner made but straightway her mind was set upon mischief, for by her aspiring mind and wanton will she quickly procured man's fall. And there fore ever since they are and have been a woe unto man and follow the line of their first leader. (194)

In less than a paragraph, Swetnam narrates his interpretation of the Fall, asserting that the first man was the victim of his flawed mate and that Eve's equally faulty descendants follow her example.[9] Swetnam's construction of

---

[8] Though Swetnam's pamphlet was published after Cary's and Lanyer's works, it is nonetheless nearly contemporary with their appearance in print (1613 and 1611 respectively) and is not a new argument; this particular pamphlet reiterates the premises of long-standing misogynistic arguments.

[9] Swetnam's recounting of the Fall suppresses the contributing actions of the serpent, arguably lending Eve greater agency than the gullible and ineffectual woman figured by patristic writers. But Swetnam's suppression of the serpent also suggests that Eve is solely responsible for her transgression and points toward the conclusion that she is indeed primarily to blame for human misery.

Eve was by this time ubiquitous and stereotypical, and the point he makes no longer seems moot.[10] This misogynist does not even need to construct a reasoned argument based on a faithful interpretation of the text, and Swetnam's tract suggests that the story is not as important as what it has come to mean.[11]

Indeed, Swetnam seems quite confident that his argument will not be subjected to significant scrutiny. The Renaissance male's pride in and command of logic and rhetoric are quite obviously lacking in this text; his argument is presented frantically, illogically, and in a random fashion.[12] Yet, as Katherine Usher Henderson and

---

[10] Woodbridge accurately summarizes Swetnam's view of Eve's progeny: "Women are opinionated, unheedful of good advice, jealous, short-tempered, proud, bold, vindictive, ungrateful, dissembling. A woman never forgets injury. Sirens all, women allure men to their destruction" (83).

[11] Eric Jager makes a similar assertion, positing that "although debate continues about whether the antifeminism traditionally associated with the Fall is inherent in the text or mainly a result of misreading by a patriarchal tradition, clearly the received myth of the Fall has been used against women during most of its history" (305).

[12] Diane Purkiss argues that the sloppy nature of Swetnam's text suggests that the debate centered on his tract can be seen as a carnivalesque game of rhetorical jesting. Woodbridge also notes the playful nature of the debate, but convincingly posits that it seems foolish "to deny that many who have insulted women in jest have contemned them in earnest" (81). Sexist jokes may indeed be jokes, but their very existence exemplifies the banality and the pervasiveness of Renaissance misogyny.

Barbara F. McManus argue, the sloppy nature of Swetnam's text makes his respondents' job more difficult:[13]

> The fact that so much of Munda's response constitutes a discussion of style rather than ideas testifies not only to the Renaissance interest in stylistic questions but also to the difficulty of replying logically to Swetnam's modes of argument. (38)

In the face of this sort of irrational misogynistic diatribe, counter assertions of a similar kind seem unlikely to succeed in successfully refuting centuries of negative perceptions of Eve.

Speght, however, offers an opposing interpretation of Eve's motivation:

> in her giving of the fruit to eat had she no malicious intent towards him, but did therein show a desire to make her husband partaker of that happiness which she thought by their eating they should both have enjoyed. (67)

Though Speght's insistence that Eve has no malicious intent is at least implied by the narrator--the fruit is, apparently, good to eat and makes one wise--like Swetnam, she presumes to know Eve's intentions. Speght responds to Swetnam by also proposing a definitive reading of Eve's

---

[13] Direct responses to Swetnam are Rachel Speght's A Muzzle for Melastomus, Esther Sowernam's Esther hath hanged Haman, and Constantia Munda's The Worming of a mad Dog, all of which were published in 1617. Though the use of pseudonyms by the latter two writers opens the possibility that they may not be women, they nonetheless speak as and on behalf of women. Henderson and McManus convincingly argue that their authors were most probably women (20-24).

moral character, thus simultaneously imitating and opposing Swetnam's authoritarian reading.

Moreover, Swetnam's respondents also read Genesis in light of and in compliance with the most crucial premise of the patristic and misogynistic exegetical tradition: Speght, Sowernam, and Munda all accept the notion that woman's secondary role is affirmed by the stories of creation.[14] Munda vehemently decries the misogynistic tradition by asserting that

> Woman, the second edition of the Epitome of the whole world, the second Tome of that goodly volume compiled by the great God of heaven and earth, is most shamefully blurred and derogatively erased by scribbling pens of savage and uncouth monsters. (248)

Sowernam likewise confirms woman's creation as "the last work" (224). Sowernam counters Swetnam's argument by affirming the overriding importance of the Yahwist story, arguing that "if Woman received her crookedness from the rib and consequently from the Man, how doth man excel in crookedness, who hath more of those crooked ribs" (222). Despite the fact that Sowernam suggests that man was created more "crooked" than woman, she nonetheless confirms woman's subordinate role, lamenting that "[i]t is a shame he hath no

---

[14] Clearly, the story of the Fall asserts woman's subordination, when God tells Eve that "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16). But interpreting the Yahwist story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib as confirming female inferiority requires ingenuity and willful reading, and the Priestly account of creation most certainly does not affirm gender inequality.

more government over the weaker vessel" (240). By either overlooking the implied egalitarianism of the Priestly version or allowing questionable premises gleaned from the Yahwist story of creation to prevail, all three respondents ultimately subscribe to the notion that woman's subordinate role was determined at the moment of her creation.

Though Speght's argument is the most logical, cogent, and lucid of the three respondents, and she skillfully employs Scripture to refute many of Swetnam's assertions, she nonetheless subscribes to conventional exegesis that supports the notion of woman's subordination. Though Speght does recognize the importance of the Priestly account of creation and asserts God's affirmation of human equality in Genesis 1:26, "[b]y which words he makes their authority equal, and all creatures to be in subjection to them both" (69), she reads the story as also affirming woman's secondary position. Paradoxically, Speght cites God's words, "All was very good" (Genesis 1:31), to conclude that woman, "excepting man--is the most excellent creature under the canopy of heaven" (65). Speght's contradictory assertions seem to point toward recognition of the incompatibility of the two creation stories, yet she applies the patriarchal interpretation of the Yahwist account of creation to the version that clearly challenges the notion

of woman's ontological inferiority.[15] A devout Protestant, Speght wants Scripture to embody absolute truth, and she echoes the authoritarian readings of Christian orthodoxy without seeming to recognize their inherent instability.

Both Swetnam and his respondents fail to consider that Eve's creation from Adam's rib does not necessarily translate into subordination; like patristic writers, they do not fully recognize the multiplicity of meanings embodied in the Yahwist text. Arguably, the layers of narrative assertion that had accumulated between the original composition and the seventeenth century obscured the Yahwist story's interpretive indeterminacy. But Swetnam is particularly steadfast in his insistence on reading the story as a narrative argument that unequivocally affirms his deterministic reading. Swetnam's tract illustrates Eve's role in Jacobean popular culture as the epitomized representative of feminine failings, and The Arraignment exemplifies Jacobean popular discussions of Eve's role as ideologically motivated polemics rather than reasoned arguments based on close textual analysis.

Though Swetnam's argument does not go unchallenged, his respondents are as concerned with deriding Swetnam and responding to his assertions as they are with reinterpreting

---

[15] Speght comes closest to recognizing the indeterminacy of the Yahwist story; as Woodbridge points out, "she believes that although the Bible does not promote misogyny, it does not allow for feminism either" (90).

the Genesis accounts of creation and fall. And Swetnam's attackers respond in kind, narrating and asserting counter arguments.[16] As a result, feminist defences tended to confirm all of the traits misogynists ascribed to women; as Munda herself recognizes, "[w]e must be tongue-tied, lest in starting up to find fault we prove ourselves guilty of those horrible accusations" (253). Responding to Swetnam also meant resorting to his tactics, and to do so only verified his misogynistic assertions. Ultimately, too, each respondent shares Swetnam's belief that the Bible must embody absolute meaning, and that she (not Swetnam) reads the authoritative text correctly.

The pamphleteers engaged in the woman debate fail to acknowledge fully the Yahwist text's ultimate interpretive indeterminacy and generic instability; responding to arguments such as Swetnam's results in equally forceful counter assertions that also propose definitive interpretations.[17] As products of their Protestant

---

[16] Sowernam's and Munda's tracts in particular are more aptly described as counter attacks than defenses of woman. As Elaine Beilin points out: "authors of defenses of women seem outspoken, raucous, even rude." Thus, in opposition to the writing mothers who assumed the redeeming role of Mary in their advice books, defenders of women adopted the role of Eve through their often aggressive and hostile responses (Redeeming 247-48).

[17] This is not to say that these works are univocal or monologic. As Purkiss points out, Swetnam deploys a "rhetoric of citation," a "genre of misogynistic writing" (72) that is explicitly multivocal, relying on centuries of antecedent arguments central to the ongoing woman debate. The Arraignment is, as Purkiss suggests, "multivalent and

culture, both Swetnam and his respondents want the Bible to be a source of definitive meaning and absolute authority, and they assert their particular understanding of that meaning through narrative argument. As Debora Kuller Shuger has shown, this sort of assertive approach to Scriptural exegesis has its roots in the Reformation, whence arose the "Puritan claim that correct interpretation is a matter of divine inspiration" (Habits 27). But in Swetnam's case, the notion that theological arguments could be asserted by claiming divine inspiration had devolved into the secular right simply to assert a self-interested and ideologically determined point of view.

Swetnam asserts the misogynistic reading of Eve by presuming to know her intentions, information that is clearly absent from the original. In Swetnam's text Eve is not the vocal character found in the Genesis story; her voice is subsumed by Swetnam's ideologically motivated narrative. Woodbridge points out that "the accusation/defense format adapted from classical rhetoricians carried the seeds of dramatic situation" (38), and the Swetnam debate created a dramatic situation that focussed on its participants, not the literary characters on whom they base their arguments. The occlusion of Eve's

---

self-contradictory" (73). Yet Swetnam and his respondents present their arguments in the mode of narrative polemic, a genre that overtly aims to assert a particular point of view.

dramatic voice ignores the generic complexity of the Yahwist story, and the rhetorical and combative nature of the woman debate places its players at center stage. The example of Swetnam and his respondents suggests that pamphlet debate could no longer serve as a forum for discussing Eve's role in a plausible or meaningful way, and a corollary of this heated and public debate is the obfuscation of her story's very real effects on countless generations of women.[18] Clearly, if the misogynistic construction of Eve were to be effectively challenged, recognition of the original story's generic complexity was in order.[19]

---

[18] Woodbridge makes a similar assertion, suggesting that the Jacobean controversy "was beginning to show signs of authorial uncertainty over the relationship between this charming parlor game and the realities of life for women" (110).

[19] Indeed, Speght herself seems to have recognized this necessity. After the publication of her answer to Swetnam, Speght turned away from the "attack and counterattack of the current pamphlet wars on the woman question" and began "to rewrite the earlier discourses of dream allegory and classical exempla" in verse (Beilin, "Writing" 268). As Beilin goes on to suggest, "one must not imagine this as a retreat from her public defense of women, but rather a new tactic" ("Writing" 268). This new tactic suggests an intent to demonstrate rather than assert woman's worth; as Beilin notes, in Speght's poem "The Dreame," she "rewrites and corrects male versions of women in gardens: not a disobedient Eve. . .but a woman <u>experiencing</u> her world in order to assimilate evidence for her ideas" ("Writing" 270-71). Moreover, it seems that Speght and her near contemporaries, Isabella Whitney and Anne Dowriche, aimed to resist indictment as the misogynistic type of the shrew by avoiding the pamphlet wars, seeking instead to exemplify a revised definition of woman's moral and intellectual worth; as Beilin points out, these writers painted woman "walking in the open, seeking truth, arguing against injustice, and composing a public self" ("Writing" 271), a feminine self that opposes the construction of woman derived from the

As demonstrated, the Genesis story is generically indeterminate; long recognized as narrative, the Old Testament cannot be regarded either as patently or exclusively so. As Alter has shown, dialogue is crucially important in the Bible, and "many pieces of third-person narration prove on inspection to be dialogue-bound. . .Narration is thus often relegated to the role of confirming assertions made in dialogue" (Art 65). With Alter's point in mind, it seems appropriate to invoke Bakhtin's notions of dialogism. As defined by M.H. Abrams, Bakhtin's theory "describes discourse as a medley of voices, social attitudes, and values that are not only opposed, but irreconcilable, with the result that the work remains unresolved and open-ended" (231). It is the Yahwist story's indeterminacy that has enabled its longevity and its continuing role as a source of artistic reimaginings; as Bakhtin himself suggests, "great novelistic images continue to grow and develop even after the moment of their creation; they are capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth" (422). Though Bakhtin's theory is formulated to address novelistic concerns, the dialogic effects Bakhtin finds in the novel are also found in the

---

misogynists' Eve.

Yahwist story, most particularly in the text's dialogue as the basis of the story's ultimate irresolvability.[20]

Certainly, too, the story of the Fall is not inaptly described as tragedy; as Ulrich Simon argues, "both Athens and Jerusalem first have to gaze at Troy for the foundation of tragic awareness" and Adam "becomes a tragic character just because he carries his own destruction in himself once he has abused his free will and become alienated from God" (1-5). Simon's argument opens with a passage from Aristotle, and his title, Pity and Terror, clearly alludes to the Poetics. But Simon's subsequent discussion of the similarity of biblical and classical tragedy affirms the tragic nature of Adam's fall without recognizing that, according to Aristotle's definition, the first man's tragedy must also be Eve's.

Central to Aristotle's notion of tragedy is pathos, which he defines as "a murderous or cruel transaction, such as killings--[taken as] real--and atrocious pain and woundings and all that sort of thing" (91). As Aristotle's translator, George Whalley, points out in his commentary, pathos "primarily means something 'suffered,' something that happens to a person--the complement to something done. Yet

---

[20] Lynne Pearce points out that dialogic theory has long been applied to genres other than the novel: from the early 1980s Bakhtin's "theoretical models were used to read (and reread) poetry and drama as well as the novel; to analyse film, music, and the visual and performing arts as well as literature" (81).

Aristotle says that a pathos is a praxis, an 'act'" (90).[21] This notion of the transactional nature of tragedy forces a reconsideration of Eve's role in the Fall. According to Aristotle, tragedy is impelled by and affects everyone involved, and though Eve's actions clearly contribute to the Fall, she neither falls nor acts alone.

Recognizing the transactional nature of tragedy, Whalley's application of the Poetics is, as Baxter suggests, "a method of critical inquiry that bears some resemblance to the sort of thing that Bakhtin describes as double-voicing or dialogism in his discussions of the novel, an acute alertness to competing voices, alternative formulations."[22] Arguably, both modern and classical genre theory can be applied to both the Yahwist story and the works this study will discuss in detail, works that imitate the original

---

[21] As John Baxter points out, Whalley's translation of the Poetics redefines conventional notions of tragedy: "Both the word 'transaction' and the term pathos-as-praxis insist on seeing the tragic action less in terms of isolated individuals, or heroes, and more in terms of relationship. . .a bold formulation that incites a radical rethinking of just what is meant by the standard account of a tragic action" (xxi). Yet Whalley's translation, which holds the complexities of the original in place, does not necessarily differ from Renaissance notions of tragedy, which have been obscured by subsequent centuries of interpretations and translations of Aristotle.

[22] Quoted from an earlier version of the preface to Whalley's text.

story's generic complexity.[23] Most obviously for Milton, genres are not distinct but composite, and the influence of multiple traditions that produces the generically unstable Paradise Lost is also evident in the work of Cary and Lanyer. These texts are not genre specific nor are genre theories limited to analysis of a singular or particular literary mode.

Abrams would disagree; this critic argues that "Bakhtin explicitly sets his theory against Aristotle's Poetics" because the Poetics insists on the primacy of plot in narrative forms, "a plot that evolves coherently from a beginning to an end in which all complications are resolved" (231). But Whalley's translation points to the similarity of these ancient and modern literary theorists: ultimately, both Bakhtin's and Aristotle's analyses illustrate both the instability of generic categories and the impossibility of containing either the dialogic narrative or the multivocal tragedy within definitive interpretations.[24] And the

---

[23] Referring specifically to the statements on genre found in Milton's essays, Heather Dubrow outlines the multiple influences on Milton's view of genre: "the classical rhetoricians are perhaps the principal source of these observations, but Milton supplements their precepts with the arguments of Renaissance theorists, the practice of patristic writers and the evidence of the Bible itself" (62).

[24] Pearce notes that Bakhtin himself, "in his later writings, more or less admitted the erroneous genre-specificity of his dialogic theorizing" (81-82), and Whalley accurately observes that "[w]hat Aristotle says about tragedy is not limited by the genre he seems to be discussing; it applies very well to any genre" (164).

Yahwist text illustrates Bakhtin's and Aristotle's similar view of the effects of multivocality. If we can accept the notion that the story of the Fall is a dramatic narrative whose voices obscure authorial intention and destabilize deterministic readings of moral culpability, then both Bakhtin's and Aristotle's literary analyses apply.

In the face of centuries of authoritarian narratives affirming Eve's moral inferiority and necessary subordination, any potentially redemptive treatment of Eve demands recognition of the complexity and concomitant indeterminacy inherent in her story. And the ultimate irresolvability of her story must be demonstrated, not simply asserted. Cary, Lanyer, and Milton attain this end by endowing woman with an independent voice, allowing Eve to speak, directly or indirectly, on her own behalf.[25] Yet these works are not uninhibited by the cumulative weight of Scriptural exegesis; they also manifest an acute awareness of Eve's popular and long-standing representation. All

---

[25] Certainly, dramatic representations of Eve appeared long before the seventeenth century; in the Middle Ages, Chaucer created his Wife of Bath, who in many ways challenged the misogynistic construction of woman derived from Eve, and Eve appeared as a character in numerous guild dramas. But the role of the Fall in medieval literature has been thoroughly examined by Jager and other scholars, and this study is not intended to be an historical survey. Rather, this work will focus on potentially subversive dramatic verse representations of Eve produced at the height of the querelle des femmes, when, as Kim Walker points out, "Protestant theology and moral philosophy interacted with humanism and capitalism to relegate women to the private domestic sphere of home and family" (3), and thus the need to contain women arguably became more urgent.

three writers evince what Shuger calls the "coexistence of contradictory habits of thought" (Habits 46), incompatible ways of thinking that are the result of the merging of a classical humanist hermeneutic that strongly emphasizes reason as the means of discovering textual truth and dogmatic assertive approaches to interpretation.[26] Shuger affirms the role of Scriptural exegesis in both creating and sustaining these contradictory "habits of thought;" despite their use of classical conventions, Cary, Lanyer, and Milton are also heavily influenced by the Christian exegetical tradition.

Indeed, the work of these three writers suggests that neither humanist nor Christian hermeneutic is adequate to the task of reconstructing Eve; in a culture that habitually merges the two, neither is sufficient unto itself. With this point in mind, it becomes crucially important to consider the ways these writers not only rewrite Eve's tale within classical modes, but also how they interpret the Genesis story as Christians. As Woodbridge affirms, "[t]he Bible and the classics were twin fountains of Renaissance thought; rare is the Renaissance writer who does not draw upon both" (87). The Tragedy of Mariam, Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, and Paradise Lost are all aptly described as

---

[26] This "copresence of rationalized and traditional habits of thought," Shuger argues, is particularly important in the Renaissance, where "the contradiction between these modes of representing experience becomes more evident, more acute" (Habits 25).

dramatic verse adaptations of ancient stories, and their use of classical literary conventions is crucial to their effective challenging of Eve's conventional Christian representation. As we shall see, it is the merging of the two literary traditions, classical and Christian, that accomplishes what the polemical counter narrative alone cannot.

## Chapter Two

## "Written on my tainted brow": Masculine Narrative and Feminine Tragedy in The Tragedy of Mariam

Elizabeth Cary was the first English woman to compose and publish an original five act play. Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam rewrites women's story not only by inscribing Cary's female presence within a hitherto exclusively male literary history, but also by challenging the misogynistic construction of woman derived from patristic figurings of Eve. Cary's closet drama suggests that there is no clearly definable generic woman, and she questions and complicates conventional interpretations of the Fall by demonstrating that women are not solely responsible for humanity's fallen condition.

Encompassing elements of narrative and drama, Mariam imitates the Yahwist story's generic complexity and effectively challenges assertions that attempt to contain interpretations of the multivocal biblical tale within authoritarian narratives. Written in the mode of classical tragedy, the play's competing voices overtly question misogynistic constructions of woman. More significant, though, are the challenges to deterministic readings of Eve found within the speeches of single characters. As a closet drama, the play contains many long passages that presumably

aim to assert a single and particular point of view.[27] Yet the play's narrated speeches are not monologic; narrative assertions are challenged within the very speeches that attempt to verify and sustain ideologically determined perceptions of woman, and this "double-voicing" reveals the instability of the ideological beliefs that narrative purports to uphold.

The dialogic nature and destabilizing function of the dramatic voice is perhaps best illustrated by the play's Chorus, where the voices of dogmatic narrative and classical tragedy converge. In the tradition of Christian orthodoxy, the Chorus advocates woman's necessary subordination to the patriarchal order, insisting that defiance of its codes can result only in tragedy. Mariam's unbridled speech, the Chorus acknowledges, is the cause of her fall:

> And though her thoughts reflect with purest light,
> Her mind if not peculiar is not chaste.
> For in a wife it is no worse to find,
> A common body than a common mind.
> (III.iii.241-44)

According to conventional interpretations of the Fall, Eve's tempting speech causes Adam's demise, and the Chorus echoes this crucial premise of Christian orthodoxy by affirming the necessity of woman's public silence. But the Chorus also suggests that perceptions enabled by authoritarian

---

[27] Laurie J. Shannon points out that "[r]ather than emphasizing dramatic interaction or even dialogue, closet drama makes use of long monologues and sparsely populated scenes to elaborate intellectual or philosophical issues" (145).

Scriptural exegesis obscure truth; even though Mariam's thoughts may be of "purest light," they will be perceived as unchaste if articulated. Clearly articulating a double standard, the Chorus recounts misogyny's premises while its articulation of those premises reveals their dependence on faulty interpretive reasoning.

The self-contradictory voice of the Chorus thus evinces what Bakhtin describes as "a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness, which no longer possesses a sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought" (367). The Chorus enacts a destabilizing deunification of asserting narrative, demonstrating the genre's insufficiency to contain and uphold patriarchal and misogynistic ideology. Presumably serving the interests of contemporary orthodoxy, the Chorus's narrative does not monologically affirm the absolutist arguments it appears to imitate; the voice of the Chorus elicits alternative readings that counter its own authoritarian assertions.

Alluding more directly to the story of the Fall, the Chorus describes the tragic consequences of willful interpretation and deterministic perceptions:

> To hear a tale with ears prejudicate,
> It spoils the judgment, and corrupts the sense:
> That human error, given to every state,
> Is greater enemy to innocence.
> It makes us foolish, heady, rash, unjust,
> It makes us never try before we trust.

(II.iv.401-6)

Human judgement, the Chorus insists, is impaired by willful reading, and this impairment results in warped perceptions that are the greatest enemy of human innocence. This passage not only reveals the intellectual folly inherent in prejudiced interpretation, it also suggests that faulty interpretation produces very real effects that reach far beyond the literary realm. The Chorus seems to apprehend the insufficiency of biased and authoritarian interpretation to realize textual truth and suggests that deterministic reading has direct and pernicious consequences.

The Chorus affirms that "foolish, heady, rash" and "unjust" actions are impelled by biased interpretation received with "ears prejudicate."[28] The Chorus suggests that pathos is enabled and inflicted through self-interested interpretation, yet it also assumes the rhetorical style of the ideology that impels the play's tragic suffering. Adopting the voice of authoritarian narrative while describing its dire effects, the Chorus illustrates Bakhtin's notion that "pathos in the novel (and in literature in general), if it is authentic, shies away from

---

[28] Though the Chorus here refers to the community's overly ready willingness to believe false rumours, "wishing Herod's death do hold it true" (II.iv.420), its general discussion of the lamentable effects of prejudiced interpretation is equally applicable to Herod's own willingness to believe false rumours of Mariam's inconstancy, a partiality that precipitates Mariam's tragic climax.

discourse that is openly emotional, not yet separated from its subject" (395).[29] The Chorus objectifies authoritarian discourse by appearing to assume the position of the ideologue even though it also affirms the far-reaching and potentially tragic effects of ideologically motivated interpretation. Thus the Chorus exemplifies the multivocality and indeterminacy inherent in the dialogic text while also conveying its recognition of the transactional nature of human tragedy.

Despite its assertions to the contrary, the Chorus's dialogic narrative challenges the notion that Mariam's actions are alone responsible for her demise. Mariam's tragic dilemma is effected by prevailing notions of the nature of woman and by her own at least partial acceptance of the defining parameters of womanly behaviour.[30] As Whalley suggests, in tragedy the "praxis (action) of the play is defined by the praxis of the persons in the play, and the praxis makes the characters what they are" (26), and

---

[29] Or, in Pearce's more accessible articulation of this notion, Bakhtin's theory shows his subjects in "a perpetual process of renegotiating their relation to those discourses. This is achieved through a process of objectification that is often heard in the subject's voice as a stylization or parody of the authoritative word," thus engaging the subject in a struggle toward objectification of the oppressor's word (65).

[30] Mariam's contradictory acceptance of and resistance to gendered codes of behaviour is generally recognized by critics; Beilin, for example, affirms that "Cary structures the play to make Mariam's conflict between obedience to and rebellion against Herod's authority the central concern" ("Cary" 55).

it is the attempts of various characters to contain Mariam within gendered codes of behaviour that both shape the protagonist's character and precipitate her tragedy.

Torn between her love for Herod and her hatred of his asserted control over her, Mariam experiences conflicting and opposite emotions: "One object," she tells us, "yields both grief and joy" (I.i.10). Mariam opens the play by lamenting her own rash judgement in censuring Herod with an unwomanly "public voice" (I.i.1), averring that "Mistaking is with us [women] but too too common" (I.i.8). Yet Mariam also rightly insists that Herod's fault created hers:

> And blame me not, for Herod's jealousy
> Had power even constancy itself to change.
> (I.i.23-24)

Herod's willingness to believe that woman is by nature inconstant initiates the series of events that culminates in Mariam's tragic demise, and Mariam's resistance to his tyranny effectuates her tragic end.

Yet by emerging as a model of virtue after struggling with her own ambiguous vices, Mariam's characterization challenges the notion that she is somehow fatally flawed or disastrously intent on realizing personal ambition.[31] Mariam's "fault," her self-acknowledged "public voice," is

---

[31] Barbara Lewalski also recognizes this point, arguing that although "[t]he drama offers several formulations of the tragic flaw that precipitates Mariam's tragedy. . .these positions are undermined by the drama as a whole" (Writing Women 197-98).

not the single determining factor in her fall.[32] And, as Whalley suggests, "the notion of hamartia as a tragic or fatal 'flaw' is completely wrong-headed. . .If the protagonist had by nature a 'flaw' that steered him more or less inevitably into a fatal situation, he would be a mechanism and predictable to us" rather than a truly tragic figure (27). Mariam is not the sole author of her own misfortune; her tragedy is both suffered and inflicted. In Mariam, it is the complex interaction of ideological belief and resistance to that ideology that culminates in tragedy; though Mariam herself suggests that her demise is deserved, she also adamantly insists that she is right to resist Herod's attempts to contain her.[33] By recognizing and demonstrating the transactional nature of tragedy, Cary's play insists that women are not the sole cause of human tragedy; Mariam falls, but she falls because of the actions of many.

---

[32] This reading counters that of Marta Straznicky, who suggests that although the play's "Argument" affirms Herod's "violent affection" as the determinate of Mariam's tragedy, "the play proper tells a different story, 'arguing' in its own way that. . .it is Mariam's unrestrained desire for personal integrity and public recognition that causes her demise" (124-25).

[33] As Lewalski notes, in the end "Mariam recognizes that prudent humility would have saved her, and admits that the conjunction of chastity and humility is the feminine ideal," yet she "projects her triumph over earthly tyrants and imagines an appropriately female heavenly reward--not in Abraham's bosom but in Sarah's lap" (Writing Women 200).

Thus feminist readings of Mariam quite rightly focus on the play's title character, invariably recognizing that the misogynistic construction of woman is challenged through the tragic figure of Mariam.[34] Feminist analyses typically avoid exploring the representation of Salome, whose characterization explicitly challenges redemptive readings of the play.[35] Indeed, Cary's characterization of the reprehensible Salome is problematic in a text that dares to align its female title character with Christ.[36] But equally important to the play's questioning of the Christian exegetical tradition is the subtle undermining of the many assertions that attempt to contain Salome as the misogynistic type of Eve. Though the play's challenges to the foundations of Christian misogyny through the characterization of Salome are cryptic, this multivocal drama nonetheless does much to destabilize and rework the

---

[34] Shannon agrees with this observation, noting that the body of Mariam criticism "emphasizes almost exclusively a reading of the drama that centers upon the character of Mariam, its conflicts, heroism, and ultimate triumph or transcendence" (136).

[35] As Beilin observes, "Mariam is as chaste, loyal, and naive as Salome is lustful, inconstant, and scheming" ("Cary" 55).

[36] Cary draws distinct parallels between Mariam's death and Christ's. This reading is advanced in one of the earliest feminist discussions of Cary's work, Elaine Beilin's essay, where she argues that "[t]he play reaches its climax in the transfiguration of Mariam: her death is an allegory of the Crucifixion" ("Cary" 60). Beilin's reading is clearly supported by the text and affirmed by subsequent critics.

conventionally deterministic view of Eve overtly figured in Mariam's antithesis.

Salome embodies all of the negative qualities attributed to Eve by patristic writers; she is proud, disobedient, the purported cause of human misery, and, as Straznicky suggests, her insistence that she will be the first woman to divorce renders her "the champion of unrestrained personal will" (127). And Salome's conflation with Eve is apparent from her first appearance in the play. We first encounter Salome in confrontation with Mariam and Alexandra, and Mariam insults Salome by attacking her lineage, addressing her as

> Thou parti-Jew, and parti-Edomite,
> Thou mongrel: issu'd from rejected race,
> Thy ancestors against the Heavens did fight,
> And thou like them wilt heavenly birth disgrace.
> (I.iii.235-39)

The editors of Cary's play point out that this passage refers to Edom's conflict with Israel, a war conducted against divine will.[37] But these lines can also be read as alluding directly to the Fall: Adam and Eve were a race rejected from Eden who also fought the heavens by defying God's will, and Salome, like Eve, disgraces her heavenly birth through disobedience.

Curiously, the subtext evident in Mariam's lines suggests that women are indeed to blame for earthly strife;

---

[37] See Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson's note (157).

the sins of the past and the sins of the present are conflated in the figure of Salome. Though this reading seems to perpetuate the condemnation of women inherent in deterministic readings of the Yahwist story, this conflation also suggests that women are not the only champions of unrestrained personal will: the patriarchal Edomites, like Eve, freely choose to defy God. Mariam asserts Salome's embodiment of Eve's feminine failings, but her speech also fittingly destabilizes those assertions by simultaneously suggesting that the propensity to disobey is not an exclusively feminine fault.

Like Mariam, Salome's rejected husband attempts to project the misogynistic view of Eve onto his wife. Addressing womankind and sounding remarkably like Swetnam, Constabarus insists that

> [Your] best are foolish, froward, wanton, vain,
> Your worst adulterous, murderous, cunning, proud:
> And Salome attends the latter train,
> Or rather [she] their leader is allow'd.[38]
> (IV.vi.333-36)

Salome, as the leader of the worst of women, embodies the misogynistic stereotype derived from the construction of Eve, and Constabarus assumes the role of the misogynistic

---

[38] Weller and Ferguson also recognize Constabarus's subscription to conventional antifeminist arguments, suggesting that he "speaks for a long tradition of misogyny" (169). Despite the fact that Mariam predates Swetnam's tract, the similarity of Swetnam's and Constabarus's speeches illustrates both the pervasiveness and the similarity of misogynistic arguments; all women, Swetnam argues, are "a woe unto man and follow the line of their first leader" (194).

polemicist who repeatedly reasserts that construction. But the voice of the ostensibly virtuous Constabarus is crucial to the play's destabilizing of antifeminist assertions based on Eve's example; like Mariam's, his words undermine his assertions.[39]

In a direct reference to the Fall, Constabarus conflates the sins of women and the sins of men:

> Cham's servile curse to all your sex was given,
> Because in Paradise you did offend.
> (IV.vi.341-42)

But Constabarus has his Bible stories confused; in Scripture, "Cham's" sin and Eve's sin are distinctly separate.[40] Thus Constabarus's strange conflation, like Mariam's, suggests that original sin is not attributable solely to women. By reading the disobedience of a man, "Cham," as inseparable from the disobedience of the first woman, Constabarus's lines suggest that men and women are not only equally apt to fall, they are both responsible for the creation and perpetuation of human misery.

---

[39] This reading of Constabarus's unreliability has been overlooked by critics, who largely regard his character in the same light as Tina Krontiris. Krontiris suggests that Constabarus is "a creditable and sympathetic, if ineffectual character" who "seems to express the author's position" (88).

[40] Weller and Ferguson note that "'Cham's servile curse' is an extraordinary condensation of the curses pronounced against Eve after the fall (Genesis 3:16) and against Canaan (apparently conflated with his father Ham, or Cham) after Ham summons his brothers to observe the drunken nakedness of their father, Noah (Genesis 9:22-25). The curse of 'Cham' is slavery" (169-70).

Furthermore, the conflation of Canaan with his father Ham suggests a tradition of curses effected and inherited by men. Blame for the sins of the father are cast upon the son in the same way that the sins of the first mother are cast upon and reflected in her female progeny. Ironically, both Mariam's and Constabarus's attempts to condemn Salome as the type of Eve demonstrate that woman is not solely to blame for human failings; as with the Chorus, the competing voices found within Mariam's and Constabarus's speeches affirm the transactional nature of tragedy, and by so doing destabilize their own attempts to assert a definitive meaning.

The play's recognition of pathos-as-praxis is repeatedly affirmed by the text. Constabarus's earlier description of Salome depicts her paradoxical nature, insisting that

> She merely is a painted sepulchre,
> That is both fair, and vilely foul at once.
> (II.iv.325-26)

And Salome's fair appearance belies the corruption beneath:

> Her mouth, though serpent-like it never hisses
> Yet like a serpent, poisons where it kisses.
> (II.iv.333-34)

Constabarus's assessment of Salome is not inaccurate--she clearly is a dissembling and duplicitous woman--but the similitude of Salome and the serpent seems strategic; we are reminded that the serpent, by offering Eve the forbidden fruit, initiated the Fall.

In his apostrophe to women, Constabarus more explicitly suggests that Salome and other women of her ilk are the type of Satan or his followers, asserting that "Your best are worse than men: your worst than devils" (IV.vi.350). A few lines later, in a direct reference to Salome, one of Babas's sons avers that

> I would forever lead a single life,
> And never venture on a devilish wife.
> (IV.vi.355-56)

Conflating devils and the type of Eve in the figure of Salome seems to support the notion that women are entirely to blame for humanity's fall from grace, yet this conflation again suggests that woman and demons share responsibility: we are reminded that humanity's fallen condition is not solely attributable to the actions of Eve.

Constabarus's readings of Scripture are not objective nor do they reflect sound interpretive reasoning; this misogynist is cast as the frothy polemicist who insists on unjustly and unreasonably projecting all of the world's evils onto the figure of woman. Constabarus's dramatic voice works ironically to reveal the rigidity and impercipience of his thinking, and his inept attempts to assert a deterministic view of woman ultimately reveal the indeterminacy of the Yahwist story.

Constabarus is the champion of Renaissance ideals of virtue and the champion of Renaissance misogyny, yet his authoritarian voice affirms the instability of deterministic

and misogynistic Scriptural exegesis. In his apostrophe to women, Constabarus argues that

> You were the angels cast from Heav'n for pride,
> And still do keep your angels' outward show,
> But none of you are inly beautified,
> For still your Heav'n-depriving pride doth grow.
> (IV.vi.321-24)

Beilin reads this passage as confirming the orthodox notion that "[e]vil entered the world with women and is maintained by them, particularly those who deny their proper place and take upon themselves men's roles" (Redeeming 171), but this reading overlooks the fact that Constabarus's argument is predicated on a faulty premise. Women are not the angels cast from heaven; in Christian theology, the fall of the angels clearly precedes the fall of Adam and Eve.[41] By conflating woman and the fallen angels, Constabarus confirms that Eve's fault is not hers alone. Moreover, Constabarus's argument, whose erroneous premise would surely not escape the seventeenth-century Christian reader, draws attention to the fact that Eve was not the first to fall nor did she fall furthest and suggests that neither pride nor disobedience are exclusively female faults.

---

[41] Eric Smith outlines the origins of the myth of the angels' fall, a composite of myths from various sources that culminated in the interpretation put forth by Augustine, which "dismisses the notion that God ever created evil, first in the Fall of the Angels and then in the case of Adam and Eve (De Civitate Dei, XIII, XIV). By his time, the account of Adam's Fall. . .was viewed as unquestionably representing the first human sin, effectively caused by his free will, but made possible by the pre-existing evil of Satan curiously at large in the Garden" (214-15).

In his attempt to gather as much traditional authority as possible in support of his belief, Constabarus unwittingly exposes the incoherence of his argument and provides Scriptural evidence for the opposition. And the implications of Constabarus's faulty arguments cannot be overlooked; by undermining his own assertions he illustrates the propensity of Scriptural exegesis to misinterpret and misread Scripture in order to justify and sustain the misogynistic construction of woman. Drawing our attention to Constabarus's repeated dogmatic utterances while illustrating their dependence on questionable interpretation, the play challenges the notion of Eve's sole culpability for the Fall and thus destabilizes the conventionally misogynistic construction of her identity.

Salome herself challenges conventional exegesis and, like her husband, destabilizes rigid constructions of gender by conflating them. But Salome is given a much more skillful voice that shows a greater command of logic and rhetoric and a clearer understanding of the inherent contradictions of Christian orthodoxy. Unlike Constabarus's self-defeating similes, Salome's conflations seem knowing and deliberate as she asks the rhetorical questions,

> Are men than we in greater grace with Heaven?
> Or cannot women hate as well as men?
> (I.iv.307-8)

The answer to the latter question is clearly evident in the vengeful Salome's characterization; yes, women can hate as

well as men. And the rhetorical nature of this question makes it double-edged; Salome affirms her reprehensible character while simultaneously suggesting that she meets a negative standard set by men. With women's capacity to hate as well as men a given within the play, together with the virtuous Mariam's ultimate martyrdom, the first question also becomes rhetorical: according to the text, men and women have equal capacity to do evil or to attain grace.

Moreover, Salome illustrates the most dire and very real consequences of a tradition of Christian exegesis that condemns women through its insistence on reading Scripture as authoritarian narrative. In her soliloquy, Salome reveals the hopelessness of women in a world where they are repeatedly told they are evil and the cause of all human misery. She insists that there is no point in her even attempting to regain her lost honour, lamenting that

> . . .Why stand I now
> On honourable points? 'Tis long ago
> Since shame was written on my tainted brow:
> And certain 'tis, that shame is honour's foe.
> (I.iv.281-84)

Salome recognizes the futility of trying to deny her type, but her choice of the word "written" also suggests that she has been branded with an unsavoury reputation, revealing her concomitant understanding that she is a literary construct.

Alluding to patristic and misogynistic interpretations of the Fall, Salome suggests that she has been defined by someone other than herself, and that the definition is solid

and pervasive, resisting both defiance and modification. What is the point, she asks, in trying to deny a stereotype indelibly etched on her brow? Once defined, Salome suggests, the fallen woman has little hope of earthly redemption. Indeed, Salome's words could as easily and appropriately be uttered by the unjustly condemned Mariam; branded as unchaste, Mariam cannot convince Herod otherwise. The reluctance and the failure of both Salome and Mariam to change the definition imposed on them by the perceptions of others affirm that the negative construction of woman is insidiously internalized in their patriarchal world.

The real tragedy of Mariam is the misogyny that is enabled and sustained by authoritarian readings of Scripture. And the greatest problem inherent in those readings is the refusal of the misogynist to see his own culpability in human tragedy, his failure to recognize that tragedy is both suffered and inflicted. The woman hater cultivates a willful blindness to his own flaws that originates in his insistence on locating all of humanity's failings in the figure of woman. Though Salome's and indeed Mariam's actions contribute to the process, Herod's negative view of woman precipitates the tragic climax. This is a fault Herod recognizes too late; though Salome does trick Herod into believing Mariam's guilt, the ultimate decision for her execution rests solely with him.

Reversing the conventional interpretation of the Yahwist story, Mariam shows man's contributing role in the downfall of woman, a fall that results from Herod's subscription to the authoritarian discourse that attempts to affirm unequivocally an inherent female inconstancy. In true misogynistic fashion, Herod insists on placing full blame on woman:

> Accursed Salome, hadst thou been still,
> My Mariam had been breathing by my side:
> Oh, never had I, had I had my will,
> Sent forth command, that Mariam should have died.
> But, Salome, thou didst with envy vex,
> To see thyself outmatched in thy sex.
> (V.i.157-62)

Despite Herod's clear culpability, he does not recognize the transactional impetus of tragedy and places responsibility for his and Mariam's fall on Salome's pride. Moreover, echoing orthodox interpretations of the Yahwist story, Herod insists that Salome's influence undermined his free will. The villainess of this play is clearly an accomplice to the crime against Mariam, but Salome is also the scapegoat who is unjustly perceived as the sole cause of the tragedy's pathos. As in the original version of the Fall, character culpability in Mariam remains indeterminate, and failing to recognize the Yahwist story's multiplicity of meanings is an important cause of the play's tragedy.

Salome is clearly not a positive character; moulded in imitation of the misogynistic construction of Eve, she is vindictive, manipulative, and cunning, and she is an

accomplice to the crime against Mariam. Yet at the same time the play offers a redeeming woman who represents the antithesis of Eve's misogynistic delineation. Salome is redeemed by a woman, an act that does not in itself change her or Eve's lamentable status, but the deterministic construction of her character is challenged by the depicted instability of traditional misogynistic arguments. By destabilizing the misogynistic delineation of woman derived from the construction of Eve and by creating her antithesis, the play presents a two-pronged challenge to the orthodox view of woman. Though Salome is clearly not a model of virtue, Cary's choice of genre reveals her resistance to and questioning of the misogynistic premises of Christian exegesis; this multivocal text embodies a multiplicity of meanings that cannot contain Salome's (or Eve's) construction within the characters' asserting narratives.

Fischer quite rightly argues that Salome "may have some feminist principles but no moral sense" (232), but she is not treated wholly without sympathy.[42] Indeed, we might very well ask which woman emerges triumphant in the end--Salome the survivor or Mariam the martyr? Though Salome is instrumental in causing Mariam's demise, she also possesses

---

[42] Betty S. Travitsky makes a similar observation, arguing that "Salome <u>does not</u> suffer death, and Cary's failure to punish her and her depiction of her pluck in ways that win some reluctant admiration. . .suggest an ambivalence in the playwright's mind over woman's stark subordination in marriage in seventeenth-century England" (187).

a degree of power and agency that Mariam lacks.[43] And, as Beilin points out, "[o]ne of Salome's functions is to express Mariam's rebellious tendencies" ("Cary" 57). Like Doris, Alexandra, and Mariam, Salome is oppressed by male tyranny, and the largest measure of influence she can find in her oppressively patriarchal world is attainable only through deceit and manipulation.

Both Mariam's and Salome's perceived faults are enabled and necessitated by imposed constructions of woman's inherently flawed nature; thus Mariam and Salome both challenge the notion of woman's ontological moral inferiority. Though criticism invariably recognizes Mariam as the tragic hero of this play, this definitive reading not only works against the play's insistence on textual indeterminacy, it also ignores the fact that both Salome and Mariam are adversely affected by authoritarian interpretation and its sweeping and multiple effects. Tragedy, as Whalley points out, "turns not upon a single 'hero'" (88), and Mariam's tragedy is shared by all women, including Salome.

Though the relationship between Mariam and Salome is seemingly polarized and unquestionably antagonistic, both Salome's and Mariam's resistance to gendered codes of

---

[43] Straznicky suggests that Mariam's defiance of male tyranny is ultimately self-defeating: "The promise of conquest in self-surrender, of glory in self-annihilation, of liberty in self-restraint is, in terms of political consequences, nothing short of perverse" (133).

behaviour reveals an oppressive male tyranny that adversely affects both women. Mariam is destroyed by deterministic notions of woman, and Salome is rendered irredeemable by misogyny's powerful and inescapable pervasiveness. Mariam illustrates the Yahwist story's ubiquitous influence while also insisting that the story's effects are dependent on interpretation. And by imitating the Yahwist story's generic complexity, the play's similar conflation of narrative and drama shows that neither text can sustain a definitive interpretation. As in the Genesis account of humanity's fall, the play's dramatic voices enable the text's irresolvability, and both Bakhtin's and Aristotle's literary theories illuminate the important role of genre in effectively challenging deterministic readings of Eve and her descendants.

Certainly critics, like Walker, have not failed to recognize the play's conflicts and contradictions that "render no single voice authoritative" (139). Yet literary criticism, in its own quest for interpretive closure, tends to view the play's multiplicity of meanings as inherently problematic.[44] But by acknowledging the play's multiple influences, many of its contradictions and polarities are more readily understood. The play's recognition of the

---

[44] Krontiris, for example, argues that Mariam "is not transparent but ambiguous about the heroine's behaviour" and "[t]he text's ambiguity seems to be a sign of the author's ambivalence" (87).

importance of both classical and Christian traditions and its affirmation of the indeterminacy of the Yahwist story generates many of its ambiguities and resulting interpretive difficulties.

Though the play's generic form inevitably challenges deterministic constructions of woman, Salome's characterization as the epitomized figure of irredeemable woman also reveals Cary's at least partial internalization of the misogynistic premises of the Christian exegetical tradition.[45] Thus critics focus on Mariam's characterization as the second Eve, the type of the Virgin Mary who is typically used to challenge misogyny, and overlook the ways Salome's characterization destabilizes the construction of the original Eve. But criticism has read the tragedy as solely Mariam's because it interprets the play's didactic message within the Christian exegetical tradition while underemphasizing the significance of the tragedy's humanist influence.

---

[45] Travitsky argues that Cary's characterization of Salome reveals Cary's own subscription to the misogynistic stereotype: "[t]he internalization of negative imagery and thinking about women by a learned and pious woman writer is surely chilling evidence of the pervasiveness of the patriarchal attitudes that underlay woman's place in Renaissance society" (186). Though Cary does show that women can be reprehensible, this negative imagery is not as internalized as Travitsky suggests. Cary does much to challenge the stereotype and she seems well aware that women of Salome's ilk are indeed constructed by the ideological interests of that patriarchal society.

Cary's play reveals a dual system of belief; Cary depicts Salome as the type of Eve figured by the absolutist readings of patristic writers, yet the depicted instability of that representation evinces her humanist belief that textual truth is much more complex and ambiguous than the one-dimensional Eve of conventional Scriptural exegesis suggests. Unlike the authoritarian Constabarus, whose contradictory speeches illustrate Shuger's observation that "one can feel very strongly and still be very wrong" (Habits 44), Cary recognizes that "[t]he escape from ideological hermeneutics lies on the road of reason, history, and the literal sense" (Shuger, Habits 30). Cary's ambiguous representation of reprehensible woman evinces her refusal to read or write a text in absolutist terms.

And the status of both Mariam and Salome as polarized types of woman is ultimately ambiguous; as Mariam herself reveals:

> But I did think because I knew me chaste,
> One virtue for a woman might suffice.
> That mind for glory of our sex might stand,
> Wherein humility and chastity
> Doth march with equal paces hand in hand.
> (IV.viii.560-65)

Mariam may indeed be chaste, but she is, like Salome, guilty of pride. Mariam is aligned with Christ, but Cary does not unequivocally insist that Mariam is the absolute embodiment of the ideal of Christian virtue. Though the play seems to suggest that woman can be admirably virtuous or that she can embody all of the worst traits conventionally ascribed to

Eve, Cary's attempt to redeem her sex destabilizes both conventionally damning and idealizing constructions of woman. Cary does not attempt to assert her own authoritarian reading of Scripture, but reinterprets and complicates both the type of the Virgin Mary and the type of Eve.

Indeed, Cary demonstrates a remarkable intellectual ability to resist containment by potentially narrowing doctrines, even though those doctrines are central to the religion to which she was devoted.[46] As Shuger has shown, many Renaissance thinkers could readily believe seemingly opposite things at the same time; though this may appear to be inadequate or careless thinking from our twentieth-century perspective, it actually suggests quite the opposite. Despite the fact that Cary was an extremely devout and pious woman, her familiarity with and use of a rational humanist hermeneutic destabilizes the dogma upheld by Christian orthodoxy without relying on its assertive and intellectually questionable interpretive and rhetorical tactics.

---

[46] Though Cary openly converted to Catholicism in 1626, her religious affiliation at the time of the play's composition, sometime before 1609, is unclear. Nonetheless, Cary was raised a Protestant and read voraciously. In addition to "history, poetry, moral philosophy, and the Church Fathers," Cary read "'most that has been written' in religious controversy--Luther and Calvin, Latimer, Jewel, and. . .especially Thomas More" (Lewalski, Writing Women 182). Thus Cary was well-acquainted with classical humanist and Protestant hermeneutic, as well as writings that influenced both Christian traditions.

Arguably, Cary's play is as a result more effectively redemptive than is possible for an asserting counter narrative; by demonstrating rather than asserting the instability of deterministic readings of Eve and her progeny, Cary both reveals the crucial flaw in patristic arguments and avoids committing the same error. And Cary resists indictment by and inclusion in the popular debate with her choice of genre; she rejects the increasingly shrewish and strident prose polemic in favour of writing within the loftier literary preserve of closet drama.[47] Certainly, Cary's choice likely had much to do with her elevated social standing, but choosing to portray the tragedy of female experience within a more respectable genre that also offers greater exploratory potential seems strategic; perhaps she does not stand a better chance of being heard, but it does seem that she would stand at least a marginally better chance of being taken seriously.

Cary's play challenges the premises of Renaissance misogyny by merging two traditions, and her deployment of Scriptural exegesis and tragic conventions acknowledges both

---

[47] Nancy A. Gutierrez points out that, unlike conventional tragedy, "closet drama is an aristocratic rather than popular cultural form." Moreover, "its characteristic tendency toward inquiry and debate about private as well as public political issues also allows insightful portrayal of women in crisis." This "elite discourse for a coterie audience" (238) is thus hierarchically superior to both prose narrative and popular drama and also provides greater exploratory potential for Cary's depiction of woman's more private tragedy.

the interpretive history and generic complexity of the Yahwist story. The Tragedy of Mariam evinces an acute awareness of the Scriptural basis of misogyny, but its generic form also reveals an equally acute awareness of the inadequacy of asserting exegesis either to sustain or challenge Renaissance misogyny. Both the Yahwist story and Cary's text resist attempts to extract a generic definition of woman; just as Eve's original story remains indeterminate, so Renaissance woman embodies a multiplicity of meanings that cannot be contained within a definitive interpretation.

## Chapter Three

### Wrong Constructions and Best Interpretations: Narrating Woman's Tragedy in Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum

The central poem of Aemilia Lanyer's Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum is an imaginative retelling of Christ's passion that is equally focussed on emphasizing the merits of both biblical and Renaissance women.[48] Salve Deus foregrounds woman's crucial and exemplary role as the embodiment of Christian virtue and portrays, as Wendy Wall suggests, both Old and New Testament women "as the instruments of God sent out to counter sinful men" (60). Lanyer's plea for gender equality is predicated on reinterpretations of Scripture that show biblical women to be inherently more virtuous than their male counterparts, and the poem ultimately suggests that the crimes committed against Christ are commensurate with those inflicted on Renaissance women.[49]

Like Cary's play, Salve Deus challenges the contemporary misogynistic stereotype by aligning women with Christ; as Wall points out, the volume "details Christ's

---

[48] Lynette McGrath persuasively argues that "[t]he image of Christ is positioned in the midst of this community of women to sanction Lanier's writing function and to validate the self-definition to which she urges herself and the members of her feminine community" ("Metaphoric Subversions" 102).

[49] As Lewalski suggests, Lanyer's collection of verse "is set forth as a comprehensive 'Book of Good Women,' fusing religious devotion and feminism so as to assert the essential harmony of those two impulses" ("Good Women" 207).

virtues in terms of the values prescribed to women in contemporary conduct books--constancy, faith, patience, sobriety, grace, piety, chastity, meekness, obedience" (67). Lanyer depicts woman as antithetical to patristic figurings of Eve and thus demonstrates the fallibility of ideologically motivated and deterministic Scriptural exegesis.

But Lanyer's most forceful challenge to Renaissance misogyny and orthodox exegesis is found in "Eves Apologie," where she reveals the multiplicity of meanings embodied in the Yahwist account of the Fall. Without altering the original story, the apology offers a reading that refutes the notion of Eve's sole culpability. Demonstrating Adam's contributing role in the Fall, the voice of Pilate's wife holds men responsible for the sins of their fathers as women have long been held accountable for Eve's failings.[50] "Eves Apologie" reveals the conventional reliance on biased Scriptural exegesis in Christian doctrine and presents an

---

[50] Though not crucial to this study, it is important to note that Lanyer also reinterprets and draws our attention to classical and historical stories of women. Reversing the assertions of Christian orthodoxy, Lanyer insists that men cause the downfall of women through their lustful scheming: Paris's desire for Helen caused the fall of Troy, Lucrece was brutally raped through no fault of her own, and Rosamund was murdered by Eleanor of Aquitane, jealous of Henry II's desire for her rival (Stanzas 27-29). As McGrath points out, Christian patriarchy conventionally "blames women's beauty for men's downfall," but Lanyer "chastises men for the downfall of beautiful women" ("Feminist Voice" 335). Lanyer argues that it is not women's sexuality that causes innumerable sins, but men's response to their sexuality.

unmistakable and forceful challenge to orthodox interpretation.[51] Rejecting misogynistic readings of the Fall and demonstrating that culpability for human tragedy does not rest solely with Eve or her descendants, Salve Deus affirms both the multiplicity of meanings embodied by the Yahwist story and the transactional impetus of tragedy.

Like many other writers engaged in the woman debate, Lanyer rewrites the Yahwist story in support of her argument. But her choice to write a narrative account of Christ's passion is rather unique; as Shuger points out, there were only a "dozen or so passion narratives published in England between 1550 and 1650," a figure that includes translations (Bible 89). By the sixteenth century, Shuger argues, the story of the Passion in a largely Calvinist culture had become what she describes as "end myth." No longer assuming the cultural significance it held in the Middle Ages and concomitantly subject to fewer reworkings, as an end myth the Passion story "does not validate traditional symbols but discloses their inadequacy to provide moral coherence, stable boundaries between right and wrong, strategies for escaping dread" (Bible 90). Thus the Passion narrative, like the Yahwist story, clearly held subversive potential, and Shuger's description of end myth's

---

[51] As Lewalski suggests, "Lanyer's biblical exegesis would have been outrageous (by contemporary standards), and she may have intended the shock to underscore the susceptibility of the biblical narratives to very different interpretations" (Writing Women 231).

destabilizing function is not inaptly applied to the story of the Fall.

Moreover, Lanyer's rereading of the Old Testament story within her rewriting of Christ's passion underscores the tragic similarity of the two stories, illustrating what Shuger describes as "a similar tendency in the Renaissance for traditional stories to acquire simultaneously tragic form and psychological complexity" (Bible 90). The story of Christ's passion is unquestionably tragic, and Lanyer's account exemplifies the mimetic effects particular to tragedy; as described by Aristotle, "[tragic] mimesis is not only [a mimesis] of a full-grown action but also of [events] terrifying and pitiful" (85). And the alignment of Christ with women suggests that the Saviour's tragedy is also woman's, and the tragic nature of female experience within an oppressively patriarchal and misogynistic culture is clearly asserted in "Eves Apologie."

Speaking in defense of both Christ and Eve, Pilate's wife reinterprets the Yahwist story within the primary account of Christ's passion, and the merging of the two narratives further emphasizes the parallel between women and Christ.[52] Positing her argument through the voice of Pilate's wife, who speaks in protest of a reprehensible act for which she is clearly and wholly blameless, Lanyer

---

[52] As McGrath argues, "She [Eve] and He are both members of the same women's community bonded together in and with this eucharistic poem" ("Metaphoric Subversions" 106).

stresses the tremendous difference between women's ambiguous faults and men's unquestionable crimes. Tellingly, the poem's only clearly identifiable dramatic voice is deployed in support of its most overt and forceful argument on behalf of the female sex.

The poem's generic shift from narrative to dramatic monologue occurs at the most crucial and urgent moment of Lanyer's defence of her sex, and the voice of Pilate's wife is explicitly multivocal.[53] Eve does not speak for herself in the poem, but the conflation of Eve's voice with that of Pilate's wife is both strategic and effective. Pilate's wife speaks for all women, and the temporal distance that is assumed to lie between the Fall and the Crucifixion (and between both of these events and the Renaissance) underscores the similarity of female experience, an experience that has been unquestionably shaped by interpretations of the Fall.[54]

---

[53] W. Gardner Campbell agrees, observing that Lanyer "achieves and uses to great effect a complex fusion of voices at the center of the Salve Deus" (1).

[54] Indeed, Eve and Pilate's wife have more in common than Lanyer explicitly suggests. Campbell's brief survey of literary representations of Pilate's wife, named Procula, outlines the polarity of her representation. Her alternative characterizations, which "do not coexist" in medieval literature, are "the good Procula, one whose intervention on Christ's behalf testified to her virtue and Christ's innocence, or the bad Procula, who very nearly undoes the necessary work of redemption" (7). The "bad Procula," Campbell points out, is often conflated with the figure of Eve. Lanyer, then, works to redeem both Procula and Eve from damning representations that are equally dependent on interpretation and ideological motivation.

"Eves Apologie" affirms the pathos-as-praxis evinced by the Yahwist story. Pilate's wife insists that Eve cannot be held solely responsible for the Fall, for she was "simply good, and had no powre to see/ The after-comming harme" (765-66) or any malicious intent on the part of the serpent. Adam, however, freely choosing to eat of the fruit from Eve's hand,

> . . .was most too blame;
> What Weaknesse offerd, Strength might have refusde,
> Being Lord of all, the greater was his shame.
> (778-80)

Eve's "fault though great" (788) is not the sole impetus of the story's pathos; the tragic action is incomplete without the contributing actions of both Adam and the serpent. Though the apology insists on an uneven distribution of culpability, it is clear that Lanyer recognizes the transactional nature of the story's tragedy; Eve is accounted less blameable than Adam, but her contributing role in the Fall is nonetheless acknowledged.

But Lanyer's strategy is somewhat troubling to the feminist reader; Pilate's wife's argument is predicated on the orthodox premise that Eve's secondary creation determined her prelapsarian ontological inferiority. And Pilate's wife also speaks within and from a male tradition of Passion narratives that are "structured by the gendered antithesis of weakness and power" (Shuger, Bible 126). Moreover, the apology offers its own definitive interpretation of the Yahwist story, thus challenging

Pilate's wife's simultaneous recognition of the instability inherent in the absolutist interpretations of Christian orthodoxy.

But the speech of Pilate's wife evinces what Pearce describes as "a stylization or parody of the authoritative word" (65), and the apology's ideological appropriation is subversive. By affirming the weakness of "poore Eve" (784), the dialogic voice of Pilate's wife enables her narrative's pathos. Strategically, the narrative voice that dominates Salve Deus is momentarily displaced to find its support in a more overtly polyphonic voice, one whose multivocal layering more effectively illustrates both the contradictions inherent in orthodox interpretations of the Fall and the common tragedy of female experience.

With Bakhtin's notion of the inherent ideological subversiveness of dialogism in mind, the apology's affirmation of misogyny's interpretation-dependent premise is unquestionably strategic. Affirming Eve's secondary role, the voice of Pilate's wife turns a tenet of Christian orthodoxy against itself, deploying it as a means of redistributing human culpability for the Fall; Adam's sin, the poem insists, must accordingly be worse, for he succumbed to a weaker woman, "No subtill Serpents falshood did betray him" (799). And by agreeing that Eve's secondary creation affirms her ontological inferiority and necessary subordination, the apology shows that this patristic

proposition fails to support its own misogynistic conclusion that Eve is solely to blame for human misery.[55]

Like the exponents of Christian orthodoxy, Pilate's wife appropriates the Yahwist story to affirm symbolically a divinely ordained sexual hierarchy, but she uses it to express the tragic complexities of female experience. The orthodox notion of Eve's secondary creation and culpability for the Fall as the determinate of her necessary subordination belies Pilate's wife's inner experience, an experience that does not support the notion of woman's ontological or even postlapsarian moral inferiority and consequently cannot affirm woman's subordination.

Pilate's wife goes on to reiterate her assertion that Adam's sin is greater than Eve's. Pointing out that Adam's fault is greater also because he defied God's "strait command" (787), Pilate's wife rather paradoxically suggests that Eve did not defy God when she ate of the forbidden tree. Though this assertion is somewhat problematic, it is

---

[55] Lanyer, like Speght, Sowernam, and Munda assumes that Eve's ontological inferiority was determined at her creation. Speght, however, advocates maintaining the hierarchy; woman's (and man's) unruliness would be largely corrected "if men would remember the duties they are to perform in being heads, some would not stand a tip-toe as they do" (72). Conversely, Lanyer pleads for a new social order based on gender equality: "Your fault beeing greater, why should you disdaine/ Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?" (829-30). In other words, Speght sees man's failure to fulfill his role as "the head" as an important cause of the Fall and Renaissance social disorder, while Lanyer argues that both the Fall and the Passion demonstrate that man is neither deserving of nor equal to the superior position.

important to note that the Genesis story explicitly states that Adam was warned by God not to eat of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17) before God decided to create "a help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18). It is clear that Eve knew of the prohibition, replying to the serpent's temptation with the assertion that "the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it" (Genesis 3:3), but it is unclear whether Eve received this command directly from God or second-hand from Adam. The latter interpretation, which suggests that Eve doubted and defied her husband, not God directly, is evidently the one Lanyer accepted.

Pilate's wife suggests that Adam, having received the command straight from God, should have been firmer in his resolve: "Gods holy word ought all his actions frame" (782). As a result of Adam's more concrete knowledge, the apology suggests a tragedy that is greater for Eve than for Adam. Aristotle, in defining the four variations of the tragic nexus, suggests that the weakest form of pathos occurs when the characters "do [the deed] [knowingly]"[56], and that a more effective variation arises "[. . .where the deed] is done in ignorance, but realising [what was involved] when the deed has been done" (105). And the apology clearly

---

[56] Though Aristotle identifies a weaker version where the character "is knowingly to intend [the deed] and not to carry it through," this variation is ultimately "not tragic because there is no pathos [i.e. no tragic act]" (103-5).

suggests that Eve's ignorance was greater than Adam's: Eve "had no powre to see,/ The after-comming harme" (765-66), but Adam knew the consequence of disobeying God's command, "The breach whereof he knew was present death" (788). Though this distinction is a departure from the Yahwist story, which makes it clear that both Adam and Eve understand that death is the price of disobedience (Genesis 2:17, 3:3), unlike Eve, Adam knows beyond any potential doubt that the command came directly from God, and he chooses to ignore it in favour of a mere woman's offering.

Exposing the crucial flaw in the reasoning of patristic and misogynistic exegetes, Pilate's wife effectively uses woman's secondary creation and consequent imperfect knowledge to absolve Eve of sole and greater blame for the Fall. Though much more prevalent in literature and popular culture and subject to more constant ideological appropriation, the story of the Fall recounted by Pilate's wife assumes a similar "end myth" status as the Passion narrative, which, Shuger points out,

> tends to appropriate the symbols of social order for the articulation of the psyche; myth becomes a language for registering the recesses and complexities of inner experience.
> (Bible 90)

The Calvinist passion narratives, Shuger suggests, are analogous to the tragedies of Euripides, which can be seen as end myths that "dramatize crumbling cultural values and ambiguous intimations about both social and cosmic

intelligibility" (Bible 90). "Eves Apologie" and the larger narrative of Salve Deus similarly dramatize the unintelligibility of a social and cosmic order constructed by orthodox exegetes, whose willful misreading precipitates woman's tragedy. And Lanyer, beginning with Adam, reveals the deterioration of social and cultural values as the inevitable result of subscription to a masculinist order, identifying male hegemony as the primary cause of the greatest injustices in Judeo-Christian history.[57]

The apology contrasts the virtue of more innocent women with the evil acts of men; Pilate's wife chastizes her husband's role in condemning Christ, insisting that "This sinne of yours, surmounts them all as farre/ As doth the Sunne, another little starre" (823-24) and that the original sin of Eve pales by comparison.[58] Yet within Christian theology, this assertion is enormously contradictory. It is only Christ's death, we are told, that allows for salvation: "His pretious blood is that which must redeeme" (1302), and all earthly remedies "cannot save without his powrefull

---

[57] Susanne Woods makes a similar assertion and points out that Lanyer, like other Renaissance defenders of women, depicts "Eve's lesser knowledge and Adam's knowing acceptance of disobedience" but "uses this argument and extends it, concluding that male culpability in the death of Christ far outweighs Eve's tragic misunderstanding" (xxxvi-vii).

[58] Or, in Lewalski's words, the apology uses "the Fall and Passion stories to weigh the characteristic sin of women (excessive love) against that of men (violence)" (Writing Women 231).

might" (1304), but Lanyer is not unaware of Christianity's primary contradiction.

The problem is anticipated early in the poem, and Lanyer reveals the paradox in two short lines: "We by Adams fall;/ Meere Cast-awaies, raised by a Judas kisse" (259-60). Later, she acknowledges that full understanding and resolution of this paradox is not within her, or anyone else's, grasp:

> O wonder, more than man can comprehend,
> Our Joy and Griefe both at one instant fram'd,
> Compounded: Contrarieties contend
> Each to exceed, yet neither to be blam'd.
> (1217-20)

The Crucifixion is an oxymoronic "joyfull sorrow" (912), and salvation that is possible only because of sin is not a contradiction created by Lanyer, it is one created by Christianity.[59] And the paradox of the Passion is not much different from that of the Fall, a tale that has been variously read as a story of human freedom and as affirmation of human bondage.[60]

---

[59] Lanyer demonstrates Shuger's assertion that in Renaissance Passion narratives "[t]he agony of Christ becomes a locus for the articulation of strange desires and moral uncertainties, disclosing rather than resolving cultural paradoxes" (Bible 90).

[60] Pagels's study, summarized in her introduction, contrasts early Christian interpretations of the Fall with Augustine's: "Most Jews and Christians had agreed that God gave humankind in creation the gift of moral freedom, and that Adam's misuse of it brought death upon his progeny. But Augustine went further: Adam's sin not only caused our mortality but cost us our moral freedom, irreversibly corrupted our experience of sexuality. . .and made us incapable of genuine political freedom" (xxvi). Campbell

But this apparent theological contradiction does not mean that these stories are not tragic; tragedy can have both catastrophic and prosperous endings, and Aristotle "shows no general preference for the tragedy that ends catastrophically over the tragedy that ends in prosperity" (Whalley 78).[61] Though it is difficult to reconcile the proposition that Pilate's sin "surmounts them all" with the conclusion that this "sin" ultimately saved humanity, this tension does not compromise Salve Deus's recognition of the tragic nature of both the Fall and Passion stories.

Christ and woman are clearly united through their similarly tragic suffering; drawing a parallel with Christ's "suffring for all the sinnes of all th'earth" (1261), Pilate's wife laments an exegetical tradition long determined to "lay the fault on Patience backe,/ That we

---

also suggests that Lanyer gestures toward the idea of a fall more fortunate than she explicitly suggests: "the figure of Pilate's wife represents Lanyer's shrewd rewriting of the ancient doctrine of the felix culpa or fortunate fall, a doctrine nowhere mentioned in the Salve Deus but teasingly implicit in Lanyer's defense of womankind" (4).

[61] Aristotle's two favourite tragedies, Oedipus Tyrannus and Iphigenia at Tauris, have very different endings; the latter ends with Iphigenia's recognition of Orestes and their escape from the island. Unlike in Oedipus, "[. . .where the deed] is done in ignorance, but realising [what was involved] when the deed has been done" (105), Iphigenia exemplifies what Aristotle defines as the best variation of the tragic nexus, where "the deed is averted after the initiating ignorance has been converted to 'realisation' in 'recognition'" (Whalley 104). Nothing can change the tragedy effected by Orestes' earlier deed of matricide, but the reconciliation of brother and sister shows that tragedy can have a prosperous ending, despite and perhaps because of the pathos that has come before.

(poore women) must endure it all" (85). Christ and woman suffer mutually on behalf of all humanity; both are persecuted by and suffer at the hands of more powerful men, and their mutual oppression and consequent suffering contribute to the Passion's tragic climax. As Aristotle suggests, pathos is an act, and pathos and praxis are inextricably entwined in both Pilate's wife's and Christ's stories.

Pilate's wife exemplifies what Whalley calls the "pathos-action paradox" (90). Aristotle shows that pathos is both suffered and inflicted; effected by her own suffering in an oppressively misogynistic world, Pilate's wife's failure to prevent the Crucifixion partly precipitates Christ's tragedy. Her failure, like the Passion story itself, is paradoxical: as Campbell astutely points out, "Pilate's wife finds her present moral strength through her original defeat, for had she been successful in preventing the Crucifixion she would have blocked humanity's redemption" (4). Both Christ and Pilate's wife thus offer redemption through what appears to be merely ineffectiveness, an act of pathos that is, in the latter's case, enabled by orthodox readings of the Fall that insist it is folly to harken unto the voice of woman.

The Crucifixion, the overarching pathos of Christian history, draws together the tragedy of both women and Christ. Praxis, Whalley affirms, is "distinct from the

separate pragmata (events) of which the praxis is composed" (90), and part of the pragmata that comprise the tragic action are Christ's and women's tragic suffering. Their shared and similar pathos is the impetus of their mutual failure to stop the action. The ineffectiveness of Pilate's wife's speech thus becomes an act that, like Christ's apparent passivity, enables the most significant event of Christian history. Indeed, the Passion may very well be the paradigmatic enactment of the pathos-action paradox; both suffering and choosing to suffer, Christ's pathos is an act that precipitates the tragedy with the most prosperous of endings.

This notion of pathos-as-praxis as enabling the ultimately fortunate tragedy also lies at the heart of "Eves Apologie." The dramatic voice of Pilate's wife affirms the tragic consequences of the Fall, yet at the same time lauds its prosperous ending: human knowledge, the apology insists, exists only because of the actions of Eve, "Yet Men will boast of Knowledge, which he tooke/ From Eves faire hand, as from a learned Booke" (807-8).[62] And, as Walker points out, "Lanyer draws attention to the contradictions of ideology in which woman is condemned for Eve's fault. . .while men take pride in the knowledge that originates in her action" (122). In Salve Deus, the gifts

---

[62] As Lewalski suggests, "[b]y taking the name of the Tree of Knowledge literally, Lanyer makes knowledge the gift of Eve or woman" (Writing Women 231).

of knowledge and human salvation are realized in an ongoing tragedy perpetuated by the pathos-action paradox evinced by both Eve and Pilate's wife. Woman's shared pathos forms a tragic nexus that contributes to the praxis of Christ's tragedy, but their roles in both the Fall and the Crucifixion also allow for the prosperous ends of intellectual enlightenment and spiritual redemption.

The dramatic voice of Pilate's wife is the centerpiece of Salve Deus, embodying a multiplicity of voices whose contradictions work subversively to undermine absolutist readings of biblical tragedy. Though appearing to offer its own authoritarian reading of the Yahwist story, "Eves Apologie" ultimately reveals the indeterminacy of the original text, illustrating that the multivocal tale can readily conform to an interpretation that places greater blame on Adam just as patristic and misogynistic exegesis has conventionally attributed greater culpability to Eve.

And the incorporation of the Yahwist's tragedy within the larger narrative of Christ's passion underscores their tragic similarity and their mutuality, illustrating Whalley's description of pathos as paradoxically "both pregnant and determinate, the beginning of a process" (90). Embodying both the greatest of tragedies and the greatest promise for humanity, the stories of the Fall and the Crucifixion similarly mark both an end and a beginning. The multiplicity of causes precipitating both the Fall and the

Passion remain unresolved and the stories' endings are yet unrealized. The dialogic text of "Eves Apologie" affirms the tragic and the ongoing nature of both biblical stories, and the open-ended poem's resulting indeterminacy is generically enabled.

Yet the bulk of Salve Deus, as critics have not failed to note, is not inaptly described as narrative polemic. And Lanyer's narrative seems unambiguous; intently and clearly imparted, the poem appears to present an unequivocally idealized construction of woman that counters Renaissance assertions of woman's ontological inferiority.[63] But Lanyer's purposeful narrative is not entirely monologic; like "Eves Apologie," the larger poem embodies a multiplicity of voices that ultimately destabilize the ideological stance the narrative ostensibly embodies.

Salve Deus is prefaced by an address "To the Vertuous Reader," a discussion that reveals the central concerns of the poem that follows. The assertive and insistent tone of the preface typifies the narrative voice found in the poem proper. In her quest to undermine the male voices of Christian orthodoxy, Lanyer adamantly asserts her own authoritarian interpretation of woman's nature, an interpretation that relies heavily on refuting antecedent exegesis. The preface embodies an intent and seemingly

---

[63] Beilin avers that Lanyer's volume imparts "a single-minded, fervent argument for the importance of women's virtue" (Redeeming 180).

monologic voice whose narrative reveals an overt commitment to its own counter ideology, a commitment equally apparent in the poem that follows.

Lanyer's poem will engage in the contemporary woman debate, refuting the "powers of ill speaking" and challenging the prevalent notion that woman's speech is inherently harmful, a claim "which men I hope unjustly lay to their charge" (48).[64] Christian orthodoxy, Lanyer insists, has perpetuated an erroneous reading of woman's nature through its "ill speaking" predicated on biased interpretation. But the poem will appeal to the sensibilities of her readers, who will "cherish, nourish, and increase the least sparke of virtue where they find it, by their favourable and best interpretations, than quench it by wrong constructions" (50), inspiration that will come from her collation of legends of good women and her depiction of the importance of women to Christ.

"[E]vill disposed men" (48) generate "wrong constructions" of women and perpetuate their tragic oppression; slander, Lanyer suggests, is the greatest of all evils and is the fault of men. All women, Lanyer insists,

> deserve not to be blamed though some
> forgetting they are women themselves,
> and in danger to be condemned by the

---

[64] Or, in Lewalski's words, "the epistle makes a brief but forceful contribution to the querelle des femmes, that centuries-old controversy over women's inherent worthiness or faultiness which Rachel Speght was soon to address in her polemic against Swetnam" (Writing Women 225).

> words of their owne mouths, fall into so great an errour, as to speake unadvisedly against the rest of their sex. (48)

Many women, Lanyer also suggests, have too easily accepted the tenets of Christian orthodoxy; in an assertion that illustrates the pathos-as-praxis inherent in woman's ongoing tragedy, Lanyer affirms that women actively help to perpetuate their own pathos. Salve Deus insists that women are models of Christian virtue, yet destabilizes this assertion by pointing out that women are also guilty of the (male) sin of slander. Lanyer, it seems, recognizes what she describes as an erroneous construction of woman's nature more than she overtly admits. The preface conflates in women opposing qualities that the poem purports to be gender exclusive, offering a portrait of woman that has more mundane applications than Salve Deus's otherworldly depiction seems to suggest.

Despite Lanyer's repeated assertions that women emulate and embody Christ's passivity, Salve Deus similarly belies the very assertions her Scriptural rewriting aims to uphold. This compromise of Lanyer's idealized depiction of women is revealed in the opening stanzas of the poem. Salve Deus begins by lavishing overtly idealizing praise on the Countess, who possesses a "Mind so perfect by thy Maker fram'd" (41). And, unlike Eve, the Countess is immune to Satanic wiles, "Respecting not the infinite annoyes/ That Satan to thy well-staid mind can show" (37-38). Lanyer

insists that the Countess was created perfect and is thus able to resist Satan's assaults, an assertion that suggests the Countess's moral fortitude exceeds that of Eve; though Lanyer uses feminine weakness as a defence in "Eves Apologie," her idealized Countess apparently does not share Eve's ontological inferiority.

The Countess, it seems, affirms Pilate's wife's assertion that women embody the ideal of Christian virtue. Yet an important part of the composite virtue of woman lies in the ideal of forgiveness; women, Pilate's wife insists, will not "glory in Mens fall" (759) and long only for gender equality, not female hegemony: "let us have our Libertie againe" (825), she pleads, and not "disdaine/ Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny" (830). Yet the poem's opening stanzas contradict the dramatic voice's later assertions.

Quickly moving from exaltation of the Countess's superlative Christian virtue to apocalyptic prophesying, Lanyer depicts a Christ who is not humble, meek, and mild on Judgement Day, when

> Consuming fire shall goe before in streames,
> And burne up all his en'mies round. (99-100)

Lanyer's depiction of Judgement Day contradicts her later insistence that Christ "hates Revenge. . .His paths are Peace" (601-3). In a work that depicts woman and the Saviour as almost one, Lanyer's prediction of apocalyptic

reprisals against the enemies of Christ is by implication a forecast of vengeance against the wrongs done to women.[65]

The poem then takes up a more worldly polemic against slander: "woe to them that double-hearted bee,/ Who with their tongues the righteous Soules doe slay" (105-6). Slanderers, the poem insists, will pay for their sins:

> The Lord wil roote them out that speak prowd things,
> Deceitfull tongues are but false Slanders wings.
> (111-12)

Lanyer's insistence that Christ will enact vengeance on his own and woman's behalf destabilizes the poem's simultaneous portrayal of the ideal and clearly feminized virtues represented by both Christ and women. The poem's "best interpretations" aligning woman's inherent humility, meekness, and patience with that of the Saviour are destabilized by Christ's embodiment of a violence that the poem otherwise genders masculine.

But this apparent contradiction reaffirms Aristotle's view of pathos as both suffered and inflicted. Christ is also persecuted by unrighteous tongues, and his tragedy is precipitated by slanderous and unbridled speech that comes even from his disciples: "Peter, he was most too

---

[65] Woods points out that Satan's "infinite annoyes" refer also to "the trouble Margaret continued to have from relatives, judges, and courtiers as she sought to secure her daughter Anne's inheritance from Margaret's late husband" (52 n.37). Though the Clifford women's struggle provides the inspiration for the poem and Lanyer's support for their cause is implicit throughout the volume, Salve Deus also speaks for all women as the victims of patriarchal oppression and secular injustice.

blame,/. . .His forward speech inflicted sinne and shame" (355-57) and is unjustly charged by the "tongues impure" (664) of "false accusers" (691). The accusers of Christ, like those who slander women, devise "wrong constructions" through inept and biased interpretation:

> They tell his Words, though farre from his intent,
> And what his Speeches were, not what he meant.
> (655-56)

Christ and women are tragic victims of false speech, yet their apparent passivity does not mean that they will continue to bear their suffering eternally without responding to and redressing the erroneous interpretation that precipitates their tragedy.

In Salve Deus, women actively react both to and within pathos through their recognition of the tragic implications of their own and Christ's experience; as Lorna Hutson has shown, the climax of the poem is figured "as a drama of interpretation, in which women elicit radiance and meaning from the event which had remained mute and indecipherable to masculine exegesis" (170). Christ's tragedy is rightly comprehended only by the female witnesses who, unlike the "spightfull men" (993), know "how much they did transgresse" (995). Women are able to interpret the biblical stories with an accuracy antithetical to the erroneous readings of their male persecutors, and, as Baxter suggests, without a moment of recognition involving "some degree of imaginative realization of the pathos and the praxis, and of both

together, there is no tragedy" (xxvi). The daughters of Jerusalem experience the tragic recognition that eludes the persecuting men. This ability to recognize the true nature of tragedy is shared by Renaissance woman; in Salve Deus, we are told, the Countess will both find and understand Christ's "true and perfect storie" (1332), similarly attaining the anagnorisis required to make the tragedy intelligible. The mutuality of Christ's and woman's tragedy is affirmed by their shared recognition and embodiment of pathos-as-praxis, the tragic paradox that is a means to a glorious and yet unrealized end.

Lanyer aims for her audience also to recognize the tragic paradox inherent in the female experience. Suggesting that all women inherently embody the Christian ideal, Lanyer expresses her prefatory hope that her audience of "all virtuous Ladies and Gentlewomen of this kingdome" will be inspired to prove false the moral insufficiency men "unjustly lay to their charge" (48). The preface pleads for a virtuous female solidarity in the face of shared persecution; Lanyer calls for recognition and reenactment of the pathos-as-praxis that precipitates a prosperous ending. Indeed, Lanyer's wish seems realized in the final poem of the collection, "The Description of Cooke-ham." In Cookeham, a community of idealized women find an idyllic, though temporary, retreat from the corrupt and violent masculine world.

In this second Eden, women happily coexist with nature, and no man intervenes to disturb the tranquillity; as Woods suggests, the poem contrasts "an idyllic natural order with a fallen human civilization" (xl). Cookeham is a paradise untainted by the vices of men, a place where women realize their full potential as models of virtue.[66] In what is perhaps the first country house poem, Lanyer describes an Edenic paradise of woman, far removed from the court and worldly concerns.[67]

The poem depicts the idealized and exalted Countess as analogous to Eve. The Countess enjoys a paradisical relationship with the natural world that is enabled by nature's recognition of her superior feminine virtues: flora "Set forth their beauties then to welcome" (34) and the hills are "Glad that they could receive so rich a prise" (38). As Lewalski suggests, these lines affirm Cookeham as the picture of Eden; like Jonson's, Lanyer's poem depicts an accommodating natural world that embodies an "obsequiousness like that of the Penshurst fish and game offering themselves

---

[66] As Lewalski points out, "[t]his poem gives mythic dimension to Lanyer's dominant concerns throughout the volume: this lost Eden was a female paradise and as such an ageless, classless society" (Writing Women 237).

[67] Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" has conventionally been designated as the first English country house poem, but which poem was composed first remains undetermined. Lewalski points out that "'Cooke-ham' may have been written before Jonson's 'To Penshurst,' published in 1616 but from the reference to Prince Henry (1.77) obviously written before his death in November 1612" (Writing Women 234).

to capture. . .The birds and animals sport before her--only slightly more timorous than they would have been with Eve" (Writing Women 238). Though recognizing the estate as a second Eden, Lewalski also rightly acknowledges that the Countess's relationship with nature is not and cannot be the same as prelapsarian Eve's.

Yet Lewalski's comparison nonetheless needs refinement; the fish and game of Cookeham may be obsequious, but they do not offer themselves to capture as Lewalski suggests: the Countess raises her weapon, and the animals "fearfull of the Bowe in your faire Hand,/ Would runne away when you did make a stand" (51-52). Lanyer's description of woman's relationship with nature is not precisely antithetical to Jonson's, but the depiction of fish and game as both obsequious and fearful depicts a paradise more compromised than Lewalski suggests, one where the realities of the fallen world that lies beyond Cookeham's boundaries necessarily intrude. Though the Countess serves as a model of woman's distinctly feminine prelapsarian and contemporary virtue, she nonetheless brings the taint of the actual world that lies beyond the womanly paradise.

Lanyer proposes that women can find an idyllic solidarity when isolated in harmony away from the violence inherent in a patriarchal society, insisting that women are far better equipped to live in imitation of a clearly feminized Christ whose "perfect path was faire humilitie"

(1710). Yet the poem also demonstrates a masculine aggression that disturbs the paradise of women, a disruption that is enacted and brought into the feminine world by the Countess herself. The poem's demonstrations thus challenge its assertions; as in Salve Deus, the Countess's momentary embodiment of an aggressive violence that is elsewhere resolutely gendered male destabilizes the poem's overt insistence on a rigid and exclusively feminine nature.

Throughout her volume, Lanyer overtly argues on behalf of a contrasting and superior feminine morality, yet Salve Deus is much more ambiguous about the inherent nature of woman than it explicitly suggests. The Countess and the feminized Christ represent the ideal of virtue in passivity, yet they also represent a potential for active violence that Lanyer purports to attribute exclusively to the male sex. And Eve and Pilate's wife, though not solely culpable for human tragedy, are nonetheless compromised by the latter's affirmation of woman's ontological inferiority and the paradoxes and polarities inherent in both their stories.[68] Though Lanyer's argument is predicated on her expressed

---

[68] Campbell concludes that Pilate's wife "represents both orthodoxy and heterodoxy, a traditionally virtuous and traditionally laughable woman, one who in the culture of Jacobean England was so polarized a figure as to present Lanyer with a difficult polemical and artistic decision" and suggests that "Lanyer's audience--fit though perhaps few--might have recognized Lanyer's admission of Procula's polarities" (12). Campbell's description of a polarized Procula who represents both orthodoxy and heterodoxy seems equally applicable to Eve.

belief in woman's moral superiority, the poem ultimately affirms the instability of any definitive interpretation of female nature.

Lanyer's narrative overtly challenges the faulty interpretation that leads to the wrong construction of both Christ and woman, yet the narrative's competing voices and multiple tragic formulations destabilize its own constructions. Like Cary's play, Lanyer's work is filled with contradictions, contradictions that serve in part to reveal the ones inherent in Christian orthodoxy. Yet at the same time, Lanyer appropriates the rhetoric of a conventional Scriptural hermeneutic, asserting her own authoritarian reading of the inherent nature of woman. Though Lanyer tends to assert her argument rather than consistently demonstrate it through clearly objective interpretations of Scripture, the contradictions apparent in her verse also reveal an implicit and perhaps unconscious awareness of the instability of any authoritarian interpretation.

In a work whose assertions seem undone almost as readily as they are made, the competing voices of Lanyer's verse exhibit the influence of a dual system of belief; despite her insistent and forceful argument, Lanyer demonstrates that interpretive truth is much more complex and ambiguous than she explicitly acknowledges. Ultimately, her work reveals the inadequacy of asserting exegesis to

sustain unequivocally both damning and idealizing constructions of woman. Arguably, Lanyer overstates her case in defense of women, an overstatement that perhaps aims to attain through the force of hyperbole a compromise, an equalization of gender that might not be realized in less certain terms. And, despite its many assertions to the contrary, Salve Deus ultimately demonstrates that woman enacts both the pathos and the praxis of humanity's ongoing tragedy, a tragedy both catastrophic and prosperous whose sufferers and inflicters are not gender specific.

## Chapter Four

## "Such favor I unworthy am voutsaf't": Narrative Assertion and Dramatic Demonstration in Paradise Lost

John Milton's Paradise Lost is English literature's paradigmatic reimagining of the Fall. Milton's magnum opus has accumulated a vast body of literary criticism revealing a longstanding and lively debate on many topics that shows no sign of abating. Though never neglected in Milton criticism, one of the more lively discussions in recent years involves the poem's treatment of Eve. Attempting either to establish or disprove Milton's misogyny, feminist analyses of Paradise Lost range from Diane McColley's thorough and celebratory study illustrating Eve's crucial prelapsarian role in Eden to Sandra Gilbert's argument averring that the poem's irredeemable misogyny is inseparable from its overt endorsement of a patriarchal hierarchy.[69] With the polarity of critical opinion and the energy manifested by this twentieth-century woman debate in mind, it seems safe to say that critical consensus on Eve's role and Milton's view of woman has not and perhaps never will be realized.

---

[69] Mary Nyquist aptly describes the polarity of feminist arguments: "The Milton of this debate is either appealed to as the patron saint of the companionate marriage and of the delicately imagined feminine sensibility, or stands darkly towering over us, the prototypical patriarch, the bad father of us all, and all our woe" ("Losing" 181).

This lack of feminist consensus is significantly attributable to the poem's multiplicity of genres. Paradise Lost encompasses a range of literary forms that reflect the scope of its "great argument" and illustrate "Milton's awareness that he can only see and tell of things invisible by using the familiar forms which literary art supplies to his own imagination and that of his readers" (Lewalski, Literary Forms 8). The poem's generic inclusiveness reflects the tremendous ambition inherent in Milton's attempt to justify the ways of God to men and also suggests an intent to appeal to an equally inclusive audience, from humanist scholar to orthodox Christian. But, as Shuger has shown, these terms are not mutually exclusive, and the poem's inscription of the absolutist premises of Milton's theology within a work that draws heavily on epic and classical conventions epitomizes the contradictory habits of thought Shuger perceptively identifies.

C.Q. Drummond, drawing on Auerbach's comparison of the striking differences between classical and biblical narrative, argues that the poem's mix of genres creates contradictory demands that are highly problematic. The problem, Drummond suggests,

> is not that there are flaws in the Genesis account, but that the literary mode of those two chapters [Genesis 2-3] is so strikingly antagonistic to the mode of the classical epic in which Milton chose to cast the enlarged story. ("Antagonistic Styles" 40)

In his persistent quest for Scriptural truth, Milton deploys a rational humanist hermeneutic to reinterpret the Yahwist story, and the conflation of the two incompatible styles in Paradise Lost generates the contradictory demands and resulting tension Drummond describes. Milton rewrites the indeterminate biblical tale within a literary mode that was only believed to be more ambiguous, and the poem's use of classical conventions ultimately affirms the indeterminacy of the Yahwist story. Paradoxically, Paradise Lost's humanist influence destabilizes deterministic exegesis by ultimately demonstrating that biblical narrative embodies greater interpretive possibilities than classical epic.

Paradise Lost's mix of genres reflects a dual system of belief; human understanding, as Raphael confirms to Adam, can be "Discursive, or Intuitive" (V.488). Though the angels are more receptive to the instantaneous intuitive understanding Raphael describes while humanity is more inclined to seek truth through discursive argument, Raphael suggests that these means of attaining knowledge are interdependent and equally worthy:

> . . .discourse
> Is oftest yours, the latter most is ours,
> Differing but in degree, of kind the same.
> (V.488-90)

The poem employs both means of communicating its meaning, but discursive and intuitive understanding are not as compatible as Raphael seems to believe. As the ongoing feminist debate reveals, these opposing means of discovering

truth are antagonistic and ultimately polarized. The discursive arguments of a classical humanist hermeneutic are often antithetically opposed to those informed by the intuitive assertions of the dogmatic and devout Christian narrator.[70]

Paradise Lost is an intensely dialogic text. Embodying a multiplicity of oppositional voices, the poem's multiple genres form the locus of its irresolvability. As Drummond points out, "[t]he narrative demands of a self-consistent story about believable characters" are antithetically opposed to Milton's simultaneous recognition of "the theological demands of an absolutely and tyrannically true scripture" ("Antagonistic Styles" 50). Especially in the case of Eve, the poem's dramatic demonstrations belie its many narrative assertions, and ultimately the poem resists

---

[70] Marshall Grossman also notes the similarity between intuitive understanding and the narrative assertions that attempt to contain the poem's multiple discursive discourses: "Raphael's discourse, like the epic in which it is embedded, locates truth in a repeating of relations rather than in the specific contents of any given description" (118). But Raphael also attains and communicates understanding through discursive argument, just as Adam and Eve demonstrate their capacity also to understand intuitively. Indeed, Raphael resorts to intuitive assertion when his discursive reasoning fails to uphold his beliefs; as Grossman points out, "Raphael asserts the hierarchy that Adam fears may be insupportable" (123) in the face of Eve's apparent embodiment of all that is "wisest, virtuousest, discreetest best" (VIII.550). Like Raphael, the epic narrator is compelled to assert his intuitive understanding of an immutable sexual hierarchy--an understanding based on intuited belief, not reason--when the poem's dramatic demonstrations threaten to undo or contradict its narrative assertions.

our attempts to sustain a definitive reading of Milton's view of Eve. As in Cary's play and Lanyer's narrative poem, the competing voices of Paradise Lost effectively destabilize orthodox readings of woman's role in the Fall and the polarized interpretations of feminist criticism.

The poem's panoply of voices and seemingly irresolvable contradictions make Milton's overall treatment of Eve highly problematic. Nonetheless, it does seem reasonable to suggest that antifeminist readings of prelapsarian Eve are ultimately unsustainable. Compared with patristic and misogynistic treatments of Eve and in light of Milton's belief that the Bible embodies absolute truth, this poet's depiction of prelapsarian Eve in an overtly patriarchal age is surprisingly egalitarian.[71] Feminist defences of Paradise Lost have shown that Eve's free will, her ability to reason, and her divinely created sufficiency to stand evince a gender equality that challenges our twentieth-

---

[71] As Anne Ferry argues, because of Milton's belief "that the Bible is a record of divinely inspired truth. . .When we question Milton's ways of treating the material of Paradise Lost, we therefore have to take into account the givens, the fixed points of interpretation that he was unavoidably compelled to work around" and acknowledge "how he shaped what he could not change, what decisions he made where some choices were allowed him" (113). Lewalski makes a similar point, suggesting that "[w]e can hardly call Paradise Lost a feminist poem in any modern sense," but it nonetheless "reaches well beyond the cultural norms of Milton's era in representing women's worth, subjectivity, autonomy and values, and in anticipating many feminist concerns" ("Yet Again" 60). In comparison with the shapings of a Christian orthodoxy that asserted woman's ontological moral inferiority, Milton's interpretive choices are remarkable.

century belief that hierarchical orders are necessarily oppressive and denigrating; as Deidre Keenan McChrystal suggests, in Milton's theology, "hierarchical subordination is not synonymous with inferiority" (492). Careful analysis of Eve's role in Eden readily counters feminist readings of the poem that build a case for Milton's misogyny based on prelapsarian Eve.

Perhaps most significant to feminist defences of Paradise Lost is Eve's equal role in discourse. Lewalski argues that Eve is a graceful rhetorician who constructs skillful arguments, and she is also a poet who composes with Adam the poems and praises of God ("Yet Once More" 8).[72] And McColley successfully demonstrates that Eve is a skillful poet and an astute interpreter whose poetic voice encompasses a range of genres, and her study does much to refute the assertions of Milton's feminist critics who read the poem as the poet's absolute endorsement of a masculine monopoly on human achievement.[73] Though, as Marilyn R.

---

[72] Lewalski's observation is supported by McChrystal, who concludes that Eve's prelapsarian voice reveals hers and Adam's "mutual capacities--for truth, wisdom, sanctitude, and freedom--and subordinates all other distinctions. These primal and fundamentally important qualities are not gender specific" (492).

[73] Landy, for example, argues that "for Milton the poet is male, 'creator' and 'author'" and that the poem establishes "the masculine priority over language" (7), an assertion that is readily countered by McColley's argument. McColley persuasively concludes that "Milton gives Eve equal work, equal talent, and equal opportunity for growth and accomplishment" (Eve 129).

Farwell points out, "Milton seems never to tire of telling his reader of Adam's superior mind and of his reflection of God's truth and wisdom" (11), the poem's dramatic demonstrations do not support its narrative assertions.[74] Eve is not shown to be the moral or intellectual inferior of her husband despite the poem's repeatedly expressed belief in an immutable sexual hierarchy.[75] Eve's dramatic voice does much to counter the assertions of the narrator and the arguments of feminist critics intent on proving the poem's irredeemable misogyny.

Redemptive readings of Milton's Eve focus almost exclusively on her prelapsarian characterization, demonstrating that her place in the hierarchy is not

---

[74] The most infamous of these assertions is found in the fourth book, where we first encounter Adam and Eve, who are

> Not equal, as thir sex not equal seem'd;
> For contemplation hee and valor form'd,
> For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
> Hee for God only, shee for God in him.
> (IV.296-99)

But, as Michael Wilding successfully demonstrates, this passage cannot be read as affirming Milton's misogyny. Wilding astutely points out the ambiguity of the passage ("seem'd" is used repeatedly throughout the longer version cited by Wilding) and the fact that this is Satan's fallen view of Adam and Eve. The "inegalitarian, hierarchical, and absolutist paradise" is, in this context, "a Satanic vision" (Wilding 175).

[75] As McColley argues, "however many of Milton's epic voices call Eve 'the inferior,' the poem as a whole gives at least as much praise to qualities often considered 'feminine' as to those considered 'masculine'" ("Sexes" 156).

degrading or antifeminist. The debate centered on prelapsarian Eve weighs heavily in favour of redeeming Milton from charges of misogyny; Lewalski is quite right to suggest that the "old canard that Eve is marred from the outset--fallen before she falls--has been largely laid to rest" ("Yet Again" 55). Indeed, recent scholarship has not only largely exculpated the poet from charges of antifeminism, some Milton critics describe the poet as an early feminist.[76]

Yet critics persist in attempting to identify the precise moment of Eve's lapse into fallen behaviour with the aim of establishing a fatal flaw, such as vanity, that renders her predisposed to succumb to Satan's temptation.[77]

---

[76] Philip J. Gallagher concludes that Milton "is the first great feminist in Western culture" (171). Joseph Wittreich, in his study of early reader reception of Milton's work, suggests that the body of criticism that lies between Milton and the twentieth century has obscured the poem's feminism, and that Paradise Lost can serve as a model for feminist critics: "It is a text that invites and has its own hidden agenda for a feminist criticism that would remove from literary works incrustations of patriarchal interpretation" (x). Though both of these critics do much to rescue the poem from charges of misogyny, Milton's overall treatment of Eve is ultimately more ambiguous than either critic suggests.

[77] Even feminist defenders of Milton subscribe to the notion that Eve is somehow fallen before her act of disobedience. McColley argues that "the fall must occur when her desire for the fruit draws her away from God" and Eve "receives the misinformation that there is wisdom in the fruit" (Eve 194-95), an argument that suggests Eve is flawed before she commits the actual sin. Lewalski suggests that "Milton's tragic hero and heroine fall through hamartia," and though she acknowledges that "Eve's earlier impulses to vanity and Adam's to uxoriousness were not heretofore sinful because they were controlled" (Literary Forms 225-26), this

Despite the success of redemptive readings of prelapsarian Eve, her role in the Fall remains troublesome. Indeed, the egalitarianism affirmed by Milton's depiction of Eve in Eden is rendered problematic by woman's intensified subordination after the Fall, presumably a punishment that fits the purportedly greater extent of her crime and seems to contradict the poem's earlier demonstrations disproving Eve's ontological inferiority. But, as with Paradise Lost's other contradictory positions, Eve's putative culpability for the Fall, an error in judgement that seems to take away all Milton has given her in Paradise, can be redressed by considering the poem's multiple and ultimately destabilizing use of genre.

As critics have not failed to note, Book Nine, the story of the Fall, marks a sudden change in genre that is overtly signalled by the poet: "I now must change/ Those Notes to Tragic" (IX.5-6).[78] Lewalski observes that many

---

assertion contradicts Milton's primary belief that God creates nothing that is not good. Moreover, as we shall see, Lewalski's reading opposes Aristotle's demonstration that tragic protagonists are not and cannot be predisposed to fall.

[78] Mary Nyquist persuasively argues that the poem employs "distinct kinds of dialogue" that notably shift to more clearly identifiable dramatic exchanges in Book Nine: "In Books 4 through 8, where the action is suspended by Paradise Lost's narrative discourse, the unfallen Eve and Adam are given dialogue that is as distant as it can be from the kind of dialogue we tend to think of as dramatic. . .a ceremonial, non-dramatic form of spoken discourse" ("Reading" 202). But, as Lewalski points out, although "the sequence of scenes presenting the Fall and its aftermath is intensely dramatic," it is erroneous to judge "these scenes

readers have noted that "the sequence of scenes presenting the Fall and its aftermath is intensely dramatic--filled with conflict, character development, colloquial dialogue, and a striking peripeteia and discovery" (Literary Forms 220).[79] The books preceding the ninth are dominated by narratives--the narrator's, Satan's, Raphael's, Adam's, Eve's, and even God's--but the shift to tragedy complicates the story, and redemptive readings of Eve consequently become more difficult to sustain.

Eve is the first character to speak after Satan delivers his pained soliloquy. Constructing a reasoned and sensible argument, Eve suggests to Adam that they divide their labours so as not to be distracted when "Looks intervene and smiles, or object new/ Casual discourse draw on" (IX.222-23). Adam praises Eve's thoughtful industry, but rightly points out that their labours are not intended to be "irksome toil" (IX.242). Though agreeing to a short absence, Adam remains fearful of the foe who is likely

---

by purely dramatic criteria. . .This sequence also incorporates the tragic lyric genres of lament, complaint, and elegy, and its several dialogues build toward tragic complication and catastrophe." Nonetheless, it is clear that all of these subgenres are contained within the tragedy, much as "Books Nine and Ten constitute an embedded tragedy within the epic" (Literary Forms 220-21).

[79] Grossman outlines an even more specific likeness to drama, pointing out that Book Nine is comprised of a series of scenes for which "the narrator provides choral comment and stage directions. The book can thus be seen as a 'closet drama' in which the 'unities' are observed and the action is presented in a prologue and five acts" (127).

lurking about. Eve, indignant, perceptively and accurately argues that

> His fraud is then thy fear, which plain infers
> Thy equal fear that my firm Faith and Love
> Can by his fraud be shak'n or seduc't.
> (IX.285-87)

The separation colloquy marks the first occasion of dramatic tension between Adam and Eve, signalling a distinct shift from what Nyquist aptly identifies as "the ceremonial patterns of interchange that have marked their previous conversations" ("Reading" 207). Both Adam and Eve present reasoned and careful arguments, and, paradoxically, both are right.

There is no doubting the validity of Eve's position. The presence of a foe, as she suggests, is no reason for her to curtail her activities; she has always moved freely in the garden before, and, as McColley argues,

> Eve is right: if they allow the enemy to narrow the scope of goodness, he will have won a major victory. . .She trusts that God has made them sufficient to stand, for if he were to expose them to evil without empowering them for good, Eden would be a kind of lie.
> (Eve 177-79)

Moreover, as Mary Jo Kietzman points out, we know from the divorce tracts that Milton's view of the primary end of marriage is "meet and happy conversation," and "by redefining marriage as conversation," Milton "insists that it is an institution that must be regulated by the consciences and the free wills of the involved parties"

(59). Indeed, it would be erroneous for Eve to submit her will to Adam when her conscience, her free will, and her reason tell her otherwise.

The scene manifests an irresolvable tension impelled by opposing but equally worthy arguments; blame for the separation that leads to the Fall cannot be placed solely on either character.[80] Adam's and Eve's dramatic voices are both persuasive and their reasoning manifestly logical and perceptive, a point that challenges Lewalski's suggestion that Adam and Eve "display their weaknesses in this dialogue" (Literary Forms 233). Certainly, the argument evinces a degree of emotionalism that is hitherto unexpressed, but the colloquy nonetheless reveals the couple's equal capacity to construct rational discursive arguments.[81] Though Lewalski does acknowledge that "they do not sin, because they do not here make deliberate choice of evil" (Literary Forms 233), her argument nonetheless points toward the conclusion that Adam and Eve's dialogue reveals that they are somehow predisposed to fall.

---

[80] Nyquist agrees, arguing that "the dramatic nature of the dialogue actively discourages the assignment of blame" ("Reading" 209).

[81] Grossman makes a similar point, positing that "[t]he voice of desire does not make itself heard beneath that of reason because Adam and Eve are already fallen or because they are created imperfect, but because the dispute takes place on the level of the emotions--the argument is about how they feel" (139).

Clearly, the colloquy is a narrative device enabling the separation demanded by the Yahwist story, and Milton must work within the terms of the myth on which his story is based.[82] But Eve is not in error when she disputes Adam's argument and asserts her own will. And when the separation colloquy is considered in light of Eve's representation as Adam's moral and intellectual equal in the earlier books and Milton's firm belief in the right of individuals to be guided by conscience, Eve departs quite unscathed. Contrary to Lewalski's identification of Eve's (and Adam's) "weakness," the separation scene reaffirms Eve's freedom from the constraints of the hierarchy, her ability to reason, and her right to exercise her free will to arrive at

---

[82] Though the Yahwist story does not make the separation explicit, Evans accurately observes that "Eve seems to be alone during the temptation" and "we can only speculate as to how she came to be so" (192). Gallagher points out that Milton decided "with the mainstream exegetical tradition, to orchestrate the temptations of woman and man sequentially and independently" but also notes that McColley, in Milton's Eve 181-82 n.1, "cites representative Renaissance commentators who thought they were seduced together" (64). Milton both follows and rejects antecedent exegesis when he devises his own version of the separation, but it is an event at least implied by the Yahwist story. And Evans goes on to demonstrate that Milton's version is original: though antecedent interpreters devised a number of ways to effect the separation, none of them were satisfactory to Milton. Moreover, Milton does much to address reader foreknowledge which makes us "naturally predisposed to side with Adam in his attempt to dissuade his wife from leaving him," and the poet "went to some lengths to avert it by giving Eve a very persuasive and superficially cogent case for working apart from Adam" (Evans 273). Though Eve's case is not "superficially cogent" as Evans suggests, it is clear that Milton's depiction of the separation differs significantly from antecedent exegesis.

a conclusion with which her conscience is comfortable. Eve is not fatally flawed; she does exactly what the poet demands from every believer.[83]

Adam rightly affirms Eve's absolute freedom to make her own choices, but his response also exacerbates the situation and intensifies Eve's determination to exercise her independent will. Adam, with reservation, finally relents, admonishing Eve to

> Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more;
> Go in thy native innocence, rely
> On what thou hast of virtue, summon all,
> For God towards thee hath done his part, do thine.
> (IX.372-75)

Lewalski perceptively points out that Adam's suggestions that she may succumb to a foe and would be weaker without

---

[83] Lewalski's Aristotelian reading of Book Nine relies heavily on the notion of hamartia as a fatal flaw, and she argues that the poet "associates that primal disobedience with hubris and ingratitude--especially in Eve as she reaches beyond the human condition, aspiring to Godhead" (Literary Forms 225). Lewalski relies on S.H. Butcher's 1895 translation of the Poetics (in Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 4th edition. rpt. New York: Dover, 1951. See Literary Forms 285, n.14), which differs from Whalley's translation of Aristotle. Whalley points out that the "19th century notion of hamartia as a 'moral flaw'. . .was encouraged, perhaps unwittingly, by Butcher and still persists balefully in non-classical criticism." Whalley rightly argues that "[i]f hamartia meant a 'moral flaw,' it would be an integral part of the character and therefore a predictable determinant outside the plot" (94-96). Aristotle's notion of hamartia as defined by Whalley is clearly evident in Paradise Lost; in Milton's theology, Adam and Eve's fall must not and cannot be predetermined by an inherent flaw in their respective natures--to insist that either man or woman is inherently flawed is to negate the free will that is the most crucial premise of Milton's theology.

her husband by her side strengthen Eve's resolve. And Adam's

> repeated imperatives--"Go," "Go," "rely," "do"--produce unintended but intense psychological pressure, making it virtually impossible for Eve now to decide to stay without seeming to back down ignominiously. . .their emotions, imperfectly controlled, have sabotaged the dialogic exchange.
> (Literary Forms 235-36)

Lewalski is quite right to suggest that Adam plays a contributing role in effecting the separation, but her assessment of the degree of emotionalism apparent in the exchange is excessive. Lewalski seems to find fault with the very existence of emotions in perfect humans, but the ability to feel on an emotional level is a distinguishing and crucial feature of humanity. Though Adam and Eve are indeed arguing monologically for their respective points of view, their conviction is reasoned and, considering the extent of that conviction, their emotions are remarkably controlled. Ultimately, an important discursive and emotional transaction takes place in the separation scene.

In this crucial scene of the tragic act, Milton makes it perfectly clear that culpability for the separation is indeterminate; through their exchange, both Adam and Eve precipitate the tragedy's forward movement.[84] But this is

---

[84] As Nyquist points out, "[m]ore than anything else has yet done, this argument, which makes an issue of the relation between spiritual temptation and personal honor, shows Adam and Eve turning by means of their dialogue towards the world of action" ("Reading" 212).

not to say that Eve's fall is determined at this point; unlike earlier exegetes, Milton does not suggest that Eve leaves her husband out of sheer misbegotten willfulness or moral waywardness.[85] And Eve's logic arguably outweighs Adam's presumption that woman "where danger or dishonor lurks,/ Safest and seemliest by her Husband stays" (IX.267-68), an inference that suggests God has somehow made woman more free to fall. By giving Eve a dramatic voice and a rational and sustained argument, Milton shows that Eve has reasonable and even admirable motives for leaving Adam's side.

Surveying critical discussions of Eve's motivation, Evans rightly concludes that the real difficulty in interpreting the separation scene "lies in determining what exactly prompted Eve to suggest that she and Adam should divide their labours" and "[b]ecause Milton did not make her motive absolutely explicit almost every critic who has analyzed the episode found it necessary to make one up" (273-74). An interpretive problem remains; as Evans points out, Eve's initial motive for suggesting separation remains unclear and her final motive is obscured by the emotional responses evident in the argument. But the real problem

---

[85] McColley points out that "[a]s dramatic poets of the Renaissance paid increasing attention to motivation, their craft required them to explain why she was alone. Milton's predecessors found an abundance of ready-made reasons based on the stereotype of female vanity," but Milton "had to explain the separation in a way that manifests Eve's sufficiency to stand" (Eve 140-41).

evinced here is our own critical unwillingness to accept textual indeterminacy even though that irresolvability is clearly demanded in any faithful rendering of the Yahwist story.

Though the Yahwist story only allows us to assume that Adam and Eve were separated at the moment of her temptation, Milton fills in a troublesome narrative gap by depicting Eve's departure. Most important, the poet does not go so far as to assert an unequivocal interpretation by assigning blame for the separation. Milton is quite willing to read missing and potentially problematic plot details out of the text, but the separation scene does not impose an interpretation onto the text by drawing conclusions that are not affirmed by the original story. Arguably, in choosing to depict the separation, Milton exercises the Christian responsibility of exegesis but does not indulge in the unwarranted liberty of <u>eisegesis</u>.

Milton's reimagining of the Yahwist story allows him narrative license, but the poet does not exercise the same interpretive freedom; the characters' dramatic voices are and must be deployed in a way that, like the original story, leaves character motivation and culpability indeterminate. The separation colloquy thus provides a model for the subsequent tragic climax, where the poet fills in narrative gaps but allows the characters to speak for themselves; unlike orthodox exegetes, Milton ultimately does not presume

to know Eve's motivations or intentions. Moreover, the argument shows that the poem's dramatic voices resist our attempts to identify a single pragmata as the precipitant of the tragic action. The separation colloquy does not allow us to assign blame nor does it make Eve (or Adam) more susceptible to temptation, as some critics suggest.[86]

Satan, disguised as the serpent, approaches Eve and begins his temptation by lavishing idolatrous praise on the lone woman, who should be "ador'd and serv'd/ By Angels numberless" (IX.547-48). But Eve does not respond to Satan's appeal to her reputed vanity; rather, she responds with astonishment that a mere serpent has the divine gift of speech.[87] Curious, Eve wants to know more: "Redouble then this miracle, and say,/ How cam'st thou speakable of mute"

---

[86] This reading counters both Lewalski's and Nyquist's. Nyquist argues that separation scene "presents the domestic Adam and Eve deliberately choosing to separate at the same time as they engage in precisely the kind of discourse that will leave them more vulnerable to the kind of temptation that Satan is plotting than they have ever been before," and as the dialogue "progressively opens up into the world of action, they are clearly in some way prepared for Satan's verbal trial" ("Reading" 214). Nyquist makes contradictory assertions, suggesting that Adam and Eve are now both more "vulnerable" and "prepared." And Lewalski argues that in the separation scene "we watch Adam and Eve lock themselves into attitudes and set themselves upon a course that leads directly to their catastrophic fall from happiness into sin and misery" (Literary Forms 227). But Lewalski's reading denies both the indeterminacy demonstrated by the complicated exchange between Adam and Eve and the indeterminacy inherent in the tragic climax that follows.

[87] Nyquist agrees, observing that "although on the surface Satan's 'Proem' appeals to what he thinks is Eve's vanity, nothing in her reply indicates that she is susceptible to flattery" ("Reading" 219).

(IX.562-63). Satan, in a lengthy passage, goes on to assert the virtue of the fruit he has eaten, but Eve remains skeptical and refutes his repeated appeals to her (evidently non-existent) vanity and pride: "overpraising," Eve maintains, "leaves in doubt/ The virtue of that fruit" (IX.615-16). Shown the tree, Eve restates the divine prohibition and also affirms her freedom; "we live/ Law to ourselves, our Reason is our Law" (IX.653-54). Though Eve simultaneously and rather paradoxically acknowledges both the importance of obedience and the primacy of free will, neither premise outweighs the other; at this point, the narrator is careful to note that Eve is "yet sinless" (IX.659).

Discussing the speeches in this "introductory stage of the temptation," Nyquist suggests that

> although the epic narrator refrains from interpolating an interpretation of the Genesis text into his presentation of it, the biblical dialogue as it appears in Paradise Lost bears almost the exact significance given it by Protestant exegetes. ("Reading" 217)

Nyquist is quite right to argue that the narrator consistently avoids imposing his own interpretation onto the story, but she paradoxically suggests that, by duplicating the significance of antecedent interpretations, the dialogic exchange somehow supports conventional exegesis. Clearly, the exchange between Eve and the serpent is susceptible to very different emphases by different exegetes. Unlike

patristic or misogynistic writers, Milton does not stress Eve's predisposition to fall or her inability to resist temptation, but invests a great deal of energy and many lines of verse into affirming her uncorrupted nature and a sufficiency to stand that is nothing short of admirable.

This "introductory stage" of the temptation illustrates several important points; Eve is not inherently vain or proud, Eve is not easily won over by Satan's guile, and Eve's natural curiosity--her desire to continue to grow and learn--provides the impetus for continuing her conversation with the serpent.[88] In all of these points, Milton's depiction of Eve differs greatly from orthodox exegesis that repeatedly asserts woman's inherently flawed nature, easy conquest, and moral and intellectual inferiority. And Milton attains this end not through narrative assertion, but by allowing Eve to demonstrate her own sufficiency to stand. The opening exchanges of Eve and Satan unequivocally demonstrate that Eve is in no way predisposed to fall.

The serpent is the culprit, and the emphasis is on his, not Eve's, rhetorical manipulation; as Lewalski rightly notes, "the scene emphasizes Satan's subversion of

---

[88] McColley observes that Satan's "materials are Eve's best qualities: her openness, her compassion, her good faith, her trust, her desire to learn and grow, her courage" (Eve 193), and Kietzman perceptively points out that "[a]lthough it ostensibly appeals to her vanity, the voice employs a strategy that is genuinely seductive and effective because it offers Eve what she desires--the opportunity to explore her experience in conversation" (71).

dialogue." Ignoring Eve's questions and continually changing the subject, "Satan largely avoids dialogic interchange, substituting other forms of communication" (Literary Forms 236). Though Lewalski recognizes that Eve has not yet erred, she does goes on to minimize the serpent's culpability as the scene progresses, subtly shifting greater blame to Eve. Discussing Eve's subsequent soliloquy, Lewalski suggests that

> Milton invests Eve's soliloquy with special significance, as the formal means by which she takes full responsibility for her act. Her first words suggest that even before she begins to speak she is probably already guilty of what Milton terms the first degree or mode of sin, "evil desire, or the will to do evil."
>
> (Literary Forms 238).

The problem with Lewalski's reading is the suggestion that Eve has already drawn conclusions while her speech makes it clear that she is still engaged in the process of reasoning, grappling with the prohibition that seems to make less sense as the scope of her reasoning capability expands.[89]

Restating God's prohibition, Eve concludes that

> . . .his forbidding
> Commends thee more, while it infers the good
> By thee communicated. (IX.753-55)

---

[89] Nyquist's reading is even more adamant, asserting that "this important soliloquy, far from furthering the action or communicating conflict or indecision, simply lets the reader know that in the silent interim between her last speech and it, Eve has beyond doubt fallen" ("Reading" 218), a conclusion that is clearly not supported by the text.

Not recognizing Satan's deception, Eve has no reason to believe that the serpent did not gain the power of speech from the fruit and logically concludes that the prohibition "forbids us to be wise" (IX.759).[90] Though Eve wrongly infers that the serpent is "Friendly to man, far from deceit or guile" (IX.772), we must not forget that Satan easily duped Uriel, who is readily forgiven for his error.[91] With Uriel's ostensibly greater capacity for intuitive understanding in mind, Eve seems less at fault for succumbing to the serpent's discursive rhetoric, a rhetoric that even the more intuitive and hierarchically superior angel could not perceive as false. Moreover, the ostensible punishment for disobedience is not apparent: "How dies the Serpent?," Eve asks, "hee hath eat'n and lives" (IX.764). Relying on the empirical evidence before her, Eve exercises her reason to arrive at a logical conclusion.

Milton's critics seem overly willing to subscribe to the narrator's previous declaration that Eve "is easily overwhelmed by his [Satan's] dazzling rhetoric" (Lewalski,

---

[90] And Eve's decision is enabled by the more discursive understanding God has allotted to humanity; as Grossman suggests, "the knowledge actually conferred on them by the fruit is empirical and appropriate to the intellectual constitution God has chosen for them" (129).

[91] Satan also had no tempter, and he readily and effortlessly instigated the heavenly revolt. The fallen angels' greater punishment affirms their greater culpability for their transgression; even God, as Drummond points out, "distinguishes between the angels who supposedly fell untempted and men who fall tempted by the angels first" ("Adam and Eve" 22).

Literary Forms 227). But the passage containing this assertion is highly ambiguous; Satan's words, we are told

> Into her heart too easy entrance won:
> Fixt on the Fruit she gaz'd, which to behold
> Might tempt alone, and in her ears the sound
> Yet rung of his persuasive words, impregn'd
> With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth.
> (IX.734-38)

Affirming that Satan wins too easy entrance into Eve's heart while simultaneously suggesting that the fruit could tempt in itself, this oppositional and dialogic passage destabilizes its own assertions. Evincing what Bakhtin describes as "a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world" (367), the narrative voice cannot contain or uphold its own ideological thought. And it is much to Eve's credit that a fruit sufficient in itself to tempt has been so far avoided, let alone when the temptation is intensified multiple times by Satan's persuasive rhetoric which seems perfectly logical and indisputable.[92] Milton asserts Eve's culpability while also suggesting that anyone would be deceived under the same circumstances; the narrator

---

[92] Moreover, the poem asserts the impossibility of Eve (or anyone else) to see through Satan's disguise. Noting the fact that Uriel, the archangel assigned to protect Eden from the foe, is also deceived by Satan, Gallagher asks the rhetorical question, "[h]ow indeed could it be otherwise, since prelapsarian deception, as Uriel discovers, is inevitable?" and rightly concludes that "the parallel between Uriel and Eve on the issue of deception is isomorphic: both are absolutely beguiled, for the created intellect cannot discern satanic fraud before the fact" (75-77). Hypocrisy, we are told, is invisible "except to God alone" and Uriel is not only Eve's hierarchical superior, he is also "The sharpest-sighted Spirit of all in Heav'n" (III.681-93).

thus simultaneously blames and exculpates Eve, and by so doing affirms the freedom of her will, the extent of her sufficiency to stand, and the impossibility of identifying a single cause of her fall.[93]

Yet there remains a crucial flaw in Eve's reasoning. Eve believes that the serpent has not died from eating the fruit, yet the exchange suggests she does not know what death is. Seeming to affirm their mutual lack of knowledge, the serpent muses about the nature of death, "whatever thing Death be" (IX.695), and Eve's speech does not disprove this suggestion.[94] For all Eve knows, the serpent could be dead. But this erroneous conclusion is not Eve's fault; not understanding the nature of death makes it impossible for her to identify the condition when it is (or is not) presented to her.

The problem here is not with Eve's reasoning, but with her lack of knowledge; God, it seems, has rigged the game. After the Fall of both Eve and Adam, God informs the heavenly assembly that

> On his transgression, Death denounc't that day
> Which he presumes already vain and void,

---

[93] Or, in Drummond's words, "the truth is that Eve has herself chosen to eat and that the cursed fraud of Satan as a serpent has beguiled her" ("Adam and Eve" 22).

[94] Satan echoes Adam's earlier words, heard while eavesdropping in the garden: "So near grows Death to Life, whate'er Death is,/ Some dreadful thing no doubt" (IV.425-26). Satan is, of course, lying about his lack of knowledge, but it is clear that neither Adam nor Eve knows precisely what the punishment entails.

> Because not yet inflicted, as he fear'd,
> By some immediate stroke; but soon shall find
> Forbearance no acquittance ere day end.
> (X.49-53)

By neglecting to inform Adam and Eve both what death is and the fact that the punishment would not be immediate, God leaves Eve ill-equipped to dispute the logic of Satan's argument; as Drummond observes, Eve "is duped by Satan, destroyed by herself, and sacrificed by God" ("Adam and Eve" 26). God's omission allows the serpent to persuade Eve that the punishment is not forthcoming, and Eve's physical survival provides the same evidence for Adam's subsequent temptation. God's speech is vengeful, and his withholding of information seems rather cruel under the circumstances, allowing Adam and Eve falsely to hope that they have been spared.[95] The causes of the Fall and the causes of human suffering multiply as the story progresses; the Fall is attributable to human disobedience, the manipulations of Satan, and even God's neglect.

---

[95] It is important to note that although this is an unfavourable and heretical reading of God's nature, the representation of God in Paradise Lost has been debated as much as Eve's. But Stevie Davies aptly and perceptively identifies the cause of the irreconcilable debate: "I would read it as an area of profound conflict and tension in which Milton's twin but incompatible impulses--to defend his God by resort to every trick in the rhetorical book and to expose him with brutal honesty to heretical judgement--fight it out on the page" (143). Davies identifies Milton's dual system of belief and also illustrates the impossibility of arriving at a definitive reading of any character in the poem: Eve, like God, is both culpable and redeemable, and the impulses of orthodox and heterodox readings of Eve similarly "fight it out on the page."

The question of culpability is further problematized with the depiction of Adam's vastly different fall. Following the Yahwist text, the narrator affirms that Adam is "not deceiv'd" (IX.998), and Adam consequently seems more to blame for his own downfall than "much deceiv'd, much failing, hapless Eve" (IX.404). Orthodox exegetes, Nyquist points out, recognized that Adam's undeceived and knowing fall suggests his greater transgression, and thus tended to emphasize the similarity of Adam's and Eve's temptation with the aim of obscuring the implications of this distinction.[96]

Nyquist argues that Paradise Lost follows the lead of antecedent exegetes and goes on to suggest that the terms of Adam's and Eve's ultimate disobedience are the same: "Just as Eve's speech reveals her intellectual assent to her tempter's demonic logic, Adam's speech reveals his sudden acceptance of Eve's account of her fall" ("Reading" 222-23). But the means of Adam's and Eve's ultimate assent are markedly different; in Milton's poem, Eve falls because she believes Satan's lies while Adam falls because Eve speaks the truth.

---

[96] In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul argues that "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (qtd. Nyquist, "Reading" 222), a spurious conclusion that disregards the interpretive instability of its propositions. A more logical conclusion than Paul's ideologically motivated and faulty syllogism is that Adam's not being deceived makes his sin knowing and deliberate and thus affirms his greater culpability.

The poem makes it perfectly clear that Adam, unlike Eve, falls fully aware of the serpent's cruel trick. In his inward monologue, Adam correctly deduces that "some cursed fraud/ Of Enemy hath beguil'd thee" (IX.904-5); he knows that Eve has been deceived. Nor is Adam beguiled by Eve, who recounts her story with absolute candor, as we know from the veracity of her narrative and from the poem's narrator: "Eve with Count'nance blithe her story told" (IX.886). Nonetheless, Adam chooses "Against his better knowledge" (IX.998) to fall with the woman without whom he is incomplete, "My other self, the partner of my life" (X.128).[97] Eve cannot be blamed for Adam's free and informed choice; this first of human tragedies, like all tragedy, is transactional in nature. Though Eve is clearly held accountable for her own failure to hold fast to the word of God and resist the serpent's temptation, the tragedy shows that she is not solely culpable or blameable for the

---

[97] Arguably, Adam and Eve's ontological oneness absolves Adam and implies God's culpability; as Drummond points out, in "Paradise Lost it is God who joins together man and woman; it is also true that Adam by refusing to be parted from Eve therefore refuses to put asunder what God hath joined together" ("Adam and Eve" 26). The terms of marriage and the terms of obedience as defined by God present Adam with an irreconcilable dilemma; thus, as Drummmond goes on to suggest, what Adam "does is not culpable except theoretically, and anything other than what he does do would be morally less noble, less an expression of love" ("Adam and Eve" 30).

Fall, an assertion that has been made but not without reservations.[98]

The problem with many readings of Paradise Lost lies in their attempts to define culpability; attempting to identify Eve, Adam, the serpent, or even God as the primary cause of the Fall denies its multiplicity of causes, a series of equally significant pragmata that culminate in the pathos-as-praxis effected by and affecting all involved. And the notion that Adam and Eve are predisposed to fall through uxoriousness or vanity clashes with the premises of Milton's theology and makes their fall seem inevitable; the tragedy of Paradise Lost clearly demonstrates that the notion of hamartia as fatal flaw is, as Whalley maintains, "completely wrong-headed" (27).[99] The problem with any attempt to find clear cause and thus blame a particular individual or factor (which is arguably sinful or fallen behaviour itself) can be

---

[98] Nyquist, for example, argues that the poem produces merely "an aesthetic illusion of complete mutuality" ("Reading 228). By concluding that mutuality is merely illusory, Nyquist posits a reading imitative of the deterministic arguments of patristic and misogynistic writers who insist that Eve is both predisposed to fall and ultimately culpable for humanity's first tragedy. Nyquist over-emphasizes the influence of orthodox exegesis on Milton's argument at the expense of minimizing and ultimately discounting the text's generically enabled indeterminacy.

[99] Grossman agrees, averring that Eve's "fall is presented as Aristotle would recommend. It grows out of an intellectual (not a moral) error that is rooted in her character or nature. It specifically excludes prior sin or depravity" (144).

clarified by further considering the destabilizing effects of the tragic genre.

As Lewalski points out, the ninth book of Paradise Lost fits Aristotle's definition of the best kind of tragedy, and "Milton's tragic plot is complex, with reversal of fortune (peripeteia) and recognition (anagnorisis)" (Literary Forms 227). And, as Lewalski goes on to suggest, the story of the Fall evokes the necessary Aristotelian elements of pity and terror that arise from our admiration for and sympathy with Adam and Eve, sympathies that are reinforced "by presenting several characters moved to like emotions by the tragic event" (Literary Forms 229). Lewalski's analysis of the Fall is persuasive on many points, but her discussion does not wholly recognize the transactional nature of tragedy and consequently does not fully appreciate the story's ultimate indeterminacy.

Drawing on Butcher's translation of the Poetics, Lewalski rightly notes that Book Nine enacts pathos, the third necessary element of tragedy defined by Aristotle. But Butcher defines pathos as "an action of a destructive or painful nature" (qtd. Literary Forms 229), a translation differing significantly from Whalley's "murderous or cruel transaction" (Emphasis added, 91). Failing to recognize pathos "both as suffered and as inflicted" (Whalley 90), Lewalski's reading does not sufficiently acknowledge tragedy's inherent irresolvability, as demonstrated in part

by her suggestion that both Adam and Eve are fatally flawed. Though Lewalski recognizes many of the complexities generated by the poem's tragic mode, her more deterministic reading tries to smooth over and explain these apparent contradictions rather than accept them as evidence of the genre's indeterminate complexity.

Lewalski discusses Book Nine in Aristotelian terms, but also suggests that Milton "points to a distinctively Christian subgenre of tragedy, with biblical models" (13).[100] Lewalski's notion of tragic action as a determinate process compels her to redefine the poem's genre after the moment of peripeteia:

> Milton's presentation of the aftermath of the Fall as Christian tragedy involves the transformation of the Aristotelian plot elements into their Christian counterparts. This metamorphosis of genre is the literary manifestation of the action of divine grace, won for man by the sacrifice of the Son. (Literary Forms 230-31)

Milton, Lewalski argues, "makes Eve's psalmic prayer [X.914-36] the point at which the classical tragedy of the Fall, eventuating in despair and death, gives way to Christian tragedy" (Literary Forms 250). But Eve's recognition of the pathos-as-praxis inherent in her tragedy, her recognition of

---

[100] Lewalski distinguishes between the tragic forms of Books Nine and Ten: "Milton presents the Fall in Book Nine as an Aristotelian tragedy, but in Book Ten looks instead to the paradigm for Christian tragedy" (Literary Forms 222).

its multiple causes and multiple effects, is fully in keeping with the conventions of classical tragedy.[101]

Eve, prostrate at Adam's feet, begs forgiveness and accuses herself of the greater fault; "both have sinn'd, but thou/ Against God only, I against God and thee" (X.930-31). Eve, though not solely culpable for the Fall, is willing to suffer on behalf of them both: "On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,/ Mee mee only just object of his ire" (X.935-36). As critics have not failed to note, Eve echoes the Son's earlier offer to redeem humanity for sins he did not commit: "Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life/ I offer, on mee let thine anger fall" (III.236-37). The alignment of Christ's and Eve's tragedy suggests that Eve is sacrificed on behalf of the sins of all, sins for which she is not solely responsible.

There is no denying the pity evoked by Eve's psalm, and it is important to note here that pity, as Aristotle suggests, "is to do with the man brought to disaster undeservedly" (95); though Eve must be allotted her share of the blame, she--like Christ--does not deserve to suffer

---

[101] As Baxter suggests, "without some degree of imaginative realization of the pathos and the praxis, and of both together, there is no tragedy," and Eve is clearly aware of what Baxter terms the "full transactive, or interactive" (xxvi) nature of her deeds.

eternally on behalf of the actions of all offenders.[102] Eve's ongoing tragedy affirms that "pathos is in one sense the suffering of the person injured by the terrible deed, and in another (and simultaneous) sense the act on the part of the person who does the terrible deed" (Whalley 100). Eve both commits the terrible offense and suffers because of her own and others' actions, and her tragedy does not end with the moment of recognition. Tragic action, as Whalley suggests, does not end with the tragic climax; it is a pregnant process whose pathos will continue to reverberate throughout human history.[103]

Lewalski's quest for interpretive closure is further impelled by her acceptance of the Aristotelian definition of tragedy described in Butcher's translation as imitative of an action "serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude" (qtd. Literary Forms 229). This passage differs significantly from Whalley's text, which translates the definition of tragedy as "a mimesis of an action--that is, it is [morally] serious and purposeful, having magnitude"

---

[102] Jesse G. Swan argues that "Eve, because of her overwhelming capacity to love selflessly, is willing to take on the punishment for Adam that she does not justly deserve. Here we see Eve aligned with the Son in, I believe, a much more profound and moving way than she is aligned with Satan earlier in the epic" (64).

[103] Grossman makes a similar point, arguing that the "meaning of an action is its historical effect. Because the consequences of an act remain in question as long as history continues to be written, meaning depends upon a proleptic view of history as complete" (9).

(67-69). The crucial distinction here is between Butcher's "complete" and Whalley's "purposeful." The latter translation's use of "purposeful" suggests movement toward an end that is not yet realized; pathos as conceived by Aristotle is a means, not an end.[104] Butcher's use of the adjective "complete" also implies definitive movement toward interpretive closure, closure that is unwarranted according to both Aristotle's theory and the continuing tragic action of Paradise Lost.

Lewalski argues that there must be a shift from Aristotelian to Christian tragedy because the aftermath of the Fall ends with hope and peace, as Adam and Eve are reconciled and appeased by the notion that humanity will ultimately be redeemed through both Christ and woman. But, according to Aristotle, a story does not need an unhappy ending to be tragic. As Baxter points out, Aristotle's recognition of two kinds of tragedy, disastrous and prosperous, manifests a tension similar to that created by his notion of pathos-as-praxis and "suggests how little the Poetics subscribes to a merely mechanical notion of plot and how far its analyses are from the merely classificatory" (xxvi). Aristotle identifies antithetical tragic endings as separate and specific to particular plays, but, much like Homer's, Milton's epic provides more than one tragedy. And

---

[104] Or, in Whalley's words, as an event both "pregnant and determinate," pathos marks "the beginning of a process" (90).

tragedy is much more multiple in meaning and effect than Miltonists seem willing to acknowledge; Eve's tragedy is attributable to a multiplicity of causes, and it does not end with the moment of recognition.

Eve's final words in the poem write woman's forthcoming and ongoing story:

> . . .though all by mee is lost,
> Such favor I unworthy am voutsaf't,
> By mee the Promis'd Seed shall all restore.
> (XII.621-23)

As McChrystal suggests, "[w]ith self-affirmation balanced against self-effacement. . .Eve reconstructs a new self-identity for a fallen world" (508). Simultaneously asserting the premises of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, Eve's contradictory and dialogic text gives with one hand as it takes with the other. Eve writes herself within the patristic and misogynistic tradition by accepting sole culpability for human tragedy yet counters her own argument by taking full credit for the promise of human redemption.[105] Eve's last words patently affirm her recognition of the transactional and complicated tragedy inherent in her story: for Eve, tragedy is paradoxically both inflicted and suffered by woman in a continuing drama

---

[105] Kietzman argues that Adam and Eve's postlapsarian experience shows them acquiring an "[i]ntellectual sympathy that makes the effort to go to the heart of the other's thinking and tries to see events from another perspective" (80-81), an assertion confirmed by Eve's last words. Kietzman perceptively concludes that "[b]y using language to explore and interpret events, Adam and Eve confront indeterminacy and learn to live with it" (81).

that will find a prosperous end in the redemption of all of humanity.[106]

Though Lewalski recognizes the separate applicability of both Aristotle's and Bakhtin's literary theories to Paradise Lost, her discussion of the Fall and its aftermath does not recognize their mutual affirmation of textual indeterminacy. Lewalski avers that "[m]ultiple genres give Milton's modern epic great complexity, but not the indeterminacy and inconclusiveness Bakhtin identifies as the product of generic multiplicity in the modern novel" (Literary Forms 17), a conclusion that demands revision. Though, as Lewalski demonstrates, Milton's use of literary forms reflects "great care and deliberateness" (Literary Forms 17), his careful and considered use of genre does not negate the destabilizing and self-subverting effects Bakhtin describes. And the indeterminacy inherent in Milton's treatment of Eve is especially apparent when the destabilizing effects of polyphonic texts are considered in tandem with Aristotle's analysis of tragedy; these ancient and modern literary theories are not mutually exclusive.

---

[106] Grossman makes a similar point, arguing that "[f]rom an exclusively human perspective, the loss of paradise is a paramount and continuing tragedy. But the exclusively human perspective is implicated in that loss; it is an empirical myopia that must be corrected by the lens of revelation" (165). Grossman's argument suggests that another moment of peripeteia and subsequent anagnorisis awaits the rest of humanity; as Adam comes to realize on the hilltop, the correction of human myopia will allow for the recognition of an ultimately fortunate fall, a tragedy with a prosperous ending.

In a reading that opposes Abram's (and Bakhtin's) conclusion that tragedy differs from the more complex and indeterminate dialogic text because it emphasizes "a plot that evolves coherently from a beginning to an end in which all complications are resolved" (Literary Terms 231), the ongoing transactional tragedy of Paradise Lost reveals the similarity of dialogic and tragic theories. The oppositional voices and ideological subversiveness Bakhtin ascribes to the indeterminate dialogic text are, in Paradise Lost, generically enabled. Milton deploys the conventions of the ambitious but interpretively unambiguous classical epic to rewrite the minimalistic and indeterminate Yahwist story, creating an inescapable friction, that, as Drummond suggests, means the poem "fights against itself and collapses," as "a collection of sublime fragments. . .it disastrously fails to do what it set out to do" ("Adam and Eve" 31). In other words, Paradise Lost fails to justify the ways of God to men because its generic multiplicity allows its resulting contradictions to remain unresolved.

And the poem also fails to justify the ways of Christian orthodoxy to woman; despite and because of its use of classical conventions, Milton's interpretation of the multivocal Yahwist story problematizes our attempts to sustain a definitive interpretation of Eve's complex role in the Fall, and by so doing affirms the indeterminacy inherent in the original. As demonstrated in Chapter One, the

biblical story of the Fall is generically complex and resultingly indeterminate. Embodying both narrative and tragedy, Paradise Lost, like the Yahwist story, is a dialogic text whose competing voices obscure character motivation and culpability, and the poem similarly resists our attempts to impose a definitive interpretation.[107]

Yet this multivocal narrative has, like the Yahwist story, paradoxically proven to be an effective means of sustaining a particular interpretation. By reading the poem as asserting narrative containing and upholding definitive meanings, feminist criticism has tended to allow the assertions of the narrative voice to obscure the poem's dramatic demonstrations. But, as with Cary's play and Lanyer's poem, the asserting narratives of Paradise Lost are undermined by its demonstrations, and its complexities and concomitant hermeneutic difficulties are inseparable from its generic multiplicity.

Married three times and father to three daughters, Milton's personal experience with women was plausibly similar to that imagined by Alter for the unknown biblical redactor. As Alter perceptively and reasonably suggests, the redactor, who took on the task of incorporating within a

---

[107] This reading opposes Grossman's, who argues that the "mastery of drama by an enclosing narrative" is "demonstrated and thematized in Raphael's account of the war in heaven" (130) and affirmed by the story of Adam and Eve's fall.

single text the tremendously contradictory Priestly and Yahwist stories of humanity's beginnings,

> surely had a fund of personal observation to draw on which could lead him to conclude that woman, contrary to institutional definitions, could be a daunting adversary or worthy partner, quite man's equal in a moral or psychological perspective, capable of exerting just as much power as he through her intelligent resourcefulness. (Alter, Art 146)

Like the Genesis author who, Alter proposes, "chose to combine these two versions of creation precisely because he understood that his subject was essentially contradictory," Milton similarly creates what Alter describes as "an approximate narrative equivalent to the technique of post-Cubist painting which gives us. . .a profile and frontal perspective of the same face" (Art 145-46).

As a multivocal tragedy evincing what Lewalski aptly describes as Milton's "multifaceted" view of women ("Yet Once More" 6), Milton's redaction of the generically and ideologically opposed Genesis creation stories imitates their simultaneous subscription to very different views of woman. But, as in the Yahwist story, Paradise Lost's competing voices embody a multiplicity of meanings that fail to uphold misogynistic readings of Eve's ontological inferiority and moral insufficiency. And the indeterminacy effected by the multiple genres and competing voices of Paradise Lost ultimately exculpates woman from her

misogynistic delineation as the sole precipitator and primary perpetuator of humanity's ongoing tragedy.

# Conclusion

In the Renaissance the Bible was believed to be a source of absolute authority, yet in The Tragedy of Mariam, Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, and Paradise Lost, this putative Scriptural truth remains unrealized. Collectively affirming the indeterminacy inherent in biblical narrative, these writers' explorations of the Yahwist story illustrate the much later arguments of Auerbach, Evans, Alter, and Shuger. Like these twentieth-century literary critics, Cary, Lanyer, and Milton reveal the hermeneutic difficulties and multiplicity of meanings biblical narrative presents, both despite and because of their use of classical conventions.

Though heavily influenced by the Christian exegetical tradition, these devout writers deploy an equally influential humanist hermeneutic that pushes beyond classical modes to realize the interpretive indeterminacy inherent in Eve's story. Exploring the Genesis story and destabilizing the Eve figured by patristic and misogynistic writers, Cary, Lanyer, and Milton weaken a foundational premise of western misogyny and consequently redeem Eve and her daughters from the charge of sole culpability for human tragedy. Though all of these works reveal much about women's oppression in a patriarchal society, their representations of Eve are empowering both to the literary character and to the living women so deeply affected by her

story. Ultimately, these rereadings of biblical narrative destabilize deterministic interpretations of female nature derived from and sustained by the misogynistic construction of Eve.

Imitating and reflecting the generically enabled indeterminacy of the Yahwist story, these Renaissance revisions of the Fall illustrate the similar complexity of dialogic narrative and tragedy and the congruity of Bakhtin's and Aristotle's literary theories. All three works illustrate the complex, overlapping, and composite nature of genre and the range of applicability of genre theories. And their comparable generic multiplicity reveals the similarly indeterminate nature of gender and genre, demonstrating that specific gender qualities are as slippery, elusive, and difficult--if not impossible--to ascribe as rigid generic categories.

Lewalski suggests that "as feminist theory turns from an emphasis on women as victims to a focus on women's empowerment, it may be easier to recognize elements of such empowerment in Milton's poetry and prose" ("Yet Again" 49). In more recent years, women writers (and by extension all women) have been empowered by their increasing inclusion in the literary canon, and though feminist critics have long analysed Milton's undeniable effect on the women who came after him, Milton's view of women in light of antecedent

women writers has yet to be explored in the broader critical debate.

In comparison with the work of these Jacobean women writers, Milton's empowering of Eve comes into sharper focus; these writers do not stand in opposition, but explore and affirm the same ideas. When we consider the similarity of these works, the example of Cary, Lanyer, and Milton blurs the lines of gender we may be tempted to construct between the authors themselves, suggesting that comparisons of this kind can help to reshift the focus of Milton's feminist critics from victimization to empowerment: women are indeed empowered in many ways throughout the canon, not only by women writers, but also by the men who believe woman's story to be equally worthy of exploration and dissemination.

# Bibliography


Abrams, M.H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Sixth Edition. Fort Worth, et.al.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993.

Alter, Robert. The Art of Biblical Narrative. New York: Basic Books, 1981.

---. The World of Biblical Literature. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Auerbach, Erich. Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953.

Aughterson, Kate, ed. Renaissance Woman: Constructions of Femininity in England. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.

Bakhtin, M.M. The Dialogic Imagination. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.

Baxter, John. "George Whalley on the Poetics: A Preface." Aristotle's "Poetics": Translated and with a Commentary by George Whalley. Ed. John Baxter and Patrick Atherton. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1997. ix-xxxvi.

Beilin, Elaine V. "Elizabeth Cary and The Tragedie of Mariam." Papers on Language and Literature 16 (1980): 45-64.

---. Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987.

---. "Writing Public Poetry: Humanism and the Woman Writer." Modern Language Quarterly 51:2 (June 1990): 249-71.

Bellis, Alice Ogden. Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox P, 1994.

Belsey, Catherine. The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.

---. John Milton: Language, Gender, Power. Rereading Literature. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.

The Bible, King James Version.

Campbell, W. Gardner. "The Figure of Pilate's Wife in Aemilia Lanyer's Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum." Renaissance Papers (1995): 1-13.

Cary, Elizabeth. The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry. Ed. Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994.

Davies, Stevie. Milton. New York: St. Martin's P, 1991.

Drummond, C.Q. "An Anti-Miltonist Reprise: The Milton Controversy." The Compass 2 (December 1977): 28-45.

---. "An Anti-Miltonist Reprise: II. Antagonistic Styles and Contradictory Demands." The Compass 3 (April 1978): 39-60.

---. "An Anti-Miltonist Reprise: III. Satan: or, God Damns his Angels." The Compass 4 (Autumn 1978): 43-62.

---. "An Anti-Miltonist Reprise: IV. Adam and Eve: or, God Hates Love." The Compass 5 (Winter 1979): 17-38.

Dubrow, Heather. Genre. The Critical Idiom 42. London and New York: Methuen, 1982.

Evans, J.M. "Paradise Lost" and the Genesis Tradition. Oxford: Clarendon, 1968.

Farwell, Marilyn R. "Eve, the Separation Scene, and the Renaissance Idea of Androgyny." Milton Studies 16 (1982): 3-20.

Ferry, Anne. "Milton's Creation of Eve." SEL 28 (1988): 113-32.

Fischer, Sandra K. "Elizabeth Cary and Tyranny, Domestic and Religious." Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works. Ed. Margaret Patterson Hannay. Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1985. 225-37.

Gallagher, Philip J. Milton, the Bible, and Misogyny. Ed. Eugene R. Cunnar and Gail L. Mortimer. Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 1990.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers: Reflections on Milton's Bogey." PMLA 93 (1978): 368-82.

Grossman, Marshall. "Authors to Themselves": Milton and the Revelation of History. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.

Gutierrez, Nancy A. "Valuing Mariam: Genre Study and Feminist Analysis." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 10:2 (Fall 1991): 233-51.

Henderson, Katherine Usher and Barbara F. McManus, eds. Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1985.

Hutson, Lorna. "Why the Lady's eyes are nothing like the sun." New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts. Ed. Isobel Armstrong. London and New York, 1992. 154-75.

Jager, Eric. The Tempter's Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1993.

Kietzman, Mary Jo. "The Fall into Conversation with Eve: Discursive Difference in Paradise Lost." Criticism 34:1 (Winter 1997): 55-88.

Krontiris, Tina. Oppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Renaissance. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

Landy, Marcia. "Kinship and the Role of Women in Paradise Lost." Milton Studies 4 (1972): 3-18.

Lanyer, Aemilia. Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum. Ed. Susanne Woods. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.

Lewalski, Barbara K. "Milton on Women--Yet Once More." Milton Studies 6 (1974): 3-20.

---. "Paradise Lost" and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985.

---. "Of God and Good Women: The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer." Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works. Ed. Margaret Patterson Hannay. Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1985. 203-24.

---. "Milton on Women--Yet Again." Problems for Feminist Criticism. Ed. Sally Minogue. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 46-69.

---. Writing Women in Jacobean England. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1993.

McChrystal, Deirdre Keenan. "Redeeming Eve." English Literary Renaissance 23:3 (Fall 1993): 490-508.

McColley, Diane. Milton's Eve. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1983.

---. "Milton and the Sexes." The Cambridge Companion to Milton. Ed. Dennis Danielson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. 147-66.

McGrath, Lynette. "Metaphoric Subversions: Feasts and Mirrors in Amelia Lanier's Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum." LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory 3 (1991): 101-13.

---. "'Let Us Have Our Libertie Againe': Amelia Lanier's 17th-Century Feminist Voice." Women's Studies 20:3 (1992): 331-48.

Miner, Earl. "The Reign of Narrative in Paradise Lost." Milton Studies 17 (1983): 3-25.

Milton, John. Complete Poems and Major Prose. Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. New York: Macmillan, 1957.

Munda, Constantia. "The Worming of a mad Dog." Henderson and McManus 244-63.

Nyquist, Mary. "Reading The Fall: Discourse in Drama in Paradise Lost." English Literary Renaissance 14 (1984): 199-229.

---. "Gynesis, Genesis, Exegesis, and the Formation of Milton's Eve." Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance. Ed. Marjorie Garber. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987. 147-208.

---. "The genesis of gendered subjectivity in the divorce tracts and in Paradise Lost." Re-membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions. Ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson. New York and London: Methuen, 1987. 99-127.

---. "Fallen Differences, Phallogocentric Discourses: Losing Paradise Lost to History." John Milton. Ed. Annabel Patterson. London and New York: Longman, 1992. 165-84.

Pagels, Elaine. Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Pearce, Lynne. Reading Dialogics. London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1994.

Pearse, Nancy Cotton. "Elizabeth Cary, Renaissance Playwright." Texas Studies in Literature and Language 18 (1977): 601-8.

Phillips, John A. Eve: The History of an Idea. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984.

Purkiss, Diane. "Material Girls: The Seventeenth-Century Woman Debate." Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760. Ed. Diane Purkiss and Clare Brant. London: Routledge, 1992. 69-101.

Raber, Karen L. "Gender and the Political Subject in The Tragedy of Mariam." SEL 35 (1995): 321-43.

Rogers, Katharine M. The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature. Seattle and London: U of Washington P, 1966.

Shullenberger, William. "Wrestling with the Angel: Paradise Lost and Feminist Criticism." Milton Quarterly 20 (1986): 69-85.

Shannon, Laurie J. "The Tragedie of Mariam: Cary's Critique of the Terms of Founding Social Discourses." English Literary Renaissance 24:1 (Winter 1994): 135-53.

Shuger, Debora Kuller. Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture. Berkeley: U of California P, 1990.

---. The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994.

Simon, Ulrich. Pity and Terror: Christianity and Tragedy. New York: St. Martin's P, 1989.

Smith, Eric. Some Versions of the Fall: The Myth of the Fall of Man in English Literature. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1973.

Sowernam, Esther. "Esther hath hanged Haman." Henderson and McManus 217-43.

Speght, Rachel. "A Muzzle for Melastomus." The Women's Sharp Revenge: Five Women's Pamphlets from the Renaissance. Ed. Simon Shepherd. London: Fourth Estate, 1985. 59-70.

Straznicky, Marta. "'Profane Stoical Paradoxes': The Tragedie of Mariam and Sidnean Closet Drama." English Literary Renaissance 24:1 (Winter 1994): 104-34.

Swan, Jesse G. "Author-Functions and the Interpretations of Eve in Paradise Lost." Milton Quarterly 26:3 (October 1992): 59-69.

Swetnam, Joseph. "The Arraignment of Lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant women." Henderson and McManus 189-216.

Travitsky, Betty S. "Husband-Murder and Petty Treason in English Renaissance Tragedy." Renaissance Drama 21 (1990): 171-98.

Walker, Kim. Women Writers of the English Renaissance. Twayne's English Authors Series 521. New York: Twayne, 1996.

Wall, Wendy. "Our Bodies/ Our Texts?: Renaissance Women and the Trials of Authorship." Anxious Power: Reading, Writing and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women. Ed. Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney. New York: State U of New York P, 1993. 51-71.

Webber, Joan Malory. "The Politics of Poetry: Feminism and Paradise Lost." Milton Studies 14 (1980): 3-24.

Whalley, George. Aristotle's "Poetics": Translated and with a Commentary by George Whalley. Ed. John Baxter and Patrick Atherton. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1997.

Wilding, Michael. "'Thir Sex Not Equal Seem'd': Equality in Paradise Lost." Of Poetry and Politics: New Essays on Milton and His World. Ed. P.G. Stanwood. Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995. 171-85.

Wittreich, Joseph. Feminist Milton. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1987.

Woodbridge, Linda. Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1984.

Woods, Susanne. "Introduction." In Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum. By Aemilia Lanyer. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993. xv-xlii.